

The People's Movement

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Politics, Elections and People's Movements

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The Ways of Intervention

The present general elections have become an exercise in a cynical polemics and intrigues *par excellence*. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is apparently outsmarting its rivals in this game. Though it has put the issue of Ayodhya and Hindutva on the backburner since the Assembly elections of four states in December 2003, according to its haughty spin doctor, Arun Jaitley, it is "sitting on the Hindutva agenda – we don't have to play it. Secularism is not an issue". It has been successful in alliances and accommodative politics, absorbing all kinds of social groups from the film-stars and celebrities to the underprivileged sections like dalits, OBCs and now the Muslims. The BJP is on the rampage. Also, it seems to have completely hijacked and completely metamorphosed development discourse. Now, it is either reduced to mere *bijli, pani, sadak* (electricity, water and roads) – which the media, intellectuals and other parties too have gleefully lapped up – or the feel good factor for the investors, stock market, national multinational capitalists and high income groups. The spin-doctoring has been attempting to black-out the large-scale destitution, unemployment and unrest in the country. Alongwith the government media, paid advertisements, it is these unpaid corporate media which has been busy in projecting the 'resurgent India' and debunking the struggling undercurrent in the land.

Whether the opposition parties including the Congress and the Left,

are able to counter this avalanche remains to be seen.

The BJP has brought a shift in the Indian political sociology of this country. It has shaped up a new 'critical mass' of the capitalists, high-income group and the upward looking middle class. They may form 15-20% of the Indian population, but is now capable of playing a pivotal role. On the basis of that it aims to turn the Indian political economy – or rather this critical mass wishes to turn the India's politics to its way through BJP.

Until the entire ideology and policies of this new class is challenged and a strong united counter force is not posed against it, one cannot expect to turn the tide. However, it cannot be done by sharing the same development ideology of this class.

Here the people's movements have a definite purpose and role in directly intervening in the electoral process.

Along with strong movements and struggles on the ground level of the downtrodden people, against religious fundamentalism and globalisation, they will have to take on the criminal, communal and capitalist game from various fronts. The speed and strength with which the new capitalist class posing as 'the people' is going ahead on policy level will have to be challenged and questioned on various levels. The people's movements including the many organizations in the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) have decided to strengthen people's movements by directly intervening in the electoral process, some of them contesting elections. The electoral process is one part of the multi-faceted politics the movements have been engaged in. However, it is imperative that such intervention in the electoral process should not remain just one event-engagement. If the people's movements are serious about this part of their politics, it has to be a multi-faceted and systematic process. The movements will have to think about the processes beyond this particular elections, if they have to usher in a non-corrupt, pro-people and a new electoral politics.

S.S.

A Scheme Without Teeth

In these times, where defeats are depicted as victories and losses as a bonanza, the Social Security Scheme for Unorganised Workers recently inaugurated by the Prime Minister, needs to come under critical scrutiny. It is certainly welcome to be told that workers will now get health insurance and old age pensions and will soon be brought under organized sector. But will this happen? The scheme will be managed by the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and will be launched in 50 select districts, including 25 state capitals and can be extended all over the country "if it gets good response". It is supposed to cover all workers drawing up to Rs.6500 as monthly wages. Each month, the workers are supposed to pay Rs.50 (if they are in the 18-35 age group) or Rs.100 (if they are in the 36-60 years age group). Contribution from the employer is expected to be Rs.100 per month. In contrast to this, the contribution of the government to the scheme is negligible, as it is only 1.16% of the National Floor Wage, which is at present Rs.1800 per worker (i.e. Rs.21). On retirement a worker is supposed to draw Rs.500 pension and in case of untimely death, the family is to draw Rs.1.25 lakhs plus Rs.500 pension. Initially 10 lakhs workers are to be covered by this scheme.

As one of the big problems of the unorganized sector workers is that they often are self-employed, work under changing employers or in situation where the employer cannot be identified, there is an option that the worker can pay the employers part as well, provided s/he is in the below 35 years category. Obviously, the burden on the worker is enormous in this case. What will domestic workers do who work in numerous households? Not to speak of home producers or seasonal agricultural and migrant labour? This kind of arrangement is a typical expression of privatization under globalisation, where the state abdicates responsibility, the employer absconds and the workers are left to fend for themselves.

If we realistically expect that employer's contribution will be difficult to come by, then the worker is basically left with the entire burden for his/her social security. Workers enrolled in the scheme are supposed to get a National Social Security Number. The EPFO is supposed to handle Registration, Record keeping, and benefit Delivery and is also expected to keep track of coverage and compliance. Intermediaries like Workers' Facilitation Centres, Panchayati Raj institutions, NGOs, Self Help Groups and designated bank branches and Post Offices are also in the picture. How this unwieldy non-structure is supposed to function, is a great mystery, especially as the EPFO is already over burdened with provident fund itself.

Let us face it, the workers in the unorganized sector earn only Rs.1500 to Rs.2000 a month on the average. They will be put under enormous

hardship to feed their families and pay up for the scheme, while their employers will give the EPFO the slip. The pension age of 60 is arbitrary, as unorganized sector workers are often incapacitated much earlier.

The most outrageous part is that this grand scheme comes after the Second Labour Commission has spent enormous energies to work towards a comprehensive legislation for unorganized labour. The proposed bill, already watered down three times, has now been completely abandoned in favour of a scheme which covers only a fraction of the workers with an unworkable infrastructure. The Central Legislation proposed by the Labour Ministry would have required access on petrol or diesel to bear the cost. This is why it has been abandoned. It is imperative that the working classes fight for a comprehensive legislation. In such a law, not only social security, but also the Right to Work and the Right to Basic Amenities and Natural Resources must be enshrined. Besides, existing state legislations like Tamilnadu Manual Labourers Act of 1982 must be implemented and the Welfare Boards for different sub-sectors must be equipped to work. Workers are ready to fight for these issues. The National Campaign for Unorganised Workers will hold agitations in the districts of different states from March 1-10. On March 23, 2004 big manifestations will be held in Delhi and in the state capitals.

D. G.

Of Goons and Bans

After the Marxists government in West Bengal banned Taslima Nasrin's book, here is another 'progressive' ban. The hoodlums of an outfit called Sambahji Brigade in Maharashtra attacked the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune in January 2004, destroying valuable books, manuscripts and historical records. This was succeeded by a ban on the book, 'Shivaji: The Hindu King in Muslim India' by the American scholar, James Lane, which said to have triggered off the attack. This matter is fast becoming a murky wrangling about the responsibility of researchers, the identity politics and caste prejudices. The freedom of a person or institution and free research seem to be evil things.

The attack on BORI, a premier research institute on Indology, established in early 20th century in the name of noted scholar and social reformer R.G. Bhandarkar, was reportedly motivated by the alleged reference against the great Maratha political-military genius, Shivaji and his mother, contained in Lane's book. It was alleged that BORI people helped Mr. Lane in his research and supplied him with the slanderous information regarding the celebrated hero, the charge the institution denied repeatedly and Lane also tendered an apology on that. However, without going into the varacity of the matter, the state government promptly banned the book. Curiously, very few scholars and progressive political-social leaders in the state condemned the incident; and almost all the political parties kept silent. The All India Marathi Literary Conference in Aurangabad was shadowed by the threats of attack, as the Brigade soldiers maintained a intimidating omnipresence, lest any word of condemnation was uttered against it.

Judging that the specifics would land them in trouble, the Brigade and its friends in academics, politics and media have come up fresh ruse: generalize the issue, which has strong ideological and polemical appeal. Accordingly, Lane was made to defame Shivaji – the leader of Bahujans (non-Brahmins), by the Brahmins in the BORI, supposedly dominated by them. Destroying such Brahministic tendencies, historiography, institutions is justified and saving the honour of Bahujans. The Brigade glorified the attack, felicitated the attackers.

Hardly anyone concerned read what James Lane has written. Those progressive elements who read book vouch that the book sets forth same 'progressive' objective – to establish the image of Shivaji as secular and 'pro-people', 'pro-poor' king and extricate him from the Hindutva trap. That apart, no Maharashtrian worth name has doubted about the character of Shivaji – he is fond hero of all communities and castes. The towering figures like Rajwade, Shejwalkar, Sardesai and others, who gave away their lives to painstakingly collect, research enormous records of Maratha history and Shivaji were also Brahmin by birth. There might be some fringe elements indulging in whispering campaign, which are always there in case of any hero. To pose that fringe element as mainstream phenomena and exploit that as an alibi for political ends – is nothing but Hitler-like distortion of social-historical process. The physical attack and destruction are justified in the garb of anti-Brahministic, therefore 'progressive' ideology and emotion.

The anti-democratic hooliganism is turned into a social-political ideology. In which way the BORI attack and the mentality behind that is any different from one which destroyed Babri Mosque, which torn the Hussein paintings, closed the plays, cinemas or ghazal performance or damaged cricket pitch, under the pretext of emotions, pride, and retaliation? They all inflict real and tangible harm and destruction on the basis of just surmises, which they claim to be reality and go berserk on rampage and then proclaim themselves as victim or martyrs. That too, under the shield of Bahujan and progressive politics which they consider as unassailable? Isn't this an abuse of Bahujan-ism? Did we not have enough of such hypocrisy from the Nazis and Sangh-Parivar? And are we going to give in to these neo-fascists- even if they blackmail us in the name of 'progressive' and Bahujan ideology? It is a time thrash out seriously the issues like emotions, identity, and therefore the claim of the right to inflict physical harm and elimination. Any section of society can use such a ruse under any pretext. And what about the freedom of research, libraries, books and bans? Whatever way we answer that, it will be a historical statement.

S. S.

Party with a Difference, or Polity with a Difference

Anand Mazgaonkar

Electoral politics by its very nature is an exclusive, divisive, and exclusionary venture whereas social and political change is an opinion-building, consensus-building, converting and in some ways a uniting process. The two do not belong together.

Differences abound in our great country on every major and minor question touching our lives. Yet, people are generally agreed that:

>> we live in a stuttering, faltering and quite often depraved democracy monopolised by self-serving politicians;

>> the basic and burning problems touching the common people's, poor people's lives remain untouched;

>> the existing political leadership cannot, will not and does not intend to deal with any fundamental issues of change;

>> the unholy nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, power brokers, criminals will not loosen its strangle-hold;

>> those in power will do nothing about corruption, violence, abuse of law by the powerful;

>> the noble goals enshrined in our Constitution will only be paid lip service to; and

>> decentralisation of power, fulfillment of the basic needs of the common and toiling people is never the focus of public policy.

An influential school of thought persuades us that it is 'this set of rulers that is bad, corrupt, ill-intentioned, unfit to rule', and so on. It is suggested that replacing them with another set of 'good people' will work wonders. The obvious 'magic wand' solution seems to be that "good people" should engage in electoral politics as it is a logical step in the course of an evolving movement and that they will (a) articulate radical alternatives, (b) act as a pressure group, set the agenda of state policy (c) get into positions of influence and the lacunae listed above will be corrected. This debate has gone on, perhaps since Independence, among well-meaning citizens, people concerned about the state of affairs in our country, activists,

intellectuals, et al. It may be added that a number of attempts at forming "a party with a difference", etc. have been undertaken, both, in our country and elsewhere. It would be pertinent to seriously look at the issue at a theoretical level on the one hand, as also based on our past experiences, as well as the ground reality as it presents itself today. And the compelling factors for such a discussion today are:

a) political parties, despite their contrary public positions, are pretty much in agreement on economic policy issues, the agenda that they will follow once in power etc. Any number of instances of every party toeing the same line, can be found across the political spectrum, from the BJP, and Congress at the Centre and states where they have been in power, to CPM in West Bengal, to Samata Party, Samajwadi Party etc.

b) all the mainstream-party worthies are engaged in more or less the same kind of hooliganism, abuse of law once in power,

c) the BJP with its Parivar, can indulge in something like demolition of religious structures, and in State led carnage with impunity -as in Gujarat,

d) the Constitution of our country is sought to be twisted out of recognition.

Sharing this assessment is, I suggest, the common ground between both, those who believe that forming a new "clean, party with a difference", and those who think otherwise. I belong to the second, perhaps, minority group who believe that

such a course will not lead anywhere, will be suicidal, and is not the *raison d'être* of the movement for change.

Those committed to social and political (not in terms of electoral politics) change as envisioned by JP in his outline of Total Revolution- are talking about the fulfillment of the basic needs of all, change in values, justice, equality, participation of all to the extent possible etc. While legislation would obviously assist in bringing about the desired changes, the inherent and extreme limitation of legislation as an engine of socio-political change must be realized. Legislated change cannot survive in the absence of a change in the atmosphere and values. And such change can come about only very gradually, at the pace of evolution, not revolution. It is impossible to think of positive value-change driven by today's politics, by any such politics ever. It must be borne in mind that Power (The Powerful) subsists on the crutches of an alliance/nexus between an entrenched lot co-sharing at any point of time - and today it happens to be the politician-bureaucrat-Corporation-criminal collusion. Another day it may have been the Priest-King-Merchant-Military man. All change is a challenge to the entrenched, and who can seriously undertake a venture of eroding or dissolving one's own power, without being toppled over by other elements (allies) in the entrenched structure? One swallow does not make a spring, so one person's or groups desire will not scratch any surface. I submit that all change has come through struggle and a struggle sitting in a power-centre is irreconcilable, unsustainable. Those with access to stories from the corridors of power know how governments have been made and unmade in India's recent past. It seems unfeasible that individuals will change systems, nor that systems can change by the stroke of a pen. The prerequisites to change are defining/ outlining a cause, building up an

atmosphere, organising/mobilising, converting people, consolidating and so on. The time-scale for change is decades, at least, and that for power is months and years.

For purposes of simplicity the present political set up can be viewed as a triad with the following three elements; people, change agents and the power structure. It does not in any way empower people if the change agents merge with the power structure. Organisations, generally, and political parties especially, are not known to be either instruments of change or radical and democratic on a sustainable basis.

Electoral politics by its very nature is an exclusive, divisive, and exclusionary venture whereas social and political change is an opinion-building, consensus-building, converting and in some ways a uniting process. One must submit that the two do not belong together. While Indian society and its villages have always been dogged by caste distinctions, untouchability, and social inequity, Panchayat level elections have cemented another permanent division along the lines of political affiliation even among single caste villages.

The malaise today results from the poor and powerless being marginalised, misled, deluded with promises and whipped up passions with the illusion of being able to participate whereas the purpose of most state policies and actions is not public weal. There is also the failure of collective functioning and decision-making.

Today's elections are fought not only on money and muscle power but also slogans, whipped up frenzy, populism and opportunistic alliances. Does the power driven 'metamorphosis' in the Congress Party of the late 1940's and '50's, the Janata Party experiment in 1977, the Janata Dal experiments in 1989, and 1997-98 hold any lesson for us? Does the Green Party, which started and sustained as a movement on a radical anti-war, anti-nuclear energy, environmental agenda then took part in the 1991 Iraq war, and hasn't delivered on its other promises teach us anything? Or, do we live outside and insulated from the force of gravity? The commonality in all these instances, in varying measures, is that these parties came into power as a result of a struggle and movement. The primary aim of a movement, more often than not, is to struggle for a cause, even if it involves sacrifice and suffering. Struggle and sacrifice are powerful for their training value. When individuals who have lived lives of such struggle end up in power the fire and urge for change starts wearing off and sooner or later the system gobbles them up. This is the force of political gravity. Individuals, not graduating out of an effective movement, when they come forward to participate in electoral politics usually have motives other than service.

Experience has demonstrated that a government cannot even stem corruption, manage law and order, nor can our "vibrant democracy" run on its citizens voting once in 5 years. Most positive change has come from outside the parliamentary system, legislation only assists in socio-political

processes. Hence, contrary to the widely held view that the best talent should enter the electoral fray, I argue otherwise. Governments necessarily view and deal with issues from a management, and law and order perspective whereas issues affecting life and society rarely lend themselves to such treatment.

If all of the above arguments seem negative and short on any positive light, it must humbly be stated that that is a fair charge. But, to certify ourselves as clean, radical, all-knowing and arrogate to ourselves the supreme and holy task of delivering 1+ billion people is not my cup of tea, at the very least. And I also suggest that the most revolutionary contributions have come not from those who wielded power, but from the voices of conscience, namely, Gandhi and JP. The effectiveness of the Narmada Bachao Andolan was not born out of any loaves of power, but from the progressive enlarging of the horizons of the movement from issue of displacement and resettlement, to that rehabilitation, from the issue of benefit to whom, at whose cost, to lobbying multilateral agencies, to mobilising public opinion on issues beyond the dam, the development paradigm.

The foregoing arguments leave at least two questions unanswered:

>> should there still be rethink on the issue of electoral politics in the light of Gujarat where the state machinery did what it did? Can politics be left to such forces?

>> should there not be a vision for something practical, something soon enough?

Yes, Gujarat changed the lives of the sane and sensitive. Yes, each one of us must do everything in one's power to fight and prevent such a death dance led and colluded in by the powers that be. But, standing up for truth does not come with underwritten guarantees of success. Gujarat was not about winning or losing an election but standing up against injustice and inhumanity. There are times when one must be content to be in a minority, and consciously so. That should be our calling. Logic and reason do not win

the game of numbers against mass frenzy. And this was frenzy cultivated and built up over 75 years. In no way are electoral skirmishes the answer. The way to a vibrant democracy is to shake up and challenge the corruption intransigence in institutions be it the bureaucracy, media, judiciary or legislature without being subject to pressures of form, formality, convention and protocol. The violence, inequity and injustice of the present set up is too dehumanizing to lend ourselves to being sucked into it.

As for a formula for quick and painless change, the quickest way seems to be with the people, go with the people and at their pace. People do vote, and do seek favours from those in seats of power but distributing largesse from that seat of power does not result in identifying with them. In the long delivery of such service is an exception not all-embracing. A short cut for people is that the last thing that can help people.

Hence, it is not only philosophical and ideological grounds that I would eschew electoral politics but also on practical grounds of lack of feasibility.

(Anand Mazgaonkar is a Sarvodaya activist working in Surat district in Gujarat)

The People's Movement would welcome short write-ups about the various struggles, processes and issues. The unsolicited write-ups should be precise (not exceeding 800 words). Send your comments, concerns and suggestions – that will make our efforts more meaningful. Send the matter either by email or by post.

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Contesting the Electoral Enigma

Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey

The problem is not just of electoral reform or political change but a combination of both. The reform itself must be put into political terms and political changes must go deep enough to encompass these measures which would change the way electoral politics functions.

There is no doubt about the widespread disaffection with the current political process. Almost every segment on all sides of the political spectrum agree that the electoral processes have been hijacked by various vested interests and that elections are eventually a question of choosing between the lesser of two or more evils in an already manipulated system. The domination of black money and raw muscle power is acknowledged by even those who are fighting elections, with the better individuals describing it as a Catch 22 situation where if they don't flow with the tide they don't have a hope of winning. They would therefore become marginalized and irrelevant in any case.

On one end of the spectrum in this debate are those who are members of parties participating in elections, and on the other end are the set of political activists who hold elections to be a sham and advocate the boycott of polls. There are however at least two other distinct groups whose involvement with the political process, has included a flirting relationship with the electoral process. This entire debate does not of course include the "NGOs and civil society groups" who emphatically state that they are "non-political", and therefore not willing to get involved with such questions.

One pro-active set of intellectual-activists, has concentrated on advocacy efforts,

lobbying for various reform measures. They are backed by a number of motivated individuals and groups in the middle class, some of whom are primarily email activists. Many of the supporters see these proposals as a few easy steps to sort the problem out. For many of them who live in and operate in a corporate environment, it is almost as if the whole thing can be dealt with as a management exercise.

The other group represents various "people's movements" who have been working as mobilization groups to have the establishment respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalized. They have functioned as pressure groups even during elections trying to force candidates and parties into supporting policies of benefit to the poor. Without putting up their own candidates, they have on occasion supported or opposed particular candidates, or parties taking their direct involvement in electoral politics even closer. One reason from keeping away from party politics has been the understanding that the current electoral system is so distorted, that direct participation will involve too many basic compromises on ethics and ideology.

Both kinds of pressure groups have come together in recent times with the common objective of fighting the growing criminal, monetary and parochial manipulation of politics. But despite (or perhaps because of) the concern, both groups have with the deteriorating electoral process, they have kept away from forming or joining political parties.

The Delhi High court, and subsequent Supreme court decisions on the compulsory disclosure of the criminal records and financial assets of candidates was a ray hope for many of these pressure groups. The sharp resistance from the whole political establishment seemed to prove how critical such opaqueness was to the survival of a corrupt system. Conversely, the premise for some, - particularly those who have great faith in the ability of the Indian system to deliver, was that if such changes were brought in the whole edifice of corrupt politics would collapse, and it would usher in a new era of "clean candidates fighting clean elections".

The supreme court decisions, even holding the parliamentary enactments on non disclosure as unconstitutional have been attractive to the middle class for yet another reason: their ideal battle is where someone else fights their fight in a proxy war and what can be better than a clean clinical victory like a supreme court decision. Nevertheless, some of their efforts have been remarkably useful and significant.

Unfortunately, as so many progressive supreme court decisions have shown, they will have a far reaching impact only if they are accompanied

by supportive political processes. This is an understanding that "movement groups" have had for some time, and it was clear to groups like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), that the court decision would have to be followed by extensive work to have the orders implemented in the right spirit. As the right to information campaign has shown, the process of implementing a radical measure is often more valuable and important than the measure itself. Also, the time frame of struggle based organizations is much more long term than any hope of "instant success." As a group who were involved centrally in the Rajasthan "Election Watch" process during the recent state assembly elections, it is worth reflecting on, and putting the experience in perspective. There has been a lot of misperception about what was expected from this intervention.

In the post-election celebration/depression, if the outcomes were to be the determining factor, then for the "election watch" in all the States it is a time for deep introspection. Election watch efforts in India have probably never been as enthusiastic or popular as they were this time. Energised largely by the candidates disclosure norms, as set out in the Supreme Court orders, small but enthusiastic groups of people set out to put in a determined effort to help "clean up the electoral process". The idea was that these norms would help identify and target those candidates indulging in corrupt practices, and that the electorate would give them the punishment they deserved by voting them out.

More than the BJP in Delhi, and the Congress in the other three States, Election Watch campaigns failed in their effort to affect the outcome of the elections. In fact, if one were to be ruthlessly honest, they did not even determine the outcome of a single seat.

Fortunately, election watch does not have to be judged by the yardstick of winning or losing. Its impact lies in determining how the game was played.

Even here the results were mixed, but there is no doubt that a small but significant beginning has been made in giving citizens a meaningful role in demanding transparency and accountability from the electoral process.

The electoral watch effort showed it has the potential to involve large numbers of individual citizens who have got so alienated from electoral processes that they dismiss politics itself in simplistic negatives. By addressing this group and insisting that their negativism cannot be used as an excuse for non-involvement and by offering this as an opportunity to do something about correcting what they despise, an opportunity for meaningful dialogue emerged. For another more important group who have been interested in political processes, but don't have a party they feel comfortable enough to be a part of, election watch presented a great opportunity for a kind of direct involvement they are comfortable with. For activists from people's movement and grass roots organizations including some NGOs election watch was another opportunity to fight and highlight

corrupt practices. Critically, it offered a conventionally acceptable platform of the electoral code of conduct to fight communal and caste based campaigning. Given the grave threat posed during the elections to basic peace and security by communal and feudal interests, this is a space that needs be widened and made sacrosanct. Removed from the over expectation of a magical transformation, the impact of the affidavits has been noteworthy.

People got involved in collecting, collating, analyzing and publicizing their contents. Candidates squirmed as they filled their forms, and squirmed more as they were analyzed and publicized. The media gave the analysis lots of space, and kept making visits to the election watch office for data and the contents of the specific affidavits. Some candidates answered questions in detail and many very specifically concealed as much as they could.

There has been a lot of debate about what can be done about those who have blatantly lied. It was clear that despite some of these cases being publicized by sections of the media, their electoral results were essentially unaffected by this information. Even the strict limits imposed on expenditure and the mandatory disclosure of candidates accounts resulted in creative accounting and new forms of underground transfer of funds. The administration managed to insist on the required information being provided, but it had almost no answers to the dishonesty in disclosure that they revealed. The last hope was that the ordinary voter would give a fitting reply. But the crux of the matter was that the voter was faced with a multiple choice question with all the wrong answers and not even being allowed the satisfaction of answering "none of the above".

The "Rajasthan Election Watch" processed this information into

comparative tables and prepared analysis sheets for each constituency. These were used by different groups in different ways. The MKSS took this information of the candidates to the people in open public platforms called "Jan Manches" in the Rajasmand, Beawar and Bhim constituencies. Candidates were invited and their information was read aloud, and questions were invited about doubts and discrepancies people might want to highlight. Despite the fact that most of the leading contenders stayed away, people took a great deal of interest in the information and it was both a point of discussion and of opinion building.

The MKSS had worked in four different campaign modes during the run up to the elections. In the first phase the attempt was to work under the banner of the "*Jan Neeti Abhiyan*" and formulate and popularize a "people's agenda" that would influence the discourse of the election campaign and bring peoples issues to the center stage of the political agenda. This phase involved 35 people traveling by truck to different districts of Rajasthan and passing the message of the people's agenda through street meetings, through theatre, through the media and through seminars with prominent citizens. Pegged to counter the communal agenda with a peoples demand, the campaign used the slogan of '*trishul nahin, talwar nahin, kaam ka adhikar chahiye*'; to promote the passage of an Employment Guarantee Act. In the people's agenda were issues of tribal rights, minority rights, women's rights and a host of other democratic issues including ones related to modes of democratic governance. The second phase of the truck yatra involved a visit to schools and colleges in collaboration with a Spic Macay programme in different places in Rajasthan, with a focus on dialoguing with young people and getting them involved in wider socio-political issues. The third phase was a ten day long dharna presented as a "peoples

assembly" in Jaipur- which coincided with the last session of Rajasthan State Assembly. The absence of seriousness of purpose and commitment to peoples concerns of the State Assembly contrasted sharply with a peoples "manch"(platform) composed of peoples movements and grass roots groups in Rajasthan. It showed up quite dramatically, the diminishing role of the State Assembly in addressing such issues.

The last phase of the truck yatra took place during the assembly election using the truck for election watch purposes, and adopting the mascot vehicle of the RTI campaign- the *Ghotala Raht Yatra*. An hour long dialogue and pantomime act evolved between the voters and the political leader of today speaking frankly and sarcastically with his electorate.

All these four phases of the truck yatra received a response far beyond what we expected, and of a kind any political party would have been happy with. The sarcasm of the last phase of the *Ghotala Rath* struck a particular chord with an electorate frustrated with politics and politicians as they were. It seemed to find at least temporarily, a satisfactory outlet for the energy generated by any election. People stood around in large numbers for the hour-long dialogue. In many places, people switched off the mikes of political parties campaigners in the vicinity so that the show would not be disturbed. The spoof targeted the people themselves and pointed out how they were being used as fodder, and they nodded and spoke up in agreement. They improvised, laughed, shouted, spoke out, and joined in to make it clear that they agreed with the message, were also fed up, and wanted to do something about it. But at the end of almost every session came the most crucial question for which there was no answer. "We agree with everything that you say. Now you tell us whom should we vote for?" This was a question for which those campaigning in electoral reforms have no answers. For which people's movement has no answers. And for whom, those who appear as fringe candidates only at election time cannot provide an answer either.

It is clearly not enough to build a peoples campaign or suggest theoretical systemic reform packages as alternatives. The problem is not just of electoral reform or political change but a combination of both. The reform itself must be put into political terms and political changes must go deep enough to encompass these measures which would change the way electoral politics functions. People's movements have begun to realize that their significant gains through issue based campaigns, and organizing people for their basic rights can be, and often is quickly offset by other decisions controlled by the 'elected establishment'. There is a need for all those who concern themselves with the political process, to understand that their critique of the electoral process must contain a political solution, in which they offer people a genuine alternative by demonstrating its viability. The risk is that they will get drowned in the quicksand of electoral politics.

Although quite different in from each other in their approach, efforts of various non-party efforts have been marked by significant achievements

in what they have taken up. They have protected their ideological and ethical purity, and have done more than what most people thought was possible in a hostile environment. They have ambitious dreams, and offer comprehensive alternatives. Despite their sharp critiques of current electoral politics, they have not even hinted at rejecting elections as a system. But they have consistently refrained from offering a political alternative in the sphere where it matters most today. Electoral politics presents the biggest challenge to all such groups because it is a sphere where theoretical answers are simply not enough. For the solutions to have any viability they have to be forged, tested, chiseled, implemented, and taken responsibility

for by the proponents themselves. If the non-party political activists look around they will realize that if the aim is to influence people when they cast their vote, for the voter at the polling booth they have as much relevance as a visitor from a distant planet.

(Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey are activists working with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan).

'VOTE AGAINST ALL CANDIDATES [VAAC]' - A Fundamental Right

What are we to do when we find that no party or candidate reflects our will and takes up our struggles? All these existing parties, for all the differences between them, are parties blindly and mutely obey the elite and powerful ruling class. We, the working people, need a party of our own, a democratic party that is accountable to people. But in the short run, how do we vote?

One way out of this situation is by having a system of 'VOTE AGAINST ALL CANDIDATES [VAAC]' in which the voter can register her/his belief in the ballot as well as rejection of the candidates. VAAC means vote against all present candidates on the ballot paper. Imagine a scenario where 200,000 out of 600,000 voters cast their vote and the winning candidate gets 20,000 votes. 170,000 voters exercise the right to say no to all candidates. This system would provide a space to 170,000 people to articulate their democratic rejection of all contesting candidates. It would accurately reflect even the position and stature of the winning candidate. It would encourage genuine alternatives to present politics in the long run. The vote would thus truly express the voice of the people. Now is right time to demand the right VAAC.

Why has the Election Commission become so alert and active in making this kind of propaganda to make people vote? The alertness and the initiative of the Commission is an attempt to curb the radicalisation of this anti-election section of the population, lest their ideas expand beyond the realm of voting and parliament, and in the hope of bringing them back to the fold of elections and parliamentary bourgeois democracy. As the Election Commission claims voting to be sacred duty, a democratic right, not voting is equally a right of the citizen. Just as a citizen has the right to choose the party or the candidate of her choice, so she has the right not to make any choice. The Constitution of India protects our right to vote, and also the right not to vote, it permit appeals to vote, appeals not to vote, or even calls for vote boycotts.

We demand that, there must be a provision for a space, along with all the names of the candidates, were it will be written, 'VOTE AGAINST ALL CANDIDATES [VAAC]' or 'do not prefer anyone', or just 'no'. Incidentally, one at least had the option of casting vote without voting in favour of any candidate on ballot paper. That has been taken away in the Electronic Voting Machine [EVM]. The campaigns of the 'VOTE AGAINST ALL CANDIDATES [VAAC]' have presented us with an opportunity of spelling out our rights in a new way.

Join us in the struggle to extend the horizon of our rights. Write to the President of India, the Election Commission of India and demand that the ballot paper and Electronic Voting Machine list the 'VAAC' alternative to exercise the real democratic choice. We request people also to send the copy of the letter to us on Email No: rt_manav@sancharnet.in

Rohit Prajapati, Trupti Shah, Thakorbbhai Shah, Kiritbbhai Bhatt (All Vadodara), Kunal Chattopadhyay , (Kolkata), Swati Desai (Daidapada), Persis Ginwalla (Ahmedabad) Madhumita Dutta (Delhi).

The Left and the People's Movements

The established Left parties generally maintained a distance and a detached attitude towards the independent socio-political movements. As the forces of Globalization and Privatization assumed threatening proposition, there have been some changes in the attitude of the Left parties and organizations in the latter part of 1990s. On the other hand, in the states like W. Bengal, the Left Front government, while supporting and inviting the capitalist forces like Vivendi or Sahara-India, came heavily down against the organizations which are fighting against the Globalization!

We are presenting the views of two stalwarts in Left parties in Maharashtra – Prof. N.D. Patil and Govind Pansare about the issue.

Courtesy 'Andolan' Diwali-2003, Pune.

Progressive Parties Must Strengthen People's Movements

N.D. Patil

Q: What should be done to revitalize the progressive forces in present situation?

The unity or at least the coordination of the like-minded political forces is of utmost importance. Due to lack of this unity, people did not see any promise in the progressive politics, which in turn affected the mass base of these parties and movements. The money and muscle power is dissuading the youth from joining the political process and its worst sufferers are the progressive forces. We will have to revive the process of training and political education of the new entrants.. There is a need to mobilize common people who may not be the members /workers of the party, but are supporters or closer to the parties.

Also we should make amends in the criterion to measure the political strength of any party or movement. At present, the strength of a party is judged on the basis of number of legislators one has. This is a partial and imperfect criteria. We have to assess, how much the candidate or party strives for the people's issues, mobilizes and follows up the issue to the

end, instills the confidence in the people about their own power, even if defeated in the elections. That would be a realistic criterion to gauge the strength of the organizations or parties. For example, during the worst drought of 1972 in Maharashtra, even the handful of Opposition Members of Legislature (MLAs) could mobilize and initiate struggle in entire state and compelled state government to enact the Employment Guarantee Act, 1974. This was a historic achievement and was done for the first time in the country. So, more than the number of MLAs and MPs a party may have, it is the struggle, the commitment and perseverance in pursuing the real issues of people's lives can be a appropriate test of strength of party.

For last many years, power holders are not at all responding to the people's movements and their issues. For the common people, it becomes futile to mobilize people and undertake the struggles, as the government just would not its cognizance. There is a need to restore the confidence that the people's mobilization and struggles can lead to the solutions.

Q : How do you look at the non-party political movements? What kind of relations do you envisage between these movements and progressive political parties?

The non-party movements and organizations bridge the gap where the political parties could not reach. For many decades, the progressive parties did not take up many pressing issues pertaining to people's lives. Therefore the people's movements and NGOs are there to stay. The progressive political parties must cast off their blinkers and should take initiative in uniting all the progressive movements. In Maharashtra we have formed an 'Anti-Globalization Action Committee' with the progressive

Left Unity means United Struggle by Parties and People's Movements.

Govind Pansare

The political parties do combine the short term or single issues with the larger goal; and their involvement in the former is a means to mobilize forces for the ultimate goal. Only those political parties having a proper ideology, definite ultimate goal, well-knit organization and a committed cadre can bring in the desired change in the system. Not all-political parties could fulfill that role; the Communist Parties do fulfill that criterion.

People's movements mobilize and organize the strength for such a social change. These non-party and 'one-issue' movements have

emerged due to the imperfections and defects of the ideology-based political parties. That can be a drawback in the practice and not a flaw in the basic philosophy. Marxist parties' perception about the caste, ethnic traditions, regional identities, cultures and their mode of reasoning has remained imperfect. Secondly, we failed in uniting all those diverse elements,

parties along with the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). This alliance is based on two criterions of secularism and opposition to globalization.

Merely fighting against religious fundamentalism is not enough. The issues like unemployment, poverty are as important as secularism. The people will have to be mobilized on an alternative economic programme, while opposing the capitalist globalization.

The progressive parties must strengthen and encourage the people's movement and must respond to their call to participate in their programmes, without harming their work. The work of the movements has a certain role and utility. The constant dialogue, exchange of views and united programmes and friendly interaction between these two should increase further. This may result in developing and expanding the understanding and an ideology from both sides.

Q: What should be the People's Movements approach towards electoral politics?

Progressive political parties have lost the strength to come to power on their own, or to change the politics alone. They should take all the progressive forces along with them. These non-party organizations have demonstrated their commitment and firm resolve for years on the issues they have been struggling. The organizations, movements struggling for the rights of the exploited and victimized Fourth world within the Third World are perfectly justified if they wish to contest elections, without compromising on their

priorities. This will further the cause of Alternative Politics.

Many a times the people's movements or certain NGOs take a purist stance of not participating in elections, as if this would pollute or corrupt them. Politics does not consist only of elections; and one does not become non-political merely because one does not contest elections. Compromise does not mean contesting the elections; compromise is that when you make deal with corrupt elements. Elections are just different method in the alternative politics – like a demonstration or a fast. Therefore the people's movements should use elections as one of the instrument without any qualms. Some of the supporters and clientele of these movements might react adversely to such a step that; but one has to face that. Of course, the elections alone should not be the end of the politics of the movements.

(Prof. N.D. Patil is a senior Leader of Peasants and Workers Party, Maharashtra, Educationist Former Minister. Convenor, Left and Democratic Front in the state).

which can become comrades in a fight against a common enemy. These lacunae will have to be corrected. There has also been change in the attitude of the 'one-issue' movements during last five to seven years. The anti-Enron project movement is a classic example of the joint endeavour of all the progressive elements including political parties, people's movements, villagers' organizations, trade unions and NGOs. We were marching separately - striking separately - on one target. That agitation was successful in achieving its objective. Now we are evolving a larger movement where all of us will be marching separately - striking together - on one target. However, there is a need of a unity in marching, striking together on one target. There is such a possibility. In Maharashtra, all the progressive parties, movements, organizations, NGOs have come together on the issues of landless and displaced people. A new solidarity is emerging out of this combined struggle.

Many non-party people's movements and NGOs still consider themselves as 'apolitical'. For them the pattern of development is related only with the proper planning and technology and the power politics has little relevance in it. However the power politics is linked with the kind of development planning. The people's movements will have to explain their attitude towards the power and party politics. Some people proclaim that they would prefer any candidate as far he is non-corrupt. This is unscientific and unrealistic. The corruption is closely linked with the ideology and programme you have. Corruption is in-built within the ideology of the party which subscribes to marketization of society. The movements must be aware of this fact and make choices accordingly.

However, there are changes.

The Left parties and people's movements must come together on the basis of some broader and key criterion, like opposing neo-colonialism, capitalist globalization and against using the religion for political end. Progressive parties have a responsibility to forge a joint front with the people's movements, which are in turn adapting themselves to the new political realities. They are no more unconcerned to the question as to who should or should not rule.

The Communist Party of India had invited Medha Patkar to address a session in our Chennai Congress; for the first time anyone outside the Left and progressive parties had addressed the meeting of the supreme congress of the party. We wanted to send the message that Narmada Bachao Andolan is our fraternal organization, we recognize the fact that the movement has organized the 'basic masses' – here the Adivasis- that too, to fight against the present system. Once we are together on this one point, other issues, differences would be thrashed out in that process.

It is a wrong strategy and unrealistic to expect an alliance only after absolute agreement by all on all issues. We must form an alliance on the basis of some minimum common issues and go ahead with the united struggle. As the collective movement proceeds, other issues would prop up and we can thrash them out to arrive at a proper decision during the course of the struggle. It is unscientific to think of the united front without united action and to get everything pre-defined and strictly on our terms beforehand. This disconnects theory from practice. This dogmatism can lead to the decline of the Left. The CPI considers that the Left Unity consists of the Left Parties and organizations, along with the organizations, forces and individuals outside the Communist orbit. The arrogance and supercilious attitude of some of the organizations and individuals in the Left movement has proved to be obstacle in such a process.

The issues being raised by the people's movements regarding alternative development and environmental consciousness are in-built in the theory of Marx and Engels. The alternative production process is an intrinsic part and pre-condition for an equitable and just distribution. For Marx the genesis and fallout of capitalism is the exploitation of Nature and Man. The Left in India had already recognized that – but that was not given the required the priority and emphasis. That is needed now.

(Veteran Leader of Communist Party of India (CPI) in Maharashtra).

Time for a Contemporary Discourse

Sanjay Sangvai

As the elections approach, the social-political circles in India resume now familiar debate about the need of the social movements and the activists, the 'clean' people entering into the fray of electoral politics. The usual ways of holding the 'People's Courts', 'Public Hearing' and 'Election Watch' are termed as fringe efforts or ineffective. The people's movements also face a dilemma. They realize that the masses with whom they have been fighting on the issues of livelihood, resources, equality and justice, deem them as irrelevant at the time of elections and vote for those who have nothing to do with or are hostile to the real issues. The movements also realize that ultimately they have to demand and negotiate with the same political establishment whose ways and ideology they oppose. They feel the need to intervene at the larger policy level along with fighting for individual issues.

In the end the call for 'direct intervention' in electoral process becomes so compelling that only the electoral process of the political parties is deemed as 'the politics'. On the other hand, there are groups and individuals within organizational orbit, aghast at the remotest thought of politics or the power, let alone the elections, resulting in further splits in already shrinking space of the movements.

Some things have to be clarified at the outset. The people's movements are different from more professionally organized and funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or even the 'civil society organizations'. Also these movements have been manifestly or potentially 'political' in its core sense. If the Politics is considered as is a process related with the allocation of values (decision-making power, authority, wealth, prestige, resources etc.) within that system, then its domain extends beyond electoral politics. Any process aimed at or affects the present decision-making processes and power relations, it is politics. Be it an act of defiance of authority by an individual, an article or a 'constructive' work on alternative health or education which questions the present set up, or the struggles of underprivileged people, the decision to vote or not to vote – whichever process challenging the present power equilibrium- it is politics. It is unrealistic on part of any such organization or individual to claim to be 'non-political'. Even a family or friendship has a political dynamics. The dichotomy of 'electoral' or 'non-electoral' does not exhaust the range of politics. It is a vast arena- from theorization of a Marx, Phule to the sensitivities of Black or Dalit Consciousness.

Elections or political parties alone are not sole repositories of politics. They are only a part of the larger political process within a system.

Asking the people's movements to 'enter politics' is but a tautology. They are already 'in' the politics, as they are involved in the politics of changing the system in whatever big or small way. The party leaders in the areas of the movements perfectly understand this and therefore try to co-opt or finish such groups. The movements are engaged in a politics at primary or more fundamental level.

It is a partial explanation that the people's movements have emerged due to the failure of progressive parties. There is more to it. The movements emerged out of a fundamental critique of the party and electoral system and have their own *raison d'être* and distinct functioning. The present malaise in the party and election system is not merely because there are no 'good and clean people' in the parties or there are no stringent laws. It is deeper and pertains to the mammoth centralized and bureaucratic party structure, huge funds, corporatization, hierarchy, political compromises and machinations along with the consensus regarding development within the political parties. The policies of Globalization and Privatization being implemented by the Left Front government in West Bengal are a reminder of the inevitable slide of the present party apparatus.

The people's movements represent an urge to go beyond the structures, ways, programmes and ideologies of the progressive political parties. The movements have expanded the dimensions and scope of the Politics, in content, form and process. In India and all over the world, they have been

shaping a new politics of development and democracy. They have established a key linkage: that the prevalent ways of production, resource utilization and consumption lead to the social-political and environmental exploitation and injustice. Accordingly, the real development consists of the equivalence of the three aspects: democracy (participation, equality, justice and such other values), environmental sustainability (new ways of production, technology, distribution and consumption) along with the increased production, growth and well-being. They have also initiated more democratic and participatory ways of organization along with new ways and means of struggle. They are working beyond a limited power structure and creating groundwork for basic change in politics.

However there has been an avoidable distance and even hostility between these both kinds of political actors. There are legitimate reservations about each other from both sides. It is true to some extent that the progressive parties have yet to internalize the new issues and realities that have been brought to the fore through such movements, which may not conform strictly with the orthodox ideology, idioms and mass base. Yet, within almost every political party there is a group that realises importance and validity of the issues the movements raise; but they are in minority and their voice is suppressed. The movements and groups are also gradually recognizing the need to have a integrated struggle along with the progressive parties. On ground level there has been intermittent interaction and at times cooperation between the parties and organization.

The party and electoral politics and non-party politics dichotomy may have been phenomena of 1950s to 1980s;

even at that time it was at best a partial truth. All the assumptions and realities have now undergone a sea change. As N.D. Patil, the veteran political leader in Maharashtra says, "Politics does not consist only of elections; and one does not become non-political merely because one does not contest elections. Compromise does not mean contesting the elections; compromise is that when you make deal with corrupt elements. Elections are just a different method in the alternative politics – like a demonstration or a fast." From mid 1980s, the movements, various groups and NGOs and progressive parties have started interacting bit-by-bit with each other, casting off their Brahminical supercilious attitude. On the other hand, the political parties have realized that they will have to look into the issues thrown up by various movements. There has been constant interface between the electoral and non-party politics – either through legislatures or outside. Whenever and wherever the movements find them necessary and conducive to their work and issue, they have participated in the electoral politics at different levels and in various ways – by contesting elections or supporting progressive parties. Though it was a bit late, the Left parties have now supporting various issues raised by the people's movements. Still there are tension areas, like those in West Bengal. The movements encounter condescending attitude and suppression at the hands of these parties.

There is a need of a contemporary discourse and theorization regarding the emerging phenomena. Progressive politics enjoys a unique advantage of having the multifarious structures, groups, and individuals of various capabilities on diverse plains and fronts fulfilling myriad roles. This multiplicity is not weakness but a but strength, which is not available for other political segments. Alternative politics requires this wonderful diversity and multiplicity and it should be cherished, encouraged, rather than reducing it into a single structure of a party.

It has become all the more necessary to have a multi-pronged, diverse yet, if not overtly, implicitly coordinated integrated struggle. For that the people's movements and political parties will have to keep aside the old hang-ups and face the future. We need to develop an ensemble of principled progressive political parties reflecting the people's real issues, groups to cleanse the electoral process, people's movements and groups working on and forcing diverse issues on the political agenda of the nation and the individuals, intellectuals, artists and mediapersons and a host of other new political actors – hitherto not thought of to cope up with the present situation. We cannot afford to have a politics of exclusion and condescension– a bane of progressive politics. Initially, the political parties, the movements and other political actors need to establish a permanent dialogue process to evolve an integrated, multiple and coordinated strategy, programme and ideology of the Alternative politics.

On People's Alliances Beyond Elections

D. Gabriele

The present climate of upcoming elections makes it extremely difficult to make some of the ground realities in different states visible. Under the *fata morgana* of "India Shining", the abysmal conditions of workers in the informal sector become completely invisible. A comprehensive legislation for this sector, despite a bill having gone through three drafts, successively watering down the recommendations of the Second Labour Commission, has now been abandoned completely in favour of a flimsy Pilot Scheme. This betrayal needs to be exposed.

The picture on the cultural front is even more confusing. With the continuous switching of alliances and plenty of soft Hindutva, the religious and caste affiliations of the opposition are often not less distressing than what is happening at the Centre. E.g. in Tamilnadu the DMK/Congress/Left alliance has gone with the Vanniar dominated PMK and thus left the Dalits in the lurch, who are now "rescued" by the Janata Dal (United) which stepped in as a supporter with Sharad Yadav and George Fernandez in the forefront. It has been rightly pointed out that this is due to the presence of S. Kannapan's Makkal Tamizh Desam, a Yadava based Tamil nationalist outfit in this new "People's Alliance". Kannappan is known for advocating the scrapping of SC/ST/Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989. In this new dispensation, the Dalits are caught up with Hindutva yet again. It often feels as if there is no way out.

It is therefore necessary to point out that quite apart of such election induced madness, there are certain ground realities in which an issue based alliance building gathers strength and seems to grow beyond the immediate issue into a new style of people's politics confronting communalism and globalisation with a degree of creativity which may be of wider relevance. This ground reality is also important in the face of the WSF and the Mumbai Resistance in January 2004, which have been divided by a gulf wider than just the Express Highway.

The events around the struggle to rescue the shrine of Baba Bhudangiri near Chikmagalur in Northern Karnataka is a very important example of people's spirit soaring above the machinations of communal organizations and overcoming the conventional divide between secularists and religious believers, Hindus and Muslims, the Left and the Mutts, the Marxist-Leninists and the democratic socialists. The events in Karnataka have been reported in *Frontline* and *Communalism Combat*.¹ It is not possible in the present context to recapitulate them in great detail. However, I want to comment on some of the

events in December 2003, because I feel they are very deeply connected to NAPM's two pronged strategy to fight globalisation and to build a society of social justice and cultural diversity. Besides, the Basava Shri Award, which Swami Murugharajendra Sharana of Chitradurga had recently bestowed on Gaddar, the revolutionary bard from Telengana, had in earlier years, been given to Medha Patkar and then to the Dalai Lama. It was this selection for the award this year, which became in some ways a catalyst in the process of alliance building. The award itself reminds of the progressive syncretic anti-Brahmin culture of Karnataka, rooted in the Vachana Movement of the 12th century. The present day attempt of the Sangh-Parivar sponsored Shobha Yatra to claim Baba's place for a modernized and Sanskritized version of Dattatreya Swami, flies in the face of the peaceful co-existence of Sufis and Natha Panthis, Shaivites and Vaishnavites which has been a hallmark of the place. The Baba Boudhangiri Sonharda Vedike, a platform of secular, progressive and non-communal (also religious) individuals and organizations has struggled in most exemplary ways to rally different forces together. Their rally of over 20,000 people on December 28th in Chikmagalur was a significant signal that the communal forces in this country, who also foster globalisation, need not have the last word.

Originally the Vedike had planned to have their rally on the same day as the Sanghparivar sponsored Shobha Yatra on December 7th 2003. At this occa-

sion, the weak kneed Congress government of Karnataka withdrew permission to the secularists and allowed the communal forces a field day. When Vedike members managed to smuggle themselves into Chikmagalur that same day to congregate in a dry tank bed on the outskirts and tried to hold their meeting without permission, they were arrested and kept in an ill-equipped new jail for two days. Due to these events, the emphasis of reporting has been on the human rights violations on the part of the government and the success of the Sangh Parivar to defeat secularism. This was indeed highly necessary. Comparatively, the spectacular success of the Vedike on December 28th to bounce⁴ back and broaden its support into a rally of over 20,000 people from about 200 organisations, has not been highlighted by the press to the extent it deserved. This alliance is significant both in terms of possible class alliances as well as political alliances. Farmers, women's and Dalit groups were catalysed by intellectuals, writers and non-communal religious leaders among Hindus and Muslims. Large contingents of Karnataka Vimochana Ranga, and youth wings of CPI and CPI(M) also participated. Other movements present were Karnataka Rajya Raita Sangham, Samata Sainik Dal, different trade unions, several DSS groups, Kuthirai Mukh National Park Adivasi groups, youth groups and college students, Mahila Jagruti and many more. The movements are involved in protection of agriculture, people's rights to resources, saving Tunga Badra River, opposing mining and indeed building a pluralistic secular culture.

Another issue, which looms in the background is the question of non-violence vs. violence. After Gujarat,

the full violent potential of the Sangh Parivar has come into focus. With a Basavasri award for Gaddar, the question of violence of revolutionary forces has loomed large. Shortly before the manifestation of Dec. 28th, two young women, Parvathi and Hajima, had been brutally killed by forces of the State in a so-called police encounter. One a Hindu, one a Muslim, they had been fighting for the rights of Adivasis to live in their natural environment and had resisted the attempts to commercialize and destroy the forest. After this so-called encounter, many of the democratic groups in the state had found their names on an extremist list put out by the Government. They rallied together in Chikmagalur in order to make clear that they stand for a determined, yet non-violent struggle, connecting the issues of bio-diversity and cultural diversity.

The events of December 2003 in Chikmagalur contrast in most heartening ways with the above mentioned confusions of the electoral process. At the same time, the question how to consolidate such victories is not easy to answer. This can only be done through ongoing organizational and ideological processes. One thing is clear: Secularism has been rethought far beyond "separation of state and religion" or "equal respect for all religions" – it has to include the full humanist social justice potential of different religions and ideologies.

Secondly, the new class alliances in the face of onslaught of globalisation on agriculture in a state of high farmers suicides like Karnataka are of great relevance. Such alliances need to be built in farmers' movements, agricultural labourers unions, Adivasi struggles and environment movements. The struggle against globalisation is a uniting factor in these.

Thirdly, the common struggle against communal violence and the violence of the State can hopefully help to deepen common insights into the need for radical non-violent combat methods. This is intrinsically linked with the need for democratic functioning.

Beyond the dialogue between different sections the working classes and of the Left, as well as Gandhians and Ambedkarites, the experiences of Women's Movements, Ecologists and Peace Movements also need to be integrated in the debate. The fact that many women are subsistence producers, are fighting violence and have a propensity for syncretism and heresy, may be of great help.

¹ Parvathi Menon, "A Communal Campaign" in: *Frontline* December 19, 2003.

Parvathi Menon, "Saffron Mobilisation" in: *Frontline* Jan. 2, 2004.

V.S. Shreedhara & Gauri Lankesh, "Battle Over Baba" in: *Communalism Combat* Jan. 2004. I also draw on conversations with some of the people involved at the ground level.

(D. Gabriele a National Convenor of NAPM)

Story of My First Love...

Friederike Habermann

Anybody who is interested in the debate of people's movements and electoral politics have , to look into the history of Green Party in Germany and learn. Here is a view point from one of the former party workers.

This is the story about one of my first loves. I was twelve, when it happened. Who became I fascinated with at that early age? A boy? A girl? No, it was the Green Party. From the very beginning I observed the different small green parties here and there, mainly emerging out of the movement against nuclear power plants and for the protection of the environment, but also gathering other left and progressive currents like the women's movement. When they united for "Die Grünen" I became excited and didn't miss any of their advertising spots on TV before the elections in 1980.

"Ecological, grassroots democratic, non-violent, social" – these were the four founding hall marks. Just to be one leg of the movements in parliament was the objective, provoking established power structures by the way they looked, by the way they behaved and by coming to parliament on bicycle. Meanwhile "Die Grünen" have grown up and not only did they cut their bonds with their parents, the movements, but also they believe their former hallmarks to be children's diseases.

Of course they don't say that. Green is the colour that stands for "ecological", for environmentalism, and I am sure they will never give that up. But there are many kinds of greens: dark greens, bright greens and very light greens. Exporting not only Germany's but Europe's biggest plutonium plant in Hanau producing fuel for nuclear reactors - which was completed in 1991, but never went into operation due to the pressure by resistance movements – exporting this to China now, well, that is a very light version of green politics.

Everybody allowed to speak - rotation of the delegates, the representatives and the members of the parliament - sharing the sessional expense allowances; one after the other of these principles of grassroots democracy have disappeared. Only last year when the head of the party tried to get rid of the ban on accumulation of offices for themselves the basis voted against. So guess what they did? They let them vote again!

It used to be the sunflower the symbol of the Green Party but these days it's more the face of our foreign minister Joschka Fischer - sometimes as plummy and plenteous as a sunflower in summer, sometimes getting flabby and sallow, depending on his diet. Instead of calling for "making peace with no weapons" he and his party now are voting for war with weapons. Instead of calling "Imagine there is war and nobody goes" they order now "Imagine! There is war! Go!" – like they did in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. Their desire to play a major role in

these wars showed that this was for the very same purpose as not going to war against Iraq. It's a power game among the western centers for global hegemony.

And finally social. The party's special public-relations-company "Zum Goldenen Hirschen" ("to the golden hart") was assigned the job to launch a campaign in order to make people consider the so-called "Agenda 2010" a welfare programme instead of right the opposite. Millions of unemployed will have to live on much less money than before. This will be an impoverishment incomparable to anything we had before. Well, people see that, this is the good news, but the bad news is, that they believe in a globalisation driven by purely economical forces, as if this wasn't the result of the strong governments in this world - like the G-8, including our government, consisting of the social democratic and the Green party.

I don't say everybody who still is a member of the Green Party became corrupted – they might have been left one or two upright. They don't have a chance though. All my political friends have left this party a long, long time ago. And I found a new love I'm very happy with for many years now: the globalisation movement. Another world doesn't need party representatives, sitting as well-minded people in parliaments and feeling honestly very, very bad for voting in favour of a war and only because otherwise their party might have been kicked out of government. Another world needs all of us, a true dialog among us and our political engagement in our daily actions.

(Friederike Habermann is an activist in Germany, involved with People's Global Action)

When Politics Becomes PR and Spin

Prashant Bhushan

Remember Satyendra Dubey? He was the engineer working on the golden quadrilateral project who had sent a letter to the Prime Minister complaining about massive corruption in the 30,000 crore project. He was shot and killed recently after his identity was casually disclosed by the PMO despite his entreaties that such disclosure would endanger his life. Remember Manish Mishra? He was the Prime Minister's nephew who was thrown out of a running train with several friends when they objected to the harassment of some girls in the train. Remember Sarita and Mahesh? They were two of our finest young activists working in the villages near Gaya in Bihar on water conservation and for restoration of the lands of Dalits which had been grabbed by local landlords. They were recently shot dead while returning home after a meeting with the villagers. These are merely some well-publicized but stray examples which illustrate the law and order situation in the entire country.

Several thousand people belonging to the minority community were butchered in a gruesome manner in broad daylight in Gujarat two years ago with the full complicity of the police and the government. Not one of the thousands of persons involved in the brutal killings, which included police officials and ministers, have been brought to book. At the same time, several hundred thousand members of the minority community whose houses were burnt and belongings looted are still unable to return to their homes because of the continuing terror.

Over a thousand of the more than 20 lakh citizens who have no shelter and sleep out in the open (according to the government census), died in the recent cold wave in the country. More than a thousand people had died in Andhra Pradesh alone in the heat wave this summer, also mostly people without shelter. Thousands of farmers died of starvation and several hundred even committed suicide this summer, being unable to feed themselves and their families. Most of these deaths went unreported by the mainstream English-language media where cuts in the fees of IIMs, cuts in customs duty on cars and computers and even gossip about models and filmstars make headline news.

We are told that Telgi and his gang cheated the public exchequer of at least 3,000 crores by his forged stamp papers while all in the establishment slept or connived with the scam. The Tehelka tapes graphically showed (despite the Honourable Justice Phukan's clean chit to our Honourable Defence Minister) how easily penetrable and thoroughly corruptible the Defence establishment has become. The non-performing assets (a euphemism for money stolen) of public financial institutions has come to exceed one lakh crores. And even this is likely to be a gross underestimate. In the UTI scam alone the public lost more than 10,000 crores. More than 10,000 crores of irregular loans (without proper appraisal) were given away last year by HUDCO, one of our smaller public financial institutions. Out of this, more than 5000 crores was handed over to 50 different corporations in one-day through a board meeting in which only three part-time directors were present! It is hardly surprising that Transparency International should continue to rank India as amongst the most corrupt countries in the world.

Public sector companies having assets of tens of thousands of crores have been sold off for amounts less than even their free reserves (which is like cash in the bank), as in the case of VSNL and IPCL. In the guise of privatization, huge chunks of public assets such as oilfields, gas fields, mine reserves, and even forests and water have been and are being transferred to private corporate and often foreign interests. Our public debt has more than doubled during the last five years and stands at more than 16 lakh crores, more than 65% of our GDP and much of it owed to foreign institutions. Much of our record foreign exchange reserves are on account of short-term and speculative investments in our stockmarkets, money markets and securities markets. All this is hot money which can disappear as quickly as it came as was seen in the Southeast Asian crisis in 1997. Most of this speculative investment is being routed through post box companies in Mauritius because the government has instructed our income tax department to give them a

tax holiday. Feeling good about such foreign exchange reserves in these circumstances is not unlike the feeling of one who is on a splurge after pawning off his assets and borrowing from a rapacious moneylender.

Unemployment is at an all-time high, with 27 million (7.32% of the workforce) jobless. The increase of unemployment is greatest in rural areas where the rate of increase of employment is only a third of the growth of the labour force. At least 24% or 47 million children continue to be deprived of elementary education as government spending on primary education continues to decline as a percentage of GDP. In the 10th plan, the planning commission has allocated only .15% of the GDP for elementary education as against the .47% stated to be required for universal elementary education. Whatever be the claims of the government regarding poverty reduction, the fact is that between 1997-98 and 2003-04, the per capita consumption of food grains has declined from 174 kg per annum to 151 kg per annum. Thus while the government cites the 8% growth rate recorded in the last quarter and the booming sensex (where stock market manipulators routinely create virtual money which eventually disappears just as surely) as evidence of India shining, hundreds of millions cannot even buy two square meals a day. And clearly this number has grown in the last 5 years as is evident from the decline in food grain consumption.

Yet this government has issued advertisements worth hundreds of crores in the last month to convince people that India is shining and that the common man in this country is feeling good. It hopes to win next elections, which have been prematurely declared, on this so-called "feel-good factor". Of course these hundreds of crores spent on this advertising blitz to make us feel good, have come from the public exchequer, which means your pockets and mine. It is like taking starving men to a laughing club to make them feel good while their last penny is squeezed out of their pockets.

Welcome to the political world of the whiz kids of the brave new world. The world of media manipulators and spin masters. A world where the advertising agency becomes the cutting-edge of a party's political campaign. Welcome to the world of the Mahajans and the Jaitleys, masters of spin (the art of deflecting attention from the real issue) and media management. No matter how inconvenient or horrendous the facts might be, they can be trusted to give it the right spin and manage the media (through ad agencies or otherwise) so that the government comes out shining white. In this world, every fact or fiction can be sold. You just need the right spin or a compliant media or a good ad agency. We all know how George Bush was able to sell the war on Iraq and convince the American people of the lie that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction which could obliterate America within minutes. He even convinced them that Saddam was

behind the Al Qaeda (though he hated Islamic fundamentalists even more than Bush did). He accomplished this by repeating his lies at every opportunity which were dutifully peddled by a compliant media which is owned by the same corporate interests represented by Bush.

It was Goebbels who first used propaganda to such devastating effect. Bush, Blair, the Jaitleys and the Mahajans of today are the political heirs of Goebbels, except that their power has been greatly amplified by the reach and concentration of the mass media (into the hand of a few gigantic corporations) and the professionalism of the ad agencies. We seem to be approaching an era when political parties and governments would be run by advertising agents. The political education of such "leaders" would take place not by observing society, the people and their problems, nor even by studying history, political science, sociology or economics, but in the schools of the ad agencies which teach the art of deception and propaganda.

(Mr. Prashant Bhushan is a Supreme Court advocate and is with the People's Union for Civil Liberties, New Delhi)

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Shining Fraud

Sulabha Brahme

Now India is shining. It has become the next Asian Tiger. The growth rate has gone upto 7-8 percent. Swanky cars, posh highways, stock market is bullish, glittering hotels, glamorous young men-women, mobiles, bikes, beverages, our elite can and is competing with his Western counterpart, and lo, even the government has also opened its coffers for them. Cellphones, computers, air-fare was made much cheaper and waived excise and custom duties upto Rs.11,000 crores ...Yup, India has arrived.

But India is Shining and we have to 'feel good'. This 'swadeshi', BJP-led government had outsmarted even the Congress government, which had taken the path of the anti-people development. However, the BJP has done in mere five years, what the Congress could not achieve in fifty years. And the more the advertisement, the more the cheating, untruth and numbness. Let us probe some sectors:

Power

In June 2003, the government of India enacted the Electricity Supply Act and completely opened the power sector to private companies. After Independence the government took up the responsibility to produce, transmit and distribute the power and an extensive network was created to do that. There has been an attempt to reach the electricity even to the remotest of village. We became self-dependent about the fuel and infrastructure. The subsidy and cross-subsidies kept the electricity rates lower for the small consumer and farmers and increased rates for the big consumers.

This made electricity go nook and corner of the nation. However, the BJP-led government started making upside down the whole concept and practice. The new law increases the rate for the small consumers, farmers Rs. 4/5 per unit and decreased rates for the industry, big consumers. Maharashtra government as yet did not endorse the Act privatized the Power sector due to the stiff opposition by consumers, state electricity employees, yet the Center has imposed this law on all states. If this law is implemented all the small consumers, farmers, medium and small industries, professionals, shopkeepers would be suffering; prices of all irrigated crops and vegetables would sky-rocket. Only big industries, luxurious consumption, five-star hotels etc. will be beneficiaries.

It is a need that at least Maharashtra and all other state governments must avoid trifurcating state electricity boards (SEBs), implement the internal reforms, stop interfering in the SEBs, make its functioning transparent, keep the tariff according to the purchasing power of the consumer.

Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)

The ruling clique and the pro-liberalization media raised a hue and cry about the alleged losses by the PSUs and the burden on the national exchequer. However, out of total investment of PSUs in 1989-90 was Rs. 58521 crores and the losses were incurred only on the Rs. 310 crores of investment. Central PSUs in many sectors were earning profits, like the PSUs in Petroleum were earning 27% profit, along with power (18%), and iron, steel and coal (12%). The central government had started selling the equity shares of the 'Navratnas', those PSUs that were earning profit for the government. For that a new Disinvestment Ministry was created by the Center to sell the PSUs overriding the objections of the concerned ministries, like that of the objections raised by the Petroleum Ministry. It launched a programme of selling off the PSUs at cheap prices to the vested interests. Entire process was done with deliberate confusion, violations of rules, large-scale corruption. And the government earned, from 1991 to 2002, only Rs. 29481 instead of proposed Rs. 78300 crores as was declared. As a result, there remained many PSUs, which earned profit upto Rs. 36,432 crores and gave 31% dividend. However, if the BJP comes to power again, the dismantling of these PSUs is certain. The privatization of Petroleum sector is a case of the BJP's anti-national economic philosophy and policy.

Privatization of Petroleum Sector

Selling off the PSUs in petroleum sector and decontrolling of the prices of petroleum products is anti-people and therefore anti-national step. It is

technically and economically sensible that the research, production of petroleum products, the refineries remain under a unified entity, as all these processes are interlinked. The petroleum industry was once in the hands of the foreign private companies. The Congress government nationalized the industry, and the country was heading for self-reliance in this sector. It was very possible to increase the efficiency further of PSUs by streamlining and integrating them. However, from 1991, the government started the process of privatization of these PSUs by selling the equity shares. It has encouraged the companies like Enron, Reliance to capture the petroleum sector. Enron company became bankrupt. The BJP government decided in 2002 to privatize the profitable distribution PSUs like Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum. However, the Supreme Court directed that the PSUs can be privatized only through a Parliamentary law, as they were created by the an act of Parliament. So, the BJP needs Parliamentary majority in the present elections. Once that achieved, it is sure that the Act would be amended dismantling of Petroleum PSUs and floodgates for unchecked privatization of other profit-making PSUs would be opened.

The decontrolling of prices of Petroleum products is hurting the common people most. The prices have been steeply rising since this policy was adopted. Petrol prices increased from Rs. 10.76 (1990) to Rs. 39 (2000) , Diesel from Rs. 4.30 to Rs.27, Kerosene Rs. 2.17 to Rs.16 and Gas from Rs. 56 to Rs. 257. All this is fuelling further price-rise in all sectors as the transport cost increasing steeply. The common people must know the adverse effects of privatization and oppose it.

Agriculture

The overall policy of BJP is pro-traders and anti-farmers. It has removed all the quantitative restrictions on all imports in 2000 and 2001, on the pretext of GATT provisions. This resulted in major decline in the prices of agricultural products. In Maharashtra, the price of Bajra came down from Rs. 700 a quintal (1999) to Rs. 400 (2000), betel nut from Rs. 154 per kg to Rs. 78, and the same is the story in case of soybean, wheat, sugar, cotton, rubber, coconut and other farm products. This was accompanied by the reduced subsidies on fertilizers, power and other farm inputs. The farmers' debt increased and hundreds of farmers from Andhra, Karnataka, Maharashtra and even from Punjab committed suicides to avoid further suffering.

Due to the falling investment in agriculture sector, the production of food grains has declined and expected production in 2003-2004 would be less than 1996-97 production (19.9 crores tons). Present per capita food grain availability declined from 174 kg (1996-97) to 151 kg, the 1951-level.

However, the food stocks in godowns kept up increasing (630 lakh tons-July 2002), not the food security of the people. Over 25% people are malnourished. The food grains could have been utilized for food for work

programme. Instead of subsidizing and distributing food grains, the government has exported some 200 lakh tons of food-grains as fodder! This is market fundamentalism.

Livelihood and Resources

When there are over 50 million people displaced in the name of development projects and even 25% of them have not been resettled, the government has been acquiring the lands for the national-multinational companies, ceding them the sea-coasts, rivers and underground water. Marginal farmers are losing lands due to indebtedness and the employment in farm sector declined drastically. The farm employment decreased from 24.3 crores (1993-94) to 23.8 crores (1990-2000). Tribals are facing the displacement. In Maharashtra 18,000 industrial units were closed during the period of 2000-2003 and 3.25 lakh workers were out of employment. The public sector is being dismantled and as a result the reservation in employment has suffered major setback. Labour laws are being changed in favour of the employers with the provisions like 'hire and fire' and ban on strikes by labourers.

According to the official figures, the percentage of unemployment was 7.3 in 2000 and was expected to go upto 10% by 2005. Official figure of 2.66 crores of unemployed persons is gross underestimate. Out of 33.7 crores of working population 2.78 crores are in organized sector, 37% get seasonal work - that is semi-employed and rest are in the self-employment sector, whose financial status is not known. Jobs in the organized sector so scarce that lakhs of people applied for the 20,000 posts for third and fourth-class positions in Railways, in November 2003. There were 20,000 engineers, 3000 MBA in those applied. There were attacks on those seeking employment from other states in Assam and Maharashtra.

Does The World Social Forum Need An Ideology?

Kishen Pattanayak

The peoples of the world, especially those of the third world, need a new philosophy of sustainable living and sustainable production. Without this basic component, socialism cannot be revived in the 21st century. So both MR 2004 and the radicals in inside WSF are facing the same challenge.

I attended the 4th World Social Forum (WSF) as an observer and in the capacity of a member of the NAPM (National Alliance) of People's Movement, India). My political organisation SJP (Samajwadi Jan Parishad), whose ideology can be called socialism as modified by Gandhism, is not very enthusiastic about the world conference. Neither does it reject the WSF as wholly irrelevant or reactionary. A practical reason for SJP not carrying out a strategy to take part in WSF is that participating effectively in this conference is

financially in this conference is financially unaffordable for the SJP. I have decided to come and attend because I can afford to travel to the venue and spend a week here. The next world conference will be held in far away countries. Going there will be beyond my means. I did want to miss this one. My curiosity is positive.

A few groups in India with whom I have good relations are mobilizing a resistance (Mumbai Resistance, MR 2004) to the WSF. They have some serious allegations against the character and compositions of the WSF. I cannot subscribe to these allegations even though a few of them are not unfounded. A brochure published on behalf of Resistance goes to the extent of alleging that the protagonists of globalization have actually initiated the WSF process with a view to taming the anti-globalization wave. This statement is either absurd or irrelevant. What is important is not who started and with what intent, but how the process is being carried forward, and with what outcome. Recent events in the world have shown that in spite of the universal discontent against Globalization there is hardly any organized, continuous resistance to the imposition of anti-people economic policies that almost all the nations are experiencing. Outside Latin America. People's anger against economic imperialism is nowhere reflected in the nations' politics. In such a situation of inaction any organization or institution which brings together, periodically, critics of globalization from all corners of the world is doing us good simply by

Though the National Income rose by 6.7%, the employment increased by 1%. This clearly indicated the trajectory of the kind of development policy. The increase in national income pertains mainly to service sector, in that too in the fields of consumerist sectors, share market and speculation on land, black money and the computer-based technology. Thus the increased national income has left hundreds of millions of workers in service sectors high and dry. All the people displaced from agriculture, rural service, fast declining industries, unorganized sectors huddle in the service sector (hawkers, rikshaws, repairmen

etc.) claiming share in already meager income. There is a de-industrialization in rural and semi-urban areas and gap dividing highbrows, rich and poor is increasing further. Along with livelihood the BJP-led government has been encroaching upon the democratic rights of the toiling masses.

For last five years the BJP has been undermining the letter and spirit of Indian Constitution, its values like Secularism, equality, freedom of expression and organization. India is on the crossroads. Would we stand by the pro-people economic development, diversity, secularism, democratic rights or will end in supporting the terrorist, capitalist totalitarianism and lose our identity, freedom, democratic rights and livelihood-bases?

(Dr. Sulabha Brahme is an Economist & involved with People's Science Movement, Pune)

providing opportunities of solidarity. Critics may be just critics, they may not even be antagonists. The motto 'another world is possible' does not deter them so long as the contents of change are not deeply debated.

The question at this stage is not whether opportunistic elements have infiltrated into the WSF. We have to search out whether some healthy, genuinely radical trends are gradually making headway and an international force against globalization is taking concrete shape as a result of the solidarity and interactions over the past four years. Is there a real sense of arriving at a worldwide consensus on radical policies, which will inspire people of various countries not only to resist globalization but also to articulate the outlines of new economic society based on the principles of equality?

The NGO Factor

The overwhelming presence of the NGOs, liberally founded by donors of rich countries, is a major source of worry, I don't know if NGOs are perceived by radical groups as the agents of western capitalism. This is an embarrassing subject because so many of our dear and esteemed friends are part of the NGOs. This is an embarrassing subject because so many of our dear and esteemed friends are part of the NGOs. Perhaps they have to be kept there to impart a progressive image to the organisations concerned. Sometimes it may so happen that one or two personalities associated with a NGO are incorruptible and beyond reproach, but the bulk of the activities and managers belong to the average run to NGO cadre. The NGOs, by the large, have to function within the development objective set by the World Bank. When Radical movements are going on in the society, the NGOs may associate with anti-establishment agitation in order to save their progressive credentials. This is remarkably illustrated in radical situation when movements are totally absent. If the USA is supporting a military rule and there is no political force there to resist it, the NGOs also tend to forget about democracy. Globalization with a human face, capitalist development accompanied by programmes of eradicating poverty -this is the ideology of NGOs in the developing countries. Needless to say, some of them can easily be covered into agents of the establishment against revolutionary and patriot movements at crucial times. Therefore it can be said with apologies to those elements in the NGOs who are genuinely radical, that the resentment against the disproportionate presence of NGOs in the WSF is not without valid reasons.

It is natural for groups starved of funds to be suspicious of NGO delegates who spend money on their travel, accommodation and activities in a manner similar to what government and corporate delegates do. It may be asked if it is bad to have more money? This is a serious question. Some organisations, like mine, may be inefficient and incapable of collecting funds for meeting the minimum needs of functioning effectively. But even the best of the organisations in a poor country will find it hard to make both ends meet if it has to remain independent, radical and uncompromising. The deplorable aspect of the funds of eminent NGOs, is that all the funds come from outside. The local society does not contribute at all. When the personal lifestyles and

organizational expenses do not reflect any of the constraints of poverty that pervades all around, that itself becomes a source of suspicion, a potential for future compromises.

It is another thing that NGOs cannot be wished away. But their limitations must be kept in mind while coexisting with them. The NGOs may constitute the majority of the delegates to the WSF. But is there also an assertive minority consisting of the genuinely radical elements? No doubt they are there, but are they visible, as distinct from the NGO crowd? Discussion on environmental damage, gender inequality and racial prejudice are commendable exercises, and must find a place in the radical ideology. But the WSF will be credited with a special role only if it devises a strategy for fighting against the economic globalization of poor countries, which means fighting against the WTO, World Bank and IMF- against world capitalism in short. Is this question central to the deliberation and activities of the WSF? Most of the critics of globalization who attend similar conferences are hesitant to clarify if they really oppose the WTO, and if they have a programme to end capitalism and its global integration. The euphoria around Cancun exposed that the average critic of globalization will be satisfied if some trade concessions are granted to the weaker nations. In this context, the slogan 'Another world is possible' does not hold much promise, even though it sounded very radical when it was uttered first, If you go on repeating the slogan without concretizing the change that is visualized, it loses the original ethos. It may not mean anything after some time.

Failure of the Non-NGO groups

The failure of the WSF is the failure to initiate a credible process of formulating a strategy for opposing the world economic system. By now some economic goals should have been laid down and popularized. It has not

even been established whether economic equality is a valid idea as part of the goal of drastically reducing the disparities between nations, regions and classes. If disparities are to be done away with, what happens to prosperity? For prosperity without any limit means basically the centralizing wealth and production. Modern technology specializes in centralizing wealth and its production. So ending inequality will necessitate a radical change in the use of technologies. The Leftists of the twentieth century, the socialists and communists, could not resolve this dilemma. So they met a dead end.

The WSF will have to begin where twentieth century socialism stopped. It not only stopped, it collapsed under the weight of unanswered questions and unresolved contradictions. It could not reconcile the pursuit of modern prosperity with the goal of the economic equality. The lure of prosperity and modern technology is so great that successful socialists everywhere have bowed to the market and postponed the ideas of equality.

Organizing struggles is one part of resisting globalization, but the other part is ideological. If a party or coalition of parties is able to gain popular support and comes to power in a developing country on the promise of fighting globalization, how does it put this into practice? What should a patriotic, anti-imperialist government do in respect of foreign capital and foreign loans? If the goal is to achieve modern prosperity, the country may need more loans and more foreign capital. Then its dependence on foreign powers and centers of world capitalism will increase. Will the WSF advise such a government not to go in for modern prosperity.

The 20th century radicals did not bother about this aspect because they tended to believe that you can use modern technology anywhere you like and produce great wealth and then distribute that wealth

by using state power. This illusion has been belied, but no proper debate has yet taken place. We know now that we cannot acquire the technology unless the multinationals are willing to give it. They do not give it cheaply, so when we start using the technology, the mining process itself gives rise to so many inequalities.

In non-technical language, globalization means integrating the developing economies with the world's most powerful economies. This process benefits the powerful economies in a total manner, and it is they who take all the initiatives. Others either okay the proposal or seek concessions and moderation. Whenever the superpowers concede in a small way, it is considered a big achievement for the poor country. Is the WSF, or some significant part of it, going to take a stand NOT to integrate poor countries' economies with the most powerful economies? If it does, it will have to give a call to the developing countries to quit the WTO. A debate on this is not yet on the agenda of the WSF.

An ideology for the WSF will be evolved if statements of policy are laid down in response to the following propositions:

- ◆ We should advocate a policy of quitting the W.T.O.
- ◆ Patriotic governments of developing nations should adopt a policy to stop asking for loans from the World Bank / IMF.
- ◆ The whole world needs a civilization change, marked by the reduction of economic disparities between nations and classes. Towards this, the WSF should strengthen and sharpen the concepts of (1) small and appropriate technology and (2) self-reliant communities which will produce all basic necessities of life in their own respective regions.
- ◆ There should be no global trade in articles of daily necessity that can be produced in every region. Even trade within the nation should adopt the economic philosophy of self-reliance of the communities.
- ◆ Trades and markets desist from multiplying human wants and commercializing the basic elements of nature like air and water.
- ◆ Mining must be drastically reduced so as to bring about a qualitative change in its impact on people and business.

And so on. The WSF should provide an atmosphere for the launching of a strategy of ideas and actions that will define a break with the old order the concepts that shaped it, 'Another World' must mean another civilization. The same appeal is extended to Mumbai Resistance 2004 (MR-4). We are not convinced that MR-4 is armed with a vision that will replace the present global economy. Centralization of wealth production and the desire for limitless prosperity was the economic aim that inspired both America and the Soviet Union in the 20th century. America has now risen to the status of a global empire, and the Soviet Union has collapsed. The peoples of the world, especially those of the third world, need a new philosophy of sustainable living and sustainable production. Without this basic component, socialism cannot be revived in the 21st century. So both MR 2004 and the radicals in inside WSF are facing the same challenge.

(Kishen Pattnayak is with Samajwadi Jan Parishad and NAPM)

What is 'Another World' Anyway?

Rubina Jabbar

The challenge is how various social movements, people's movements can come together in this space, formulate their agendas based along these lines.

"Another world is possible." People from different countries, diverse cultures and faith kept chanting and exhibiting through placards this one-lined slogan throughout the six-day World Social Forum (WSF) hosted at a dusty, sprawling field in Goregaon, Mumbai from January 16th-21.

Is this 'another world' just the same for a South Korean university student, and a Dalit from a village in Gujarat, or a Palestinian from occupied territories and to others from elsewhere? Except the basic fundamentals of peace, equity and justice the concept of this 'another world' is as diverse as these people are.

"Fundamentally, it must be a world that is free of violence and negative impact of globalisation. A world that granted freedom to the basic human rights, freedom of expression, freedom to live the way you want to live, freedom to be what you are in the world where somebody does not topple the freedom of others," observed Ave Odete, policy research coordinator, Action Aid Kenya.

'Another world' is possible so long as the world leaders, multinational companies and various interest groups are ready to come to terms with the negative impact of globalization and the rights of individuals. If they are ready to protect the rights of individuals at the cost of profit and power domination then, of course, another world is possible. Some might say it's a jamboree, but people committed time to come all the way to Mumbai, and demonstrated against the violations of minority rights, child labour etc because they have a cause, and for this cause they came here, opined Odete.

"Another world to me is a socialist world. I think socialist world is a better world. And it is possible (to achieve)," claimed Sang-won Han, a student of philosophy from the University of Seoul while enjoying Far Eastern food with other fellow delegates. Socialist world does not mean previous Soviet Union, Stalinist regime or North Korean regime or China."My socialist idea is about the socialist from below—a stronger worker class and not the socialists from bourgeois society."

The world is changing and anti-capitalist movements and anti-war movements are growing. And these two movements are meeting just here in this forum. These two movements should meet and be seen together, Han said

adding that many people in Western Europe are disillusioned about socialist democratic society.

For Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal, 'another world' means repatriation to their homeland and peace in every corner of the world.

"Another world means world having peace in every country and equality among people. As Bhutanese refugees we want to be repatriated to our homeland with dignity, honour and security. And we want to involve third parties, like United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), to the process of rehabilitation, verification and repatriation, so we can stay inside Bhutan with safety and security," said Hari Khanal, a journalist for FM radio in Nepal.

"Over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have been living in camps in Nepal. But 20,000 Bhutanese living in Sikkim, Assam and West Bengal states in India have not been recognized as refugees like we are, and they are not getting any help like we do", Hari said adding that WSF helped raised the issue to the international community who would hopefully act accordingly.

Freedom, dignity and right to self-determination for Palestinians mean 'another world' to Nina Atallah, the head of Monitoring & Documentation Unit of Al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights organisation formed by independent lawyers in Ramallah.

"It's possible only through civil society and people. The only hope for us is people. If there is a will, there is also a

way. I always hope people can do something when they all work together with unity and peace. WSF is a success even though sometimes I think it's actually like a demonstration. But at least if you can reach 5% of people here you did win," she said.

On the occasion of its 25th anniversary Al-Haq is launching a campaign against collective punishments. The campaign is targeting the governments but it's also targeting the people to put pressure on their governments taking decisions for their people so that they can stop Israel.

Anne Finger, a writer and a disabled delegate from the US dreams for a 'world' where disabled people will really have full access to the world, where they would be included in education, have employment rights, and where they would be accepted as human beings.

"That is a very important part of that vision of the 'new world' for me," said Anne who has had her three books published. Anne who also works for the disabled rights movement, said she was very happy to be here. "It's very exciting. The only sad part about this is that arrangements for the wheelchair access, disability access was really not done. So it has been difficult. But other than that it's a great conference." Anne did not feel at all uncomfortable here at the venue where the US was portrayed as some monstrous evil, enemy Number One of the humankind.

"I don't feel any of the slogans are anti-American in a race system. They are only anti-American in the sense of being opposed to the things that the government has been doing. They are really terrible. In the US people are very insulated from what is really going on in the world. And I think, unfortunately, things are getting a lot worse before they

get better. And I hope that they don't get too much worse before they get any better", she added.

For Tibetan lamas, freedom from Chinese rule is 'another world'. Wrapped in the tradition robe, a 20-year-old lama sitting with his group on kerbside watching the passing marchers said they had been living in India instead of their own homeland since 1959 after China occupied it.

"We don't have our country. Freedom from the occupation of China is our 'another world', and we will win this freedom one day," he said adding 200,000 lamas are scattered across the world.

But Dalits, who made a strong presence at the WSF, seek a world where they are not discriminated or looked upon. R B Jadev, a construction worker hailing from a village in Chotila in the state of Gujarat said: "Our entire life is a total problem. We are zero in education, refused jobs in government offices. As such what we have been doing is manual work like farmers or labourers." About the reserved seats, he said reservation is only on papers and in reality, there is no reservation.

For Luca, a Pakistani activist of Anjumane Mazaareen Punjab, property rights to peasants working on farms for the last 100 years is 'another world'. "An employee is given pension after he completes 25 years of service, so why can't peasants working on the lands for the last 100 years be given the property rights," he asked.

Endorsing Lucas's views, Sarwar Abbas, a delegate from the province of Sindh, said big landlords should surrender huge land holdings. "The 100,000 plus acres landholdings of Benazir Bhutto and 60,000 acres of Jatoi should equally be distributed among the peasants for bringing change in the oppressive system," he suggested.

"Another world to me is a world where people's movements, cultural exchange, exchange of ideas, collaboration and co-operation are as globalised as capital commercial goods," commented Tom Ashwanden, programme manager for Asia, Freres des Hommes (FDH), a Paris-based organisation. Strategy to realise 'another world' depends on what 'other world' we are talking about. And the strength and weakness of WSF is that there are several other worlds possible and there are several strategies needed to get that.

The problem is in keeping the momentum going because WSF is not a movement, it's a an open space, a forum where all those opposed to neo-liberal globalization have the opportunity in agreement to the principles of non-violence, have space to share their ideas.

Tom said that we need to globalise our resistance to our global problems. "To me, that is the important thrust of the social forum." We may not be able to change the world overnight through people's power but people's

power is fundamental to any kind of participatory, democratic and just development. So, there has to be people's power. People's power is very much seen in opposition to the current political world order, he added.

Tom said that one has to only look at the attitude of the Indian Government towards this whole event to see the potential of people's power. The Indian Government has been hostile and obstructionist to the success of this event. The example of Pakistanis we need to mention and bring it up, he added. 1,200 Pakistani visa applications all assured at the highest level of success in their applications being given the visa. 420 visas were issued. No explanations, no apologies, no excuses (offered).

"Millions of people marched together against war in Iraq. But we could not stop the war. Yet, we made George Bush, Tony Blair and war-mongers in crisis," the Korean student claimed. He believed that the international working class could stop this war because they produced all the wealth all over the world. "If they stopped producing goods and working in military factories, the war will stop," he assured.

Tom, on the other hand, believed that the forum is not against globalisation. "The forum itself is a phenomenon of globalisation. The fact that I, a British citizen living in France, can come to an international event of this kind to discuss issues with Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians, Australians and Brazilians is a phenomenon of globalization. What the WSF is opposing is the current model of neo-liberal globalization based on a hugely unjust system of capitalist development.

"I believe the representatives of World Bank are here, but my personal feeling is good. The World Bank is not some amorphous evil-doer; it's made up of some bright people who have some good ideas working in the wrong system. Let's get them to see what's going around and how strong we are. Let's get them around the table, and talk to them," Tom said, adding that he was not suggesting that they form some alliance, but tackle them.

The six-day event reportedly cost Rs. 8.5 crore. Two Netherlands-based organisations Havos and Novib and UK-based Oxfam provided 60% of the amount. The rest of the money was raised by the India General Council to which as many as 216 Indian organisations are linked.

Ave said Ford Foundation Kenya funded and supported this event through sending participants, and Action Aid International funded several partner organisations to come here. According to Tom, Ford Foundation in the past has been involved in the funding of WSF, but this year the Indian Organising Committee refused funding from the Ford Foundation.

"But it's a tricky question for the funding of this kind of event," Tom said. The Communist Party of India (CPI) has contributed in some kind of funding to this gathering. And yet the CPI-ML (Marxist Leninist) have opposed the whole event and organized a parallel event as one of the reasons on the issue of foreign funding. But the CPI-ML had been receiving funding from Soviet Union during the 1950s and '60s.

"Groups of peasant women and their children would never have the opportunity to come to Mumbai, perhaps never had the opportunity to come to this kind of event, meet the people from around the world, share their struggle who are here. And that's hugely important not just for mobilisation but also for capacity-building to grow the capacity of these grassroots organisations.

"My one reservation about the whole event happening in Mumbai is that Mumbai is such a huge city where over 100,000 camped out on the Nesco Ground. And this whole thing is happening in isolation. What impact do we have on Mumbai? Do the regular Mumbai citizens know that we are here? And the answer is that lot of them don't," he said.

So there needs to be wider interaction with the wider world. "We are not just some extreme marginalised movements now. We like to assume that we represent the majority here. And in order to represent the majority people need to know about its importance," Tom advised.

(Rubina Jabbar is a journalist with 'The News', Karachi)

The Karachi Turnaround – Going Beyond A 'Peace Mela'

M.J. Vijayan

The recent Joint Convention of the Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy-PIPFDP, in Karachi, did much more than what 'peace melas' and 'peaceniks' have done. The write-up analyses the event and its outcome in the context of the present Indo-Pak Peace Process.

Lot has been shared by many of the participants and media representatives about the 6th Joint Convention of Pakistan India Peoples' Forum for Peace and democracy (PIPFDP), held at Karachi between the December 12 to 14, 2003. It has been called a 'jamboree of peaceniks', 'biggest ever secular delegation between India and Pakistan', 'track-II at its best', and so on. The Convention did bring 550 Indians and Pakistanis together, made them sit around and talk about the nitty-gritty of peace, democracy and human rights. The wide range of the issues that came up for discussions during the convention, including imperialist globalization, economic co-operation, Siachen, Kashmir, militarisation, nuclear issues, minority rights and so on, are reflected in the Karachi Declaration. The Declaration clearly spelt out the peoples' perspectives on these issues that need to be immediately addressed, to initiate a lasting peace process.

On Globalization

The declaration observed that the people of the world in general and South Asia in particular, face new forms of imperialistic

Globalization that are today

- i) increasingly aided and abetted by local interests and constituencies,
- ii) imposes an iniquitous system on the developing countries,
- iii) destroys the livelihood of common people undermines the political and economic independence of countries directs violence against societies with different political and social ideals, particularly Muslim people, and
- vi) terrorises entire countries in the name of fighting terrorism.

"That the future of the people of Pakistan and India as independent countries is contingent upon permanent peace and harmony in order to fight the imperialist machination of subjugating and exploitation of the resources and the people of our countries."

The declaration affirms that building strong trade and economic cooperation between the two countries and in entire South Asia to foster independent development is the only way to build substantive resistance against the IMF, World Bank and WTO, and the agents of imperialist Globalization.

On Kashmir:

"Settle the Kashmir dispute respecting the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir on both sides of LoC, withdrawal of armed forces and armed groups on both sides, establish an effective and accountable mechanism to ensure protection of life and liberty of the people of J&K, particularly women."

Forum reiterated its position that, Kashmir is not just a bilateral issue to be settled between India and Pakistan. A lasting solution could be brought about only by honouring the aspirations of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. Towards this, the Convention has appointed a joint peoples' committee on Kashmir, inclusive of people from J&K, Pakistan and India.

Negating any role of 'Nuclear Deterrence', the Karachi Declaration reiterated the call for global nuclear disarmament, and an immediate de-alert and then destruction of all nuclear weapons by the two countries, a 25% reduction in conventional forces, and the immediate removal and an end to the use of landmines.

On religious intolerance

Asserting that, *"The persistence of majoritarian politics and increasing communalisation of the polity pitting one disadvantaged section against the other deprives the people of their right to self-realisation,"* the Declaration pointed that without adequate protection of religious, linguistic, cultural and political minorities there can be no democracy.

"There can be no justice without granting redress to the victims of human rights abuses especially with the connivance of the state, particularly women and children, as in Gujarat."

On Women's Rights:

"We call upon both governments to recognize the disadvantaged position of women in our countries; to count the productivity of women and their contribution to the GDP; to ensure the provision of basic minimum needs to women, particularly health, nutrition, education and employment; and, in view of the documented feminization of poverty in both our countries, to focus on rural women in poverty reduction measures. Women must be included in all government and civil society initiatives for peace."

The Convention demanded that the governments repeal all discriminatory anti-women laws (such as the Hudood Ordinances in Pakistan), and enact enabling legislation, especially laws on violence against women, through cross-cutting, non-partisan political processes, for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Peoples' Peace formula

The Convention appointed three Peoples' committees:

The Joint Committee on Kashmir to arrange for and facilitate a dialogue between the people on both sides of the LOC and interact with all organisations involved in the efforts to achieve peace and democratic resolution of the Kashmir issue and ensure 50 % participation for women.

The Joint Committee on Peace to prepare an immediate and short-term plan for confidence building and normalcy in the region and a long-term strategy for establishing a just and durable peace in the subcontinent. For this purpose the committee will visit different parts of India and Pakistan, hold extended discussions with various sections of the society, including political parties, business community, women's groups, farmers and workers organisations and other people's movements.

The Joint Committee on Minorities to deal with the issue relating to the protection of minorities and their rights in the two countries

US, Elections and 'Politics of Peace'

Most, if not all, of this new spirit of the governments, is also a byproduct of the US pressure. A contributory factor is the general elections. It is a historical irony that last time, in 1999, the same coalition led by BJP, won the elections by raising chauvinistic slogans against Pakistan in the wake of the Kargil conflict and this time the tactic is friendship with the same country. An added incentive will be some voting from the Muslims owing to the Pak-friendly posture.

The interest of the Bush administration, apart from keeping Pakistan in good humour, is to reduce the enmity that they have earned in the Islamic and Arab world. An additional attraction is the sizeable consumer market comprising of Indian middle class. The freer the Government is from tension on the borders, the better it would serve that class and provide greater opportunities to the US by opening up the economy to the US Multinational Corporates.

It is to the larger interest of the people of Pakistan and India that the peace process must go on, unconcerned of 'who' comes to power after the general elections to the Indian Parliament. Peace should not become the casualty once the elections are over. Neither India nor Pakistan can afford to go back to war mongering, nor to military operations like 'Parakram', which not only costs the exchequer, but also affects the progress and development of the country.

(Quotes and sentences in italics are reproduced from the original 'Karachi Declaration')

(MJ Vijayan is on National Committee of PIPFPD- India and The Other Media, Delhi).

MIFFed Vikalp

Anand Patwardhan

The filmmakers did not call for a boycott of MIFF, because despite a flawed selection process, some good films would be screened there. They decided that the best way to fight censorship was to screen the 'rejected' films at a venue near MIFF.

With majority fundamentalism rising in the wake of a government that uses it to retain power, it is no accident that the official machinery of the state is ranged against the advocates of secularism, egalitarianism and social and gender justice. With the same state surrendering national sovereignty to multinational corporations and the "free market" resistance against militarism, rapacious and unsustainable "development" and the ruin of the country's natural and human resources is sought to be suppressed with equal vehemence. It is in this larger context that the current struggle of Indian documentary filmmakers must be seen.

As Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) 2004 approached, the government knew that many films on the carnage in Gujarat exposing the ruling party's complicity were in the making and could embarrass it on an international stage. Perhaps to circumvent this, an amazing new rule was introduced stipulating that all Indian films should have a censor certificate. Foreign films were exempted from this rule. Documentary filmmakers across the country were galvanised into action. Over 275 filmmakers exchanged ideas, drew up action plans, organised a Campaign Against Censorship (CAC) and threatened to boycott MIFF if the censor certificate requirement was not withdrawn. As a result of a united and popular campaign, the rules for MIFF

were amended again and the censorship clause withdrawn.

The filmmakers were nevertheless apprehensive that there would be an attempt to introduce censorship through the backdoor, that is, by eliminating 'uncomfortable' films from the festival through a manipulated selection. Their fears came true.

MIFF 2004 rejected some 30 of the most outstanding new Indian films made on a range of themes - primarily political. Included in the reject list were several films on state complicity in the Gujarat violence and many excellent films on communalism, caste and gender, sexuality and the environment. Quite a number of these have already been screened at major international festivals and won awards.

Filmmakers faced a dilemma. While there was criticism about the functioning of MIFF from its inception, acts of omission and commission were tolerated by the filmmaking community because it tended to look upon the festival as an important space for the Indian documentary. However, this time the blatant attempt to stifle critical voices made it impossible to look the other way. Filmmakers decided to hold parallel screenings near the MIFF venue, showcasing the very films MIFF had rejected, so that the public could judge these films for themselves.

The campaign rose to a higher pitch. Surabhi Sharma, whose documentary *Aamakar* was selected to compete in MIFF, wrote to the authorities that she would withdraw her film from MIFF in solidarity with filmmakers whose work had been rejected unfairly. By the time MIFF began, 14 filmmakers had withdrawn their work and the head of the MIFF jury, Girish Karnad, stepped down in sympathy with the fight against censorship. Other jury members and filmmakers offered to do likewise and MIFF was in danger of being marred by dissent and disorder.

Members of the CAC, however, decided not to paralyse MIFF 2004 because it still has the potential of being an important festival for Indian and international documentaries, short and animation films. MIFF is run with public money and people have a right to demand that the best films in the land are screened without censorship. The filmmakers did not call for a boycott of MIFF, because despite a flawed selection process, some good films would be screened there. All that they demanded was dialogue, transparency and professionalism so that MIFF has a future that all can look forward to.

They decided that the best way to fight censorship was to screen the 'rejected' films at a venue near MIFF. The films that were withdrawn from MIFF joined

Parliament and MNCs

Maju Varghese

The Joint Parliamentary Committee found that the soft drink multinational companies use caffeine as one of the ingredient and the consumers are not informed about it with adequate labeling.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee, set up by the Parliament of India to enquire into the accuracy of the findings of Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) of pesticide residues in soft drinks marketed in India, submitted their report to the Parliament on February 14, 2004.

The CSE had earlier put to test 12 brands of soft drinks commonly used in the country marketed by the two giant multinationals viz Pepsi Cola and Coca Cola who control the Indian Market. The analysis showed presence of organochlorine, organophosphorus pesticides and also presence of DDT in the soft drinks, which was much more than the EU standards.

The findings generated so much debate in the country and the parliament and the government was forced to set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee to look into the accuracy of the CSE findings and criteria for setting standards for soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages.

In the report, the JPC under the Chairmanship of Sharad Pawar has upheld

the report on the presence of organochlorine and organophosphorus pesticide residues. The committee also expressed their 'deep concern' on lack of regulation in the soft drink industry and also lack of standards for water which is used in the soft drinks. It recommended a range of measures to improve food safety standards in a country where experts say toxins contaminate a large number of items, including water, milk, oil, ghee and vegetables.

The JPC also found that the soft drink companies use caffeine as one of their ingredient and the consumers are not informed about the presence of the same with adequate labeling. The committee recommended adequate labeling to inform the consumers regarding the presence of caffeine and also to bring down the present

the screening list and a new festival 'VIKALP: Films for Freedom' was born. Each filmmaker contributed Rs.1,000 and two friends put in Rs.10,000 each. With this shoestring budget, armed with Mini DV tapes and a video projector, they went in search of an appropriate hall near the MIFF venue. They found a perfect one in Bhupesh Gupta Bhavan, which houses the printing press of the Communist Party of India (CPI). The CPI's solidarity was unconditional and total. Its leaders did not ask for a penny for the hall. Once the party realised that the filmmakers were short of money, it allowed them to print their material free of cost from its press. The large hall posed a problem as it had terrible acoustics and a low ceiling. The organisers put thick curtains on the windows, did away with chairs, put mattresses on the floor and a shoe rack outside the hall. Volunteers poured in from all over the city and some arrived from across the country. Almost overnight, as if by miracle, a full-fledged, beautifully running people's film festival was under way.

Publicity for VIKALP was by word of mouth but, incredibly, the festival had a full house from day one. The festival opened with an excerpt from Sadaat Hasan Manto's "Safed Jhoot", an indictment of censorship and hypocrisy, performed

by Jamil Khan, directed by Naseeruddin Shah and introduced by Ratna Pathak Shah. The spirit generated by the play was palpable and it did not get diminished for a moment throughout the day as exciting films and discussions followed each other without pause till nightfall.

The festival is a resounding success but our battle against the erosion of democratic rights cannot end here. Filmmakers' appeal is not to the filmmaking community alone. For an assault on freedom of expression does not affect filmmakers alone. It is an assault on democracy itself.

(Anand Patwardhan is an award winning documentary film maker)

Two Pre-WSF tours were organized by National Alliance of People's Movement for some of the participants of WSF, from January 7 to 14, 2004 . While one tour visited people's movements in Gujarat, the other went to Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Here are two reflections from the participants.

Inspiration to Build Movement...

Johanna Walczak

I took part in the NAPM's tour of people's movements with a group of about 30 others from the U.S., Italy, Germany, France, Canada, and India. As my first experience abroad, I don't think any other trip in the future will move me and touch me as much as this one did. Over our weeklong trek, we traveled through the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, visiting people's movements struggling around such issues as land rights, mega-dam projects, corporate

accountability, and tribal rights. We visited people affected by the Union Carbide gas disaster in Bhopal, communities threatened with submergence by the Sardar Sarovar dam in the Narmada Valley, villages struggling for their rights as tribals to their own land and natural resources, and people involved in the campaign against Coca-Cola. At each village we visited, people told us about their struggles and experiences of resistance and, in exchange, we told them about the movements we are involved in and the causes we are fighting for.

Many of us who went on the tour are involved in various social movements in our respective countries, struggling against such institutions and processes as the World Bank, IMF, multinational corporations, and

permitted limit of caffeine to 200 ppm in carbonated beverages.

The Committee expressed their concern on the use of ground water by the soft drink and bottled water manufacturing countries. The committee has found that though these companies are extracting huge amount of ground water they are not being charged for the water usage. They put forth the need to regulate water particularly for commercial purposes and also fix the price for water.

The JPC also brought out the effects of the bottling plants of both Pepsi and Coca cola in Palghat district of Kerala where they 'have resulted in causing pollution of water, depletion of ground water, reduced yields in crops, skin disorders and other ailments among the inhabitants'.

The JPC report have brought into light many issues related to public health and the need for bringing in standards in bottled

industry. It is also clear from the reports that the Multinational cola companies were lying to the Indian public regarding the safety of their products and also the differential treatment they give to the first world and third world consumers.

While this being a good beginning in setting standards in the industry, we also need to look into the deteriorating quality of surface /ground water and drinking water in the country. According to United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women about 80% of all the disease in the developing world are attributed to water and women, who is in constant touch with water which is often polluted are the most vulnerable. About 70% of the surface water according to this report is polluted. About 20% of the country does not have access to drinking water even after 50 years of independence.

The rationale of the bottled water industry estimated to be over 6000 crore is derived from the lack of clean and safe drinking water to the public. It is sad that this being transformed into profit by a capitalist class. The availability of safe and adequate water to all the population for their drinking and sensible irrigation needs should be the basic priority of the government and ensuring this at the time when water is being privatised and sold out for corporate profits is the agenda of the peoples struggle to own and manage their own resources.

(Maju Varghese is with Initiative, Mumbai)

Need For Meaningful Linkages

Nilofer Ahsan

The trip wasn't always easy. We covered a lot of ground—by train, by jeep, by boat, by bus, and even a little of it on foot. The distances, the isolation of many of the communities most adversely impacted by globalization, the difficulties of transportation, the lack of phone lines or even roads to many of the villages we visited—all represented a real challenges to organizing that seem tremendously daunting. To add to these challenges are the real oppression these movements face. In one case we had to move the location of a meeting because

the school that was hosting us had received phone threats. An activist from a movement to protect the rights of Adivasi on forest lands described how the forest service had burned down 17 villages and beaten an activist to death in retribution for his political activities.

neoliberal capitalist globalization; struggling for workers rights, indigenous rights, autonomy, radical democracy, and an alternative globalization that favors people over profits. We were able to make connections between our different experiences, because although our struggles may vary on the surface, they are merely different faces of the same monster. People everywhere, in every corner of the world, are struggling against the same systems of oppression and exploitation. Marginalized people in the United States are feeling the harsh effects of neoliberal capitalist globalization, as corporations gain more power, control, and profit, while people suffer from dwindling social services, weak labor unions, and lower wages. Small farmers are losing their land and livelihood while big agro-industries reap more benefits and government subsidies. The same thing is happening everywhere, as people are subjected to the tightening grip of multinational corporations, structural adjustment, and increasing foreign debt. BUT, around the globe movements continue to build and grow in strong resistance against these processes.

On the tour we did not only see people's *resistance* – what they are *against* – we also saw what they are *creating as alternatives* – what they are *for*. We visited the village of Bilgaon, in the Narmada Valley, where they have a micro-hydro project that successfully supplies electricity to the village and 12 surrounding hamlets *without* displacing any people or negatively impacting the surrounding ecosystem. We visited the Adarshila Learning Centre, an Adivasi school in the village of Sakad, where they have developed a curriculum “based on the local social, economic, cultural and environmental context” and where the “local community has a major role.” Similarly, in the U.S., communities are creating their own alternatives, such as urban gardening programs, independent media centers, housing collectives, food cooperatives, and alternative education systems.

It was inspiring to see, hear and *feel* such strength, spirit and resilience among the people involved in the movements we visited. Going on the tour of people's movements created concrete connections between the abstractness

of the term ‘global justice’ in the context of U.S. movements and people's everyday struggles and tangible realities. This experience gave me inspiration to continue struggling against the sources of exploitation and oppression that originate in the U.S. – in ‘the belly of the beast’. We must create a true form of international solidarity –one in which we support one another through our *actions*. We will show our international solidarity in April of this year through massive demonstrations at the annual meetings for the IMF and World Bank, held in their world headquarters in Washington, DC. Our actions will tell them that 60 years is *enough*. We will show our international solidarity by joining a nationwide boycott against Coke, in opposition to the ‘Coca-Colanisation’ that has suppressed labor movements and exploited natural resources all over the world.

I have brought my experiences of people's movements in India back to the United States, and I am sharing your stories of struggle, resistance and creation with my own community as inspiration to continue building the movement here. *Amu aka ek se!*

(Johanna is a student-activist, working with Worcester Global Action Network, Ma, USA.)

Yet these same difficulties also underline the importance of creating connections and lines of solidarity across movements and between activists both in India and within the United States. While the villagers we visited were often isolated, the forces they were struggling against were networked and globalized. They included multinational companies such as Coca-Cola and Dow Chemical. Even the Government of India or the State Governments in Gujarat and Maharashtra are in fact global players. Most of us were in India to participate in the World Social Forum. Where these issues really came to life for me, however, was not in the seminars and workshops of the Forum, but in the conversations and dialogues that we had within the tour.

The pressing question the tour raised for me is how do I, as an activist within the South Asian Diaspora in the US network and globalize my work. The answer seems to link the campaigns of people's movements in South Asia to actions within the US. Direct contacts between activists in the US and activists and people's movements in India are the first step. Hopefully these will build communication channels that allow us to better coordinate action in real time—in a real demonstration that abuses on the part of multi-nationals in India will have real consequences not only there, but in the countries they call home.

(Nilofer Ahsan works with South Asian Progressive Action Collective in USA)

Farmers Lose a Comrade

Professor M.D. Nanjundaswamy, a leading and renowned advocate of farmers' rights, passed away on February 3, 2004 at Bangalore, Karnataka. He was 68.

Born a native of Mysore in Karnataka, India, Professor Swamy was the son of a farmer turned lawyer and socialist parliamentarian. He was educated in Mysore and Karnataka Universities in Science and Law, and then did post-master's specialisations at the Hague Academy of International Law, and in Constitutional Law at different universities in the then West Germany and France till 1964.

Professor Swamy had a long and illustrious career in academic, public and political life. In 1980, he was leading Karnataka Rajya Raitha sangham (KRRS), which was formed by crop based farmers organisations at the Taluk (sub-district) and District levels merging together to fight against the increasing state repression on farmers' agitations for fair commodity prices, appropriate policy supports and debt relief. By 1983, KRRS had become a formidable organisational and political force, and was instrumental in installing the first non-Congress government in Karnataka. In 1989, KRRS contested in State Legislative Assembly elections and won in two constituencies. In 1990, Prof. Nanjundaswamy became a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).

As KRRS President, he formulated many direct actions against liberalisation and globalisation, the major ones directed at Cargill seeds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Monsanto transgenic seeds and crops. Professor Nanjundaswamy and KRRS have been vociferous critics of the Dunkel Draft text which led to the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and consistently demanded that India not become a member of WTO; to this day, KRRS demands that India pull out of the WTO (India became a member in 1994, at the very establishment of the WTO).

In 1996 he was selected as the South- Asia Coordinator of La Via Campesina, the only international small farmers' movement in the world committed to upholding the rights of small farmers the world over and as a result his actions against multinational seed companies acquired greater international visibility.

Prof. Swamy was widely respected for his sharp intellect, incisive political analysis and unfailing commitment to the needs and priorities of small farmers and rural communities. He was the Managing Trustee of "Amrita Bhoomi," an International Centre for Sustainable Development, conserving indigenous seeds and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Victims of Criminalisation of Politics

Medha Patkar

The recent most ghastly murder of two young and devoted activists in Bihar, Sarita and Mahesh, has shaken not just myself, but all the people's organizations. Not a lonely incidence in Bihar, this one has once again stimulated concerns regarding criminalisation of politics and politics allying with the corrupt and capitalists, that is ruling over the welfare state. The landlords in Bihar with hundreds of acres of land, oppressors of the landless dalits, have been resorting to a nexus of the politicians-police-criminals to perpetrate their crimes and that has led to the killing. Known to be committed by Sadhu Yadav and Budhan Yadav, two brothers who has taken a revenge by their father's death, in another encounter between the police and the criminals, there is no enquiry needed to identify them. The police having named Mahesh as one informer, Samman Yadav's sons have taken a revenge. The political protection has enabled them to be free till day while there have been a continued reaction in the form of a mass rally and protests since January, a cycle *yatra* from Kanpur to Patna, tour through 40 villages and a five day fast by Puspendra, Sarita's husband, Karubhai, activist of Bodhgaya Andolan, Sandeep Pandey and others, which have raised the issue of not just the arrest and action against the killers but the people's right to peace and security and to reject violence.

It is not only Bihar where the unholy alliance and brutal violence is more crude and even more criticized by the courts to the concerned citizens but all over the country crime has infested the power game. Muscle power has a role much more than one could ignore. While in Gujarat, the fundamentalists used even the police force towards the carnage, here too the administration is silent while the rulers are expressing their helplessness beyond some cosmetic actions, not having arrested the murderers till date.

Sarita who came out of the Naxalite groups to take to a non-violent yet revolutionary path was joined by Mahesh from a well-to-do family with equal commitment to socio-economic transformation. Reviving the traditional water management system of Ahar and Pyne they have guided us towards effective ways of utilizing the rich natural resources of this poor state, why even the country, without displacement and destruction. Through *shramadan* by the villagers of Shabdo and atleast 40 villages in Gaya district, they have created not just a 45 km long canal but collective farms and all preparations were ready towards collective cattle-sheds through and beyond the strong mobilization and achievements in prohibition and unity in the village. This should not have led to any conflict but for the fact that even a simple move claiming dalits' right to house-plots and the obvious contribution to people's

power upset the casteist and the land-elite within the politicized rural community. The state could not protect the two nor did they ask for security inspite of threats as the common people too could never get it even with 'secular and popular' Chief Minister of Bihar.

This is witnessed even today with the culprits moving in the open, threatening the villagers in deep shock and grief, while the local police station stands as a dead center with neither a vehicle nor a phone to perform their duty. Not only the zeal and confidence but the ideological clarity and commitment, expressed through Saita's gleaming eyes and Mahesh's deep looks was a challenge to all this that couldn't be permitted by the power seekers.

While the criminal-political mafia behind Satyendra Dubey's murder could not be apprehended as yet, many a people's organizations and National Alliance of People's Movements is committed to a continuous campaign, beginning with Sarita-Mahesh *Karyanjali Yatra* from March 15th to 19th culminating in a dharna at Patna on the last day.

We demand urgent steps to arrest the killers, transfer of all police officials, CBI enquiry for an in-depth investigation and a serious and decisive dialogue between the Chief Minister, Lallo Prasad Yadav and people's organizations on dealing with the criminalisation.

(Medha Patkar is the National Coordinator of NAPM)

News Capsules

Debate on Interlinking of Rivers in Pune

"The Inter Linking of Rivers (ILR) project is not the only panacea for the water problem of India nor the project may stand as it is," said Mr. Suresh Prabhu, the chairman of the Task Force on ILR (TF-ILR), in a debate held in Pune on February 11 2004. He also conceded that there were no detailed studies ready regarding the links in this project and said that it may not also be necessary to undertake all the declared 30 links all over India. He made it clear that the cost of the dam will have to be worked out and the earlier figure of Rs. 5,60,000 crores was a mere a general statement.

The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) has organized a first such debate with the Task Force on 'Drought and Water Problem: Inter Linking Rivers – Is it real Solution?', in Pune. It was a part programmes of the Birth Centenary of veteran Socialist leader S.M Joshi. Apart from Mr. Prabhu, the TF Secretary Mr. C.C. Patel and Mr. Gopal Krishnan, pertinent issues were raised by Ramaswami Iyer, former Secretary of Union water Resources Ministry, Mr. Biksham Gujja of Wildlife Fund of Hyderabad, Maj.Gen.(Retd.) Sudhir Vombatkere, a structural engineer from Mysore, Vijay Paranjapye, an economist and water-planning expert from Pune and Medha Patkar, the National Coordinator of NAPM.

People's Manifesto by Workers in TN

Tamilnadu Unorganised Sector Workers' Federation decided to draft a "People's Manifesto" and to

examine the party manifestos in the light of their demands on February 14, at Trichy. In a training camp and campaign planning meeting, they also stressed the need to fight globalisation and to quit WTO, as it leads to rampant unemployment, suicides of farmers, weavers and jewelry workers and to erosion of health and education facilities. They also affirmed secularism and the democratic right to organize.

The meeting, held under the chairmanship of G. Natarajan and the Secretary R. Anandan gave the welcome speech and the state office bearers I.P. Murthy, R. Lilavathy, Kondavallai, P. Jeny, M.S. Antuvan, Sukumaran and Trichy organizer V. Maheshvaran as well as N.M.P.S. President Paulraj were present. In the training camp, Prof. Shanmugavelayudhan (T.N. Forces) explained the Central Government Social Security Scheme, while representatives from various unions shared their difficulties with the working of the Welfare Boards. G. Muthu, trade unionist, spoke on the impact of globalisation on organized and unorganized sector labour. After this Dr D. Gabriele, National Convenor of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) spoke on the need to integrate the struggle against globalisation, liberalization, privatization and mechanization and the demands of unorganized sector labour in the campaign during the coming national elections. She also stressed the need for a comprehensive legislation to safeguard the welfare and also right to work of unorganized sector workers, including also the right to natural resources and the need to fight rising fascism.

Tehri Dam Rehabilitation Issues

The Honourable Supreme Court, while disposing of the case regarding the Tehri Dam, had laid down certain conditions regarding the rehabilitation of the project affected people and also asked the High Court of Uttaranchal to monitor compliance. Subsequently, the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation (THDC) and the Government of Uttaranchal have made public assertions, both in writing and verbally, claiming that rehabilitation has been satisfactorily completed and all the conditions laid down by the Supreme Court complied with. Based on these assertions, are intending to close the remaining tunnels and to fully fill the reservoir. However, the information being received from the activists working in the area is that this is far from the truth.

Therefore, the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) has appointed a Citizen's Commission that would examine the veracity of the government's claims, primarily by holding a series of public hearings (*jan sunwais*) in the Tehri region. Those who have agreed to be members of the citizen's commission are Prabhaskar Joshi (eminent journalist), Dr. NC Saxena (Former Secretary, Government of

India, Ministry of Rural Development and Planning Commission), Harsh Mander (Formerly of the IAS and Executive Director, Action Aid India), and Sandeep Pandey (Winner of the Magsaysay Award).

Against Criminalization of Politics

A cycle rally, passing through over 25 towns and villages from IIT Kanpur to Gaya, is organized by Asha, Parivartan, National Alliance of People's Movements, Mazdoor Kissan Shakti Sangathan from 15th February to 12th March, 2004 to free the Indian political system from the clutches of criminal and corrupt elements.

The recent murder of social activists Sarita and Mahesh in Gaya, Bihar and that of Satyendra Dubey a couple of months back, incidentally in the same district, highlights the total grip of criminal and corrupt elements over the Indian political scenario. Over the last several years we have also witnessed the killing of Chandrashekhar in Siwan, Bihar, kidnapping and (yet unconfirmed) killing of Sanjay Ghosh in Assam by sectarian group ULFA, and burning of Australian doctor working for leprosy patients, Graham Staines along with his two little sons in his jeep in Orissa by a person belonging to communal Hindutva group. All these deceased persons were voices of conscience in their areas, often fighting injustice and corruption and questioning the status quo of vested interests. They had to ultimately pay in terms of their lives for the causes that they were working for.

The rallyists say, "We are not merely interested in seeing the perpetrators of the crimes brought to justice but for us it is a question of freeing the Indian political system from the clutches politicians-administrators-contractors nexus, helped by criminal and corrupt elements. A larger exercise for cleaning up the Indian political system needs to be taken up. We have to ensure that criminal and corrupt elements don't get elected as people's representatives. Instead we would like candidates who truly represent common people's interests, are genuine and honest and most importantly have a record of serving the people get elected".

Narmada: Promises and Pressures

On January 19th, towards the culmination of the World Social Forum in Mumbai, the NBA and supporters started a *dharna* (sit-in), outside of the gates of Mantralaya (State Secretariat). After being forcibly stopped by police from entering the Mantralaya, about 200 people set up camp outside the gates, draping flags and banners from the locked metal doors, and hunkering down on the cement for what would be a protracted *dharna*. The demands, among others, included full and time bound land-based rehabilitation plan and that Maharashtra government should not consent to any increase in the dam height until rehabilitation of all tribal families is completed as required by law.

Due to a very non-committal attitude of the government of Maharashtra, Kalusingh Padvi, Bhikamsingh Vasave, Kamal

Yadav and Medha Patkar began a fast. Finally, on the January 28th, after six days of fast and 9 days of protest, the Maharashtra Cabinet agreed to not allow an increase in the dam height until rehabilitation was totally complete, which it said it could do in four months time. All the rehabilitation demands were also agreed to in writing.

The NCA

Maharashtra's commitment to rehabilitation was quickly put to the test in the Narmada Control Authority (NCA) meeting on January 28 and 29 in Delhi. At that meeting, both Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh both made false assertions that rehabilitation was complete in their states.

Maharashtra, however, admitted that rehabilitation was incomplete and thus would not consent to a height increase. The other states tried to bully Maharashtra into agreeing 'in principle' and thus allowing construction to proceed while rehabilitation was on-going, something that is totally illegal. But Maharashtra stood firm, no resolution was passed, and the decision was postponed to another meeting of the Review Committee of the NCA (comprising the Chief Ministers of the states) on February 12. Much to Gujarat Chief Minister Modi's chagrin, that meeting also failed to produce a consensus, as Maharashtra and Rajasthan were absent. The meeting was postponed till March 4.

Gujarat Tribals Arrested During Mass Action: False Claims Exposed

On February 16, 500 SSP-affected adivasis in Gujarat, angered and agitated after years of not having received legal and fair rehabilitation, began an sit-in and public hearing outside of the SSPA offices in Kevadia Colony near the dam site. After only two hours, in which a public hearing of grievances was conducted by senior social workers including Jyotibhai Desai, Gandhian educationist, Jashbhai Patel,

Scientist and visiting professor at IIT, and Chinu Srinivasan, health activist, they were soon met with police repression, and over 150 people were arrested, some of them dragged and beaten with lathis, before being released and scattered over several villages. The governments' refusal to permit the hearing of grievances and to meet with a delegation of PAFs and activists, confirms the government's fear of being exposed on tall claims of rehabilitation.

In a bizarre post-script, the Gujarat police arrested 12 villagers on February 25, as they were going to meet the Delhi-based journalists, who were brought by the Gujarat government, at Kevadia colony. Some journalists, nevertheless met the people in the police station.

The Modispeak in Court too

The judgement by the Gujarat High Court rejecting the state government's appeal in the Best Bakery case reflects the deep hostility of ruling class in Gujarat against the hapless Muslim victims of Gujarat carnage (2002) and against the secular, human rights groups who stand by them. The judgement has ridiculed and demonized attempts by these for justice for the victims. The loquacious judgement waxed eloquently, and unwarrantedly, about the history, philosophy, development model but not on the issue at hand. It did not show any concern or regret, let alone compassion, on the murder of 12 people in the Best Bakery, and justified that one of the victims was a Hindu.

In a cunning exercise, the court unwarrantedly linked the movement of the Narmada oustees and the human right groups against Gujarat carnage, and clubbed both as 'anti-social and anti-national', as they have maligned Gujarat's image and development. A perfect Modispeak by their Lordships.

International

March 20: The World *Still* Says No to War

Momentum is building around the world for the Global Day of Action against War and Occupation on March 20, the one-year anniversary of the U.S. bombing and invasion of Iraq.

On that day, people on every continent will take to the streets to say YES to peace and NO to pre-emptive war and occupation. Joining with growing numbers of military families and soldiers, we will call for an end to the occupation of Iraq and Bush's militaristic foreign policies, and highlight the linkages between the occupations of Iraq and Palestine. This day has been endorsed by the Global Assembly of the Anti-War Movement, the World Social Forum, and the 3rd Hemispheric Forum Against the FTAA.

For more details: www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=2136

Against World Bank and IMF: April 21-25

In solidarity with global struggles against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, join the mass mobilization in Washington DC, April 21-25, 2004.

From the World Social Forum in Mumbai (Bombay), India, to the streets of Washington DC, people have called for protests at the semi-annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Global justice activists will come together to demand the *globalization of liberation, not corporate greed!*

2004 is the 60th Anniversary of the World Bank & IMF. Since 1944, these institutions have pushed policies that decimate women's rights and devastate the lives of women, their families and communities, hand democracy over to bankers and corporate boards, trap countries in a cycle of debt dependence. It forces governments to privatize essential services, perpetuate the destruction of the environment in the name of profit-making, institutionalize the domination of the wealthy over the impoverished the new form of colonialism and facilitate corporate agendas through the economic re-structuring of countries enduring conflict and occupation, such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the 60th anniversary year of the IMF and World Bank, Mobilization for Global Justice demands the following:
>> Open all World Bank and IMF meetings to the media and the public.

>> Cancel all impoverished country debt to the World Bank and IMF, using the institutions' own resources.

>> End all World Bank and IMF policies that hinder people's access to food, clean water, shelter, health care, education, and right to organize. (Such "structural adjustment" policies include user fees, privatization, and so-called economic austerity programs).

>> Stop all World Bank support for socially and environmentally destructive projects such as oil, gas, and mining activities, and all support for projects.

For more details: <http://sept.globalizethis.org/>

International Day of Action Against Dams And for Rivers, Water and Life - March 14

The 7th Annual International Day of *Action against Dams and for Rivers, Water and Life* will be observed all over the globe on March 14th, 2004. This is a time to join together in solidarity to protest destructive development and celebrate our successes over the last year. It is also a time to fight for social justice and the rights of communities over their resources and lives.

As a special focus in 2004, the 60th anniversary of the World Bank and IMF, we are encouraging participants to celebrate a day of action on the World Bank and large dams. By acting together we can promote more equitable and sustainable ways of managing our waterways.

You can organize actions and events on the World Bank and large dams – be it on the legacy of past dam projects, the need for reparation and restoration, the new Bank strategy to re-engage in high-risk projects, or the impacts of privatizing the water sector. As always, groups are free to choose whatever topics and forms of action they like, and it will make sense to focus on topics and forms that make sense within your own context.

For More information: <http://www.irn.org/dayofaction/>

Peace Movement Remains on the Move

During the last year, millions of Americans—joined by millions of other people from countries around the world—created an extraordinary movement to try to stop the invasion of Iraq. More than 400 cities and towns across the United States held peace marches in the months leading up to the war. One hundred and sixty-four city governments, including Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, passed resolutions opposing an unprovoked war. And on February 15, humanity witnessed the single largest day of coordinated protest in *world history* when some 10 million people across the planet went out into the streets to protest against an attack on Iraq.

The peace movement opposed an invasion of Iraq for many reasons. Iraq did not pose a clear and present danger to the United States. An invasion without United Nations approval would shatter international law and shred the U.S.'s relations with other nations. A war would lead to chaos in Iraq and kill thousands of innocent civilians.

Today, with the phantom weapons of mass destruction undiscovered and Iraq sinking into anarchy, it is clear that the peace movement was all-too right.

The Iraqi military clearly did not have the means to deploy chemical or biological weapons, or even the ability to defend its own capital, much less the strength to attack the U.S. or its neighbors. American military planners were scandalously unprepared to deal with governing Iraq. U.S. relations with the rest of the world remain unsteady. This was an unjust and unnecessary war, one that needlessly took the lives of thousands of innocent people.

Global Exchange is now working to end the U.S. occupation of Iraq while helping the Iraqi people achieve their aspirations of creating a democratic country. We are urging the U.S. to hand over the administration of Iraq. And we have set up an Occupation Watch Center in Baghdad to monitor the behaviors of the U.S. military and U.S. corporations in Iraq.

The peace movement remains on the move.

For more information: <http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/iraq/>

PEOPLE'S POLITICAL FRONT

A series of meetings since December last, with political activists, representatives of various people's movements and intellectuals were held in different parts of the country to discuss seriously about the intervention in the electoral politics. The meetings came to a conclusion that people's movements, which opposed to the communal fascism and imperialist globalization and which are for alternative development paradigm and pro people electoral reforms, should intervene into the electoral politics. People's Political Front, comprising of various people's movements, like-minded political parties and organizations, is formed to take up the challenge.

Most of the mainstream political parties in the country are not capable of representing people's aspirations in confronting the danger of pro-globalization and fundamentalist/fascist powers taking over the political power. On the other hand, the political space of people's movements, working for downtrodden people and for social justice, is narrowing down and they are facing a danger of getting marginalised. Therefore, it is utmost necessary that an all-embracing political movement aimed at changing the structure of the state as well as changing the electoral system and development strategy must be launched by all the like-minded forces coming together. It will provide the broad frame, within which the bid to penetrate the legislatures must be made by contesting the elections. Thus the creation of alternative political space for peoples movements, distinct from and in opposition to both the NDA and the Congress led front, is the overall objective of the PPF. The objective of contesting elections would be to strengthen people's movements and struggles and establish a value based political alternative.

Since the advancement of polls has not left with sufficient time to prepare for contesting elections in a large number of constituencies where the people's movements have a significant presence, it may be necessary to put up candidates in a few constituencies as an exemplar of this intervention. In those places where contesting elections is not directly contesting elections, the PPF will seek use other equally important ways of intervening in the electoral process: 'election watch' to expose the character of established political parties and candidates, issuing people's manifesto to highlight people's issues and demands and to carry out campaigns to increase voters' awareness and consciousness.

PPF shall not enter into an alliance with the NDA or the Congress. A joint front with Left and other progressive parties can be considered in those places where these parties have a record of working together with people's movements. The PPF may extend support to candidates and or parties that may help defeat the NDA, provided these are opposed to communal politics and imperialist globalization and are for people's rights over the natural resources and are friends of people's movements. Under no situation shall the PPF extend support to a candidate who is corrupt or involved in criminal activities.

Two committees were formed to take the process ahead:

1. Electoral Political Strategy Committee

Convenor: Aruna Roy

Co Conveners: Medha Patkar, Prof. Vinod Prasad Singh, P. Chennaiah, Sanjay M.G.

Members: Thomas Kocherry, Kuldip Nayar, Rajinder Sachar, Siddharaj Dhaddha, Prashant Bhushan, Surendra Mohan, Kishen Pattanayak.

2. Political Manifesto Committee

Convener: Ajit Jha

Members: Sanjay M.G., Rajendra Chaudhari, Rakesh Rafique, Ulka Mahajan, Yogendra Yadav, Dhansinghbhai, Gabriel D.

It was agreed that the people's movements have an independent and critical role to play in the alternative politics, despite the change in the rulers. Therefore this political front will be independent of National Alliance of People's Movements.

Hang A Flag In The Window

David Rovics

We want a safer country
And it's in God we trust
So we'll bomb you during Ramadan
Turn your world into dust
But pull up on your bootstraps
And stand on your own two feet
While we blow them off with cluster bombs
Disguised as something to eat

We stand for freedom
And prosperity
So we'll bomb your schools and hospitals
And make sure you live in misery
All you evildoers
And your children and your wives
With our B-52's we'll show you
How we value civilian lives

Give us your hungry, your restless
We'll show you democracy
A military trial
Or detention indefinitely
We'll have homeland security
Thomas Ridge all hail
We may not find the terrorists
But we can throw the left in jail

When facing anyone with boxcutters
We'll say put up your dukes
As we spend fifty billion
On bombers and nukes
We're a beacon of light
And just to make the point
We'll cut taxes on the rich
And throw the poor into the joint

Yes we'll bail out the airlines
Put on your green fedoras
And for all the laid-off workers
We've got maquiladoras
Yes capitalism will save us
For have you ever seen a
More convincing proof
Than Enron and Argentina

The Axis of Evil
We'll bomb 'em down the skids
There'll be no more terrorists
Once we kill their kids
People may starve
And economies may crumble
But those folks'll just
Have to learn to be more humble

And give us your money
Debt repayments with aplomb
While we scour the map
For some targets left to bomb
And as another city falls
Upon our sacred American soil
At least we got our Daisy Cutters
And that Alaskan oil

*So hang a flag in the window
And all hail to the chief
Follow the leader
And suspend your disbelief
Our country right or wrong
You know what to do
Sing God bless America
Oh that red, white and blue*

“That a large number of delegates is in any way a help to the better conduct of the business, or that it safeguards the principle of democracy. Fifteen hundred delegates, jealous of the interests of the people, broad-minded and truthful, would any day be a better safeguard for democracy than six thousand irresponsible men chosen anyhow. To safeguard democracy the people must have a keen sense of independence, self-respect and their oneness, and should insist upon choosing as their representatives only such persons as are good and true.”

(An Autobiography, M K Gandhi, 1927)