

The People's **Movement**

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News Magazine of the National Alliance of People's Movements

CORPORATE IRRESPONSIBILITY

- Licence to Kill Unlimited
- Plachimada Refuses to Become Another Bhopal
- Fight Hypocrisy or Free Trade?
- Judiciary and Corporations
- Searching for Corporate Responsibility

Report of NAPM Conveners' Meeting

17-18 October 04 , Bhopal, M.P.

The meeting started with paying homage and observing a two minutes silence in the memory of beloved leader and ideologue Kishen Pattnayak, fondly called as Kishenji.

Thomas Kocherry and Medha Patkar spoke briefly about Kishenji and his valuable contribution.

After this, the report of the last meeting held at Wardha was read followed by reporting of follow up action and issues taken by respective states by concerned persons. At the end, future plan of action was chalked out as follows

21st November 2004 Chalo Mumbai

To express our respect on the occasion of birth centenary of veteran leader and freedom fighter S.M.Joshi, a big rally has been organized on Sunday 21st November 2004. About one lakh people are expected to participate in this Anti-Globalization and Anti-Communalism event. NAPM has decided to participate in it with all its allies in a very big way.

The programme for the day will be:

10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. Public hearing on Displacement and livelihood opportunities on the occasion of World Fisheries Day. Main Speakers: Mahashweta Devi, Asagar Ali Engineer, Madhu Dandavate and Medha Patkar.

2.00 p.m. - 6.00 p.m. Rally

Venue: Shivaji Park Ground in Mumbai.

Anti-Coke and Pepsi Padyatra and direct action

NAPM in UP along with other struggling organization has planned a Padyatra from November 15-24 2004. The yatra will start on 15th from Singhachaur village in Balia district, and conclude with direct action at Rajatalav, in Varanasi on the 24th. Please contact your state coordinators, National Conveners or the organizers of Padyatra Mr. Nandlal and Arvind at napm_up@yahoo.com

National Conference on Development, Displacement & Rehabilitation in Delhi

This conference will be held in Delhi on 30th November and 1st December 2004. The Venue will be decided soon. The core team of organizing committee includes, APVVU, Shoshit Jan Andolan, NBA, Shahar Vikas Manch, NFF, Lokayan, MATU, ISI, Delhi forum, Halitat International, Rajendra Prasad Academy & Delhi Vikas Morcha. The objective is to assert people's rights to resources, define and demand justice and sustainable development & evolve a common strategy.

Reach Delhi in big numbers to discuss about the development induced displacement and the problem faced by the urban and rural marginalised communities and strategies to counter this problem jointly and politically.

National Conference on Inter-Linking of Rivers in Delhi

A national conference on Linking Rivers will be held on 2-3 December 2004 in Delhi to discuss the politics and the devastating effect of this project, which is being forced on us. The core team of organizing committee would include Maj.Gen.(retd.) Sudhir Vombatkere, Uma Shankari and others. Sudhir Vombatkere is coordinating the event.

All National & State Conveners must contact & mobilize all the Organizations in their states & all over the country & ensure that two representatives per organization attend the convention. Both the conventions are crucial.

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❑ US Elections

It's quite a dark day here in the US (a feeling I'm sure is shared across the globe). It's nauseating and scary that a majority of voters could send these people back to office. I'm scared of what the next 4 years will bring, and scared by the kinds of values that a large chunk of this country seem to care about.

It's profoundly alienating, even if I don't harbour many illusions about what Kerry or the democrats had to offer. It also makes me step back and think about where we go from here? It's daunting to think about the challenges to making real economic, political, and cultural change in the US – challenges, which this election makes very clear. If it weren't for its impact on the rest of the globe, one is almost inclined to think – well, if this is how people feel, let the country go to the dogs. Unfortunately, it does have a huge impact on others, there is still a huge portion of this country that is not with Bush and is victimised by what he stands for, and for better or worse this is where I was born. So, we'll keep fighting. And, of course, electoral politics is not where fundamental change occurs.

Given all the ignorance and narrowness of mind I hear expressed over here (like "THEY attacked us" – the "they" encompassing this huge swath of the "Other," or "those people don't understand democracy," or that we need a decisive President even if the decisions he makes are

wrong, or that a President that displays so little regard for life can be considered the Pro-Life moral values candidate), I almost feel like our top priority should be raising a volunteer army of teachers to go into the schools across the country to help rear more critical and thoughtful people. If all the people that volunteered for the Kerry campaign went into communities in the manner of Gandhi's constructive programme, then we might see some fundamental change.

That kind of change will continue to be my focus, but there's no question it's becoming a more difficult environment for that change, and that I'm sure we'll have to spend a lot of the next 4 years fighting fires.

*Mike Levien
Providence, US*

❑ Delhi Declaration of the 2nd National Convention on the Right to Information adopted on October 10th

The first milestone of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information was achieved in Beawar, Rajasthan, in 2001.

Today, in 2004, the second milestone at Delhi marks the people's assertion for transparency and accountability. The road from Beawar to Delhi has been covered in only three years. But in this short interval the campaign has spread to numerous States of the nation and the significance of this right has been established in

people's incessant struggles for their rights. As a result, the right to information movement and the national campaign has been greatly strengthened and the fundamental relationship between the Right to information and democracy has emerged with clarity.

The participants of this convention from 20 states and 200 organisations and movements demand in one voice that the National Right to Information Act be passed immediately. This Act should be people friendly and any information relevant to ordinary citizens should not be deemed an official secret. It should provide for punitive measures against non-complying officials. Only such an Act will empower democratic processes and people's participation in governance. This demand, this hope, and this persistent effort arises from a deep disappointment with the current political scenario in which the voice of the people can be articulated only once in five years.

People are tired of this farce in the name of democracy. What kind of state is this in which working hands do not have the opportunity to work, where appropriate wages are still not secure, where children remain hungry while grains rot in godowns, where all resources are being sold to the rich? We must peel the layers of this State. If this country indeed belongs to the people, then the government is accountable to us for our money, our accounts, our happiness and our misery.



The Myth of CSR

The added significance that it is 20 years since the Bhopal gas leak, killing till now nearly 20,000 is that the judiciary and the successive governments failed to punish the guilty; the victims were able to secure a compensation worth its name only after two decades and they are yet to get justice. Besides, the plant continues to pollute the ground water and soil with its toxic remains and no attempts are made to clean it up and the governments have not learned any lessons from the Bhopal experience, that they failed to come up with stringent laws and strict compliance to avoid similar human and environmental catastrophe.

An irresponsible state, unmindful of human rights and nature cannot bring social responsibility in other institutions, including corporations. Corporations put immense pressure on the governments to do away with national laws to give them unchallenged power to enter and exploit our natural resources (the proposed watering down of our Environmental laws is a glaring example). This possibility, something that would not have moved a cynic till the other day, is a reality today. Consider the following:

“The number of transnational corporations in the world has jumped from 7,000 in 1970 to 40,000 in 1995. One simple indicator of the comparative might of the corporations and governments is the economic wealth each generates, measured by corporate sales and a country’s gross domestic product (GDP). Using this benchmark, it turns out that the combined revenues of just General Motors and Ford – the two largest automobile corporations in the world – exceed the combined GDP for all of sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the combined sales of Mitsubishi, Mitsui, ITOCHU, Sumitomo, Marubeni and Nissho Iwai, Japan’s top six *sogo shosha*, or trading companies, are nearly equivalent to the combined GDP of all of South America.”

The cocktail of a weak state and a profit driven corporate world would lead only to social irresponsibility and destruction of natural resources. “The land, water, air and sea have been functionally transformed from life-supporting systems into repositories for waste.” The much harped upon corporate social responsibility (CSR)

would then be part of a new business strategy to acquire respectability and camouflage irresponsible activities.

The more irresponsible and damaging the corporations are, the more they talk of CSR. Here are some examples: Coca Cola “The environmental management system of TCCC (The Coca Cola Company) is known as the eKOsystem. The Company ‘conducts its business in ways that protect, preserve and enhance the environment.’ The eKOsystem of TCCC translates this principle into action by establishing a framework for successfully managing the Company’s environmental performance worldwide,” Dow Chemical “Dow people around the world develop solutions for society based on the company’s inherent strength in science and technology – to constantly improve the essentials of life. This distinctive contribution we make to society helps customers succeed, stockholders prosper, employees achieve and communities thrive,” and McDonalds “McDonald’s commitment to corporate responsibility is an important part of our heritageMore than ever, we are focused on and committed to doing the right thing for the local communities in which we operate and for the customers we serve. This philosophy of doing good and giving back has always been at the heart and soul of the McDonald’s business – like french fries and hamburgers...” However, the struggles against Coca Cola in Plachimeda and Mehendiganj, polluting industries in Ankaleshwar and Surat, farmers’ struggle against Monsanto and BT Cotton, Enron and Dow, NTPC and Uranium Corporation of India and many such people’s struggles expose their tall claims.

If the late 80’s and 90’s saw ‘environmentally friendly’ industries, in the new millennium we have ‘socially responsible’ corporations. Bhopal was an inevitable result of weak laws and bad compliance. To consider it merely as an accident is unjust; failure in punishing the guilty is criminal. A corporation voluntarily responsible to the society is a myth. Only a strong state, with impeccable commitment to human rights and nature can insist on responsibility and accountability from corporations.

J.A.



Countering Trivialisation

For the last some months the television channels in India are continuously showing one advertisement by the movie superstar Amitabh Bacchan. There the actor, rowing as a boatsman in a river, is shown preferring Pepsi Coke to the river water. And, after laying hands on the Pepsi bottles with a victorious smile, jeers the other person – *pani piyo, pani piyo* (have/drink water!). This is one of the ways the Coke companies' (Pepsi and Coca-Cola) response to the oft repeated slogan – *Pepsi nahin- Pani chahiye* (We want water not Pepsi), in almost all the struggles the common people of this land are waging. This is also one of the slogans of the anti-Globalisation, anti-multinationals movements.

So the MNCs, and Coke companies to be specific, have decided to hit directly. They made it clear that 'water' is their target, if their product is to exist. This is an unequal war. They have billions to spend on flashy-glossy-catchy ads; they have pocketed political leaders like Digvijay Singh who had written off Rs. 78 crores of taxes for Coca-Cola, in Madhya Pradesh. And Amitabh Bacchans, Aamir Khans, Sachin Tendulkars are with them to catch the young and legitimise their polluting, hazardous acts. These icons are playing with the health of the people, especially the youngsters. How much money do Amitabh Bacchan and Sachin Tendulkar want at the cost of the lives and health of the next generation of this country? Except the badminton champion P. Gopichand, no star dared to refuse the lure of the money from the cola companies.

Such blitzkrieg also aims to undermine the people's struggles in Plachmimada, Mehendiganj, Kaladera and other places against the Coke companies for their unrestrained extraction of ground water and pollution of land and water.

The chain newspaper groups, particularly the metropolitan English-language media along with the audio-visual news channels, have been overactive for promoting the cause of the big capital. The self-styled Journalism of Courage i.e. 'Indian Express' has been operating as an unabashed agent of the corporate powers; its courage consists only in ridiculing and berating the public services and the people's struggles.

Its recent coverage of the talks between the Andhra government and Naxals is one such proof, if required. Such newspapers are indulging in twisting the facts, belittling the common people and are projecting the interests and ideas of the tiny section of population as the Indiaspeak, and trivialise the interests and demands of vast number of people – the peasants, workers, unemployed, dalits, tribals, and the poor. With enormous reach and impact due to their money power they stifle, distort and ridicule the dissenting and different voices and agenda. This is a new form of Totalitarianism, under the garb of liberalism.

The people's movements, no doubt, have been struggling with such challenges continuously. But new circumstances require new and deeper response, analysis along with comprehensive and dynamic strategy. A better communication process, internally and with the outside world, is necessary for strengthening the larger struggle. The movements and organisations will have to give time to reflect and act on this front also.

S.S.



We invite your opinion and comments on the articles appeared in this issue.

We welcome analysis, discussions and short write-ups about the various struggles, processes and issues. Please send the matter (not exceeding 800 words) either by email or post.

Please email them to <themovement@riseup.net> or post it to: The People's Movement, c/o National Alliance of People's Movements, Haji Habib Bldg , A Wing, Dadar (E), Mumbai - 400 014

Editor

License to Kill Unlimited

Unlike the stereotypical common criminals, the top directors of corporate crimes – even convicted criminals – often smell good, drive expensive cars and can legitimately gain access to the policy-making circles of the world governments.

Nityanand Jayaraman

Are you inclined to violence, but are forced to restrain yourself for fear of the law? Would you rather make your money by robbing others but are scared of the police? There are fool-proof ways of killing or maiming legally, of robbing strangers, and going scot-free and even making a decent packet in the process if you're wise in the ways of the world. Believe it or not, the law will protect you – to a great extent. You may even have the sympathies of some of the judges regarding the extent of punishment if, a big IF, guilt is ever established or the case comes to sentencing. As time passes, significant sections of the public, may even find the demands of the victims against the perpetrator(s) unreasonable.

The vehicle for such perfect crimes is the **limited liability company** – a corporate entity.

A company can poison an entire reservoir or river, or wipe out a town, or make away with a nationalised bank, run away with your grandmother's term deposit, or convert the sacred lands of native people to radioactive wastelands. For the worst of these, the liability is limited to civil damages not exceeding the assets of the company. And, any creative accountant will tell you how to manage your assets in times of liability.

Consider the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal. Company documents reveal that the then Carbide CEO Warren Anderson and the senior management were explicitly warned that the plant design had several inherent flaws that compromised its safety. The company, through its senior management, decided that the risks posed by locating a hazardous factory with an inherently flawed design in a crowded locality in Bhopal, were worth the economic benefits it would bring the company and its top management.

They were right, it seems. The disaster may have killed more than 20,000, and left generations to suffer the long-term effects. Anderson, the man who signed the papers authorising the location of the defective plant in a populated area, lives a life of luxury paying monthly golf bills at least four times in excess of the paltry Rs. 25,000 paid to survivors as compensation for loss of life or lifelong ill-health.

The Bhopal disaster is now 20 years old but nothing much has changed. On November 26, 2003, 150 people were poisoned when chlorine gas leaked from Mangalam Drugs and Chemicals, an infamous chemical factory near Sangamner town on the Nashik-Pune highway. The incident took place roughly a week before the 19th anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, but caused barely a stir outside the small industrial town where the incident occurred.

For years before the incident occurred, residents had complained to regulatory authorities and the district administration about the pollution from the factory. Emissions from the chemical plant had made life unlivable for the communities. The company was given closure orders by the Pollution Control Board. But the High Court set aside the order, and allowed the plant to operate until the tragedy occurred where 150 were injured and 18 seriously poisoned.

A day later, in an unrelated incident in Gaya, Bihar, Satyendra Dubey was murdered by "unidentified assailants" for blowing the whistle on the corrupt contracts that characterised the project. Dubey had conveyed the details of irregularities in the project through a confidential letter to the Prime Minister's Office. A leak, allegedly from the PMO, alerted corporate interests who set their goondas to silence Dubey.

The Bhopal disaster, the Dubey murder and the Sangamner poisoning share a common thread. All are instances of corporate crime – an example of crimes perpetrated by business interests against workers, consumers, the government, communities or shareholders.

Limited Liability

Corporate crime results from a business house's motive to profit at any cost. In the Carbide and the Mangalam cases, the companies chose to save on costs for maintaining safety and environmental quality. With Dubey, the company acted in revenge or to prevent the engineer from leaking any more information about its wrong-doings. In all the cases, earlier warnings – and in Dubey's case, requests for confidentiality – by the victims were ignored by the authorities.

Depending on the stakes, corporations deploy various tools to ensure the security of their businesses. Some of the favourite tools corporations use to neutralise threats include paying bribes, issuing counter-threats, harassment (transfers, suspension, false cases against community or labour activists), police action, political pressure, physical violence or even murder. But this is by no means an exhaustive list of tools available at the corporation's disposal.

In the guise of the limited liability company, corporations usually have the most powerful allies on their sides – the law, the law-makers and the law-enforcers. The courts have had a difficult time coming to grips with the corporation as a criminal. The company's criminality is seen to arise from the criminal acts of those who manage or direct it.

Rather than creatively explore the prospect of criminal liability for companies, the companies' directors are the only ones left with the responsibility of discharging criminal liabilities. "[T]he corporation has been above the law by the simple device of not being squarely in it," sums up New Delhi-based legal researcher Usha Ramanathan.

In a 2:1 decision on September 16, the Supreme Court ruled that a corporation cannot be charged with crimes that carry mandatory sentencing of imprisonment and fine. Because a company cannot be imprisoned, the

Supreme Court reasons that it can only be charged with crimes carrying sentencing of a fine even if graver offences are committed.

Ramanathan writes that the observation of the two judges "can be seen by some as a failure of legal imagination. If imprisonment means drawing a convicted offender into a pre-set confined space as a prison, it is arguable that an offending corporation cannot be imprisoned. But, the constituents of imprisonment include detention, restriction of certain liberties and, more recently, it has been held to be about productive work while in prison the wages for which would go to repair the victims' lives. These are certainly capable of being imposed on a corporation. The notion of imprisonment clearly needs to be re-visited. So too do other possibilities of sentencing of a convicted corporation." [Ecologist Asia, December 2003]

Unfortunately, Dubey's death and the poisoning of the Sangamner residents will both go unavenged, with no lessons learnt from the tragedies, and with no insights gained into the insidious menace of corporate crime. Evidence to convict a corporate criminal is not easy to come by, especially if people like Dubey don't speak out for fear of losing their job or life. In Dubey's case, the highest offices in the country are charged – with or without intent to cause him harm – with leaking Dubey's identity and sealing his fate.

The law offers no protection to "whistleblowers" – those who risk their jobs and even lives – to alert the authorities or the public about criminal dealings within an institution. The absence of such laws prevents any but the most courageous from exposing wrongdoings in high places.

Even worse, awareness about or acknowledgement of the seriousness of corporate crimes is yet to permeate the corridors of power. The National Crime Records Bureau, for instance, has little data on white-collar or corporate crimes. Such crimes, however, represent a monumental loss of public money – the bank scams, the bankrupt NBFCs, the non-performing assets in public sector banks, illegal lockouts, and the numerous violations of food, product, environmental and workplace safety regulations.

Continued on page 22

Plachimada Refuses to Become Another Bhopal

R. Ajayan

The Plachimada Solidarity Committee has demanded immediate closure of the bottling plant of Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages at Plachimada, in Palakkad district of Kerala and asked the Kerala government to initiate criminal proceedings against the company to make the company culpable and pay for its 'crimes'. The Committee has called for the immediate steps to ensure availability of safe water until such a time, the surface and ground water is reversed to the safe limit with guaranteed potable water to all the affected areas and guaranteed free health care for all the affected.

The people of Plachimada and organizations in Kerala and India have been protesting against the Coca Cola plant for causing rapid depletion of ground water in the surrounding area, rendering of the water in the wells and borewell useless and harmful for drinking, washing and cooking in a radius of 1.5 to 2 kms. They allege that the company is rendering the land toxic by dumping the waste sludge and slurry extensively on the land adding to the health problems to the people in the vicinity, thereby leading to the destruction of agriculture and leaving vast numbers of agricultural labourers unemployed. In all this, the Scheduled Tribes are the most adversely affected,

In a recent letter to Mr. Oommen Chandy, the new Chief Minister of Kerala, the committee has called for Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Ltd. be directed to make payment of compensation on "Polluter Pays" principle for its crimes against people.

Violations by Coca-Cola

Plachimada Solidarity Committee is constituted by 32 organisations from across the state of Kerala in support of the just struggle. Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Ltd. (HCCBPL) established the Plachimada plant in 2000. The company, in violation of laws, has been

extracting 8 lakh liters to 15 lakh liters/day. The company has been dumping the sludge and slurry on lands of unsuspecting farmers promoting their use as fertilisers. The consequence of the company's blatant use, misuse and violations of existing laws along with the connivance of the concerned departments of the governments have led to the depletion and degradation of the natural resources like groundwater and land in the vicinity.

The people of Plachimada, had launched an agitation since 22 April 2002 maintaining a picket outside the Coke factory since then. The agitation has crossed 800 days. And yet no action has been taken to address the problems that the victims of the Coke factory face. No criminal action has yet been initiated against HCCBPL till date despite their criminal acts and culpability under the relevant acts as the Pollution Control Act, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, amended 1988, SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and relevant sections of IPC and CrPC. The HCCBPL has not been made accountable to their acts of commission and omission. Some of these misdeeds are:

Surface and Ground Water

1. The test report, dated March 4 2002, of water sample from the Panchayat Well (Sample 1) and from the well at R.Krishnaswamy's farm (Sample 2) were analysed for drinking water quality parameters at Sargam Metals Laboratories, Chennai [recognised by the Department of Science of Technology, Government of India]. The report concluded that:

"water from the Panchayat well contains very high levels of 'hardness' and salinity that would render water from this source unfit for human consumption, domestic use (bathing and washing), and for irrigation."

2. This has been further corroborated by the Primary

Health Centre, which has concluded that the water is not potable around the Coca Cola Factory at Plachimada in its letter on May 13, 2003 based on the analysis of water samples at the regional Analytical Laboratory.

Solid Waste: Heavy Poisoning

The BBC Radio, in its programme *Face the Facts* released a report on the three solid waste samples on July 25, 2003. David Santillo, University of Exeter, who carried out the tests said the results were concerning: "Of the three solid wastes analysed, one showed relatively high levels of two toxic metals, namely cadmium and lead. Some other heavy metals, including nickel, chromium and zinc, were also present at levels significantly above those expected for background, uncontaminated soils and sludge. The presence of high levels of lead and cadmium is of particular concern. Lead is a developmental toxin in humans, particularly noted for its ability to damage the developing nervous system. Cadmium is especially toxic to the kidney, but also to the liver – it is classified as a known human carcinogen." This was subsequently corroborated by the Report of the Kerala Pollution Control Board of August 7, 2003.

The *Supreme Court Monitoring Committee on Hazardous Wastes* (SCMC) visited the HCCBPL plant on August 12, 2004. In its report on August 14, 2004, the committee indicted HCCBPL for .

- i. the unauthorised disposal of sludge
- ii. no prior approval of the authorities concerned with agriculture, disposed of its sludge

(containing heavy metals) to farmers in the neighborhood as fertiliser.

- iii. no convincing explanation for the source of the toxic heavy metals in the sludge.

The Committee made it clear that this was not the situation prevailing prior to the company being established in the area, and concluded that the life of the communities settled around the plant – tribals and unprivileged – had been disturbed by the company's activities.

On the basis of all this the Joint committee has demanded that

- a. An immediate closure of the Plachimada plant of Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Ltd.;
- b. Initiation of criminal proceedings against the company making the company culpable and therefore pay for their crimes;
- c. Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Private Ltd. be directed to make payment of compensation on "Polluter Pays" principle for its crimes against people.

People are waiting for response by the state government. The people are protesting and one thing is sure, they will not allow themselves to be another victim of corporate crime.

(R. Ajayan is Convenor of the Plachimada Solidarity Committee. Email: neerajam2004@yahoo.com)



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Editor

Fight Hypocrisy or Free Trade?

Is the problem US protectionism, or is the problem free trade itself? The international trade in shrimp is a good example of the destructive nature of market liberalization for working people all over the world. Is this really a case of ‘first world’ versus ‘third world?’ Mike Levien finds some harsh truth.

Mike Levien

The recent decision by the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) to slap anti-dumping tariffs on imported shrimp has understandably left many countries crying foul. In its preliminary ruling in early August, the DOC found six countries—Thailand, India, China, Vietnam, Ecuador, and Brazil—guilty of dumping shrimp on the US market at artificially low prices, and imposed tariffs ranging from 3.5 to 27.5 percent for Indian exporters to as much as 67% for some Brazilian firms, and 112% for the “non-market” countries of China and Vietnam. Coming at the same time as US and EU negotiators were pressuring developing countries to further liberalize their markets under the auspices of the WTO framework agreement, the move left no doubt as to the transparent hypocrisy of US trade policy.

Nonetheless, the response of many in the media has not gone beyond a simple condemnation of US duplicity. The implication is that everything would be fine if the US simply opened its markets as it demands of others. This was also the discourse surrounding the recent WTO negotiations, with the leaders of ‘developing’ countries trying to bargain for a reduction in agricultural subsidies of the US and EU, and greater access to their markets in exchange for the liberalization of their own. But, while the US government’s practice of forcing other countries to open their markets while protecting its own is contemptible, is real “free trade” the answer? Is the problem US protectionism, or is the problem free trade itself?

If we are concerned with the fate of working class and lower-income people, then I would contend that free trade is the problem, not the answer. The international trade in shrimp, I believe, is a good example of the

destructive nature of market liberalization for working people generally, across international borders. Turning aside the legal issue of whether the implicated countries in the shrimp controversy are in fact guilty of dumping (which is questionable), I’d like to question whether free trade in shrimp is in fact desirable for traditional fishermen and working class communities on both sides of the equation, specifically in the US and India.

Shrimp in US

In the US, it is the high demand for shrimp in restaurants and supermarkets that has created high retail prices and thus an attractive market opportunity for both domestic and foreign suppliers. Most domestic shrimp, which accounts for only about 12% of the total US demand, is caught wild by small independent trawlers in the Gulf of Mexico and the Southern Atlantic Ocean. The fishing is done on modestly sized boats (by American standards), and are usually owner-operated. Most shrimpers are working class people and although they haven’t themselves seen much of the windfall profit of the high retail price of shrimp (it is the companies who buy, can, freeze, and transport the shrimp who make the killing), shrimping has been a secure way to provide a decent standard of living.

In the region of southern Louisiana, to take an area with which I’m quite familiar, shrimping has been a mainstay of the economy and a vital part of the distinct Cajun communities there for most of the last century. Cajuns are a group of people who came from France to Nova Scotia, Canada around 1600, from where they were subsequently kicked out by the British in the mid-18th century. Most of them made their way south to settle as fishermen and farmers in the swampy coast of southern Louisiana when it was still a French territory. While fishing was always a staple of Cajun livelihood, shrimping itself began in earnest around the beginning

of the 20th century, and soon became the backbone of the regional economy. Since then it has become such an integral part of the area that it's hard to imagine the small Cajun towns along the swampy coast without their characteristic shrimp trawlers lining the *bayous* (brackish canals).

For the last few years, however, the shrimp industry in Southern Louisiana, as in the rest of the Gulf, has been in serious trouble. While the store price of shrimp in the US has soared due to high demand, the price that shrimpers get for their catch has plummeted. Between 2000 and the present, the price for shrimp has dropped from \$6.45 per pound to \$1.8, and the value of the US shrimp harvest has been cut from \$1.25 billion in 2000 to \$560 million in 2002. Many old timers can't remember dockside prices ever being so low, and increasingly trawlers don't consider it even worth the price of diesel to go out to sea. Where generations had followed shrimping, it is now threatened with extinction. The decline of shrimping, coupled with a shortage of other jobs to turn to, has resulted in increased unemployment, a downward spiral of opportunity for young people, and a depression of the local economy.

Real World Scenario

The main reason for this dramatic dive in shrimp prices has been the large quantities of factory farmed shrimp that have begun flooding the US market over the last five years or so. These shrimp are mostly coming from South and Southeast Asian countries, who, with the encouragement of the World Bank, have been adopting capital intensive aquaculture, including huge shrimp farms, as a get-rich-quick model of economic growth and means of acquiring foreign exchange. The resulting influx of cheap farm-raised shrimp from these countries has driven down the price for raw shrimp to such a low level that it's hardly above production cost in the US. Thus, it is not clear that the shrimp industry in the US can survive under the current trade scenario and the prices that come with it. It was in this context that the Southern Shrimp Alliance, an association of tens of thousands of US shrimpers, brought the anti-dumping case to US Trade Court.

Fair enough. But, in the language of economists (from Adam Smith on), this is just comparative advantage. If

country A can produce the same good at a cheaper cost than country B, then country B should no longer produce that good, import it instead from A, and make more efficient use of its capital in other sectors. This, so the theory goes, will increase efficiency and overall wealth for both countries.

The theory sounds reasonable enough, but when applied to the real world of people, communities, and geography, is it one we can stomach? What will happen to traditional industries and the communities that are dependent on them if they are exposed to the assault of international markets? What will happen to people who have spent their entire lives working in one industry and are not skilled for other work? Who's to guarantee that more jobs will be created in the same place they were destroyed? And whose authority is it to deem someone else's occupation as inefficient and worthy of termination?

Bane of Aquaculture in India

While we've seen the Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Indian Seafood Association, and other pundits in the mainstream Indian media denounce the new anti-dumping measures, it doesn't seem at all clear that the relatively new, export-oriented shrimp industry in India is very beneficial for poor and working class Indians at all. The shrimp aquaculture farms that have sprung up in coastal and estuarine areas across the country (and which are mostly responsible for shrimp exports) are by and large highly capital intensive undertakings, which create relatively few jobs. They are owned by large corporations or wealthy individuals, and it is some of India's largest business houses that control shrimp exports. This was clearly illustrated by the fact that Hindustan Lever was the number one Indian company targeted by the new anti-dumping tariffs.

Moreover, these new and often illegally operated shrimp farms have been converting and destroying agricultural land, polluting ground and water with the antibiotics and chemicals they use, and destroying estuarine habitats all along the coast of India. In many instances these operations have come into conflict with surrounding communities, who often lose productive agriculture and grazing land, while suffering from the effects of soil and water degradation. Aquaculture farms have often turned out to be fly-by-night affairs

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Judiciary and Corporations

Except the decision about the oil company's case, the Court dismissed all other petitions challenging any executive act taken under the cover of economic reforms. Were Court's decisions influenced by its own approval of the new policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation?

Prashant Bhushan

The foundations of public interest litigation (PIL) were laid in the late 1970s and subsequently expanded in scope from the initial environmental concerns to concerns like bonded labour, the rights of detainees, the right of the poor to basic amenities like education, shelter, etc., corruption in high places and accountability of public servants. This process relied on an expansive interpretation of Article 21 to include a wide range of rights, and a relaxed interpretation of Locus Standi to enable any public spirited citizen to move the courts on behalf of persons without the financial capacity to do so themselves. This activism on part of the courts enjoyed increasing public support and kept in check the desire of a discontented political and bureaucratic establishment to curb the powers of the courts with regard to PIL by legislation.

However in the last decade of 'economic reforms' almost all the public interest cases filed challenging alleged perversions, corruption and other illegalities involved in the implementation of the new economic policies, were dismissed. In several of them, the court made gratuitous and unmerited remarks suggesting an abuse of PIL.

In *BALCO Employees Union Vs Union of India* (2002 Vol 2 SCC 343), where the employees union of the government company had challenged its disinvestment on various grounds including the arbitrary and non transparent fixation of its reserve price, the Supreme Court while dismissing the petition went on to make the following observations:

"There is, in recent years, a feeling which is not without any foundation that [PIL] is now tending to become publicity interest litigation or private interest litigation and has a tendency to be counter-productive."

"PIL is not a pill or a panacea for all wrongs... There have been, in recent times increasing instances of abuse of PIL. Therefore there is a need to re-emphasise the parameters within which PIL can be resorted to by a petitioner and entertained by the court."

While refusing to consider the petition of Mr B. L. Wadhwa, a lawyer known for having taken up many serious public interest cases, on the ground that he was not directly affected by the disinvestment of BALCO, it went on to observe, "it will be seen that whenever the court has interfered and given directions while entertaining PIL, it has mainly been where there has been an element of violation of Article 21 or of human rights or where the litigation has been initiated for the benefit of the poor and the underprivileged who are unable to come to court due to some disadvantage. In those cases also it is the legal rights which were secured by the courts. We may, however, add that [PIL] was not meant to be a weapon to challenge the financial or economic decisions which had been taken by the government in exercise of their administrative power. No doubt a person personally aggrieved by such decisions which s/he regards as illegal, can impugn the same in the court of law, but, a [PIL] at the behest of a stranger could not to be entertained."

This effectively meant that a citizen could not challenge by way of PIL, the loot of the public exchequer, unless s/he was personally affected. It is significant that these observations were made in a case involving a challenge to an element of the so-called "economic reforms" of the government. It will be seen that the Supreme Court has almost without exception negated all challenges to any element of the economic reforms package of the government, even when such challenges were based on specific violation of law or evidence of corruption.

In *BALCO* itself, the challenge to the selloff of the PSU, was based inter alia on a completely non

transparent and arbitrary valuation of the company conducted in less than a week by a valuer of immovable property having no experience in the valuation of companies. It had been pointed out that the valuation of the captive power plants of the company alone were worth more than the price at which it was being sold. The court however refused to examine this challenge by saying that the valuation was done by one of the known methods of valuation.

No Consideration

In CITU Vs. State of Maharashtra, where the validity of the Enron power project had been challenged on the ground that it was being set up in violation of section 29 of the Electricity Supply Act, that the project would be ruinous to the finances of the State Electricity Board, and that there was adequate circumstantial evidence of corruption in the sanction of the project, the court restricted the challenge only to examine the accountability of the public servants involved in the sanction of the project. It refused to examine the challenge to the project itself on the ground that they did not think it to be in public interest to go into the validity of a project which had been substantially set up and against which several previous challenges had been rejected by the courts. This was said despite the fact that the construction of phase 2 of the project (which was more than twice the size of phase 1) had not even commenced at the time, and that none of the previous challenges to the project were based on the grounds and material on which the CITU challenge was based.

In State of Karnataka Vs. Arun Kumar Agrawal, (2000 1 SCC 210) the Karnataka High Court had ordered a CBI investigation into the circumstances in which a 1000 MW power project had been approved in Karnataka. The series of highly suspicious circumstances found by the High Court which warranted such investigation were among others:

- Complete lack of financial capacity of the company, Cogentrix, to execute the project.
- False claims made regarding technical partnerships.
- Changes in project specifications from the original agreement such as moving the entire project to Mangalore and signing a power purchase agreement with Karnataka State Electricity Board, both changes entailing financial losses for the state of Karnataka.

The Supreme Court however made short shrift of the

elaborate High Court judgment, holding that, “Thus none of the 13 circumstances noticed by the High Court can be characterized as giving rise to any suspicion, much less the basis for investigation by a criminal investigating agency.”

In case of the Center for Public Interest Litigation versus Union of India (2000 8 SCC 606), the government’s decision to sell off developed offshore gas and oilfields from ONGC to a private joint venture was challenged based on a large number of facts and circumstances suggesting corruption, report of an SP of the anti-corruption unit of the CBI suggesting corruption and a CAG report with several negative remarks about the deal. However, despite the host of devastating charges the Court did not think it fit to even order an investigation in the matter.

In Union of India Vs. Azaadi Bachao Andolan, (2003 8 SCALE 287) the Supreme Court reversed an earlier High Court decision striking down tax-exemptions to “offshore companies”, holding that the government could in terms of its economic policies grant a tax holiday to foreign companies in order to attract foreign investment. It gave short shrift to the argument that this would violate the Income Tax Act under which non-resident companies are taxable on their domestic income and that any change in the tax regime would have to be done by means of a Finance Act passed by Parliament and could not be made by the executive alone. A similar fate was to meet the Delhi Science Forum versus Union of India (AIR 1996 SC 1356) case challenging the award of telecom licenses to private companies.

The Oil companies case (CPIL Vs. UOI 2003 Supp 1 JT 515) is the only case to my knowledge in which the Supreme Court has allowed a challenge to any purported implementation of the new economic policy. It held here that the government oil companies nationalised by Acts of Parliament which specifically mandated the companies to remain government companies could not be privatised without amending the Acts and thus taking the approval of Parliament.

So we see that barring the exception of the oil companies case, the court dismissed all other petitions challenging any executive act taken under the cover of economic reforms. While it may be possible to take the view that all these decisions are technically correct, it is

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Searching for Corporate Responsibility

The newly found Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) seems to be the latest buzzword. Though its extent seems small as of now, what it promises and searches for itself? Rajni Bakshi delves into the newly emerging world of CSR in India and abroad.

Rajni Bakshi

The modern corporation has won a reputation of being a predatory, somewhat amoral creature. Its motto was captured by the title of Noam Chomsky's book "Profit before People". The evidence that has won corporations this dubious reputation is indeed voluminous. Most notably, there is the on-going tragedy of the gas leak at Union Carbide's plant in Bhopal twenty years ago.

Less well known, in India, is the case of Anderson vs. General Motors company. The case was filed by a woman whose car exploded in flames after a rear-end collision. During the trial Anderson's lawyers were able to prove how GM had knowingly placed the fuel tank in a dangerous position in order to save costs. Since US law prohibits putting profits above public safety the victim and her family were awarded over one billion dollars in damages.

However, this is only part of the story. Corporations are now under internal and external pressures to clean up their act. Some years back Global Finance, an American business magazine did a cover story titled 'Corporate Angels'. The cover showed the CEO of Unilever with a golden halo and fluffy white angel-wings. Inside was an account of how major global businesses are responding to a growing public clamor for more corporate social responsibility (CSR).

"There is something magnificently perverse about the concept of the 'socially responsible' corporation" noted the editor of Global Finance, in an introduction to the article. "After all, multinational corporations have worked long and hard for their reputation as

environmental and social pariahs."

That hard-earned reputation is not about to dissolve. Yet CSR is a concept that appears to be gathering ground. Is there more to this term than an 'eye-wash' kind of public relations? Or could it possibly play a role in the global process of social and economic transformation that ensures at least basic needs for every person on earth?

These questions may appear unnecessary, even offensive, to those activists who see global capital as an unmitigated evil. However, even those who hold this view could sharpen action strategy by understanding the emerging trend towards corporate social responsibility. Then there are those who hold the view that capitalism can and should be reformed from within. Such people are actively engaged in pushing for greater CSR. Their activism is based on the premise that profits are a necessity of any business, but not its 'purpose'.

Of course the hypnotic lure of super profits is not going to just fade away. There will always be some who pursue profits with minimal regard for larger social consequences. But these predilections are no longer fashionable. There is now a growing force of those who act on the belief that the 'bottom-line' is not about money alone. This view is rooted in much more than a moral imperative. It is a response to the post-revolutionary era.

Good Business Pays

We live in a time when cataclysmic revolutions, promising egalitarian utopias have been discredited. But the urge to ensure basic livelihood for all remains strong and it is not limited to passionately dedicated

social activists on the fringes of society. It is obvious to some people in the mainstream of economic activity that the long term sustainability of their businesses depends on the health of the environment and society at large. And thus it is unacceptable that millions of people continue to live in economic and ecological wastelands. For them 'order' would, eventually, have to be enforced by armed militias, which is not an attractive option.

Therefore, many large corporations are finding good business sense in being more socially accountable. This is quite different from corporate philanthropy, which means giving large donations to community projects, the arts and humanitarian charities. Corporate social responsibility is about modifying, or even re-making, the ethical basis on which corporations conduct their business.

Time appears to be running out for those who are content to maximise profits with minimal regard for the social, economic and environmental impact of their business. More and more American and European investors are looking for stocks in which they can invest with a clear conscience. For example, some years ago the American biotechnology multinational company Monsanto saw its share-price nose-dive due to public protests about its genetically modified products. Thus, these concerns are squeezing their way into corporate board-rooms.

In many Western countries there is a growth in Ethical Investments, also known as Socially Responsible Investing. This phenomenon has three dimensions. One, investors who refuse to put their money into particular industries e.g.. liquor, tobacco, armaments, producers of genetically-modified food, companies that have particularly bad track record of human rights violations and damage to the environment. Two, investors who actively seek out companies working with more ecologically sustainable modes of production. Three, shareholders of major corporations aim to push the management towards greater social and environmental responsibility. For example, Greenpeace has bought shares in Shell and now uses that leverage to push the company to switch to renewable energy. According to one estimate in the USA one out of every seven dollars invested is screened through some ethical filter.

One signal of this is the fact that there is now a Dow

Jones Sustainability Group Index (SGI) on Wall Street. This listing automatically excludes companies involved in gambling or alcohol manufacturing. The SGI rates companies for their success in managing economic, environmental and social factors. At the time of the launch of this index in 2000 only 200 of the top 2000 companies listed with Dow Jones could qualify for inclusion in this new index.

The San Francisco based group Business for Social Responsibility has been working since 1992 to help companies to sustain their commercial success "in ways that demonstrate respect for ethical values, people, communities and the environment." This group has 1400 member companies and their affiliates, which employ a total of six million workers. Among the member companies are American Express, AT&T, Du Pont, Ford, General Motors, Johnson and Johnson and Levi-Strauss.

Accountability and Profits

This is a definite break from the traditional view, argued by many economists, that a company is answerable only to the law and to its shareholders. At least three generations of business school graduates have been initiated with the mantra: "maximise the medium-term earnings per share." But since the early 1990s this dogma has come under pressure from a wide range of 'stakeholders' in the North – that is, employees, customers and the general public, which is in anyway affected by the functioning of the company.

"The issue here is not the hoary ideological debate between the government and the market. Rather it concerns the kind of entities that will comprise the market" says analyst Jonathan Rowe in an essay titled 'Reinventing the Corporation'. The real question is: "How can we reconnect the corporation to the social and community concerns it was originally intended to serve?"

This concern has given birth to numerous studies and books, such as 'In Pursuit of Principle and Profit: Business Success Through Social Responsibility' by Alan Reder. The author shows, through documentation of successful companies that "marrying profits and humane, respectful management practices is no mere ideal. But in this case, profits are the by-product, not

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Education Engine Driver

*Prof. Krishna Kumar took over as the new Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) last September. Prof. Kumar was a Professor of Education at the Delhi University since mid 1980s and was the Dean of Central Institute of Education. Last year, Prof. Kumar coordinated the pioneering effort of developing child-centred, Indradhanushya text-book series of SCERT, Delhi in his capacity as a Chief Advisor of the textbook writing team. He has been appointed a member of UNESCO's advisory group for preparing a report on Global Monitoring of Quality in Education by 2005. Prof. Kumar is a well-known writer, essayist and columnist in Hindi and English. He also writes for children. He spoke with **Rosamma Thomas** on the current state of the premier educational institution as well as his vision for future.*

RT - *On the personal front, how have things changed since you assumed charge as Director of the NCERT?*

KK - I have now become like any regular office goer in Delhi. I commute a long distance to work, and keep a regular working day. (Earlier, his residence was within the campus of the Central Institute of Education, where he was a Professor, and his hours of work allowed him an afternoon nap, after which he would wake up refreshed, ready for the evening's reading and writing.) What has changed now is that I listen to music on the discman on the way back from office, and in the morning on the way to work, I listen to taped readings from journals, books, even, of late, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales! Some of my students and friends have been kind enough to tape readings for me.

This new office has also been an eye-opener, an occasion for me to discover the enormous good will that exists, and the lengths to which people will go to be of use.

RT - *How is this position different from any of the positions you have held earlier? After all, you have been in administrative positions before.*

KK - Heading a department in the university is very different from heading an organisation like the NCERT. The only other position I have held that could compare with the directorship of the NCERT is the work I did for the Delhi government last year, designing and producing textbooks for government schools, from

classes I to VIII, for all subjects. When I look back at it in retrospect, it still seems impossible that 5-600 people could be brought together to work on those textbooks, and that the work on them could be completed in 8 months.

RT - *There were 47 textbooks in all?*

KK - That's right. That experience was important, I gained confidence from it. I discovered how much people do, when you trust them, and motivate them, put the right people together, and keep sorting out their relationship problems.

RT - *Do you think you are good at sorting out relationship problems?*

KK - Not that I'm particularly great at it, but it's necessary work, and I do the best I can. Work at the NCERT means motivating people on a large scale, to do the things they already do better, and also to attempt new things. It involves organisational leadership, for the NCERT comprises a chain of institutions, and holds tremendous potential. It impacts every corner of the country; it is a large organization, with about 2,900 employees, (including 400 academic staff) spread over 5 campuses. About managing relationships, when I came to the NCERT, there were two categories of senior staff—those who saw themselves as beneficiaries, and those who saw themselves as victims. The younger staff saw themselves as survivors. It was clear that there was a perception that with the regime change, beneficiaries and victims

would experience a reversal of roles. This state of affairs is clearly not something that should be allowed to continue. We need a more sustainable structural solution.

The NCERT can achieve its full potential only when it recovers and reforms itself first; educational reform depends on the institutional reform of the Council.

RT - *Surely, given that the NCERT is an old organisation, some institutional procedures and norms would be in place by now?*

KK - The NCERT was set up in 1961, at the height of the Nehruvian period, with the aim of modernizing education by creating a scientific base for the education policies of the government. It was among the more ambitious institutions set up in the era of national institution building. It functioned as an adjunct to the government; unlike the university, it developed no institutional procedures and norms of its own. The position of Director is perceived as one of power, and for long, the office was held by benevolent directors. I was a little dismayed by the flood of emails and messages offering congratulations on my appointment as Director. It suggests that people don't really relate themselves to the position; this is a collective opportunity, a collective effort. A council is an assembly of people. I am saddened when people send messages saying "education is safe in your hands." Educational reform is a participatory task. We must not exaggerate the role of one person, even if he is the Director of the NCERT.

The NCERT was meant to build capacity in the states, where the action is, in school education. Over the years, it has, instead, created dependence. The states seek ready-made answers and textbooks. Making model textbooks is only one of about 15 aims of the NCERT; at the heart of the mandate of the NCERT is educational training and research. To provide, as I said earlier, a scientific basis for decision-making. The NCERT conducts talent search examinations, it conducts surveys of education that cover every school in the country; it creates a data base for policy making. The seventh survey is now nearing completion. The NCERT has departments serving the government in more direct ways, supporting the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. It creates programmes for television, for

IGNOU and radio, that are put out on Gyanvani and FM radio. It has a large technical capability, in the Central Institute for Educational Technology. It has an institute for vocational education based in Bhopal. It funds research in various aspects of education: the promotion of gender awareness; the development of appropriate tools for social science, mathematics and other subjects in the curricula. It has a programme of teacher education, conducted in the four regular institutes at Bhubaneswar, Mysore, Bhopal, Ajmer, and now also at Guwahati, affiliated to the local universities.

RT - *Has it helped that the NCERT got some publicity with the changes in the history syllabi?*

KK - The public has become somewhat more aware of the role of the NCERT, but I suspect that the awareness has not yet generated sustained interest, or vigilance. As a council, the NCERT is an assembly, a platform for people. Our website, to start with, will become an interactive one from next month. We already have a window that invites people to respond to our textbooks. Soon we will be able to respond to these comments and suggestions on the website. The National Curriculum Framework, prepared in 2000, is going to be reviewed by a Committee chaired by Professor Yashpal. Eminent scholars like Ramchandra Guha, Gopal Guru and Mrinal Miri will be part of this process. National Focus Groups will prepare position papers on Art Education, Science Education, Peace... The purpose is to generate a social deliberation, a public hearing. These groups will be led by eminent scholars in the field, and will function from different places in the country. The paper on the Aims of Education will be prepared by a group led by Professor Mrinal Miri from Shillong, and the Work and Education one by Professor Anil Sadgopal from Bhopal, for example. We hope to create and utilize a dispersed, federal space for dialogue on education. Curricular reform is everybody's business, and the ultimate aim is to allow experts to travel and interact, so that the child's experience in varied settings is made known to the experts. This is especially important for the rural children, the bulk of whom do not go to school beyond class 5 or 8. Only one of hundred rural girls studies upto class 12. To these children, the reality of the school is not just unstimulating, but also harsh, violent, one of relentless exclusion, failure. If we must humanize and soften this reality, we must first at least recognise it.

Continued from Last Failure

The Opposition was confused. Congress led Front came back to power, with some shrewd moves by Sharad Pawar, but more due to the failure of Progressive and Left politics in Maharashtra.

Sanjay Mangala Gopal

Since the formation of Maharashtra State in 1960, it was ruled by Congress party till 1978. In the 'Janata Wave' that followed the Emergency in mid-1970s, Governments at the Center as well as at the State was taken over by the Janata Party. It did not last long. The Congress very soon got back the power.

In Maharashtra, Congress experienced real blow when in 1995 elections, it got defeated by Bharatiya Janata Party – Shiv Sena (BJP-SS) Alliance. In 1999 election, Congress was split into Congress (I) and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). In spite of their infighting, people elected them to power; although with very little

margin. During the recent elections in October 2004 Congress (I) and NCP together fought the battle with a pre-poll alliance. Still they could not muster absolute majority on their own. This must have happened, due to not so impressive performance by Chief Minister-Deputy Chief Minister duos like Vilasrao Deshmukh – Chhagan Bhujbal and Sushil Kumar Shinde – Vijay Singh Mohite Patil.

The Sena-BJP Alliance was confused about the issues. The Third Force of the Left and Socialist parties broke away just on the eve of the Assembly elections. This must have balanced the anti-incumbency effect against the Congress led Front, if any! In a way the message by the voters is, *we are returning back the Congress (I) and NCP Front as lesser evil, as there is better alternative.*

Pawar Show

The previous government led by the same Front did nothing, except for loud rhetoric through the rallies and media for a month before a pre-election code of conduct was imposed. The State Government announced series of concessions, like writing off loans of farmers, 'free electricity' etc. during that period. Did that work? May be. For the last five years, till Lok Sabha elections changed the rulers at the Center, the Congress (I)-NCP led government in Maharashtra was often let down by the Central government by the then BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. This crossing the swords between rulers at Center and State belonging to different parties has been real cause of our misery. The Front claimed that the state government could not do anything for entire four and half years; but in last few months, when the Congress came to power at Center, they could extract substantial aid from the Center. The Front made it a point to emphasise that the state would benefit if the governments of the state and the Center belonged to the same party. And that

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RT - *On quite a different plane, is there any move to make sports a part of the school curriculum? We always only think of it after a dismal performance at the Olympics.*

KK - There is nothing at the moment, but we do have a Focus Group on Health and Physical Education.

(P.S. If you are wondering about the title of the interview, its because Prof Kumar likes to think of his 5-year term as Director of the NCERT as a train ride from New Delhi to Trivandrum Central. Some weeks ago, he was at Tilak Bridge. Right now, he's at Faridabad!).

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But voters were not interested.

Alarming Signs

During and after the elections, two things have emerged as most alarming for progressive section in the state. First, the total collapse of Third Force and secondly, no attempt by the new alternative force – People’s Political Front (PPF) – to forge its way. Through struggle against Enron, and Anti Globalisation Action Committee, the Left parties in the state like both Communist parties, Peasants and Workers Party, Janata Dal (S) with Samajwadi Jan Parishad and the people’s movements with their front National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM), have forged into very strong unity. However this unity, momentum and strength could not be maintained till the election.

PPF tried to contest in the last Lok Sabha elections but that did not materialise. This time also they made an aborted attempt. The people’s movements and groups are still confined to the struggles and the issues, but are not able to convert their issues and mass base for electoral gains. Other Left and democratic parties are also joining this trend. Ten year-old Samajwadi Jana Parishad could nominate only one candidate and that candidate could not get even four figure votes! Politicisation and electoral gains of the movement/struggles again emerged as challenges for the Left, progressive parties and movements.

What about addressing the real issues of the State during the campaign? You get a big ‘No’. Farmer’s suicides, hunger deaths in tribal belt, increasing unemployment, increasing closures of companies, droughts and water scarcity, commercialisation of education, communalisation by BJP/SS/Muslim League... None of these were addressed with due seriousness by any party. People’s Movements, parties like SJP and forums like PPF could not translate their struggles into the political agenda. The People’s verdict was as if, the sham issues like the expressway, highways, fly-overs and other such schemes of development don’t mean much to them. Overcoming communalism and religion-based politics has no place in their mind. As there is no viable, strong and committed alternative, they are continuing with Cong (I) – NCP Front.

NAPM – PPF and the Left-Progressive-Democratic parties need to address this issue. Struggling masses – dalit, adivasis, fisherpeople, workers, and farmers along with sensitive middle classes need to come together and play proactive and supportive role. Then only real change may begin through the electoral processes.

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that exploit the local water and soil resources until they’re exhausted, then pack up and leave the damage for the local communities. They’ve also had a large negative impact on traditional fisherpeople relying on coastal estuaries and inland fisheries whose chemical and hydrological properties the aquaculture farms are destroying. In some cases, like Chilika Lake in Orissa, common fishing grounds have even been fenced in for aquaculture and privatised to companies like Tata.

These destructive effects of shrimp aquaculture have resulted in many struggles and agitations by people’s movements, from the Chilika Bachao Andolan in Orissa to LAFTI in Tamil Nadu, and the National Fishworkers’ Forum. During NAPM’s *Desh Banao, Desh Bachao* tour, one of the major actions was a protest against aquaculture projects in Tamil Nadu. The anti-social and environmentally unsound nature of these operations even led the Indian Supreme Court in 1996 to issue a moratorium on shrimp farms along the Indian coast, a ruling that has not been enforced due to powerful industry pressure.

Thus, while US anti-dumping tariffs will clearly have an effect on Indian corporations involved in shrimp aquaculture, is this really an industry that we can say is beneficial to the working poor of India? Given the above, I think it is fair to conclude that it is not. It seems that the growth of an international trade in shrimp has, by and large, been a negative development for working-class people and traditional fisherpeople in both the US and India.

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Undermining the Environment?

Excerpts from an open letter to Ministry of Environment and Forests

The role of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) seems increasingly to be that of simply a clearing agency for unsustainable and destructive economic and commercial activities. To make matters worse, the MoEF appears to be systematically undermining the participation of citizens in its decision-making process, and has become more and more closed in its functioning.

Several actions of the MoEF (and of GOI in general) point to the following broad trends:

1. Severe reduction in opportunities available to citizens to input into MoEF (and GOI) decisions, and in the seriousness with which MoEF considers such inputs;
2. Decline in the ability and willingness of MoEF to ensure that 'development' processes and projects (e.g. in hydro-power and infrastructure) are oriented towards integrating environmental and social concerns.
3. Declining emphasis on improving regulation and regulatory mechanisms, and instead pushing for 'voluntary' and 'market based' instruments.

Examples of the above (which have been clearly pointed out to the government) include:

1. **The notification of the Biological Diversity Rules 2004:** These Rules notified under the Biological Diversity Act 2002, are scientifically unsound, considerably undermine the role of local communities in safeguarding biodiversity and traditional knowledge, and have *completely* ignored the very many sound inputs provided by NGOs and activists when the draft Rules were first put out by MoEF.
2. **The dilution of notifications under the Environment Protection Act:** Over the last few years MoEF has considerably reduced the scope and weakened the provisions of various notifications and rules under the Environment Protection Act 1986. The promulgation of this comprehensive Act had in 1986 indicated that the government was committed to environmental

conservation, and towards making development projects sustainable. However, a series of dilutions (about 30 in all!) have considerably weakened various notifications under the Act. The dilutions include: (in the case of the Environment Impact Assessment notification) public hearings being dropped for projects such as the widening of highways and mining leases for major minerals under 25 ha.; (in the case of Coastal Regulation Zone notification) allowing Special Economic Zones, effluent treatment plants, industrial salt pans, and the mining of atomic minerals in coastal areas.

3. **The clearance of 'development' projects without adequate assessment:** There are many shocking instances where MoEF has given clearance to dams, mining, roads, ports, industries, and other projects, without an adequate environmental impact assessment or without ensuring that environmental safeguards are built into the project. This is not surprising because increasingly members of various environmental clearance expert committees of MoEF, have little or no independent environmental record or credibility. NGOs and community groups have frequently pointed out such faulty decision-making, and have provided strong evidence of the dangers posed by such projects, but have been consistently ignored.
4. **Reluctance to insist that environmental conditionalities are followed by project proponents:** A large number of development projects cleared by MoEF do not fulfil the conditions under which they were cleared, yet MoEF has taken action on hardly any of them.

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- 5. Waste of capacity building funds:** A huge loan was received by MoEF some years ago, for “Environmental Management Capacity Building Programme” which essentially required: a) A comprehensive review of the Environmental Clearance Mechanism; b) Preparation of Manuals for Environment Impact Assessment; c) Development of an Environmental Information Centre and d) Environmental Law Capacity Building both for the Ministry and for other agencies. Yet this process has been developed with meagre consultation, and despite the debt incurred, the results do not seem to have resulted in any significant improvement in the functioning of the MoEF.
- 6. The framing of a National Environment Policy without public participation:** Having heard that MoEF is drafting a National Environment Policy, some of us have repeatedly asked for details on how this is happening and how citizens can make inputs. A draft was put up on the MoEF website on 21st August, for comments. There has been no other process of reaching out to the citizens of India for inputs to the Policy, in particular to local communities who do not access websites or read English. Moreover, what is the guarantee that this Policy will not be pushed through like the Biodiversity Rules 2004, completely ignoring public inputs?
- 7. The delaying of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP):** Despite itself facilitating a uniquely consultative process over four years, to prepare the NBSAP, MoEF is now delaying its final approval, publication, and release. The reasons being given are that even as a final technical report, the draft needs to go through Cabinet approval, and that it needs to wait for the National Environment Policy to be finalised (though the process of framing this Policy began over three years after NBSAP did).
- 8. Siding with the building lobby:** Rather than help conserve natural ecosystems against unchecked urban growth, MoEF has often tried to make the way easier for the building lobby. For example, instead of supporting people’s groups to protect some of the last remaining forest areas in the highly polluted city of Delhi, including parts of the Delhi

ridge, MoEF has favoured the lobby that wants to promote the construction of five star hotels and shopping malls in this area.

- 9. Ignoring Supreme Court orders on A&N Islands:** In violation of Supreme Court orders, the MoEF has refused to close down the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Forest and Plantation Development Corporation that has been destroying the forests and the habitat of the tribals in the islands. Orders to control mining of sand from the beaches of the islands and deal with inappropriate tourism too have not been satisfactorily complied with.
- 10. Lack of public discussion and transparency on genetic engineering:** Another example of the increasing opaqueness of functioning in the government is the lack of public participation in decisions regarding genetic engineering. This risky technology is being pushed through with no long-term safety tests, and almost no independent scientific or public inputs.

These are only a few of the many examples where MoEF in particular and the GOI in general, have undermined environmental issues and ignored public inputs. In almost all such cases NGOs and affected people have protested, pointed to violations and destructive implications, and often even offered alternatives, yet all this has been systematically ignored. Indeed, resistance to the trends by sensitive government officials themselves has been largely sidelined. Worse, there is no accessible platform on which MoEF (and GOI in general) can be made accountable to the public. It is not surprising therefore that citizens have had to take recourse to the courts to obtain justice.

The current government in its Common Minimum Programme has almost nothing on the environment. Nor has there been acknowledgement of the fact that tens of millions of people in India continue to depend directly on natural resources for their survival, livelihood, health, and future development with dignity. Indeed many of the decisions taken by MoEF have further reduced the access and rights of communities to livelihood resources and supported ‘development’ projects that impinge on community lands and resources.

It is Possible to Reverse

We do believe, however, that the new government has the opportunity to reverse this trend. It needs to take at least the following steps:

1. Providing a legally mandated and explicit role for citizens (especially local communities) in the decision-making process within MoEF (and GOI in general). This can be done by including independent and credible representatives of communities and civil society in the various expert committees; ensuring that citizens' inputs in draft notifications and legislation are considered through a transparent process; strengthening the public hearing process for 'development' projects; constituting an independent monitoring and evaluation agency to assess compliance of environmental conditions and regulations; and other such measures.
2. Considerably strengthen the mandate and functioning of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, e.g. by increasing the number of technical experts and officials who are known for their commitment to the environment.
3. Centrally integrate environmental considerations across the entire decision-making process, right from the planning and design stage of economic sectors and projects and not only at the final stage of clearance. This includes, the strengthening of the EIA, clearance, and monitoring procedures.
4. Reviewing the Common Minimum Programme and its implementation from the environmental perspective, including through a serious consideration of environmental issues in forums such as the National Advisory Council (NAC). The NAC is a step towards more public participation in decision-making, but needs a greater integration of environmental concerns in its deliberations.

We urge the government to draw up a concrete action plan on how to take the above and other steps, to significantly improve the manner in which decisions are taken on environmental issues. This should include the setting up of an independent monitoring and evaluation body, comprised of community and civil society representatives, that can ensure environmental sensitivity in decision-making. While drawing up such an action plan, there should be active and meaningful

participation of community organisations, people's movements, NGOs, and other civil society organisations.

Ashish Kothari (Kalpavriksh), **Ravi Agarwal** (Toxics Link), **Shekhar Singh** (Centre for Equity Studies)...

On behalf of several organizations



Lazy Manager's Guide to Corporate Success

First, stock your Board with senior government servants. Next, stock the government with members of your board. Add oil and stir. When no one can tell where the government ends and your company begins, collude with your government to equip and arm a cold-blooded dictator in an oil-rich country. Look away while he kills his own people. Simmer gently. Use the time collect to collect a few billion dollars in government contracts. Then collude with your government once again while it topples the dictator and bombs his subjects, taking to specifically target essential infrastructure, killing a hundred thousand people on the side. Pick up another billion dollars or so worth of contracts to 'reconstruct' the infrastructure. To cover travel and incidentals, sue for reparations for lost profits from the devastated country. Finally, diversify. Buy a TV station, so that next war around you can showcase your hardware and weapons technology masquerading as coverage of the war. And finally finally, institute a Human Rights Prize in your company's name. You could give the first one posthumously to Mother Teresa. She won't be able to turn it down or argue back.

Arundhati Roy

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Ralph Nader, an American consumer activist and candidate in the last US presidential polls, identifies corporate crime as one of the most pressing issues facing society. Citing various governmental and industry sources, Nader establishes that white-collar and corporate crimes in the US are far more damaging than street-level crimes. Health care fraud, for instance, costs the US some \$100 million; anti-trust violations about \$250 million. “By comparison,” Nader writes, “the FBI estimated that in 2002, the nation’s total loss from robbery, burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson was less than \$18 billion – less than a third of the estimated \$60 billion Enron alone cost investors, pensioners and employees.”

In India, this pattern is not likely to be vastly different. Efforts to tackle such crime are grossly inadequate. Only 4 percent of the white-collar criminals get convicted in the Supreme Court, according to a PTI report of November 2003 that quotes C.L. Ramakrishnan, former director of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption. The report also notes that “criminals escape with fines of few thousand rupees for offences running to several hundred crores.”

Criminal charges seldom reach the stage of sentencing. The Union Carbide case presents the classic example of corporate crime gone unpunished. Union Carbide Corporation’s status as a US multinational, no doubt, added a further complicating factor. Immediately after the disaster, the US courts refused to hear the complaints for compensation filed by Bhopal victims on grounds that the forum (in the US) was inappropriate given the robustness of the Indian judicial system. The US court, instead, exhorted Carbide and its officials to cooperate with Indian authorities. The company and its chief executives did nothing of that sort. They fled to seek refuge in their home country to escape liability that could arise from their crimes in Bhopal if convicted.

Both Union Carbide and Warren Anderson are proclaimed absconders by the Chief Judicial Magistrate’s court in Bhopal for their failure to honour summons issued by the court. Both Carbide and Anderson face charges of “culpable homicide not amounting to murder” and other crimes. A notice of extradition for Warren Anderson was served more than

10 years after the order seeking his extradition was given. The US Government is yet to respond to the request.

In the meantime, Carbide has added insult to injury by reappearing in India, albeit in proxy. In February 2001, the company merged with US-based Dow Chemical. Although Dow acquired Carbide with full knowledge of the latter’s pending criminal and civil liabilities in India, Dow has made clear that it will not address any of Carbide’s Bhopal liabilities. So certain is it about its position and security of its assets that Dow has opened several offices in India, including the manufacture and marketing of Dursban (chlorpyrifos), a deadly pesticide, in collaboration with NOCIL. Meanwhile the Indian Government seems in no hurry to challenge Dow’s version of law.

At least part of the blame for the predicament we find ourselves in lies with the fact that our society sees a corporate criminal as undeserving of the strict punishment meted out to common criminals. Senior corporate executives, like Warren Anderson, who make decisions that kill, poison or rob people often pass off for respectable law-abiding citizens. Unlike the stereotypical common criminals, the top directors of corporate crimes – even convicted criminals – often smell good, drive expensive cars and can legitimately gain access to the policy-making circles of the world governments.

When corporate crimes involve premeditated murder, as in the case of Dubey, the law is clear on the fate of at least the human perpetrators. But what about poisoning that results from willful negligence? Not all corporate criminals set their goons to murder those who stand in the way of their money. Some like Mangalam still exhibit the same depraved indifference to human life and environment in their pursuit for money that they subsidise their production by feeding off the health of the communities and the environment.

The courts are clear about murder, but seem confused about whether or not a little poisoning is inevitable and should be allowed in the interests of “development.”

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Uniting Victims of Toxic Dumps

The meeting of environmental and progressive organisations in Kerala highlights the pressing issues of pollution, irresponsible politics by the capitalist management and future planning for concerted struggle.

C. R. Neelakandan

On October 17, 2004 Eloor (the industrial capital of Kerala) witnessed a rare type of gathering. Leading political personalities of the Left parties, leaders of trade unions, cultural leaders, journalists and a large number of environmental and human rights activists from various parts of the state; the people from Plachimada, (where tribals are leading a struggle against the mighty Coca Cola), from Chaliar who had won their battle against Gwalior Rayons factory, groups fighting against air pollution by a Goenka company for more than two decades; various organisations from all over the state fighting the monstrous Express Highway project, fisher folks and others fighting to protect the land from sand mining by MNC's, and many others formed the gathering.

The meet discussed various issues regarding environment and development in the background of the threat faced by river Periyar – the lifeline of Kerala – due to pollution by 250 industrial units on its banks. What initiated this meeting was the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) slapping closure notices on 32 industrial units, mostly in the Eloor-Edayar industrial belt. These industrial units, including many owned by the government, relied on obsolete technology and obsolete products and were using the river as an illegal disposal facility. No wonder that the area is now ranked 35th in the list of most polluted hotspots in the world and third in India.

Various studies conducted on the river water over the last two decades show that the chemical waste content is dangerously high. Average pH was found to be as low as 2 which means that the water is highly acidic. Along with high chloride content, hazardous substances including heavy metals, Nitrates and various pesticides were present well above acceptable limits. At some places presence of highly radioactive elements were

also found. This had led to several mass fish deaths, disappearance of a large number of flora and fauna, loss of livelihoods in the agriculture and fisheries sector and high incidence of water borne diseases amongst the population of Kochi and its suburbs.

The Pollution Control Board (PCB) had flung into action only when its officials were threatened with punitive action and contempt of court proceedings by the Supreme Court Monitoring Committee (SCMC) on Hazardous Wastes (HW). The SCMC was set up by the nation's apex court in October 2003 to monitor the progress in implementation of the HW Rules as well as a series of orders passed by the court since 1995. 'The PCB has wilfully and callously disregarded the directions of the Supreme Court's (SC) orders,' the committee observed in its report, which recommended closure within eight days of all industrial units that continued to flout the law. Time was running out for the industry as well as the workers because the one-year lease of time granted by the SC for setting up adequate 'Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facility' (TSDF) for hazardous waste ended on October 14.

Though 89 sites in different parts of the country were identified for TSDF and out of which 30 were notified, only 11 were put into operation by September 2003, leaving the bulk of HW being dumped in improper landfills. The High Power Committee (HPC) set up by the SC had guesstimated that every day close to 12,000 tonnes of HW were being generated in the country.

In May 1997 itself, the SC had asked state governments to show cause why units authorised to handle hazardous waste but which operated without requisite safe disposal sites as also units operating without any authorisation should not be closed down. Again, in October last the court had set a time limit of three weeks for closure of all unauthorized units.

But neither the industry nor the PCB made any move

for setting up an adequate TSDF, forcing the SCMC to describe the ground situation existing in the state as “terrible.” Earlier, a Greenpeace study had established that as most of the fertiliser, insecticide and chemical manufacturing plants in the Eloor Edayar region were dumping toxic waste into the Periyar, the incidence of almost all diseases, whether respiratory, dermatological or mental, was “two to five times higher in the region” compared to control areas. After site inspections, the SCMC team chaired by Dr. G. Thyagarajan recently observed that most factories in the region had contaminated ground water supplies of neighbouring communities and nothing had been done to remedy the situation. The SCMC found, for instance, pollution of groundwater “everywhere outside the jarosite ponds of Binani Zinc Ltd,” that the waste disposal practices of Hindustan Newsprint Ltd were “completely unacceptable” The committee was convinced that “Hindustan Insecticides Ltd (HIL) should go for closure,” the area occupied by the company allowed to recover from the impact of discharges of toxic materials over the decades and the company should be “allowed to reopen only if it shifted to clean technology and a new product mix.”

Apart from ordering closure of all unauthorized industries, the SCMC recommended an inquiry into the omissions of KSPCB, warned state authorities of contempt of court proceedings, sought measures for ensuring water supply through pipeline to the residences of affected communities and decided to levy a heavy collective fine of Rs 2.5 crore on the entire industrial estate of Eloor-Edayar based on the ‘polluter pays principle’.

In a bid to inject the spirit of openness and participation in the entire process of pollution control, the SCMC also directed KSPCB to set up Local Area Environment Committees (LAEC) with representation of KSPCB, industry associations or industrial units and local environment groups. The LAEC in Eloor-Edayar region was granted powers to conduct an environment audit of all the 247 industries in the area and to report to the SC on the units’ compliance of all environmental laws including the HW Rules.

Three LAECs have started functioning in the state and local self-government institutions, workers unions and people’s representatives have started demanding

representation in them. But KSPCB had tried to use this request to sabotage the entire process.

Whenever activists raise the issue of severe pollution by these factories, the managements bring the unions to fight the activists, thus allowing them to escape from their duties. The owners threaten to close down the factory in case they are forced to obey the law which leaves the workers with no other choice but to support the polluters. This game has been going on for a long time with the workers not realising that they are the first victims of this pollution and it is the part of their class struggle to join hands with the people who are fighting to protect their ‘Right to Live’.

Moreover the leftists of Kerala were of the opinion that development is possible only in a capitalistic mode, any development is acceptable and any attempt to question this mode and form is covert imperialism. But of late they have started to think differently. Now there is a strong support group in the Left for these struggles. In this context the activists had planned this programme with the aim of bringing all the victims on one platform.

The discussions, though inconclusive, were a strong launching platform for future struggles. A detailed declaration explaining the united stand on various aspects of the problem and an action plan to protect the river Periyar and also the livelihood of the workers was also presented.

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Polar Regions experiencing severe climate change

The Arctic and Antarctic are experiencing severe climate change. The Arctic ice cap is melting at an unprecedented rate due to human induced global warming, according to a new study conducted by 300 scientists and elders from native communities in the arctic, released on November 8. Over the last 30 years the ice cap has shrunk 15-20 per cent. In 2003 the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, the largest in the Arctic, broke into two pieces. With the build up of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide, the trend is set to accelerate with forecasts that by the summer of 2070 there maybe no ice at all.

Free Trade – A War Against Dalits & Adivasis

Prophets of trade and commerce argue that free trade maximises world economic output. But what we have been witnessing with the Dalits and Adivasis in India is diametrically opposite to these claims.

Goldy M. George

The steady economic growth of industries with active support from the state machinery is directly proportional to the unchecked exploitation of masses. Most of them belong to marginalised communities such as dalits, adivasis, women, working class, etc. With WTO taking the centre stage of all trade and transactions, the problem started amplifying. Trade is no longer buying and selling of goods and services but it encompasses issues like Intellectual Property Rights. Global market is open for exploration and exploitation of resources under the aegis of free trade. Industrialised nations found their tools to maintain supremacy on world trade. Prophets of trade and commerce argue that free trade maximises world economic output. But what we have been witnessing with the dalits and adivasis in India is diametrically opposite to these claims.

Decline of People's Rights on Natural Resources

The symbiotic relationship between the forest-dwelling communities and the forest Eco-system is an eternal truth. Their life cannot be segregated into watertight compartments such as social, economic, political, religious, cultural, administrative, intellectual, spiritual, etc.

Undoubtedly adivasis and dalits have the greatest dependency on forests. The past policies of the state had seriously disturbed the close and lively relationship between people and natural resources – leading to the unrestricted destruction of forest wealth, affecting their wholesome lifestyle and their very survival. The rule of globalisation added extra intensity on the question of

natural resources. These policies were directly or indirectly aimed at capturing the resources throughout the world, which includes the natural resources too.

People's control over natural resources further reduced with the direct intervention of IMF, World Bank, WTO, etc. Several World Bank funded projects have already deteriorated the condition of the forests and forest dwelling communities. The capitalistic notion foresee the treasure of wealth in forest, the rich biodiversity, bionetwork genealogy, natural knowledge systems, medicinal value of herbs etc. in Indian forests. The intention was not just to capture the resources, but also to establish an unquestionable political and social control over people.

Corporate Property YES! People's Rights NO!

Forests, the nurturer of thousands of adivasis and other forest workers, are well under inspection of the corporate investors. The government along with the forest department has been engaged in dispossessing the forest-based communities under the pretext of forest conservation and wildlife protection. On the contrary, it is opened for industrial purpose like mining, power, dams, defence projects, so-called wildlife management, botanical gardens, bio-experiments, eco-tourism and so on.

In Chhattisgarh itself almost 17 lakh acres of land has been demarcated as protected area, where people face the threat of eviction. According to government sources there are more than 250 villages with a population above 35,000. The majority of them are adivasis and dalits. adivasis and dalits living in forest regions are almost bonded labourers of the forest department.

In Chhattisgarh 10 major projects have taken 257032.585 acres of land. In all 238 villages have been affected by dams and their rehabilitation has not yet been done. In addition to this there are 30 medium projects affecting 123 villages with 32745.13 acres of land. Further there are 8 projects pending and 6 medium projects have been proposed affecting 150 villages for which 261314.59 acres of land is to be occupied. Majority of the land lost is forest land. There already exists an unfair line created by the unjust socio-political divide. Under this circumstance what it would be meant by free trade?

Free Trade – A War Against Indigenous People!

War because the indigenous people are thrown out of their resource zones and livelihoods. Lifestyle, culture and eco-friendly ethos are reversed. Land and forests turned to be a commodity of consumption with concentration on private and individual (corporate) capital; not meant for the welfare of all.

War because their right to land, water and forests are yet to be determined by the state. Many so-called development projects resulted in mass displacement and forced migration creating an army of domestic refugees.

War because the immense skills and knowledge of Indian natural zones are patented under the newly coined phenomenon of TRIPRs. Once this is transferred it could easily brought under the TRIPRs.

War because everything is now in the market. But the Dalits and Adivasis are nowhere in the market. Is it not really ironical that the inherited ones are out of livelihood, profession, trade and even market?

War because the exploitation of non-renewable resources is diametrically opposite to the human-resource relationship. This at large disturbs eco-system and erupts major ecological problems, which threatens the life of the mother earth.

War because the corporate house needs resources whereas people need their livelihood. It is a war between surplus and survival. Thus the subsistent economy is transferred into market economy.

War because those who resist and refuse to disappear are routinely arrested, beaten and even killed.

What next?

Many pundits state it as TINA - "There Is No Alternative." This is not true, nor it is the right approach. Our approach should begin from two primary viewpoints. One is that globalisation is not development. Second is that trade and financial liberalisation does not raise social and labour standards. The greatest enemies of terror never lose sight of the economic interests served by violence or the violence of capitalism itself.

Developing countries must be allowed the policy flexibility and the political space to create national development strategies that increase incomes and secure livelihoods. Policies, which create employment and raise productivity – especially in the agricultural and natural resources, and informal sector – linked with a progressive taxation system, land reform and equitable access to assets such as education, health, credit and technology, are the best means of raising social and labour standards.

Essentially state should recognise the identity, culture and rights of Indigenous Peoples. Promote appropriate conditions to benefit from forest use, maintain cultural identity, and achieve adequate levels of livelihood arrange land tenures, which serve as incentives for the sustainable management of forests.

Betrayal of land rights leads to land alienation, which eventually leads to depeasantisation. The separation of land from the indigenous communities can be understood in a more scientific way with the assistance of the theoretical formulations of the concept of alienation. Land is power, a symbol of self-determination, co-existence, community feelings, cultural heritage and dignity.

*(Goldy George words with Dalit Study Circle, Raipur.
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No race possesses the monopoly of beauty, intelligence and force, and there is room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory.

Aime Cesaire

Wangari Maathai's Bill of Rights

Anna Lappé and Frances Moore Lappé

Several prominent Norwegians have questioned the Nobel Committee for awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Wangari Maathai. Why honor environmental activism in an era when war, terrorism and nuclear proliferation are even more urgent problems?

What they miss is Dr. Maathai's special genius.

The first time we met Maathai was four years ago in an airy guesthouse beneath towering jacaranda trees on the outskirts of Nairobi. At the time, the Green Belt Movement she had founded nearly 25 years earlier was still struggling against the ruthless regime of President Daniel arap Moi.

Maathai planted seven trees on Earth Day in 1977 to honor Kenyan women environmental leaders. Then, recognizing that deforestation could only be reversed if village women throughout her country became tree planters themselves, she launched the Green Belt Movement. Government foresters laughed at her idea of enlisting villagers; it took trained foresters to plant trees, they told her.

Because Maathai didn't listen, today Kenya has 30 million more trees, all planted by village women.

Maathai's genius is in recognizing the interrelation of local and global problems, and the fact that they can only be addressed when citizens find the voice and courage to act. Maathai saw in the Green Belt Movement both a good in itself, and a way in which women could discover they were not powerless in the face of autocratic husbands, village chiefs and a ruthless president. Through creating their own tree nurseries – at least 6,000 throughout Kenya – and planting trees, women began to control the supply of their own firewood, an enormous power shift that also freed up time for other pursuits.

Then, through popular education, village women – who had watched public forests be used by the Moi regime

to grant political favors – began to see forests differently, as something they, as citizens, had a claim to.

Through the Green Belt Movement, village women also came to see that a narrow focus on export commodities, such as coffee, at the expense of environmentally appropriate food crops, was an inheritance of colonialism reinforced by IMF policies.

That, too, they could change.

Through a village food-security campaign, Green Belt members are learning to re-establish indigenous crops using organic methods and to reintroduce kitchen gardens – a skill many had lost in the wake of government-promoted export-oriented agriculture.

Over the years, Maathai and members of the Movement have been jailed and even beaten for their protests of government anti-environment actions. One of the movement's organic-farming educators described to us how he was almost arrested for promoting sustainable agriculture. The government, it turned out, had lucrative contracts with major chemical agriculture companies; the teachers' education posed a serious threat.

Maathai has also become a leader in international debt-relief efforts. By the time we traveled to Kenya in 2000, the Green Belt Movement had grown into a major pro-democracy force.

In 2002, Maathai decided to run for a seat in Parliament. She beat her opponent 50 to 1. Women, we were told, danced in the streets of Nairobi for joy. A few weeks later, when President arap Moi stepped down after holding power for more than two decades, Maathai was appointed deputy minister of the environment.

We last saw Maathai in May this year at a gathering in New York. She said she was helping write a new constitution for Kenya. "We are working on a Bill of Rights, only ours," she said, with her irrepressible grin,

“will include rights not only for human beings, but for animals and the environment.”

We recalled our time in Kenya where we saw many village women wearing a Green Belt Movement T-shirt. The T-shirt says simply, “As for me, I’ve made a choice.” In selecting Dr. Maathai, perhaps the Nobel Committee wants us to recognize that the real hope for peace, both with each other and with the earth itself, lies in the choices – individual and collective – of empowered citizens.

Bringing this insight to life is Wangari Maathai’s genius.

Courtesy: International Herald Tribune



Continued from page 14

the point.” The most famous examples of this are The Body Shop, Ben and Jerry’s Homemade ice cream and Patagonia garments.

In 1991 Patagonia did an environmental audit of its products and found that all its products, even cotton garments, cause pollution. Consequently the company sought replacement materials, dropped 30 percent of its clothing line and planned to restrict the growth of its operations. Generally it is considered unthinkable for a company to restrict its own growth. But Yvon Chouinard, the founder and President of Patagonia, creatively challenged this convention. In restricting growth, Chouinard wrote: “we also committed ourselves to a life span of a hundred years. A company that intends to be around that long will live within its resources, care for its people, and do everything it can to satisfy its community of customers.”

Of course this is the radical end of the CSR spectrum. Many companies are content to do damage control to improve their rating on sustainability and responsibility. But some companies are also approaching the social sector as a learning laboratory.

“Tackling social sector problems forces companies to stretch their capabilities to produce innovations that have business as well as community payoffs” writes Prof. Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Harvard Business School. “This is not charity, it is R & D – a strategic business investment.”

Kanter has been documenting the social sector efforts of giants like Bell Atlantic and IBM. This trend is based on the realisation that better-educated children are tomorrow’s knowledge workers and lower unemployment means higher consumption. The result is an emerging paradigm for innovation, which is: “...a partnership between private enterprise and public interest that produces profitable and sustainable change for both sides” says Kanter.

The future potential of this trend depends on the widest possible redefinition of the community of customers, or stakeholders. The real challenge for responsible corporates is not only accountability in their day to day business but whether they are willing to play a positive role in the larger process of change.

Challenge in India

In India the need for this is not only urgent but also desperate. Unless Indian business begins to see the entire population as stakeholders the future is extremely grim. So far most of the excitement about liberalisation and globalisation has revolved around the creation of new possibilities for about one-fifth of the population. But now more and more people among the corporate elite are arguing that special effort will have to be made to expand opportunities for everyone. It is clear to more and more people that mere ‘trickle down’ will not do the trick. The imbalances in the current model of liberalisation will have to be addressed.

Just what kind of changes would bring about a true liberalisation? Firstly, it would mean giving a real chance to the enterprising energies and creativity of people at the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Across the corporate and NGO sectors there is a wealth of ideas on how this could be done. But so far there is virtually no comprehensive effort to pool this knowledge and put it into action.

It is important to note that one of the most stark reports on India’s environmental and livelihood crisis has come from a corporate sector body, the Tata Energy Research Institute. The study, sponsored by eleven of India’s biggest companies, was published in 1998 and titled “Looking Back to Think Ahead: Growth with Resource Enhancement of Environment and

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Kishen Pattnayak

Yogendra Yadav

Eminent socialist activist-thinker and ex-parliamentarian Kishen Pattnayak passed away in Bhuvaneshwar on September 27, 2004. With his demise, peoples' movements all over the country have lost one of their foremost ideologues and guides.

He was admitted last week to a hospital in Bhuvaneshwar and was diagnosed with pneumonia and bacterial meningitis. He was 74 and is survived by his wife.

Kishen Pattnayak was born in 1930 into a lower middle class family in Kalahandi, Orissa. After graduating from Nagpur, he joined the Socialist Party and became its 'full-timer' at the age of 22. He was asked to work in the youth wing of the Party, Samajwadi Yuvjan Sabha, and soon rose to become its National President. At the age of 32 he was elected to Lok Sabha from Sambalpur in Orissa. With a handful of other colleagues, he was instrumental in turning the Lok Sabha into a real forum to discuss matters of national importance. His unsuccessful attempt to raise the issue of famine-related deaths in Kalahandi, debates on Hindi and the no-confidence motion against the Congress government were some of his trail blazing interventions in the parliament. His defeat in the next Lok Sabha elections, the death of Rammanohar Lohia and his own disillusionment with the state of the socialist party led him to quit the party and spend the rest of his life in attempts to create a genuine political alternative outside mainstream politics.

'Kishen ji', as he was called by colleagues and admirers all over the country, was one of the founders of Lohia Vichar Manch, a forum of socialists who challenged from within the degeneration of socialist movement. He was also the co-founder of Samata Sangathan, a non-party political formation that sought to create alternative politics, in 1980. Throughout the 1980s he was instrumental in bringing the various peoples movements, particularly farmers' movement across the country, close to one another. His efforts led in 1990 to the formation of Janandolan Samanvay Samiti, one of the

precursors of the various attempts in recent times to create all-India networks of people's movements. Towards the end of his life, he returned to party politics and brought a large number of movement groups together to establish Samajwadi Janparishad, a political party that contests elections with a view to changing the mainstream discourse on questions of our time. He served as the president of Samajwadi Janparishad and then stepped back, typical of his low profile demeanour. In the last few years, he was accepted as an ideologue and guide of the various peoples' movements, including the National Alliance for Peoples Movements and was active in attempts to create Peoples Political Forum.

Following the tradition of the national movement, Kishen Pattnayak was as much active in the world of ideas as he was in the world of politics. A native speaker of Oriya, Shri Pattnayak wrote mostly in Hindi, besides Oriya and English. He wrote hundreds of essays dealing with contemporary India and the world. Some of these have been collected in 'Bharat Shudron ka Hoga' (Shudras Shall Inherit India) and 'Vikalpheen Nahin Hai Dunia' (The World is not without Alternatives). He served on the editorial board of 'Mankind' when Dr. Rammanohar Lohia was its editor. He founded and continued to edit Samayik Varta, a monthly Hindi political magazine, that has continued to come out regularly since 1977. He lectured all over the country and traveled extensively despite his frail health.

Kishen ji was considered a model of honesty and integrity in public life. His wife, Bani ji, and he decided not to have kids, so that they could devote their lives to public service. Although he did not have any independent source of livelihood, Kishen Pattnayak did not accept the pension and other perks of an ex-MP till very recently when his falling health made it unavoidable. Both of them lived on the salary of Bani ji, a school teacher in Orissa. Kishen ji displayed no signs of envy or anger when his ex-comrades and disciples joined mainstream politics and rose to positions of power in national politics. At the same time he never sought to take advantage of their positions. Unusual for an Indian politician who entered the parliament in his thirties, Kishen Pattnayak did not acquire any property.

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Nature.” This document provided a grim picture of ecological degradation across the sub-continent and also placed a monetary value on this damage. For example the “annual economic value” of the impact of poor quality of drinking water has been estimated at Rs.122 billion! The adverse effects on human health due to polluted air are estimated at over Rs.885 billion!

Yet the idea that environmental and social-equity concerns somehow hold back progress and growth is still around. A true liberalization would involve policies and business practices, which see the opportunities that can be derived from solving this crisis. And these must be opportunities for the very last Indian not merely the top 20 percent of the population. However, at present the reverse is true. A wide variety of alternative perspectives on modes of production and building of infrastructure are still knocking on the outer gates of corporate India.

This concern was voiced by Amrita Patel, Chairman of the National Dairy Development Board when she delivered the J.R.D.Tata oration on business ethics at Jamshedpur in 1999. Outlining the acute environmental crisis facing India, Patel said that the need to preserve ecological health must not only define the morality and ethics of business but also “set the limits of our business ambitions and pursuits.”

Such “limits” do not imply regression or stagnation. For example, the large-scale switch to organic farming and decentralised power generation would in the short-term curtail the business of certain corporations. But if those practices ensured a much greater spread of prosperity this would increase the over-all size of the economic cake. That in turn would constitute a whole new range of business opportunities across the board. So the “limits” could in the long run be “expansions” of opportunity – and not just for a limited segment of the population.

Skeptics will argue that it is virtually impossible to bring this perspective into the core concerns of the Indian corporate world. Yet the task will be eminently worthy for those capable of dogged perseverance and willing to ferret out hidden creative possibilities.

This also means that activists who have a negative or skeptical view of the market will have to reconsider

their position. After all the market, as bazaar – a meeting place for exchange of goods and ideas – is an ancient and vital mechanism of human society.

The problem today is not Bazaar in this sense but the phenomenon known as ‘market fundamentalism’ – which is a world-view that justifies the reduction of more and more of life into the ‘bottom-line’ of monetary profit. Market fundamentalism also defines self-interest in a narrow, constricted manner and thus undermines community and collective good.

Ethical investments and CSR are part of the trends that are undermining market fundamentalism. These are nascent trend towards “mindful markets”, a term popularised by David Korten, author of ‘The Post-Corporate World: Life After Capitalism’. These trends are also an indirect form of Trusteeship – a value which was central to Mahatma Gandhi’s vision and which was widely rejected as being “unrealistic”. However, as is well known, the profits of many Tata companies flow into charitable trusts which are supporting a wide range of grass roots work. What is not widely known is that the Tata group has an unwritten motto of not investing in armaments and liquor – regardless of the profit that could be made from such ventures.

It is important to note that India’s two most globally successful companies today, Infosys and Wipro, are led by people who are exploring how Trusteeship can be a living practise. This means much more than sharing wealth with employees and pouring crores of rupees into public purposes. The CEO of Infosys, Nandan Nilekani, has also spear-headed a Karnataka government task force which set up systems aimed at bringing greater transparency accountability into the functioning of government departments.

Yes, these are glimmers of hope. Whether the promise of these glimmers turns into reality depends partly on how many people actively engage in pushing for deeper and wider applications of CSR. Yes, the concept of ‘mindful markets’ seems almost impossible to realize today. But then, in 1904 the struggle against colonialism looked like a losing, even futile, battle.

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Palestine's Patriarch

Vaiju Naravane

Yasser Arafat's burial in Ramallah was rendered grandiose by the love and adulation, the fury, sorrow and despair of a people bereft.

If the ceremonies in Paris and Cairo had been solemn, marked by pomp and circumstance, the burial in Ramallah was one of raw emotion.

The besieged helicopter, surrounded by a tight, dark, mass of swirling humanity, the near constant pop-pop of guns being fired in ultimate salute, the cries of "Yasser" and "Abu Ammar" that rent the air, as the coffin made its way, seemingly floating over a sea of human hands and heads, desperate to touch, to see, one last time, their departing leader.

No matter that the place of his burial was the rubble ridden compound of the building where he had lived, a virtual prisoner, facing down Israeli guns and humiliation for over three year. No matter that the ceremony appeared improvised, out of control, uncoordinated, not precision-timed as state occasions usually are. It was this very spontaneous, uncontrolled element, this outpouring of feeling, that lent the occasion greatness, poignancy, even certain tenderness.

A famous photograph shows him on a small boat in mid-ocean, his back to the camera, staring out at a distant shore. A shore that many a time came tantalisingly close only to be clouded over, repeatedly, by storms and choppy seas.

Arafat incarnated that destination, embodying the dreams and aspirations of the Palestinian people, a people simply denied existence, wiped off the map of the earth. All his life he fought to give the lie to former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's acidic remark: "The Palestinian people do not exist. They are Arabs." And, therefore, have no right to a state.

Zionists determined to establish a Jewish state on the ancient land of Palestine had chased out his people.

Colonial powers reeling under the guilt of what Nazi Germany had done to the Jews were blinded to the very existence of the people who had lived there for generations.

When Yasser Arafat created his Fatah movement in 1959, the Palestinians had no name. Starting with a tiny, embryonic movement that patiently brought together the sons and daughters of a scattered and dismembered people, he gave the Palestinians a national identity, placing their destiny firmly on the map and on the world's conscience. Who can say today that the Palestinians do not exist?

Born in Cairo in 1929 as Mohamed Abdul Rauf Arafat Al-Qudwa Al-Husseini into a middle class family, the man who would take the *nom de guerre* Abu Ammar lived briefly with his uncle in Jerusalem after losing his mother at an early age.

He returned to Cairo to earn an engineering degree, set up his business in Kuwait, then very early on plunged into politics there, launching a magazine *Filistinuna* (Our Palestine) that exhorted his fellow Palestinians to resist leaving their homes and land under relentless Zionist pressure.

In Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, Israel's labour Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Arafat found genuine interlocutors for peace. The Oslo Accords were announced in 1993 with a historic handshake on the lawns of the Rose Garden in the White House in Washington, and in 1994 the three men shared the Nobel Peace Prize.

But a year later an Israeli right wing extremist, the peace process torpedoed by the intransigent Israeli Right, assassinated Rabin.

Although President Clinton and the Israelis have blamed Arafat for the failure of historic talks at Taba, others like Robert Malley, present at the talks tell another story. The PLO was offered too little. It was not a peace Arafat could sell to his people back home. Not after almost half a century of untold misery, suffering and resistance.

S.M Joshi: A Visionary

Because of his clean image and transparent behaviour, he was equally acceptable in all the shades of left as well as rightist groups. Remembering a visionary in his birth centenary year.

Sanjay Mangala Gopal

We know Mahatma Gandhi, we are proud of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar; we have heard about Dr. Ram Mahohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan. S.M. Joshi was last link of this chain. Born in 1904, SM became active in Socialist movement at a very young age and continued to remain active till he took last breath on 1st April 1989.

When Jayaprakash Narayan gave a call for 'Nav Nirman' in 1976-77, a whole lot of youngsters joined the movement and SM Joshi championed the cause in Maharashtra through Rashtra Seva Dal which was one of the strongest organisations, where youngsters got trained to fight against corruption, caste system and communalism. In those days, youth movement, struggle of agrarian workers, industrial labour, dalits and minorities were at very high pitch. SM took active part in all this and enjoyed a great deal of respect – something he gained due to his consistent and sincere participation in freedom struggle and later in the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement. SM was fondly and affectionately known as Anna.

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A man of simple tastes, Arafat was never attracted to personal wealth. Money for him was a means to an end — the birth of a Palestinian state.

For 45 relentless years, he fought for the cause of Palestine, using various means, setting up guerrilla cells across the Arab world and beyond, using armed struggle to make the world sit up and take notice, diplomacy to cajole and obtain international recognition. "I am married to Palestine, she is my only mistress," he said often.

(Excerpts from an article published in The Hindu) 

SM was never known as an ideologue. However his thinking about social realities and need for socialism was very clear. His speeches were very simple and have inspired and motivated several activists.

SM was a symbol of alliance building. Because of his clean image and transparent behaviour, he was equally acceptable in all the shades of left as well as even in rightist groups. He will never drift away from his principles or beliefs, and still would be very affectionate even with whom he disagreed.

It was fashionable in those days to say 'Politics is Bad'. Still if anyone would complain about its nature SM would vehemently argue that 'Politics is inevitable'. It is a sad coincidence that true and great follower of SM, Kishan Pattnayak passed away very recently.

S.M was a supporter of Narmada Bachao Andolan from its inception, when Medha Patkar started the struggle in 1985-86 at a time when even the Rashtra Seva Dal colleagues and progressive forces was not forthcoming with their support.

To celebrate the occasion of his birth centenary many like-minded forces have allied together to organise the Samata Rally on November 21st 2004, which also happens to be the World Fisheries Day at Shivaji Park Ground in Mumbai. Dalits, tribals, fisher people, project affected people, urban poor, slum dwellers, labourers, Muslims, women, youth all are going to converge at Shivaji Park on Nov 21st.

The real challenge will begin from Nov 22nd to maintain the unity; to maintain the inclusiveness to synthesise real socialistic ideology; to continue united struggle and alternative constructive activities.

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Time to Get Serious

It's important that everyone is able to openly debate the Social Forum – because only that way will the fast-snowballing phenomenon that is the social forum movement be able to grow in the right direction, and avoid some of the mistakes of the past.

Paul Kingsnorth

The 2004 European Social Forum was not a success. It was not quite a failure either, and it certainly wasn't a disaster. Nevertheless, there were deep, wide and widely-noticed problems with it, which many people commented on. In this article I'll seek to lay out honestly and starkly what, in my opinion, were the strengths and weaknesses of the London event. Whatever others think of my analysis, it's important that everyone is able to openly debate this – because only that way will the fast-snowballing phenomenon that is the social forum movement be able to grow in the right direction, and avoid some of the mistakes of the past.

Open or Closed Doors?

Previous social forums have been largely open events. Entrance prices, where they existed, were kept deliberately low, spaces were provided for all to participate, free accommodation was provided and organising committees were deeply, even if often frustratingly, democratic. All this is in keeping with the overall principles of the social forum movement, dedicated to creating open, free, largely non-hierarchical and democratic spaces for serious debate about the future.

In London, unfortunately, things were rather different. It wasn't possible to get in in the first place unless you bought a ticket for £30 (though there were concessions). If you wanted to stage an event you were expected to shell out over £200 for the privilege of doing so.

Control Freaks

Much of this, in turn, stemmed from the way the event was organised. For over a year there has been serious criticism of the event's organisers for trying to control

the process themselves rather than opening it up to all-comers. When you discover that the key organisation involved was the notoriously anti-democratic Socialist Workers Party (SWP), this may not seem surprising. But in combination with Ken Livingstone's Greater London Authority (GLA), which put an estimated £400,000 towards the event, it was a potent and frustrating combination for many.

There is no doubt that the SWP and the GLA worked hard to ensure that the focus of the event, from the themes chosen for discussion to the people selected to speak and chair meetings, was in their hands as much as possible. The consequence was that many activists refused even to come – holding an "alternative ESF" elsewhere in London – and many who did were disappointed. So much so that 300 people invaded a speaker meeting on the Saturday night at which Ken Livingstone had been due to speak to protest about the "undemocratic" nature of the forum.

Going with the Flow

In 2003, Susan Richards wrote about the hard left's attempts to seize the agenda at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Such attempts, she wrote, misunderstood the nature of social forums: they are not "events" to be controlled from the top, but happenings, which gain their strength from below. She was right about that: in London, again, the hard left showed that they had no idea what this was really supposed to be about, and that they weren't particularly interested.

The danger, though, is that their attempts to grab this movement for themselves could drive away precisely those people who made the movement happen in the first place, and leave a hollowed-out shell of empty leftist rhetoric in its place. It would hardly be the first time.

But there is a wider issue. This is not something that this forum, or even European social forums in general

can be blamed for, but it is a problem encountered wherever radicals get together.

The problem is twofold. First, there is simply too much focus on what's wrong, and not enough on what we can do about it – and how. We all know global capitalism stinks. We also know that war is a nasty thing, American foreign policy is bad, racism isn't nice and oil companies are unethical. Why, then, do we need speaker after speaker standing up and telling us so? Why do we need to spend any of these three precious days repeating truisms and patting ourselves on the back for agreeing with each other about how bad things are? Five years ago this was useful. Now it's unnecessary.

This leads neatly onto the second aspect of the problem: why do so many people here agree on so much? It might seem a strange thing to ask of a forum in which Trots, anarchists and NGO moderates were often at each others' throats, but it is a valid one.

From Exchange to Solutions

First, it's always worth reiterating an obvious but overlooked point: it is a wonder that events like this happen at all. The social forum movement began life at Porto Alegre just four years ago. It was a single, tentative event. Nobody knew what would come of it. What has come of it is a mass explosion of forums, all over the world, from international to city level and everything in-between. Every event is – or at least is supposed to be – a positive, forward-looking occasion. Social forums are not about protest – they are about change and how to achieve it. In less than five years, they have become a global phenomenon, and one which testifies better than anything else to a real and growing appetite for significant change amongst many of the world's people.

Making this forum happen, then, was a hell of an achievement in itself. And despite the far-from-perfect way it was organised, it was still an occasion on which

a huge diversity of people from across Europe and further afield could get together, talk, debate and, perhaps most importantly, plan how to work together in the future.

Which leads onto the second positive aspect of the event: its diversity. No matter how hard the SWP tried, they couldn't limit the forum to Trots alone, and a huge variety of people and causes were there. An estimated 25,000 people attended, and many would have had the chance to hear about things they had never encountered before. The ongoing oppression of the people of Iran by its Islamist regime, for example: a number of Iranian exiles were at the forum with a disturbing display of the brutality of the mullahs. A similar stall highlighted the reality of life in Burma, while trade unionists from Colombia spoke about the repression of their fellows by the military regime and called for solidarity.

Then there was the “assembly of the social movements”, a large and growing part of all social forums, in which grassroots groups from across Europe gathered to discuss pooling resources and campaigning on common topics for 2005. Where else could such a meeting be held?

But it wasn't enough. The next European Social Forum, to be held in Greece in 2006, will have to work better. A question needs to be asked: do we want these events to be a serious display of alternatives to the current order? Do we want real, hard, difficult discussions about what to do and how to do it, together, with all the hard work, serious thinking, strategic disagreements and political battling that this involves? Or do we, instead, want a back-slapping display of our angry opposition to all the Bad Things in the world, after which we all hold a big march and then go home and do what we were doing before? The former path might lead to something big. The latter could lead to extinction for this movement.

(Paul Kingsnorth is a UK based journalist. Email: paul@paulkingsnorth.net)



Anti-Nuclear Demonstrator Killed in France

The 23 year old protestor Sebastien died in Avricourt, France on November 7, while trying to stop a so-called CASTOR train, carrying 12 containers - holding 175 metric tons of atomic waste - from La Hague, France to Gorleben, Germany, after he was run over by the train. According to latest news, he had locked himself to the train tracks, but the train conductor saw him too late to stop in time. Spontaneous rallies to mourn his death took place in more than 25 cities in Germany, but in most cases it was decided to go on with the protest actions.

Restrain Market Fundamentalists

Fundamentalists, by definition, are always more committed to their ideological positions than even the sincerest pragmatists. While the former can, owing to their commitments, run single party Governments successfully, coalitions can be led, on a sustained basis, only by pragmatists. But with regards to returning to power, much depends on their quality of governance, and not on their being either fundamentalists or otherwise.

These considerations are assuming increasing relevance as coalitions at the Centre are now a fact of our polity. Although the experiments of the National Front and the United Front coalition Governments fell in the mid-term, the Government of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) did complete its full tenure. The difference between it and the two previous Governments was that the former had to depend on the support from outside by those parties which themselves aspired to replace them. However, the failure of the NDA to return to power owed not only to the assertion in it by the fundamentalists like Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, the Union Minister of Human Resources Development and the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, as also the activities of other fundamentalist allies like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and myriad other outfits of the RSS fraternity. In fact, none of the top leaders of the NDA even suspected that they would be trumped so decisively.

Nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that the bitter experiences of 1996 and 1998 when the BJP and the NDA Governments, respectively, had to resign for lack of majority support in Lok Sabha, made the leaders of the BJP more circumspect. Hence they agreed to put in the cold storage the three contentious Hindutva issues, and stuck to the NDA's Common Minimum Programme in most cases and against tremendous pressure from their 'ideological' allies. The adroitness of the then Prime Minister in being able to restrain the more strident voices and his frequent change of tune to keep all kinds of people in good humour enabled his

Government to survive for five years. If he had nipped the state-managed pogrom in Gujarat in its early stages, he might still be the Prime Minister.

However, other leaders of the BJP have not learnt any lessons from the ignoble defeat of their party and its NDA allies. Their first reaction was to return to their 'roots'. They refused to follow Vajpayee's advice who wanted them to discuss the Gujarat case. He also did not persist, although his advice and dissenting voices from the NDA allies made them tone down the Hindutva rhetoric and stick to NDA's agenda. From now on it is extremely necessary that the NDA

functions as a responsible and vigilant opposition without which the Congress leaders in the United Progressive Alliance

(UPA) could develop unwarranted over-confidence.

Unfortunately, criticism against the Prime Minister and other Ministers of the present Government has been couched in less than the usual political verbiage. This can hardly reassure the people that the BJP has reconciled to its defeat. The longer it takes to do so, the less will be the required vigilance exercised by it as the largest opposition party. The tendency within the Congress to dismiss such genuine criticism by the opposition is already affecting its behaviour towards its close allies. If this attitude persists, it will prevent it from learning the art of running a coalition Government for which it is not yet mentally prepared.

While Vajpayee, as the leader of the largest party in the NDA, was able to display sufficient pragmatism and enable his party to agree to jettison the contentious issues, the same cannot be said about the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. Even during the first four months, the tendency of some of the market fundamentalists among his colleagues to pursue a hard line has weakened the cooperation, which other constituents of the UPA have been extending it. Otherwise, there was no reason at all for not consulting the Left parties on such crucial issues as raising the equity limit on foreign capital in telecom, insurance and civil aviation. The Union Finance Minister

PAST FOR FUTURE

Surendra Mohan

Chidambaram should have remembered the openly expressed unhappiness of these parties in 1997 when he, as Finance Minister of the United Front Government, had proposed that the insurance sector be opened to foreign investors.

Regrettably, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission has done one better. He has proposed the induction of some representatives of the World Bank in various consultative committees of the Commission. The Prime Minister, as Chairman of the Commission, could be assumed to have cleared the proposal. This is hardly the correct way to run a coalition Government. The sensitivities of the Left parties are not unknown either to the Prime Minister who had observed their opposition to the structural reforms introduced by him as Finance Minister in 1991-96, or the Finance Minister

who was Commerce Minister in the UF Government which enjoyed the support and the participation of at least one of them, the CPI. Obviously, Dr. Man Mohan Singh has yet to learn the basics of the coalition ethos.

If these market fundamentalists are taking their chances in the belief that the Left is too scared of the return of the BJP-led NDA to topple the UPA's apple cart, they may be right, but not in the long run. For, these parties cannot but reject these policies and mobilize the masses against them, even though they will continue to bear with the Government in Parliament. Rising prices are already taxing the patience of the poorer sections of the society as also the salaried employees. This means that even as the Government remains stable, possibly introducing more of the market fundamentalist policies, society could become unstable.



Convention on Interlinking Rivers – Feasibility & Justifiability New Delhi, on 2nd & 3rd December 2004

Severe floods in Assam and Bihar and concurrent drought in other parts of India are causing immense suffering and loss to people, especially poor rural populations.

A proposal to interlink the rivers of India made national headlines in 2002 following an order by the Supreme Court of India to the Government of India to interlink the nation's rivers in a time frame of 10 years with the intention of finding a permanent solution to both flood and drought. A Task Force for Interlinking Rivers (ILR) was formed in December 2002 to implement the project at a cost of Rs.5,60,000 crores, making it India's largest-ever project. Such a large project obviously needs to be assessed within the democratic process and from a multi-disciplinary angle, but even though the project has not been discussed in the Lok Sabha, it has received the explicit support of many leading figures in the country including notably, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. The colossal cost of the project is seen as a factor that will lead to foreign direct investment and relatedly, privatization of our water and our rivers. However, there has also been a rising tide of well-argued opposition to the project on political, social, economic, financial, engineering and ecological/environmental grounds.

On the one hand, are the proponents of ILR who aver that the only solution to flood-drought is mass transfer of water from flood affected areas to drought affected areas, while on the other, are those who argue that ILR will not only fail to solve the flood-drought problem, but will create enormous fresh problems. While the UPA government is committed to a review of ILR in its Common Minimum Program, it has till date limited the same to an internal group of ministers and civil servants. In the absence of a debate in the Lok Sabha or a national debate on such giant projects, there is a felt need to highlight the issues involved in interlinking national rivers and discuss them threadbare. To this end, the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) has arranged a Convention at which eminent speakers professing both points of view will put forward their arguments, and also allow time for maximum public participation.

Venue: Gandhi Peace Foundation (GPF), Near ITO, New Delhi

Contact person: Vimal Bhai: 9891814707, Delhi Forum: 26680883/ 26680914

Increasing Hunger

The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the right to food in the United Nations, Jean Ziegler, submitted his fourth report to the General Assembly on World Food Day, October 15. The report takes an overview of the present situation of world hunger, reviews the activities of the Special Rapporteur over the last year and addresses situations of special concern with regard to the right to food.

The shocking news is that hunger is increasing. According to the most recent report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the number of victims of permanent and grave

undernourishment has increased since its last report. There are now 842 million people suffering from undernourishment in a world that already grows more than enough food to feed the global population. Hunger levels have increased every year since the World Food Summit in 1996, when Governments promised to reduce hunger. Hunger kills many more people than any contemporary war or terrorist attack. One child below the age of 5 dies from hunger-related diseases every 5 seconds. Today, more than ever, the right to food as a basic human right is violated.

The Special Rapporteur is gravely concerned at current situations in a number of countries and areas, particularly in Sudan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Cuba and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. He urges the Governments of the Sudan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to stop violations of the right to food of their peoples. He also urges the Government of Israel, as the occupying power, to respect its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law towards the right to food of people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. He appeals to the United States government

to refrain from unilateral measures that affect the right to food of people living in Cuba.

In order to enforce the right to food, it is essential that the general understanding of the right is better developed. At present, the FAO Inter-Governmental Working Group is involved in drafting "voluntary guidelines" that aim to assist Governments in their

efforts to implement the right to food through a rights-based approach to food security. The guidelines may remain relatively weak, because a small number of Governments are reluctant to strengthen the protection of the right to food. The Special Rapporteur urges

Governments to focus on the goal of the right to food for all and to strengthen the final guidelines

GLOBAL WATCH

Thomas Kocherry

War or Food

The Declaration in Food Summit in Rome 2002 states that by 2010 we should reduce the number of hungry ones in the World into half. From the report it is very clear that will never happen. This is the work of FAO. Concerning health WHO made a similar declaration. The health situation is worsening. On the other hand every body knows that there is enough food in the world for the need of all. Instead of destroying food for political reasons, it has to be converted into food for life. For this we need only US \$80 billion per year to feed everybody in the world. But due to war and sanctions this will never happen. For the Iraq war alone US \$800 b. was spent already within a year. The people who talk about DEMOCRACY are more interested in investing money and food for killing people rather for life. What kind of Democracy is this? If there is true Democracy at home, it has to be expressed outside. True democracy respects all people at home and outside.



Adbusters / Culture Jammers is a "class act" that defies the mainstream wasteful and arrogant culture of the major power on earth. They not only take up and publicise innovative ideas like "Buy Nothing Day" and "No TV Day" but also mock the establishment by putting up posters and hoardings on 4th of July (Independence Day) displaying the US flag showing logos of fortune 500 companies in place of the stars with the slogan below that reads "Declare Independence from Corporate Rule" as an obvious comment on the way the Government allows itself to be used by unscrupulous corporations like Enron.

National Convention on Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation: Asserting Rights, Demanding Justice and Evolving Strategies 30 November & 1 December, 2004 at New Delhi

Development, with its all-pervasive appeal, has also begun to be perceived as a threat to the very survival of the downtrodden. The plundering of natural resources, acquisition of land, eviction of simple living, natural resource-rich communities, acquisition of land, and destruction of other sources of lives and livelihood, have resulted in deprivation and displacement of millions in the country.

In different sectors – whether it is dams, mines, industrial complexes, infrastructure development, and tourism, military establishments, sanctuaries, national parks and forest conservation, or urban expansion and other small and large projects, the displacement caused and environmental destruction caused has led to a serious conflict between the State and the people facing the backlash. The battles have exposed and challenged every organ of the State, the multinationals and the Indian corporate, the bilateral and multilateral lenders such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) through alliances and multiple strategies of both struggle and reconstruction both. Yet the spree of fast track development on the fast track, through the undemocratic processes and unjust impacts, continues with its ever-widening encroachment on people's lives and livelihoods, posing a grave challenge before us.

It is in this context that a national convention on displacement, development and rehabilitation is held. The convention will consist of the people displaced by development projects, active representatives of the struggles of the against such lopsided development - project affected people and activists, and allies. We are also inviting the concerned ministers and officials.

The convention on displacement will be held on 30th November and 1st December 2004 at Rajendra Bhavan Sabhagar, Deendayal Upadhyaya Marg, Near ITO, New Delhi.

Contact: Vimal Bhai: 9891814707, Delhi Forum: 011 26680883, 26680914;
Malvika / Shivani: 011 24358492

Convened by: National Alliance of People's Movements, Delhi Forum, Indian Social Institute, Habitat International Coalition – Housing and Land Rights Network, Matu Jana Sangathan and Rajendra Prasad Academy, New Delhi.

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difficult not to get the feeling that the Courts decisions were influenced by its own approval of the new policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. Indeed, the court in BALCO went on to say that, “lastly, no ex parte relief by way of injunction especially with respect to public projects and schemes or economic policies or schemes should be granted. It is only when the court is satisfied for good and valid reasons, that there will be irreplaceable and irretrievable damage that an injunction be issued after hearing all the parties. Even then the petitioner should be put on appropriate terms such as providing an indemnity or an adequate undertaking to make good the loss or damage

in the event the PIL filed is dismissed.”

The above cases provide more than anecdotal evidence for the proposition that the Supreme Court as an institution has frowned upon challenges to any action of the executive taken in the purported furtherance of “economic reforms”, even when such challenges were based on violations of Statute and evidence of corruption.

(Prashant Bhushan is a renowned Supreme Court lawyer and is involved with the Center for Public Interest Litigation. Email: sbhushan@vsnl.com)



Anti Nuclear Convention

The 2nd National Convention of Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) would be held at Jaipur from 26-28 November 2004.

After the 1998 nuclear tests, South Asia has undeniably become a potential nuclear flashpoint, making our responsibility to fight for a regional and global nuclear free world all the more important.

The CNDP, India, was therefore, set up through the collective initiative of some 120 civil society organisations and people's movements at a National Convention in New Delhi in November 2000, attended by over 700 delegates.

For more details: CNDP, A-124/6, First Floor, Katwaria Sarai, New Delhi- 110 016, Ph: 011-26517814 E-mail: cndp_india@rediffmail.com, anil@cndpindia.org www.cndpindia.org

Action Against Dow Chemical

International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) called upon all groups fighting corporate crime to take action on December 3 against the human, environmental, consumer and labour rights violations by private or public corporations. ICJB appealed for action against criminal corporations and especially Dow Chemical facilities and offices worldwide; teach-ins; vigils; phone-ins; petition drives; celebrations and media events. A list of Dow/Carbide facilities worldwide can be located at the Dow Company website. Thousands of people from around

the world will be participating in the Global Day of Action. Cities in India, including Bhopal, will host protests, events and actions; trade unions and community organizations internationally will also be participating.

Visit the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal to learn 20 Things You Can Do To Help Make Dow Responsible For Bhopal

For more details: globalaction@studentsforbhopal.org www.bhopal.net/gda2004.html

Coca-Cola Tour

An international campaign, led by communities, has emerged to hold Coca-Cola accountable for its crimes in Colombia and India. The campaign included a tour in United Kingdom from 6-17 October 2004. The tour passed through cities like Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol and London.

The tour held Coca Cola guilty of complicity in the murder and torture of trade union organizers in Colombia and creating water shortages, pollution and selling poisoned drinks in India.

Fashion Show

Visitors attending the release of Dow's new textile at Premier Vision's exhibition were received by Greenpeace activists dressed in black t-shirts revealing the faces of the victims of Bhopal. They were also handed information regarding the company's corporate irresponsibility. Greenpeace is also demanding that the multinational pay the

health treatments of the survivors and clean up the large stockpiles of dangerous poisons and the contaminated underground water left behind at the site of the accident.

Greenpeace, the environment watchdog displayed pictures of the victims of the world's worst industrial disaster at Bhopal.

The venue was where Dow Chemical, the entity responsible for the 1984 disaster presented a new fibre called XLA. Greenpeace, together with ICJB demanded that Dow accept full liability for the disaster in Bhopal and its aftermath.

Right Livelihood Award

Renowned social worker Swami Agnivesh and Muslim scholar Asghar Ali Engineer have been chosen for the honorary 'Right Livelihood Award' — considered as the 'alternative Nobel prizes' — for their 'strong commitment to promote values of co-existence and tolerance'.

"The selection of the two distinguished Indian religious figures for the honorary award shows that we have much more to learn from India. They have worked unceasingly for social justice and communal harmony for more than two decades," Right Livelihood Award Foundation's founder and chairman Jakob Von Uexkull said.

World Dignity Forum

Dalits, minorities, indigenous forest people, unorganized workers and women from these sections will be

coming together at Ramlila Grounds on December 5 in New Delhi, to express their collective hopes, aspirations and demands to live with dignity. World Dignity Forum is a forum against casteism, racism and other forms of exclusion. This will also be an occasion for many of the partners of the rally, leaders of other progressive movements as well as progressive international organizations to endorse and encourage these very collective hopes, aspirations and demands.

For further details:
worlddignityforum@yahoo.com
www.worlddignityforum.org

Campaign On Common Schooling And The Right To Work

NAFRE (National Alliance for the Fundamental Right to Education) held an important meeting in Hyderabad recently, and decided to launch "a people's campaign for Common School System and constitutional right to work".

Employment Guarantee

The draft Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) is winding its way through the system (Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Rural Development, other Ministries, Cabinet, etc.). It is expected to reach the Cabinet any time this month, and if all goes well it will be tabled in Parliament in early December - in what form it will reach remains to be seen. Meanwhile, organizations across the country are getting ready to agitate for the right to work, including a full-fledged EGA, on 10 December (Human Rights

Day). An unanimous decision to demonstrate for the right to work on 10 December was taken at a convention on EGA held in Delhi last month (a report on this convention has just been published in Frontline). All-India organisations involved in this effort already include the All India Agricultural Workers Alliance, All India Agricultural Workers Union (AIAWU), All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), among many others - the list is growing fast. The participating organizations are planning to agitate independently or jointly, but in any case on the same date - 10 December. In case you haven't planned anything yet for 10 December, it is not too late!

Direct action to close down the Coca Cola bottling plant in Varanasi

Thousands of people directly or indirectly ill-affected by Coca Cola/Pepsi Cola bottling plants have decided to strengthen the call for direct action to close down the Coca Cola bottling plants. A March from the Coca Cola bottling plant in Ballia will commence on November 15, 2004 and traverse its way holding meetings and discussions with local communities and conclude on November 24, 2004 at Coca Cola bottling plant in Mehndiganj Varanasi. Simultaneously there will be protest demonstrations outside Coca Cola bottling plants in USA too by the resident populations, and on November 24, 2004, they

will hold a non-violent demonstration outside Coca Cola International HQ voicing the concerns of affected communities and demanding closure of Mehndiganj bottling plant in Varanasi.

For more details:
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Coca-Cola Spins Out of Control in India

Farmers in India are delighted that they have finally found a use for Coca-Cola - as pesticide! News from farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Chattisgarh has confirmed that hundreds of farmers are spraying Coca-Cola directly on their crops, with amazing success. Using Coke to destroy pests is also more cost-effective than using other branded pesticides, and forecasts are that soon, thousands of farmers in India will be using Coca-Cola as pesticide.

For more information: <http://www.indiaresource.org/campaigns/coke/2004/cokespins.html>

Convention on Communal Harmony

The national convention on communal harmony will be held in Ayodhya on December 18 & 19 2004. It will be jointly organised by 'Ayodhya ki Awaz', 'Anhad' and 'Centre for Study of Society and Secularism'.

For details: Tel: 0522-2347365,
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Continued from inside frontcover

20 years of Gas Tragedy:

On 3rd December 2004 Bhopal day programme will be held at Delhi to remind us of the 20 years of Gas tragedy at Bhopal. The participants in the conference on ILR & those who can will participate in the evening events.

Falicitation of Surendra Mohanji who is to complete 75 years. Full day programme is planned on the 4th December 2004 at Delhi. contact: Alit Jha.

Dalit Solidarity Day: This will be held on 5-6 of December 2004 at Delhi. Please plan to be in Delhi for a week from 30th November to 6th December 2004.

Anti Communalism Conference at Ayodhya, UP on Dec 18-19-04. People from Ayodhya do not want communal hatred on the Temple and Mosque issue. They on the contrary want Peace, Harmony and Development. People from all over India will Join these *Ayodhyawasis* to show solidarity and reiterate to this resolve and plan a future strategy.

People from Ayodhya will then tour all over India with their Message and "Ayodhya Ki Asli Awaz" (the Real Voice of People of Ayodhya).

Dalits Against Untouchability programme is to be organized in Tamilnadu on 1 Dec. 2004.

East India Convention on Land, Water and Forest and ILR: This will be held in Puri from Jan 23-25, 2005. Jansahyog Trust will be organizing the programme. NAPM State meeting for Orissa is planned to be held in Puri on Jan 25.

An indefinite action / Satyagraha at Plachimada, Kerala will be initiated by NAPM Kerala unit under the leadership of local struggling people in March 2005. More details later.

In Narmada Valley an Indefinite action may begin any time in Dec-04. Please be prepared to join the struggle at the valley whenever you receive SOS.

From National Alliance of People's Movements to National People's Movement

After a detailed discussion on the note circulated by Thomas Kocherry and P.Chennaiah, the following plan of action was decided towards a National People's Movement

- Choose a selected issues and develop pointed demand which concerns large numbers of marginalised people (Issues chalked out included in the note)
- A one-day large gathering in Delhi followed by few thousands staying back indefinitely till our pointed demands are met.
- It would be even more meaningful if strong action is planned at state level a few months before the Delhi action.
- The notes will be sent to all conveners, state national coordinators, prominent thinkers and allies for discussion and suggestions. The final decision will be taken in the next meeting in Jan 2005.

The next NAPM meeting of national, regional and state conveners and coordinators will be held from 14-16 Jan-05 at Nagpur. Please plan to reach by 14 Jan. afternoon and stay till late evening on the 16 Jan.-05.

PPF National Meeting also took place on the 18th of Oct. 2004 at Bhopal. Report of the same is sent separately from Delhi office of PPF.



Dear Mike, Iraq Sucks

Civilian contractors are fleecing taxpayers; US troops don't have proper equipment; and supposedly liberated Iraqis hate them. After the release of Fahrenheit 9/11, Michael Moore received a flood of letters and emails from disillusioned and angry American soldiers serving in Iraq.

From: RH
To: mike@michaelmoore.com
Sent: Monday, July 12, 2003 4:57 PM
Subject: Iraqi freedom veteran supports you

Dear Mr Moore,

I went to Iraq with thoughts of killing people who I thought were horrible. I was like, "Fuck Iraq, fuck these people, I hope we kill thousands." I believed my president. He was taking care of business and wasn't going to let al Qaeda push us around. I was with the 3rd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 3rd Infantry division out of Fort Stewart, Georgia. My unit was one of the first to Baghdad. I was so scared. Didn't know what to think. Seeing dead bodies for the first time. People blown in half. Little kids with no legs. It was overwhelming, the sights, sounds, fear. I was over there from Jan'03 to Aug'03. I hated every minute. It was a daily battle to keep my spirits up. I hate the army and my job. I am supposed to get out next February but will now be unable to because the asshole in the White House decided that now would be a great time to put a stop-loss in effect for the army. So I get to do a second tour in Iraq and be away from those I love again because some guy has the audacity to put others' lives on the line for his personal war. I thought we were the good guys.

From: Anonymous
Sent: Thursday April 15 2004 12.41am
Subject: From KBR truck driver now in Iraq

Mike, I am a truck driver right now in Iraq. Let me give you this one small fact because I am right here at the heart of it: since I started this job several months ago, 100% (that's right, not 99%) of the workers I am aware of are inflating the hours they claim on their time sheets. There is so much more I could tell you. But the fact is that MILLIONS AND MILLIONS of dollars are being raped from both the American taxpayers and the Iraqi people because of the unbelievable amount of greed and abuse over here. And yes, my conscience does bother me because I am participating in this rip-off.

Read more at: http://www.truthout.org/docs_04/100604Y.shtml
Courtesy: Truthout.org