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General Secretary of the
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Mazdoor Ekta Lehar (MEL): It is now more than 11 months since kisans from numerous regions have been protesting at the Delhi borders. What is your assessment, comrade, of the Kisan Andolan?

Lal Singh: The most striking feature of this movement is that the vast majority of kisans, across the length and breadth of the country, from the poorest to the richest, have come together. They are waging a united struggle against monopoly capitalist corporations and against the government which is in their service.

Over five hundred kisan unions have united around one set of immediate demands. That is a historic achievement.

The first of their immediate demands is that the three central farm laws enacted in 2020 must be repealed. One of these laws is aimed at replacing the existing state regulated markets by private markets and direct purchase from the farmers by capitalist companies. Another law is meant to widen the scope for contract farming. Both the market for agricultural produce, as well as contract farming agreements, have so far been under the purview of state governments. Now the central law overrides all existing state laws. The third law amends the central Essential Commodities Act to remove all limits on the amount of food stocks that can be held by private companies.

The Tatas, Ambanis, Birlas, Adanis and other Indian monopoly groups as well as the billionaire owners of Amazon, Wal-Mart, Nestle, Cargill and other foreign multinational companies are all rejoicing. The enactment of these laws fulfils a longstanding aim and demand of theirs. This is the demand that all restrictions on private corporate domination of agricultural trade and storage must be removed.

Indian and international monopoly capitalists want freedom to purchase any crop from any kisan in any part of the country at any price, at any private market yard of their choice. They want to be free to legally hoard any amount of any agricultural product of their choice. Their

aim is to gain a controlling share of the market. They want to become the biggest buyers, hoarders and sellers of food. They can then loot to their heart's content, both those who produce the food and those who purchase it in the retail market.

The enactment of the three central laws is a blatant act of violation of the rights of kisans, for the sake of fulfilling monopoly capitalist greed. Parliament has enacted laws aimed at enriching a few super-rich Indians and foreigners by completely ruining lakhs of kisans. These laws have been imposed on the kisans, without their consent and against their will. In demanding the repeal of these laws, the kisans are expressing their right to have a say in legislation affecting their lives.

It is not only the kisans who are threatened by these laws. The prospect of further decline in net incomes of kisans also threatens the livelihood of agricultural workers. Reduction in the role of the State and expansion in the role of private companies over the procurement and distribution of food will lead to further rise in the prices that urban workers have to pay. Lakhs of traders are also threatened with loss of business to the monopoly companies. In sum, the vast majority of people stand to lose, while a tiny minority of super-rich monopoly capitalists stand to gain.

The second immediate demand of the Kisan Andolan is for legally guaranteed procurement of all agricultural products in all parts of the country at no less than the officially announced Minimum Support Price (MSP), which should be set at a remunerative level. This demand reflects the reality that even though MSPs are announced for many crops, the majority of peasants have no effective state protection when it comes to the price they receive for the products they sell.

In the present system, the state provides some degree of support for the procurement prices of only wheat and paddy. The Food Corporation of India purchases only these two crops at MSP, and only in some selected regions of the country. The kisan unions are demanding that the protection which has so far been provided only to some kisans and for a couple of crops must now be provided to all kisans and for all agricultural produce.

The third immediate demand is that the proposed Electricity Amendment Bill, aimed at converting electricity distribution into a profitable business for monopoly capitalists, must be withdrawn. Its enactment will lead to a hike in electricity rates that kisans have to pay.

Those who till the land and produce the food we all eat are demanding their right to security of livelihood. The central government is refusing to fulfil this right.

Why is the central government adamantly refusing to repeal the three farm laws? Some people think it is because of some specific quality of BJP, the party in charge of the central government. They are mistaken. The reason lies in the fact that Indian and foreign monopoly capitalists do not want the government to repeal these laws which they have been longing to establish for a very long time.

The enactment of the three central laws in 2020 is the culmination of a long process of reforming laws in one state after another. Having finally achieved what they wanted, the monopoly capitalists do not want the central government to back down. They want the Modi government to deceive, divert and divide the kisans and destroy their united struggle by any means.

Right from the time the kisans arrived at the Delhi borders, the central government has been trying in various ways to discredit their struggle through all kinds of disinformation and outright lies and slanders spread through social media.

One lie which continues to be spread is that only rich farmers of Punjab, Haryana and western UP are opposing the three farm laws. The truth is that all sections of kisans in all parts of the country are threatened by the monopoly capitalist agenda for

agriculture. That is why the movement is spreading to all regions.

The domination of food grain procurement by giant capitalist corporations is a threat not only for the kisans in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh who have been selling wheat and paddy to FCI. Even for kisans in other regions who are selling these crops to private traders, the MSP serves as a benchmark. If MSP goes, they will lose even this benchmark and their condition will go from bad to worse.

As for the kisans who produce other crops, the MSPs announced by the government before each sowing season does not amount to any real protection because there is very little or zero public procurement. Those who produce dal, oilseeds, spices and other crops have no choice except to sell to private traders and their agents, often at much less than the MSP. The demand for guaranteed procurement of all agricultural products at no less than MSP is clearly in the interests of all these kisans.

So if we look at all the three main demands of the Kisan Andolan, it is a platform that represents the interests of kisans in all regions, of everyone who is producing and selling agricultural products, be it on one acre of land or on 50 acres. All those bourgeois economists and

journalists who distort this reality are serving the ruling class in its effort to deceive and divide the united struggle of the kisans.

A second big lie that the rulers have been spreading, and continue to spread, is that the Kisan Andolan is infiltrated by *Sikh terrorists*. Sometimes they talk about *Khalistanis* and at other times about *Babbar Khalsa*.

History shows that the official propaganda about the alleged threat of “Sikh terrorism” is a cruel fraud perpetrated on the people of Punjab and the entire people of India. The experience in the 1980s clearly showed how spreading fear about this alleged threat was used as a weapon to divide Punjabis on the basis of religious beliefs. It was used to mobilise people in the rest of India against people of Sikh faith. All Sikhs were portrayed as terrorists. The central intelligence agencies would organise terrorist killings of Hindus and pin the blame on “Sikh terrorists”. The spectre of Sikh terrorism was used to justify the savage state terrorism which was unleashed in Punjab, Delhi and other places.

The lying propaganda and divisive tactics deployed by the central government in dealing with the Kisan Andolan is reminiscent of the methods used in the 1980s. However, the government’s propaganda campaign carried out during December 2020 did not achieve the

desired outcome. Day by day, sympathy and support for the kisans grew among the people all over the country. It also grew among Indians abroad.

Hoping to turn public opinion against the Kisan Andolan, the Central Government unleashed an elaborate and diabolical plot on Republic Day, 26th January, 2021.

The government and all TV news channels turned truth on its head by blaming some youthful participants of the kisan tractor rally for the anarchy and violence that took place on Republic Day. The truth is that the violent incidents around the Red Fort were pre-planned and organised by the central agencies and the Delhi Police, which is directly under the command of the central Home Ministry.

Numerous eyewitnesses have confirmed that many roads along the routes approved for the tractor rally were blocked by barricades and that the police guided several tractors to go along roads leading towards the Red Fort.

The protesting kisans were portrayed as being a threat to national security. This was used to justify erecting barbed wire fences, cutting off internet and water supply to the protest sites and issuing arbitrary arrest orders against so-called extremist elements. Thousands of innocent men, women and youth who participated in the tractor rally continue to be persecuted by the police.

It is an undeniable fact that the kisans would not have reached the Delhi border at all if it had not been for the determination and fighting spirit displayed by the youthful participants in the movement. The youth are a source of strength for the movement. They deserve to be steadfastly defended from the slanderous propaganda and persecution by the State.

For the past several months, the ruling class has deliberately kept the demands of the kisans hanging. While the media has kept public attention focused on the unresolved problem of the kisans, the Central Government has accelerated the implementation of the privatisation program. It has sold Air India to the Tatas for a price which is far below the value of its assets. The government has also announced a plan to hand over huge public infrastructure assets to private profiteers in the name of monetisation. Other anti-people and anti-national moves which have been taken in this period include the escalation of Indo-US military collaboration.

The rulers seem to be calculating that as time goes by, kisans will get tired sitting at the Delhi borders; and that public opinion can be turned against the protesting kisans by organising various violent incidents and blaming it on them. The killing of protesting kisans at Lakhimpur Kheri, the gruesome murder at the Singhu border, the threats issued by the Haryana government

of using force to disperse the kisans, side by side with renewed propaganda against “Sikh fundamentalists” need to be seen in this light.

The illogical argument of a Supreme Court bench that kisans do not have the right to protest when the matter is being considered by the courts is also part of the offensive of the ruling class.

In sum, our Party considers the Kisan Andolan as an entirely just and historic struggle which is currently facing many grave dangers. The situation calls for utmost vigilance and serious thought as to how the movement can steer clear of the dangers it faces.

While assessing this movement, we must never forget that the kisans of our country have a proud history of fighting not just in defence of their own livelihood and rights but also for the country’s freedom. Kisans and their sons in the British army were in the forefront of the Great Ghadar of 1857. They were in the forefront of numerous armed uprisings against the illegitimate British Raj.

Kisans have close links with the working class, both within the country and abroad. They have educated sons and daughters. They are becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that their struggle is of national and international dimension. It is against the monopoly

capitalists who are threatening the livelihood and rights of the working class and all the toiling people throughout the world.

The struggle of the kisans has received wholehearted support from the workers' unions. The kisan unions are in turn extending full support to the struggle of workers against privatisation and the anti-worker labour codes.

The main challenge is to build and strengthen a firm alliance between the workers and kisans, against the capitalist monopoly houses and their anti-social program of liberalisation and privatisation. It is a challenge because the rulers will not stop their efforts to discredit, divide and destroy the united struggle of kisans and its unity with the working class. They will use all their dirty tricks, including communal and caste polarisation, including the ballot and the bullet, to prevent worker-peasant unity from becoming a real threat.

MEL: You mentioned that these farm laws have a long history and are fulfilling a longstanding demand of the capitalists. Can you please explain?

Lal Singh: The enactment of these three farm laws is the culmination of a long process which began about 30 years ago. It is a process of reforming policies and laws

related to agricultural production and trade, to fulfil the greed of Indian and foreign monopoly capitalists.

The globalisation and liberalisation program was unveiled in the 1991 Budget speech of Manmohan Singh, who was then the finance minister under the Congress-led government headed by Narasimha Rao. It marked the decision of Indian monopoly capitalists to bring to an end the old policy framework of state-led capitalist industrialization, restrictive import and foreign investment policy and state-regulated trade in agricultural products.

The reforms implemented in the 1990s, referred to as the first wave, were focused largely on import and export policy. Quantitative restrictions on imports were removed and customs duty rates were reduced, in line with the prescriptions of the World Trade Organisation, or WTO for short. Palm oil and numerous imported food products started flooding the Indian market. It led to the destruction of livelihoods of lakhs of kisans. There were mass protests by kisan unions against the government's compliance with GATT, and its successor, the WTO.

Through the WTO, the US and other western imperialists applied pressure on the Government of India to cut back public procurement of wheat and rice. They wanted government of India to create favourable conditions for the foreign monopoly companies to dump cheaper wheat

and rice in the Indian market, leading to widespread ruin among the kisans.

The Indian bourgeoisie wanted to postpone the liberalisation of domestic agricultural trade, until they themselves were ready to compete with foreign agribusiness companies. They used the mass protests by kisans to negotiate for additional time to dismantle the public procurement system and bring down the food subsidy.

By the first decade of the 21st century, Indian monopoly houses had become enormously richer than they were in 1990. They had started competing with foreign monopolies in various markets. They had started entering the sphere of agricultural trade and sale of food products. The Adani group established its joint venture called Adani-Wilmar in 1999. Tatas established their Star enterprise in 2003. Mukesh Ambani launched Reliance Retail in 2006. Aditya Birla Retail was formed in 2007. All these monopoly houses have been striking deals with international companies and striving to gain control of huge supply chains, integrating wholesale and retail trade, both domestic and foreign.

It is precisely during the first decade of the 21st century that Government of India began to promote the agenda

of reforming the policies and laws governing domestic trade in agricultural products.

The policies, laws, rules, regulations and institutions that were built in the Nehruvian era had served the interests of the capitalist class in the early years after independence. Having enriched themselves and become big enough to compete with the likes of Wal-Mart and Amazon, the Indian monopoly capitalists now wanted the old framework to be dismantled. They wanted to compete and collude with foreign monopolies to establish giant-sized stocks and supply chains.

Successive governments at the centre, headed by BJP and Congress Party, began persuading state governments to implement a particular set of amendments in their Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Acts. A Model Amendment Act was drafted under the Vajpayee government. A model set of rules was drafted under the Manmohan Singh government.

One of the aims of these amendments was to remove the requirement for private wholesale buyers of food crops to go through the state regulated APMC markets. It was to give full freedom for capitalist companies to develop private market yards, invest in privately owned storage facilities, and to purchase any product from any kisan at any price. Another aim was to promote contract farming.

From 1997 to 2007, the World Bank provided technical assistance and extended policy-based loans to various state governments. It was under one such World Bank program that the state government headed by Nitish Kumar repealed the Bihar APMC Act, thereby destroying the state regulated markets at one stroke.

The process of getting all the states in line turned out to be a long and tortuous process. In addition to the resistance of the kisans, there was resistance also on the part of wholesale traders who were afraid of being driven out of business by giant monopoly companies.

It has taken almost 20 years for the majority of state governments to amend their APMC Acts. Even then, the amendments are not uniform. And there are still a few states in which no amendment has been enacted.

Indian and international monopoly companies grew more and more impatient with this process. They decided that the only sure way to achieve what they want, in one stroke, is to enact central laws on agricultural trade which override all state laws. This decision was implemented in 2020. The Modi government exploited the conditions of Corona Virus induced lockdowns as an opportunity to enact these central laws. The monopoly companies have got what they have been yearning for, namely, an all-

India market to dominate and plunder, without being restricted by state boundaries.

So you see, comrade, with the enactment of these three laws, the Indian and international monopoly capitalists have at last achieved the reforms they wanted in the sphere of agricultural trade and storage.

MEL: You said that the Indian bourgeoisie has been dismantling the old policy framework of the Nehruvian era. Why was that old framework adopted in the first place and why is it being dismantled now?

Lal Singh: That is a very important question, comrade. It is important to understand why the Indian and international bourgeoisie adopted a particular policy framework in the 1950s and why they have been dismantling it since the 1990s, under the banner of liberalisation and privatisation.

The policy framework adopted in our country soon after independence was dictated by the economic and political conditions of that time. The Tatas, Birlas and other big industrial houses had become the rulers of a huge country, in alliance with big landlords and other oppressors of the people. They had ambitions of becoming a mighty industrial and military power in

Asia. However, they did not have machine building industry or adequate steel and electricity. Their own capital was not enough to finance the huge investments that were needed. In such conditions, they decided that public funds must be used to create a state sector of heavy industry and infrastructure. They decided to restrict imports of automobiles and a wide range of manufactured consumer goods, so that they themselves can dominate these markets and reap maximum profits.

This entire framework was elaborated in the Bombay Plan, a vision document published in 1944-45, written by a group of representatives of the industrial houses, headed by JRD Tata and Ganshyam Das Birla. This document was vetted by the British Viceroy before it was published.

India gained independence at a time when the tide of revolution was in full flow on the world scale. The prestige of the socialist Soviet Union was at its peak. A large socialist camp of states had been created at the end of the Second World War. The capitalist ruling classes in Britain, France and other European countries were relying on social-democratic parties and social-welfare programs to pacify the working class and prevent revolution from breaking out.

The toiling majority of Indian people aspired for socialism. The capitalists and landlords of India as well

as the Anglo-American imperialists feared the prospect of workers and peasants of India rising up in revolution. They entrusted Prime Minister Nehru with the task of marketing their plan for developing Indian capitalism as being a project to build a “socialistic pattern of society”.

The first three five-year plans covering the period 1951-65 were based on the Bombay Plan. The Tatas, Birlas and other industrial houses accumulated their wealth and captured a dominant share of the domestic market for manufactured consumer goods. They benefited from the state sector providing them the infrastructure and assured supply of steel, coal, electricity, etc.

By the middle of the 1960s, India was facing a serious famine. Food riots were breaking out in the cities. The Government of India had to depend on food aid from the USA to deal with the situation. In such a situation, the ruling class decided that it was essential to raise the productivity of wheat and rice production and create a buffer stock of these two staple food grains under central government control. The so-called Green Revolution was launched with this aim. Systems were set up for supplying high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and bank credit to kisans in selected irrigated regions. The Food Corporation of India was set up to purchase, store and distribute wheat and rice through a public distribution system, with ration shops in all the cities.

The Green Revolution served the development of capitalism in numerous ways. Expansion of commercial crops and capitalist methods in agriculture served to expand the home market for capitalist industry. The concentration of rural household savings through the banking system served to generate finance capital for the monopoly industrial houses.

The Green Revolution led to increased net incomes from farming in the initial years. The procurement price of wheat in 1971, for instance, was more than 25 percent higher than the average cost of production in Punjab. However, these conditions did not last too long. The prices kisans had to pay for inputs rose more steeply than the prices they received for their output. By 1976, the procurement price of wheat in Punjab was only 5 percent more than the average cost of production.

The development of capitalist production and petty commodity production in agriculture had a major impact on the kisans and the nature of their main demands. In the early years after independence, their struggle was focused on the question of land, its ownership and possession. It was directed against feudal and caste oppression by big landlords. By the 1980s, kisans all over the country were agitating against hikes in electricity and water rates and demanding remunerative prices for their crops.

The 1980s was a decade when so-called free market reforms were launched in Britain and the United States. Gorbachev unleashed capitalist reforms in the Soviet Union under the banner of glasnost and perestroika, the Russian version of liberalisation and privatisation. India came under increasing pressure from the World Bank and IMF to open up the domestic market to imports and foreign capital investment. The Government of India responded by gradually lowering import duties and gradually devaluing the Rupee throughout that decade.

The 1990s opened with major abrupt changes taking place on the world scale, with the Soviet Union disintegrating in 1991. The United States of America led the capitalists of the world in launching an unprecedented offensive against the very idea of socialism and against all the rights which the working class, women and people at large had won through their struggles in the 20th century.

Capitalist ideologues declared that communism is finished. They declared that there is no alternative to a market-oriented economy and multi-party representative democracy. In the name of free market reforms, they started pressurising all independent states to open up their markets to the monopoly corporations of the world.

The monopoly capitalists of North America, western Europe and Japan started actively looking for ways to penetrate the markets in the former Soviet camp. They also had their eyes on India's fertile land, hardworking people, rich natural resources and huge domestic markets for food and other commodities.

In the previous period, the Indian bourgeoisie used to resist US imperialist pressure by threatening to get closer to the Soviet Union. Now that manoeuvring space was gone. The Indian bourgeoisie had to adjust to the new situation.

Starting in 1991, the Indian ruling class began to openly abandon the pretence of building a socialistic pattern of society and embraced the prescriptions of globalisation, through liberalisation and privatisation.

Having built up their industrial base by restricting foreign competition, Indian monopoly houses decided that it was time to lift those restrictions in the interest of becoming globally competitive. They wanted the Government of India to open up the domestic market to foreign capital investments, and foreign governments to open up their markets to Indian capital investments. Having used the public sector to build up their private empires, the monopoly houses decided that the time had come

to grab hold of public assets at a discount, to further expand their private empires.

The implementation of the liberalisation and privatisation program has led to further intensification of exploitation of workers and heightened insecurity for small producers. It has led to enormous growth in the indebtedness of kisans, driving thousands of them to suicide every year. It has increased the degree of monopoly and role of foreign capital in almost all spheres of the economy.

In addition to the aggravation of the problems of workers and peasants, the course being pursued since the 1990s has also further intensified contradictions within the bourgeoisie. Various propertied and privileged strata whose interests used to be accommodated to some extent in the old framework have now been left to fend for themselves.

In order to divert, divide and suppress the resistance of workers and peasants as well as the resistance within the propertied strata to the imperialist reform program, the monopoly houses and their trusted parties have used the most diabolical and monstrous methods. They unleashed the Mandir and Mandal agitations. They organised the demolition of Babri Masjid, the Gujarat genocide, other episodes of communal violence and other forms of state terrorism to drown the struggles of the people in blood.

Side by side with the unleashing of communal violence and other forms of state terrorism, the monopoly houses have groomed a new set of politicians to replace the old brigade trained in marketing a “socialistic pattern of society”. They have promoted leaders who promote rapid capitalist growth headed by monopoly corporations, steering India on an imperialist course, as the way to achieve development for all. They have groomed the revanchist BJP as a party well suited to champion this aggressive imperialist course under the banner of restoring Hindu pride.

In sum, the change in the policy framework since the 1990s is part of a worldwide trend. It is part of the imperialist offensive in the present period, directed against the toiling people, against socialism and all the achievements of humankind in the realm of human rights and democratic rights. It is an anti-social agenda being pushed by the monopoly capitalists and imperialist powers of the world.

MEL: What do you think of the view being expressed by some parties that the immediate aim of the Kisan Andolan should be to defeat BJP in elections?

Lal Singh: Is it only the BJP which is pursuing the agenda of agricultural trade liberalisation? No, Indian and international monopoly capitalists are the ones who are pursuing this agenda. BJP has been

entrusted at this time with the task of running the government and implementing the agenda set by the monopoly capitalists.

The monopoly houses are the leaders of the capitalist class. It is they who have been pushing for the enactment of the three central laws which open the path for corporate domination of agriculture. They have also been pushing for privatisation of all public assets and for the four labour codes which open the path for more intense exploitation of the working class.

Less than 150 capitalist monopoly houses are setting the agenda for this country of 140 crore people. How does a tiny minority rule over the vast majority? They rule by means of a bureaucratic machinery and special bodies of armed soldiers and police, trained to use force against the exploited and oppressed classes. They rule by entrusting the central executive power in the hands of one of their tried and trusted parties.

The relationship between the class in power and the party which is running the government is like the relationship between the owner of a company and its management. The management has to implement what the owners decide. If they don't, the owners can get rid of them and install a new management team.

In the existing political system, both the ruling and opposition parties play specific roles in maintaining the rule of the capitalist class. The role of the ruling party is to implement the monopoly capitalist agenda while fooling the people that it is in their best interests. The role of the opposition parties in parliament is to make a lot of noise against whatever the government does. Their aim is to create the impression that they are speaking in the interests of the toiling majority, and wait for the day when they can occupy the ruling benches.

See how the Congress Party is speaking today. Sonia Gandhi is calling for the repeal of all three farm laws enacted last year. However, during the ten years of the Manmohan Singh government, the Congress Party was pushing the very same agenda of liberalisation and privatisation. And in those years, BJP was opposing the liberalisation of agricultural trade, claiming it was against kisans and small traders.

Both BJP and Congress Party know that when they get the chance to run the government, they have to implement the agenda of the monopoly houses. When they are in the opposition, they have to act like they are champions of the oppressed people. This is the real content of the so-called parliamentary *maryada* they swear by.

Identifying the party which is running the government as the source of all problems serves to hide the truth from the people. It creates the harmful illusion that their problems will end if a particular party is dislodged from power. It serves to mobilise people behind one or another trusted party of the ruling capitalist class.

Hence the answer to your question is that it is wrong and very harmful to think that defeating BJP in the vidhan sabha and lok sabha elections is going to advance the cause of the kisans.

The long history of agricultural trade liberalisation confirms that it is the monopoly capitalists who are setting the agenda. The struggle of workers and peasants is not just against the BJP. The real enemy we are fighting is the capitalist class, headed by the monopoly houses.

Our immediate task is to defend and further strengthen our fighting unity against our common enemy. The alternative to privatisation and liberalisation is the program for empowering the toiling people and reorienting the economy from fulfilling capitalist greed to fulfilling people's needs. We have to build and strengthen the unity of workers and peasants around this alternative.

History shows that whenever there has been a rise in mass protests by workers and peasants, the opposition parties in parliament work to channel the discontent of the people along a path that is acceptable to the ruling class. They play the role of a safety valve. This danger exists at the present time in the form of those whose aim is to merely replace the BJP with an alternative management team.

MEL: Can you explain how opposition parties in parliament play the role of a safety valve?

Lal Singh: As you know, in a pressure cooker, when the pressure builds up, the safety valve lets out steam. Its role is to prevent the cooker from exploding.

When the Congress Party was formed in 1885, the British rulers considered it to be a safety valve. They were afraid that all the peoples of this subcontinent may once again unite and rise up in rebellion, as they did in 1857. They relied on the Congress Party to wean the people away from the revolutionary road.

The Congress Party was led by representatives of capitalists and landlords who wanted to maintain the exploitative and oppressive system of the British and enhance their own position within it. The British rulers

established a process of electing Indians to provincial assemblies, so that Congress Party leaders could be accommodated in elected bodies and make patriotic speeches there.

Acting like a safety valve is an important function that opposition parties in parliament play in the existing system. They present themselves as the champions of the exploited and oppressed majority, so as to manipulate their struggles and prevent them from becoming a threat to the system.

History provides many examples of how the struggles of workers and peasants have been manipulated by the ruling class. One such example is how the ruling class manipulated the people's struggle during the Emergency regime of 1975-77.

A National Emergency was declared by the Congress Party government headed by Indira Gandhi on 26 June, 1975. Workers, peasants and the vast majority of people were deprived of all democratic rights and civil liberties at one stroke.

It was a time when mass protests by workers and peasants had reached a peak. Lakhs of railway workers had gone on an indefinite strike in 1974, bringing the entire economy to a grinding halt. Mass student protests

were growing across the country. Large numbers of youth had responded to the call of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), formed in 1969, to overthrow the existing State and establish a people's democratic State. The influence of this revolutionary call was spreading not only within the country but also among Indian workers and students abroad.

The main aim behind the declaration of Emergency was to avert the danger of revolution. In the name of safeguarding national security, widespread repression was unleashed against the workers, peasants, all revolutionaries and all critics of the government.

As mass opposition to the emergency regime grew, the opposition parties in parliament launched a movement for defeating the Congress Party and for the "Restoration of Democracy".

In addition to large-scale arrests of union leaders and communist revolutionaries, the Central Government also arrested several prominent politicians of the parliamentary opposition. These included Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Atal Behari Vajpayee, Charan Singh, Lal Krishna Advani, George Fernandez, Laloo Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav. These arrests served to promote these politicians as heroes who were allegedly fighting for the democratic rights of all the people.

What was the result of that so-called movement for restoration of democracy? The bourgeoisie established the Janata Party government in place of the Congress Party government, and continued with its dictatorship. The struggle for revolutionary change got diverted.

Several political personalities who were promoted as champions of democracy during the emergency period ended up subsequently becoming chief ministers. Some became the prime minister of the country. One section of them formed the BJP, which was built up by the ruling class in the 1980s as the principal opposition to the Congress Party.

Both the declaration of emergency and the launching of a movement for “restoration of democracy” were part of the plan of the capitalist class, headed by the monopoly houses. They together served the aim of diverting and dividing the people, thereby preventing revolution and safeguarding the existing system. They served the aim of the ruling class to create a viable alternative to the Congress Party.

One of the factors that helped the bourgeoisie to tide over the revolutionary crisis of the 1975-77 period was the divided state of the communist movement and the conciliation of several parties within it with bourgeois

ideology and politics. The CPI supported the Congress Party and its justification that the Emergency was imposed to fight against right reaction. The CPI(M) joined hands with the parliamentary opposition in the name of restoring democracy.

An important lesson from this entire experience is that the capitalist class rules through a party in power and one or more parties in the opposition within parliament. It rules by cultivating its agents within the organisations of workers and peasants, who create illusions about the existing system of democracy. It rules by repeatedly creating a so-called viable alternative to the party in power, ready to take its place when the time comes.

We must remember what happened in 2004. In spite of the communal massacres and other diabolical diversions organised by the ruling class, the opposition of workers and peasants to the liberalisation and privatisation program had grown to reach a peak at that time. The ruling class responded by using the election of the 14th Lok Sabha to replace the BJP-led government headed by Vajpayee with a Congress-led government headed by Manmohan Singh. The slogan of “India Shining” was replaced by the slogan of “Reforms with a Human Face”.

The developments since 2004 have clearly exposed the truth that the program of the monopoly capitalists is by its very nature anti-worker and anti-peasant. It is anti-national and against the general interests of society. This anti-human program of liberalisation and privatisation cannot be given a human face.

At the present time, Indian and international monopoly capitalists are relying on BJP to continue to exploit the covid crisis to push their anti-people agenda. At the same time, they are aware of the growing mass opposition of workers and peasants to the measures being taken by the present government. They want to prepare for the time when the BJP will no longer be able to deceive the toiling majority of people. They want to groom some credible alternative to the BJP headed by Narendra Modi.

Several opposition politicians and parties are very keen to be selected by the bourgeoisie as the preferred alternative to Modi and BJP. Such politicians and parties have a vested interest in promoting slogans like “Defeat BJP” and “Save Democracy!” They look upon the Kisan Andolan as a stepping stone to achieve their aim of taking the place of BJP in 2024. They are serving the function of diverting workers and peasants from the revolutionary alternative.

MEL: Do you mean to say, comrade, that the present-day call to “Save Democracy” is a dangerous diversion?

Lal Singh: Yes, that is exactly what I mean. Those who are giving this call are serving the ruling class. They are not serving the interests of workers and peasants.

The reality which is staring us in the face is that the Parliament represents the interests of a super-rich minority. It enacts laws which are for the benefit of a few monopoly capitalists and completely against the interests of workers and peasants, who make up the majority of the population. Why should workers and peasants save this system?

In a class divided society, the political system and state institutions will always serve the interest of one class or the other. To talk about democracy in the abstract means to hide this reality.

The present political system is a form of bourgeois democracy. The interests and rights of workers and peasants are subordinate to the will of capitalists. It is a system which is democratic for the bourgeoisie, that is, for those who own property and accumulate their private wealth by exploiting the labour of others. It is a dictatorship for the workers, peasants and other exploited people. Laws

and policies serve the interests of a propertied minority, at the expense of the toiling majority of the population.

Elections are used by the ruling bourgeois class to select a particular management team. The bourgeoisie ensures that only those parties who have a proven track record of loyalty to itself are allowed to capture a majority in parliament.

Elections serve to deceive, divert and divide the people. This is being realised by those who are organising the united struggle of the kisans. Many participants of the Kisan Andolan in Punjab, for instance, have openly expressed their concern that the campaign of rival parties for the state assembly elections in early 2022 would have a negative impact on the unity of their movement.

The call to save this system of democracy is a call of the bourgeoisie. It is a call which opposition parties raise in order to hoodwink workers and peasants and keep them bound hand and foot to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

The existing system of parliamentary democracy is not even made in India. It is made in Britain. The British colonialists implanted this alien system on Indian soil. They used this system to train parties of the Indian big capitalists and big landlords in the art of defending the

exploitative and oppressive system they had established. After independence, the Indian bourgeoisie has adapted this system and further refined it to divide and rule over the people. There is no reason for the Indian people to save this system.

The true patriots and revolutionary fighters against British colonial rule over India upheld the principle that the Indian people must decide what kind of political and economic system should be built once British rule is ended.

The insurgents of 1857 declared, “*Hum hain iske malik, Hindustan humaara!*” (India belongs to us, We are her master!)

Hindustan Ghadar Party, formed in 1913, declared its aim as the complete overthrow of British colonial rule and the establishment of a federal republic of United States of India.

Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his comrades of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association fought to establish a new state committed to the elimination of all forms of exploitation and oppression.

The aim of our revolutionary martyrs was betrayed in 1947. Political power was transferred from London to

Delhi but it did not come into the people's hands. It came into the hands of the big capitalists who were allied with the big landlords. The big capitalists have found it beneficial to preserve and further perfect the State which the British bourgeoisie built to divide and rule over the masses of Indian people.

The call to defend democracy is a call to defend the institutions, theories and values which the British bourgeoisie imposed on us.

Prime Minister Modi talks about models of democracy that existed in ancient India. However, the government he heads manages a political system modelled after the English Westminster system.

Various leaders of BJP pay lip service to *Raj Dharm* or Indian political theory. However, the BJP government violates the fundamental principle of Raj Dharm that the State is duty bound to ensure *sukh* (prosperity) and *raksha* (protection) for all.

While it pretends to uphold Indian philosophy and criticizes the Congress Party for being influenced by western ideas, the BJP follows Anglo-American prescriptions on governance, just like the Congress Party. Modi's slogan of "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance", for instance, is a clear expression of the

so-called free-market ideology promoted by the World Bank, IMF and other imperialist agencies.

Minimum government means that the government should withdraw from its responsibility to ensure adequate food, clothing and other basic necessities for all. It must reduce its role in the economy to a minimum, leaving everything to so-called market forces, which means leaving everything to profit hungry monopoly capitalists. Maximum governance means to increase India's score in the World Bank's Index of the Ease of Doing Business. It means to create suitable conditions for capitalists to reap maximum profits, at the expense of the livelihood and rights of workers and peasants.

The declaration of the insurgents of 1857 that "Hindustan belongs to us and WE are her master" brought forward what is most precious from Indian political thought. This is the concept that it is the people who are sovereign. It is the people who give birth to the State. This is entirely different from the western bourgeois concept of a State which defends private property and the privileged position of a minority of property owners.

That there existed a period in our history when people selected their leader is shown by the word '*praja*', which literally means the one who gives birth to '*raja*'. The right of the people to select their leader was lost when

kingdoms arose in which rights and duties were defined on the basis of the caste of one's birth. The social surplus was appropriated by a minority that was deemed to have been "*born to rule*".

We need to modernise Indian political theory, which means to bring it on par with modern conditions. It is not a king or queen that people must select and elect, but a group of persons to whom they delegate a part of their power, while holding on to the power to recall the one they elected at any time. Those elected must be duty bound to ensure prosperity and protection for all.

Prosperity and protection need to be defined in tune with present day conditions. Human needs include food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe drinking water, electricity and internet connectivity. It is perfectly possible to guarantee these for all, provided capitalist greed is prevented from dominating the economy.

In sum, the task facing the workers, peasants and all progressive forces in the country is not to save the existing system of bourgeois democracy. It is to unite and fight for a superior system of proletarian democracy. We must fight for a system in which sovereignty is vested in the people, in theory and in practice.

MEL: What are the measures which need to be taken to actually ensure secure livelihood and prosperity for all kisans?

Lal Singh: The measures with respect to agriculture have to be seen as part of the measures needed to reorient the entire economic system. What and how much to produce, how much to invest, how many people to employ in different spheres, how much of agricultural products to purchase and at what price are at present being driven by the motive of fulfilling the monopoly capitalist greed for maximum profits. This has to be replaced by the motive of maximising the degree of fulfilment of the material and cultural needs of the entire population.

There is need to continuously raise the standard of living of the entire population. For this we need a big increase in food production. The country needs more houses, schools, hospitals, more cement and steel production, more highways. There will be adequate avenues to employ men and women who want to be employed.

One of the immediate measures is to bring the trade in agricultural products and other essential commodities under social ownership and control.

Sale of agricultural inputs as well as the procurement of all crops must be brought under public control. Central and state government agencies must organise to ensure adequate supply of agricultural inputs at affordable prices. They must also organise the purchase, storage and distribution of the bulk of agricultural produce. The public procurement system must feed into a public distribution system which covers all essential articles of daily consumption.

Once the State becomes the purchaser of the bulk of agricultural products, it will become possible to ensure that all kisans receive at least the Minimum Support Price. It will be possible to narrow the huge gap which exists between the high prices which urban workers pay and the low prices which peasant producers receive for dal, vegetables, oilseeds and other agricultural products.

Kisan unions and other people's organisations in the villages must exercise control over agricultural markets. Workers' unions and various people's organisations in the cities must exercise control over urban retail outlets.

If all these measures are carried out, crores of kisans will have security of livelihood. However, even then, the very poor kisans who operate tiny plots of land will find it difficult to survive. In order to overcome the problem of

uneconomic size of plots, competition among individual kisans needs to be replaced by cooperation.

The central and state governments must encourage and support the creation of cooperatives, starting with trade and progressing towards voluntary pooling of land by the kisans. Collective farms, created by a number of peasants pooling their land, will lead to increased agricultural productivity and rural incomes. The government must extend all possible assistance to empower the collective farms. It must provide modern technology, machinery and technical assistance for free or at low affordable rates.

All these measures can and will be taken provided workers and peasants become the decision-makers. No bourgeois government will implement these measures because they go against the interests of the monopoly capitalists.

We must agitate for the implementation of these measures, knowing very well that the capitalist class will try its best to concede nothing. We must build our strength and fighting capacity, so that the rulers are forced to either concede something or stand totally discredited. In the course of waging this struggle, we workers and peasants must become a powerful force capable of capturing political power.

We, the toiling people, have to take the reins of India's destiny in our hands. Only then can the economic system be reoriented to fulfil the people's needs.

We must wage the immediate struggle with the strategic aim of replacing the existing system of parliamentary democracy, which is a form of bourgeois rule, by a new system of workers' and peasants' democracy.

An important lesson to be learnt from the wise words and brave deeds of the Hindustan Ghadar Party, which was formed in 1913, is that a civilised Indian Republic must respect and protect the rights of every nation, nationality and people who make up India. The existing Republic of the Indian Union and its Constitution do not even recognise the national rights of every constituent of the union, let alone protect them.

Some among the people in Punjab say the times are calling on all Punjabis to unite in the struggle to save Punjab. The fact is that the times are calling on the Punjabis as well as the Tamilians, Bengalis, Biharis, Marathis, Kannadigas, Malayalees, Odiyas, Gujaratis, Haryanvis, Assamese, Manipuris, Nagas and all the other peoples to unite. We are all exploited by the same Indian bourgeoisie. We are oppressed by the same Indian state. It is one struggle, against one common enemy. Workers, peasants, women and youth of all

nationalities need to unite and wage this struggle. Only then can we defeat the class which is ruling today.

To save Punjab we need to save India. We need to save India from the capital-centred economic orientation, the inhuman political power and the anti-social imperialist drive of the monopoly capitalists.

We need to reconstitute the Indian Republic as a free and equal union of all the nations, nationalities and peoples who make up this country. AFSPA, UAPA and all other draconian laws must be immediately repealed. We need to adopt a constitution that vests sovereignty in the people and guarantees the inviolability of human rights and democratic rights.

We need to reorient the foreign policy and international relations of India, from being allied with the strategy of US imperialism into being allied with all anti-imperialist forces, as a factor for peace in South Asia and on the world scale.

In sum, the conditions are crying out for the Navnirman of India, which is the true alternative to the present program of liberalisation and privatisation accompanied by state terrorism.

The day is not far off when we workers, peasants and all the toiling and oppressed people will become the

decision-makers. The establishment of workers' and peasants' rule will open the path for lifting Indian society out of crisis.

So let me conclude on that note, comrade. I am confident that the day is not far off when a new India will be born where we, the people, will be the *maalik*, an India where *sukh* and *raksha* will be guaranteed for all.

MEL: Thank you very much, comrade, for this interesting, enlightening and inspiring interview.

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