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Two Indias: Rahul Gandhi's Rhetoric and the Grim Reality of Congress-Ruled India

In the course of the ongoing AICC session, Congress 'crown prince' Rahul Gandhi obliquely acknowledged the reality of 'two Indias,' one that is rich and 'moving forward fast' while the other is that of the poor which is in crisis. While being forced to recognize this chasm, Rahul Gandhi however chose to obscure the real role of the ruling class and the UPA Government in particular in creating and deepening this chasm. Instead he asserted that only the Congress party could 'connect and unite' the rich and poor Indias. Citing his experience of travelling all over the country, he claimed that only the poor could take the country forward, and in turn, only PM Manmohan Singh's strategy of 'economic growth' could take the poor forward!

Meanwhile Congress President Sonia Gandhi too, in her remarks, made similar expressions of concern for India's poor in times of inflation. Paying tribute to Manmohan Singh's leadership for achieving high rates of economic growth even in times of global financial crisis, she added that "booming stock markets and record capital inflows do not reflect the difficulties faced by the majority of our people," and called to balance such growth with efforts to curb inflation and address environmental concerns.

Such rhetoric by Rahul and Sonia Gandhi signal the Congress' realization of simmering resentment among the common people against the growing chasm between the rich beneficiaries of the Manmohan regime's 'growth' and 'progress' and its poor victims on the other. These pious pronouncements however carry little conviction with people who have already faced the bitter reality of Congress' betrayal of its 'aam aadmi' promises. Even the same AICC session has been marked by conspicuous silence on a host of embarrassing scams in which Congress Governments and leaders have been embroiled.

In Maharashtra, top Congress and NCP leaders along with top army personnel stand implicated in the Adarsh Housing Society Scam. This scam, in which a housing society in the name of Kargil war veterans and war widows became a pretext for real estate sharks to grab prime land and construct high rises in violation of coastal regulations, with top politicians and army per-

sonnel vying to secure illegal allotments, is reminiscent of the revelations of corruption in defence transactions and purchase of coffins for soldiers during the NDA regime. The efforts of environmental activists brought the scam to light – and not only the Maharashtra CM but other top leaders of the Congress and NCP are mired in this scandal. Coming on top of the CWG scam (involving the Congress-ruled Delhi Government as well as top Ministers in the UPA-II Government) and the Spectrum 2G scam involving the UPA-II Telecom Minister, the Adarsh Society scam is yet another instance of the rampant corruption and misuse of public resources and funds by Congress governments and leaders which cruelly underline the empty character of the Congress' pro-poor rhetoric.

In addition to suicides by farmers burdened by debt and crippled by the agrarian policies of the Congress governments at the Centre, now there are reports of peasant suicides linked to high interest rates and coercive loan collection by much-touted private microfinance institutions in Congress-ruled Andhra Pradesh. Rahul Gandhi has only recently had to cancel his proposed trip to AP in the wake of the social and political ferment over the instances of peasants' suicide due to usurious and profit-seeking MFIs. Rahul Gandhi's 2005 visit to SKS, one of the state's leading MFIs, and Sonia Gandhi's awarding of the 'Social Entrepreneur of the Year' Award to the CEO of SKS in 2006, are in the spotlight now in the wake of SKS' spectacular increase in profits (from 2 crore in 2008 to 174 crore currently) and its alleged role in suicides of indebted farmers.

Such peasants' suicides, along with the spate of instances of corporate land grab, displacement of poor farmers and deaths of protesting farmers in police firing, as well as Operation Green Hunt are all episodes in the Congress-ruled UPA Government's war on poor India to protect the interests of privileged India. Rahul Gandhi's pro-poor rhetoric cannot erase all the evidence of the role of the Congress Governments' pro-rich, pro-corporate priorities and policies in deepening the chasm between rich and poor in today's India.

Comrade Ram Naresh Ram Will Always Remain Alive in Ours Hearts

CPI(ML)'s senior-most leader and architect of the people's revolutionary struggles led by the CPI(ML) in Bhojpur, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram (Paras ji) passed away on 26 October 2010 at the age of 86. He was one of the founders of the revolutionary CPI(ML) current in the communist movement in Bihar. With his demise, a glorious chapter in the history of post-independence revolutionary struggles comes to an end. Comrade Ram Naresh Ram was born in 1924, in Ekwari village in the Sahar block of Shahabad district (now called Bhojpur). As an 18-year-old he participated in the Quit India movement of 1942 and thus began his political career with the freedom struggle. Some years later he entered the communist movement and joined the peasant movement. The voice of the peasant insurgency of Telengana touched him and in 1948, he participated in a campaign to collect funds in support of that movement. In 1951 he became a member of the Communist Party of India and in 1952-54, he was one of the leaders of the CPI-led peasants' struggle against hike in the canal irrigation rate by the Bihar Government.

At the time of the division of the Communist Party he joined the CPI(M) and in 1965 he contested for the post of mukhiya of Ekwari panchayat. This step was an open challenge to the feudal forces because till then, the feudal forces of Ekwari village had been electing their own candidates unopposed and on this pretext, they tried to stop Comrade Ram Naresh Ram from contesting elections. But he defied every scheme of the feudal forces and, on the strength of the unity of the poor and oppressed of Ekwari under the communist banner he gave a crushing defeat to the feudal candidate and opened a new chapter in the assertion of the oppressed. He was hailed as Ekwari's 'mukhiyajji' ever since.

In 1967, he was the CPI(M) candidate in the Bihar Assembly elections. This election became a direct contention with the feudal forces and during the elections, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram's comrade and fellow-fighter 'Master' Jagdish was captured and beaten nearly to death and Comrade Ram Naresh Ram was locked in a room to prevent him be-

ing able to come to Comrade Jagdish's rescue. This incident gave birth to the resolve in Comrade Ram Naresh Ram's mind to wage armed struggle against feudal forces.

Soon after, the 'spring thunder' of Naxalbari could be heard in Bhojpur and Comrade Ram Naresh could see in it the future trajectory of anti-feudal struggles. He internalized Comrade Charu Mazumdar's idea that people's democratic revolution is the only way ahead, and peasant revolution is its essence. In the phase following Naxalbari, those comrades of Bhojpur who were disillusioned with the CPI(M) went straight to Kolkata to seek out and make contact with the CPI(ML). In 1970, Comrade Ram Naresh along with other comrades of Bhojpur joined the CPI(ML) and as an underground leader, he took responsibility for the peasant struggles led by the party. With this starts the glorious saga of the revolutionary struggles of the Bhojpur plains.

In underground life, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram was known as 'Parasji.' He had become a popular mass leader whose relations with the masses were as deep as that of fish with water. This was why, even while he was underground, he was successful in ensuring the participation of the masses in CPI(ML)'s revolutionary struggles, and in the decade of the 1970s, the armed struggle of Bhojpur's peasants always had a mass character and the emphasis in these struggles remained on opening the doors for people's initiatives and on mass actions. In 1974, after the reorganization of the party, it was Bhojpur's experience that showed the party the way for the rectification campaign and even in underground circumstances it was in Bhojpur under Comrade Ram Naresh Ram's supervision that the party's special All India Conference was successfully held.

In the CPI(ML)'s Third Congress (1982) Comrade Ram Naresh Ram was elected a member of the party's Central Committee, since when he remained a member of the Central Committee all his life. After the Congress he took up the post of the party's Bihar State Secretary and in the 1980s he led the

fresh upsurge of the peasant struggle in Bihar. Later he was given responsibility of Secretary of the special regional committee which functioned under direct leadership of the Central Committee. In 1990 Comrade Ram Naresh Ram took on the responsibility of the party's open front and in the same year, addressed the massive 'Dam Bandho Kam Do' Rally organized by the Indian People's Front (IPF) at Delhi as CPI(ML)'s representative. After this, he was elected National Vice President of the IPF and attended the CPI's Vijaywada Congress as the fraternal representative of the CPI(ML)-IPF. Comrade Ram Naresh Ram was a Polit Bureau member of the party between 1989-1992 and 1995-2007.

In 1995 when CPI(ML) decided to participate in elections for the first time in the Party's own name, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram led the election campaign, and filed nominations in the name of Parasnath in the Sahar Assembly constituency. This caused great consternation in the ruling class camp. The Government and administration put up many hurdles to his candidature and indulged in widespread slander. In the face of all this, he won the seat by a wide margin. Thus, after a relentless struggle of 28 years, he entered the Bihar Assembly and took up the post of the party's legislative group – a responsibility he retained till the end.

Comrade Ram Naresh Ram's victory caused deep demoralization among the feudal and communal forces. The Ranveer Sena (a private feudal militia) was born out of this demoralization and reaction, and then began the phase of barbaric massacres in dozens of poor hamlets like Bathani Tola, Bathe, Nagri, Shankarbiga, Narayanpur, Miyanpur, etc. In these massacres, the Ranveer Sena took the lives of hundreds of dalits and poor people, including a large number of unborn babies, children, women and old people. Under the perceptive political guidance of Comrade Ram Naresh Ram and the leadership of the CPI(ML), the poor people of Bhojpur and Bihar defeated this feudal ploy. Today the Ranveer Sena along with all other private armies no longer exist in Bihar.

His role as an MLA representative of the revolutionary opposition was unparalleled, and a model for all communist legislators. As an MLA, he always led the people's struggles of his constituency from the front and always posed a challenge to the Government and administration. In particular, he waged powerful struggles inside and outside the Assembly on the question of political patronage to the Ranveer Sena and imposition of draconian laws (especially TADA) on the struggling poor. On the other hand, he himself gave direct leadership to the process of establishing people's supervision and regulation over the development undertaken by government machinery and in reining in the corruption by government officials and contractors. As a result he became such a popular MLA from his constituency that all his opponents considered him invincible.

Comrade Ram Naresh Ram always remained a major challenge for the ruling class. Be it the Congress Government, the 'social justice' government of Laloo-Rabri or the Nitish Government with its rhetoric of 'good governance-development', all felt threatened by him. Not only during the Emergency but during Laloo's rule (1995 and 1997), Rbari Devi's rule (2000) and during Nitish Kumar's rule (currently), fresh false cases were concocted and filed against him and there were plots to arrest him. In one such false case, a warrant for his arrest was issued which was never scrapped even till the day of his death, in spite of the fact that the entire Opposition united inside the Bihar Assembly to protest the police's attempt, through this warrant, to brand him an 'extremist,' and even the Bihar CM was forced to issue a statement on this question.

From the first war of independence of 1857 through the 1942 Quit India struggle, and beyond, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram was a torch-bearer of the revolutionary anti-imperialist anti-feudal legacy of the entire freedom struggle. It was this legacy that he carried forward by leading the revolutionary communist movement. In his constituency he had a memorial to 1942 martyrs constructed at Lasarhi – something which no previous MLA of this constituency had undertaken in 50 years of India's independence. Every year a 'Shaheed Mela' would be

organized at this memorial and this year too Comrade Ram Naresh Ram actively participated in this event.

During the freedom struggle Swami Sahajanand Saraswati had played a vanguard role in lighting the spark of anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggles among India's peasants; in the period of India's 'second Independence struggle,' Comrade Ram Naresh Ram under the leadership of the Communist Party played the same role – lighting the revolutionary spark of political assertion in the most oppressed sections of society from the initial phase till the revolutionary anti-feudal struggles of the Bihar plains. As a result of these struggles, the dalit-backward rural poor of independent India achieved their basic democratic right – the right to vote – for the first time and not only sent their representatives to the Parliament and Assembly but also changed the balance of forces in local self-governance bodies. Comrade Ram Naresh raised the issue of land reform in Bihar with such commitment that he can be called the Swami Sahajanand of independent India. At the founding Conference of the All India Agricultural Labourers' Association (AIALA) at Ara in 2003, he was elected the National President of the organization and till the end, he remained the Honorary President of AIALA.

In spite of the travails of old age and serious illnesses, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram remained active till his last days and participated actively in mass programmes. He not only addressed the Jan-Adhikar (People's Rights) Rally this very year in Patna, he was even present at the mass meeting for the nomination of party candidates in Ara a few days before his demise. Expressing outrage at the arrest of Comrade Rameshwar Prasad during nominations, he asked the assembled people to ensure the victory of Comrade Rameshwar as a fitting rebuff to this unjust and biased move of the administration.

Comrade Ram Naresh Ram's wife passed away last year. He is survived by two daughters. Comrade Ram Naresh Ram's personality was steel tempered in the fire of revolutionary struggles. He was a peerless leader from among the dalit-oppressed people, speaking their own language. On the one hand he was known for his simplicity, his friendly

and simple nature and his humility and on the other for his firm principles and his dauntless commitment. He was a unique icon of struggle and simplicity. He grasped a range of immensely varied responsibilities given to him by party and successfully undertook them with great commitment. His entire struggling life will be a lighthouse of inspiration not only for the present but for the coming generations.

Comrade Ram Naresh Ram is no longer physically present among us. As long as oppression, exploitation and inequality remain in society, until struggles for land reforms and social transformation achieve their goal, Comrade Ram Naresh Ram will continue to guide our way like a flaming torch in fields of struggle of Bihar and India's democratic revolution. Only by marching in the light of that flaming torch to realize his dreams can we pay true homage to Comrade Ram Naresh Ram.

**Red Salute to Comrade
Ram Naresh Ram!
Central Committee,
CPI(ML) Liberation**

AICCTU Convention in Punjab

On 27 October a condolence meeting was organised by the mess workers' union of Punjab Engineering College (PEC) at Chandigarh to condole and pay tributes to two mess workers, Kushal Singh and Kundan, who passed away recently and Comrade Ram Naresh Ram. Among those present were comrades Swapan Mukherjee, General Secretary of All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), Kanwaljit (GS, AICCTU Chandigarh) and Satish Kumar, (VP, AICCTU Chandigarh unit).

On 30 October, a convention of contract workers was held in Chandigarh in which various unions of city's workers participated who recently joined AICCTU. Some of these are PGI workers, workers' union from 16 Sector Government Hospital, GMCH, Municipal Hospital, Prahari Security Men's Union and PEC mess unions from initial periods. These unions represent a large section of the city's working class. 400 workers participated in the convention.

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The convention was organised at the rally ground of Sector 25. Apart from AICCTU's National Secretary Com. Santosh Rai, Punjab GS of AICTU Com. C Rana, Com. Harbhagwan Bhikhi of Mazdoor Mukti Morcha, human rights activist Rajwinder Bains, Com. Kanwaljit, Gurjant Mansa of brick kiln workers' union and others were also present at the Convention.

The speakers underlined the importance of the day that saw many unions of the unorganised sector contract workers coming together for fighting for their rights. Some of the main demands of the Convention were minimum wage of Rs. 10000/pm, strictly implementing Bonus, EPF, ESI benefits etc. and clearly fixing and declaring the number of holidays.

State-level Party School Held in Uttarakhand

A three day long state-level Party School was organised on 21-23 October after being postponed in August due to heavy rains that caused massive losses in the State and threw normal life out of gear. For the same reason the School had to be shifted to Party's old area of work – Bindukhatta. The Bindukhatta committee showed appreciable flexibility in organising this School as it did so on a very short notice.

The School began at Comrade Deepak Bose memorial hall by observing silence and paying homage to all the martyrs and those who lost their lives in the recent landslides and other calamity caused by rains

in the State. Comrade Girja Pathak took the class on committee system and democratic centralism in Party Organisation. Comrade KK Bora discussed the political context of Maoism and Operation Green Hunt. Comrade Pankaj introduced and discussed the contents of booklet on Women's Movement and Communist Party. Comrade

Kailash Pandey presented many lesser known facts in his discussion on Agrarian crisis. Leader of the peasant organisation Comrade Purshottam Sharma presented discussion on Agrarian Programme.

There was enthusiastic and involved participation of all 40 comrades/students who came from far-flung areas, evident from their questions and inputs. Comrade Rajendra Pratholi summed up the entire debate-discussions of three days and said that comrades must shed the retirement mentality and strengthen flexibility in their work-style. Personal life should be organised such that it uncompromisingly accommodates political responsibilities and necessities. This synergy is very crucial for dislodging the inertia, he said. Party's State incharge Comrade Raja Bahuguna who inaugurated the School, also gave concluding remarks. He asked the comrades to

go about organisational tasks and discharging of political responsibilities through the Party branches. He also stressed the importance of effective and constant flow of communication in the Party organisation.

Condemn the Attacks of Communal Fascists on Arundhati Roy's Residence

The attack by a BJP Mahila Morcha mob on writer Arundhati Roy's residence, ostensibly in reaction to her views expressed at a recent Seminar on Kashmir, is a highly condemnable assault on freedom of expression and democracy.

Ms. Roy's views on history on Kashmir's accession to and relationship with India, while they may be unpalatable to the BJP-Sangh Parivar jingoists, are not new in Indian politics and society. Many historians and political commentators, not to mention leaders including even the current Kashmir CM, have expressed similar views. No resolution of the Kashmir issue is possible unless the right of Kashmiri people to express the entire spectrum of their political demands including autonomy and azaadi is unreservedly recognized as a precondition for real political dialogue. The demand that the Central Government confront the sordid history of denial and betrayal of democracy in Kashmir as well as the ongoing brutal repression and human rights violations by security forces cannot be wished away by branding it as 'sedition.'

There can be no place in a democracy for mobs who attack a writer for expressing her views freely, and all democratic forces and voices in India must unequivocally condemn such violent assaults on freedom of expression.

CPI(ML) Central Committee