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Challenge Islamophobic and Racist Violence in the US and India

The murder of three young Muslims in the US, followed by the brutal violence by US police on an aged Indian man, Sureshbhai Patel, have once again shone the spotlight on deeply entrenched Islamophobia and racism in the USA.

In Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a Muslim man Deah Barakat, his wife Yusor Abu-Salha, and her sister Razan Mohammed Abu-Salha were gunned down in their home by a white neighbor. The killer had been reportedly expressing prejudice and hatred for the hijab worn by Yusor Abu-Salha, and had picked fights before with the Muslim family.

In a familiar pattern, the US police are trying to portray the killings as the consequence of a 'parking dispute' rather than an Islamophobic hate crime. This is reminiscent of the Delhi Police chief trying to portray targeted vandalization and desecration of churches in India's national capital as a 'robbery', comparable to 'robberies' of temples.

The US media also largely ignored and trivialized the murders, thereby reflecting their own unwillingness to recognize and challenge Islamophobia. But local people, including neighbours, co-workers, and fellow students of the three victims, came out in large numbers to protest the hate crime. On social media also, outrage over the killings spilt over with the 'Muslim Lives Matter' hashtag, striking a chord with ongoing protests against racist murders that had used the 'Black Lives Matter' hashtag.

Soon after, in Alabama, police officers slammed an old Indian man on the ground, breaking his neck and partially paralyzing him. Sureshbhai Patel was visiting his son's family to help take care of his baby grandson. Seeing Sureshbhai on a walk in the neighbourhood, a neighbor reported to the police that a "skinny black guy" was wandering about, leading him to fear about his wife's safety. Sureshbhai communicated to the police that he was from India and could not speak English. But the senior police officer threw Sunilbhai on the ground, grievously injuring him.

Initially the Alabama police put out a press release justifying the police brutality and blaming Sureshbhai for disobeying the police. But following diplomatic

intervention by India, the police officer has been sacked and arrested.

It would be a mistake to assume that the police behaviour against Sureshbhai Patel was an aberration. The attack on Sureshbhai is part of a pattern of similar incidents involving police high-handedness and killings of Black and Latina people in the US. In fact, the senior police officer who attacked Sureshbhai was giving the younger trainee officer a lesson in routine racist high-handedness and brutality. Aware that his actions and words were being recorded, he kept up a commentary falsely implying that Sureshbhai was being non-cooperative and violent. And in incident after incident of killings of Black and Latina men, the US police have literally got away with murder. They would have got away in Sureshbhai's case too, were it not for the diplomatic issues involved.

Indian civil liberties activists in the US have pointed out that it is not enough to respond to the attack on Sureshbhai by 'educating' US police officers to distinguish Indian Hindus from Blacks, or from Arab and South Asian Muslims. Instead, the effort must be to forge solidarity between Black and Arab communities as well as South Asians of all faiths, to resist the fresh surge in racism and Islamophobia in the US.

At the same time, our outrage over the prejudice and violence meted out to Sureshbhai Patel in the US, must also serve to make us introspect about xenophobia and anti-Black racism in India. When Black people are subjected to mob violence in India, the politicians and police here, too, tend to blame such violence on 'criminal activities' by 'foreign nationals' rather than on racist prejudice. When people from North Eastern states are attacked in Indian cities, the police try to claim that the incidents are random rather than racist. Violence against Muslim economic migrants and refugees alike tends to be justified, celebrated and promoted as action against 'Bangladeshi infiltrators'.

Communal hatred and violence, at the hands of Hindu majoritarian groups as well as by police, against religious minorities in India has been systematic and state-sponsored. The BJP continues to systematically use anti-minority hatred and violence to expand its

presence across India. Following President Obama's remarks on the need to curb religious intolerance and by the scathing call by New York Times for Modi to break his silence, the Indian Prime Minister has finally declared his Government's commitment to uphold religious freedom of all Indians. But these vague statements are mere lip service, given that no action has been taken against members of

Modi's own Cabinet and his team of MPs who have been at the forefront of the hate-mongering. Further, his words ring hollow in the face of the systematic persecution of activists who have been striving to pursue cases of communal violence in which Modi himself is implicated, and the systematic impunity to the BJP President and police officers who staged fake encounters of Muslim men and women in Gujarat

on Modi's own watch.

The Chapel Hill murders and the assault on Sureshbhai Patel have reminded us all that Islamophobic, racist and xenophobic prejudice and violence are no less a problem in the US than in India. The way forward is for movements against communalism, Islamophobia and racism in India, the US, UK and other countries to join hands with each other in closer solidarity and united struggle.

Mid Day Meal Workers' Struggles in Bihar

In the workshop organized by the party in Muzaffarpur on 21-22 September 2014, it was decided to intensify and speedup the process of uniting the mid-day meal workers in Bihar. Since of the 1, 86,000 mid day meal workers, nearly 1, 25,000 of them are women, it was further decided that it would be most appropriate to bring them together under the banner of AIPWA under the leadership of AIPWA leaders. In keeping with this decision, efforts were initially started to bring together the women mid day meal workers in four blocks of Patna district- Fatuha, Dulhin Bazar, Punpun and Paliganj. Their main demands are- 1) As per the resolution no. 2401/20.7.07 passed by the General Administration Department of Bihar, pay an honorarium of 15,000/- per month, on a regular basis (at present they are paid merely 1000/- per month); 2) All the cooks should be given the status of government employee and thereafter they should be provided the facilities due to a fourth class employee; 3) All the cooks should be given an identity card and a uniform; 4) All the cooks be provided with the benefits of ESI and EPF; 5) all the cooks should be included in the accident and health insurance policies; 6) Female cooks should be provided with the facility to avail maternity leave, emergency leave and special leave; 7) the pending honorarium of all the cooks should be immediately paid; 8) The honorarium due to all the employees be deposited in their account; 9) The cooks should not be made to job that are not a part of their job profile, such as cleaning school premises, cleaning toilets, washing utensils, etc.; 10) All

the mid day meal workers should be treated with dignity and should not be threatened with expulsion threats.

Focusing on the above mentioned demands, demonstrations were held in Dulhin Bazaar on 28 January, in Paliganj on 29 January and in Punpun on 4 February. Prior to the demonstration in Punpun, a convention was also held on 1 February in which 45 mid day meal workers were also present. Nearly 150 mid day meal workers participated in the demonstration in Dulhin Bazar, 100 in Paliganj and about 200 in Punpun. The state AIPWA President, Com. Saroj Dubey was present in all the demonstrations and after each demonstrations, the charter of demands was presented to the block officers.

On 1st February, 2015, a unit of State Midday Meal Workers' Association was also established in a convention held in Fatuha in which nearly 225 mid day meal workers participated. They shared their difficulties and problems. The convention ended with the formation of 23 member committee and by a passing a resolution to ensure the success of the programmes undertaken for 12 February and 24 March 2015, in continuation of the early initiatives.

On 12 February 2015, thousands of midday meal workers under the banners of State School Midday Meal Workers' Association and AIPWA staged demonstrations in different districts in front of the district officials. In the state capital, Patna, the protest demonstrations were led by state AIPWA President Com. Saroj Chaubey, state AIPWA Jt. Secretary Com. Anita Sinha, Patna AIPWA Vice President cum Sinhi Panchayat

head, Com. Asha Devi along with several other state and district level AIPWA leaders. In Bhojpur district, the protests demonstrations were led by AIPWA General Secretary Com. Meena Tiwari and in Nawada, they were led by the Com. Shashi Yadav, AIPWA Secretary. In Gaya, the protest demonstrations were led by Comrade Reeta Baranwaal and in Siwan, Comrades Sohila Gupta, Malti Ram, Kumanti Ram led the protests along with other leaders.

In the protest demonstrations held in Patna, the speakers pointed out how in Bihar, the mid day meal workers were being paid only Rs. 33/- day for only ten months in a year, despite working for nearly 8 to 8 ½ hours every day. This was in clear violation of resolution no. 2401/20.7.2007 of the Bihar government's Common Administrative Department according to which the workers were to be paid an honorarium of Rs.15,000/month. In protest demonstrations in different states, the workers pointed out how even the current wages were paid after considerable delays and not deposited in their accounts. The charter of demands of the mid day workers were submitted to the district officials of the different districts.

First State Convention of the Insaaf Manch - Bihar

The 'Insaaf Manch' (Platform for Justice) was formed an year ago in Muzaffarpur to raise the voices of minorities, dalits and women. In one of its major initiatives, the Insaaf Manch had organized successful movements against witch hunting of minority youth who were falsely implicated by NIA in terror cases. In some of the cases relating to the Patna bomb blasts, the NIA had been forced to release boys whom it

had initially picked up and tortured, and in one case, mass protests by villagers themselves had prevented NIA from being able to abduct and torture a young man.

The Insaaf Manch has also made significant interventions in the cases involving mass killings of Dalits. The Insaaf Manch held its founding Bihar State convention on 15 February 2015. The convention was held at the Gate Public Library in Patna. CPI (ML) General Secretary Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya, President of the UP unit of Rihar Manch, Mohd. Shoaib Inqalabi, Convenor of the Inqilabi Muslim Conference, Com. Salim, and others participated in the conference.

Addressing the convention, Com. Dipankar Bhattacharya said that it is not the ruling class but the common masses who will set the political agenda of the country. The slogan of 'sabka saath-sabka vikas' (support of all- development for all) has been proved to be a lie. The issues of the common masses included- home, food, employment, land, peace and harmony and these were the agenda for people's struggles. After coming to power with a clear majority, BJP has speeded up the economic policies introduced in the 90's, is running the government mainly by way of ordinances and instead of fulfilling the promises it made to people, it has started working for the benefit of a handful of rich corporations and imperialist interests. Meanwhile the RSS has started showing its true colours and its cadre is enjoying complete support from the central government. The BJP government had not only compromised the sovereignty of the country by signing the nuclear deal but had also endangered the life of the citizens. However, the Delhi elections had shown that people were not pleased with the policies of the BJP government. He also spoke about how the youth from minority communities were being targeted in the name of fighting terrorism. The Insaaf Manch, he said, had proved to be a platform reflecting the concerns of democratic citizens for the young boys and men who are picked up and tortured by security agencies to falsely accuse them of

terrorism.

Referring to the current political situation in Bihar, Com. Dipankar pointed out that while on one hand, Nitish Kumar who had initially made Jitan Ram Manjhi the CM of Bihar was now bent on having him removed. On the other hand, BJP which had over the years provided political patronage to those responsible for the numerous mass killings of Dalits and had compared Ranveer Sena chief Brahmeshwar Mukhiya to Gandhi, was now trying to prove itself as a well wisher of the Mahadalits by supporting Jitan Ram Manjhi. The attitude of both the JD (U) and the BJP towards Mahadalits is evident from their own actions.

Com. Salim, the national convenor of the Inqilabi Muslim Conference, in his speech said that in times when the fascist forces were trying to run their dictatorship in the country and the secularism and democracy were under threat, the struggles fought by the Insaaf Manch in Bihar were indeed laudable. He cautioned that the attempts of the BJP to destroy the secular fabric of the country and compromise it's sovereignty for the benefit of handful of individuals and the US, will be strongly resisted and defeated.

Prof. Jameel Saheb, Anwar Hussain, Islamuddin, Neyaz Ahmad, Shahid Muzaffarpuri, Manoj Manzil and several other leaders also addressed the convention. In their speeches, they all pointed out that the minority communities had now understood how the ruling parties assumed silence on the question of justice be it in the case of witch hunting of Muslim youth in the name of terrorism or on the issue of justice to the victims of mass killings of Dalits in Laxmanpur Bathe and Bathani Tola. They spoke about the hope of justice that the Insaaf Manch had been able to inspire among the minorities and the Dalits through their various initiatives and interventions.

Towards the closing of the convention, a 57 member state level committee was formed with Mohd. Iftakhaar Aalam as the President and Suraj Kumar Singh as the Secretary.

Workshop for women workers in Uttar Pradesh

A workshop for women workers was jointly organized by AIPWA and AICCTU in Kanpur on 25 January 2015. The women workers who participated in the conference included women working in factories, nursing homes and laundries in Kanpur and also the mid day meal workers in the state primary schools. Addressing the participants, state Jt. Secretary of AIPWA Com. Kusum Verma said that in the present times when the current government was planning to introduce several anti-workers' policies and laws, it was important that the workers working in different areas unite to resist and defeat such moves. She added that women workers had to put with double oppression. From home to work, they had to face insecurity and discrimination. She pointed out that provisions like day care facilities at work places for children of working women, double wages for overtime and secure transportation service for women working in night shifts were integral parts of labour laws and that AIPWA and AICCTU would unite working women to assertively raise these demands and ensure equal wages and dignified working conditions for women. Addressing the workshop, the district president of AIPWA, Com. Shivani Verma said that under the present system, working women have to play a dual role in societal development. One hand they have to take up the responsibility of raising their children and on the other hand participate in the production process. However given the patriarchal structures, they have to face oppression on both fronts. During the workshop, the honorary President of AIPWA, Com. Vidya Rajwar that there were provisions for providing free education to the children of working women and for providing them with cycles for the purpose of commutation under the 'U.P. Buildings and other construction workers welfare ordinance' and these could be availed only by mobilizing and uniting with organization's struggles.

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To :

Construction Workers' Protest in Lucknow

On 22 December 2015, nearly 300 construction workers demonstrated outside the office of Deputy Labour Commissioner under the banner of the AICCTU affiliated Construction Workers' Union, to protest against the obstacles being posed in the registration and delivery of benefits to the workers and in support of their basic rights. Secretary of the Construction Workers Union, Nomi Laal, other leaders of construction workers- Kaamta Prasad, Bhanumati, Keshav Mishra, Geeta ji, District in charge of CPI (ML) Com. Ramesh Singh Sengar, leader of Railway Workers' Union, Com. Magan ji and Scooter India Workers' Union Aarbi Singh addressed the protest demonstration. The leaders pointed out the big scale rigging that was taking place and also that for long they had they been demanding that the opinions of the registered workers' unions be taken into account. However no heed was being paid to these demands. Our union has been demanding that basic provisions such as night shelters at labour sites, toilets, tin shades for resting purpose and safe drinking water facilities be provided to the construction workers. However, neither has any action been taken so far by the concerned authorities, nor have they even bothered to provide any updates regarding the progress on the aforementioned demands. Several speakers also raised the demands of providing identity cards and ration cards to all the workers who had come from the outside states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh or even from districts in UP outside Lucknow. They also demanded that the names of these workers, who had given their sweat and blood for the development of Lucknow, be added in the BPL list and they should be given places to stay. The speakers also pointed out that while certain provisions did exist for the registered workers such as provision of Rs. 1,00,000/- for building house for workers who have land, it was unlikely for a construction worker to have land in Lucknow. During the protests, list of demands were submitted to the concerned authorities which included- 1) Camps be organized on construction sites on specified dates and time for the registration of construction workers; 2) Provisions such as toilets, tin shades for taking rest and drinking water facility, be made available on construction sites; 3) All construction

workers be issued red ration cards and their names be included in the BPL list; 4) Colonies should be established for providing housing facilities to construction workers; 5) There should be effective mechanisms to ensure that wages usurped by the building owners or builders be paid to the workers; 6) There should effective mechanisms to ensure that the provisions and benefits guaranteed to the workers through various laws are made available to them.

Protest against Hindu Mahasabha's threats on valentine s day

The Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha had issued threats prior to 14 February that couples seen holding hands or displaying any other form of affection publicly on the Valentine's Day would be forcibly married off. The Hindu Mahasabha had further warned of conducting ghar waapsi in case of inter-religious couples. Responding to such anti constitutional diktats that reflect utter disdain towards individuals' freedom to choose and express, several progressive organizations including AISA and JNUSU, called for a protest outside the Hindu Mahasabha office in Delhi on 14 February 2015. In a creative form of protest, the students and youth had come with garlands and musical instruments daring the Hindu Mahasabha cadre to carry out their threats of marrying them. The protestors included couples belonging to different religions, castes and sexual identities. They raised slogans on the lines of "Fall in love, not in line"; "No Man shall be discriminated for wearing a sari and no woman shall be violated for a short skirt"; "In love, our consent is all that matters, we neither fear your threats, nor your fetters"! However, the Delhi police instead of protecting the rights of common citizens and taking actions against those who had issued threats chose to cordon off the area outside the Mahasabha office and detain the protestors who were only asserting their right to choice and expression. While the political patronage accorded to the threat issuing cadres of saffron brigade was clearly evident, the students and youth demonstrated that they were not the ones to bow done in face of such right wing threats.