

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)

RESOLUTION ADOPTED AT THE ALL INDIA CONVENTION ON PROBLEMS OF DALITS

NEW DELHI – FEBRUARY 22, 2006

1. A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON CASTE OPPRESSION

The thoroughly reactionary varna and caste system has hounded Indian society for thousands of years. India is the only country in the world where such a system came into being and still exists. The varna and caste system was sanctified by Hindu religion and by Vedic scriptures. This was the main reason for its consolidation. The notorious text, Manusmriti, codified the then prevailing social norms and consigned the shudras, atishudras and women to a thoroughly unequal and miserable existence. The distinctiveness of the caste system was that it was hereditary, compulsory and endogamous. The worst affected by the caste system and its social oppression have been the dalits, or atishudras, or scheduled castes. Albeit in a different way, the adivasis or scheduled tribes in India have also faced social oppression over the ages. The stories of Shambuka in the Ramayana and of Ekalavya in the Mahabharata are classic testimonies of the non-egalitarian nature of Hindu society in ancient India.

Along with the curse of untouchability, the dalits had no right to have any property. They had to eat the foulest food, including leftovers thrown away by the higher varnas; they were not allowed to draw water from the common well; they were prohibited from entering temples; they were barred from the right to education and knowledge; they had to perform menial jobs for the higher castes; they were not allowed to use the common burial ground; they were not allowed to live in the main village inhabited by the upper varnas; and they were deprived of ownership rights to land and property, leading to the lack of access to all sources of economic mobility. Thus, dalits were subjected to both social exclusion and economic discrimination over the centuries. In one form or the other, this continues even today in most parts of the country.

As Comrade B.T. Ranadive pointed out “the three powerful class interests, the imperialists, the landlords and bourgeois leadership were acting as the defenders of the caste system, by protecting the landlord

and pre-capitalist land system.” It will be seen from here that the interests of the bourgeois class rested in maintaining the status quo. There has been no basic change in caste system after nearly 60 years of independence after independence as the bourgeoisie compromised with landlordism fostered caste prejudices. After independence also, the basic structure of land relations, overhauling of which would have given a blow to untouchability and the caste system has not been changed.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw great social reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Sri Narayan Guru, Jyothiba Phule, Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker and others. These social reform movements conducted many struggles against the caste system, caste oppression and untouchability in many ways. But, despite the struggles against caste oppression, the social reform movement did not address the crucial issue of radical land reforms. It got delinked from the anti-imperialist struggle. The Congress-led national movement on its part, failed to take up radical social reform measures as part of the freedom movement.

Diametrically opposed to the progressive role of the reform movement was the thoroughly reactionary role on social issues that was played by the RSS and the Sangh Parivar ever since its inception. Apart from its rabid communal ideology, the RSS adopted a Brahmanical stance right from the beginning. With this understanding, the RSS opposed the amendments to the Hindu Code Bill after independence. The BJP's opposition to the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations was also on this basis.

Wherever the BJP is in power in the states, atrocities on Muslims, dalits and adivasis have increased markedly. At the same time in some areas, they sought to pit the poor people belonging to dalits and tribal community against Muslims and Christians. So, the fight against caste oppression and communalism are interlinked.

The experience clearly shows the need to link the fight against caste oppression with the struggle against class exploitation. At the same time, the class struggle must include the struggle for the abolition of the caste system and all forms of social oppression. This is an important part of the democratic revolution.

2. THE CPI (M) ON THE CASTE QUESTION

The CPI(M) Programme updated in 2000 succinctly summarises the caste question as follows: “The bourgeois-landlord system has also failed to put an end to caste oppression. The worst sufferers are the scheduled castes. The dalits are subject to untouchability and other forms of discrimination despite these being declared unlawful. The growing consciousness among the dalits for emancipation is sought to be met with brutal oppression and atrocities. The assertion by the dalits has a democratic content reflecting the aspirations of the most oppressed sections of society. The backward castes have also asserted their rights in a caste-ridden society.

“At the same time a purely caste appeal which seeks to perpetuate caste divisions for the narrow aim of consolidating vote banks and detaching these downtrodden sections from the common democratic movement has also been at work. Many caste leaders and certain leaders of bourgeois political parties seek to utilise the polarisation on caste lines for narrow electoral gains and are hostile to building up the common movement of the oppressed sections of all castes. They ignore the basic class issues of land, wages and fight against landlordism, which is the basis for overthrowing the old order.

“The problem of caste oppression and discrimination has a long history and is deeply rooted in the pre-capitalist social system. The society under capitalist development has compromised with the existing caste system. The Indian bourgeoisie itself fosters caste prejudices. Working class unity presupposes unity against the caste system and the oppression of dalits, since the vast majority of dalits are part of the labouring classes. To fight for the abolition of the caste system and all forms of social oppression through a social reform movement is an important part of the democratic revolution. The fight against caste oppression is interlinked with the struggle against class exploitation.”

The Political Resolution of the 18th Congress of the CPI(M) held in 2005 gives concrete guidance to the Party to take up caste and social issues. In the section titled “Caste Oppression and Dalits”, it says, “The caste system contains both social oppression and class exploitation. The dalits suffer from both types of exploitation in the worst form. 86.25 per cent of the scheduled caste households are landless and 49 per cent of the scheduled castes in the rural areas are agricultural workers. Communists who champion abolition of the caste system, eradication of

untouchability and caste oppression have to be in the forefront in launching struggles against the denial of basic human rights. This struggle has to be combined with the struggle to end the landlord-dominated order which consigns the dalit rural masses to bondage. The issues of land, wages and employment must be taken up to unite different sections of the working people and the non-dalit rural poor must be made conscious of the evils of caste oppression and discrimination by a powerful democratic campaign. There are some dalit organisations and NGOs who seek to foster anti-communist feelings amongst the dalit masses and to detach them from the Left movement. Such sectarian and, in certain cases, foreign-funded activities must be countered and exposed by positively putting forth the Party's stand on caste oppression and making special efforts to draw the dalit masses into common struggles."

In the section titled "Fight Caste Appeal", the Political Resolution says, "The intensification of the caste appeal and fragmentation of the working people on caste lines is a serious challenge to the Left and democratic movement. Taking up caste oppression, forging the common movement of the oppressed of all castes and taking up class issues of common concern must be combined with a bold campaign to highlight the pernicious effects of caste-based politics. The Party should work out concrete tactics in different areas taking into account the caste and class configurations. Electoral exigencies should not come in the way of the Party's independent campaign against caste-based politics. Reservation is no panacea for the problems of caste and class exploitation. But they provide some limited and necessary relief within the existing order. Reservation should be extended to dalit Christians. In the context of the privatisation drive and the shrinkage of jobs in the government and public sector, reservations in the private sector for scheduled castes and tribes should be worked out after wide consultations."

3. THE POSITION OF DALITS IN INDIA TODAY

According to the 2001 census, scheduled castes comprise 16.2 per cent of the total population of India, that is, they number over 17 crore. Scheduled tribes comprise 8.2 per cent of the population, that is, they number over 8 crore. Both together constitute 24.4 per cent of the Indian population, that is, they together number over 25 crore.

The six states that have the highest percentage of scheduled caste population are Punjab (28.9), Himachal Pradesh (24.7), West Bengal

(23.0), Uttar Pradesh (21.1), Haryana (19.3) and Tamil Nadu (19.0). The twelve states that have the largest number of scheduled castes are Uttar Pradesh (351.5 lakhs), West Bengal (184.5 lakhs), Bihar (130.5 lakhs), Andhra Pradesh (123.4 lakhs), Tamil Nadu (118.6 lakhs), Maharashtra (98.8 lakhs), Rajasthan (96.9 lakhs), Madhya Pradesh (91.6 lakhs), Karnataka (85.6 lakhs), Punjab (70.3 lakhs), Orissa (60.8 lakhs) and Haryana (40.9 lakhs).

Almost every socio-economic indicator shows that the position of scheduled caste families is awful. In many cases their plight is getting worse. Let us have a look at some of the major indicators.

LAND: In 1991 70% of the total SC households were landless or near landless (owning less than one acre). This increased to 75% in 2000. In 1991, 13% of the rural SC households were landless. However, in 2000 this saw a decline and was 10%. As per the Agricultural Census of 1995-96, the bottom 61.6% of operational holdings accounted for only 17.2% of the total operated land area. As against this, the top 7.3% of operational holdings accounted for 40.1% of the total operated area. This gives an indication of land concentration in the hands of a few.

FIXED CAPITAL ASSETS: In 2000, about 28 % of SC households in rural areas had acquired some access to fixed capital assets (agricultural land and non-land assets). This was only half compared to 56 % for other non-SC/ST households who had some access to fixed capital assets. In the urban areas, the proportion was 27 % for SCs and 35.5 % for others.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR: In 2000, 49.06 % of the working SC population were agricultural labourers, as compared to 32.69 % for the STs and only 19.66 % for the others. This shows the preponderance of dalits in agricultural labour. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of agricultural labourers in India increased from 7.46 crore to 10.74 crore, and a large proportion of them were dalits. On the other hand, the average number of workdays available to an agricultural labourer slumped from 123 in 1981 to 70 in 2005.

CHILD LABOUR: It is reported that out of the 60 million child labour in India, 40 % come from SC families. Moreover, it is estimated that 80 % of child labour engaged in carpet, matchstick and firecracker industries come from scheduled caste backgrounds. The tanning, colouring and leather processing, lifting dead animals, clearing human excreta, cleaning soiled clothes, collection of waste in slaughter houses

and sale of toddy are some of the hereditary jobs generally pursued by Dalit children.

PER CAPITA INCOME: In 2000, as against the national average of Rs. 4485, the per capita income of SCs was Rs. 3,237. The average weekly wage earning of an SC worker was Rs. 174.50 compared to Rs. 197.05 for other non- SC/ST workers.

POVERTY: In 2000, 35.4 % of the SC population was below the poverty line in rural areas as against 21 % among others ('Others' everywhere means non-SC/ST); in urban areas the gap was larger – 39 % of SC as against only 15 % among others. The largest incidence of poverty in rural areas was among agricultural labour followed by non-agricultural labour, whereas in urban areas the largest incidence of poverty was among casual labour followed by self-employed households. The monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) for all household types was lower for SCs than others.

EMPLOYMENT: In 2000, the unemployment rate based on current daily status was 5 % for SCs as compared to 3.5 % for others in rural and urban areas. The wage labour households accounted for 61.4 % of all SC households in rural areas and 26 % in urban areas, as compared to 25.5 % and 7.45 % for other households.

RESERVATIONS: 15 % and 7.5 % of central government posts are reserved for SCs and STs respectively. For SCs, in Group A, only 10.15 % posts were filled, in Group B it was 12.67 %, in Group C it was 16.15 % and in Group D it was 21.26 %. The figures for STs were even lower, at 2.89 %, 2.68 %, 5.69 % and 6.48 % for the four groups respectively. Of the 544 judges in the High Courts, only 13 were SC and 4 were ST. Among school teachers all over the country, only 6.7 % were SC/STs, while among college and university teachers, only 2.6 % were SC/STs.

EDUCATION: In 2001, the literacy rate among SCs was 54.7 % and among STs it was 47.1 %, as against 68.8 % for others. Among women, the literacy rate for SCs was 41.9 %, for STs it was 34.8 % and for others it was 58.2 %. School attendance was about 10 % less among SC boys than other boys, and about 5 % less among SC girls than other girls. Several studies have observed discrimination against SCs in schools in various forms.

HEALTH: In 2000, the Infant Mortality Rate (child death before the age of 1) in SCs was 83 per 1000 live births as against 61.8 for the others, and the Child Mortality Rate (child death before the age of 5) was 119.3 for 1000 live births as against 82.6 for the others. These high rates among the SCs are closely linked with poverty, low educational status and discrimination in access to health services. In 1999, at least 75 % of SC women suffered from anaemia and more than 70 % SC women's deliveries took place at home. More than 75 % of SC children were

anaemic and more than 50 % suffered from various degrees of malnutrition.

WOMEN: While dalit women share common problems of gender discrimination with their high caste counterparts, they also suffer from problems specific to them. Dalit women are the worst affected and suffer the three forms oppression -- caste, class and gender. As some of the above figures show, these relate to extremely low literacy and education levels, heavy dependence on wage labour, discrimination in employment and wages, heavy concentration in unskilled, low-paid and hazardous manual jobs, violence and sexual exploitation, being the victims of various forms of superstitions (like the devadasi system) etc.

SANITATION: Only 11 % of SC households and 7 % of ST households had access to sanitary facilities as against the national average of 29 %.

ELECTRICITY: Only 28 % of the SC population and 22 % of the ST population were users of electricity as against the national average of 48 %.

ATROCITIES, UNTOUCHABILITY AND DISCRIMINATION:

During 16 years between 1981 to 2000 for which records are available, a total of 3,57,945 cases of crime and atrocities were committed against the SCs. This comes to an annual average of about 22,371 crimes and atrocities per year. The break-up of the atrocities and violence for the year 2000 is as follows: 486 cases of murder, 3298 grievous hurt, 260 of arson, 1034 cases of rape and 18,664 cases of other offences. The practice of untouchability and social discrimination in the matter of use of public water bodies, water taps, temples, tea stalls, restaurants, community bath, roads and other social services continues to be of high magnitude.

4. EFFECT OF LIBERALISATION POLICIES

With the onset of the imperialist-dictated policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation by the ruling classes of our country during the last decade and a half, the problems of dalits, adivasis, other backward castes and the working people as a whole have greatly aggravated. The drive to privatise the public sector has directly hit reservations for the SC/STs. The closure of thousands of mills and factories have rendered lakhs jobless and this has also hit dalits and other backward castes. The ban on recruitment to government and semi-government jobs that has been imposed in several states has also had an adverse effect. The growing commercialisation of education and health has kept innumerable people from both socially and economically backward sections out of these vital sectors. In this background, reservation in private sector has become very important

because the joblessness among the SC and STs has witnessed a steady increase in the recent period.

The most disastrous effects of these policies can be seen in the deep agrarian crisis that has afflicted the rural sector. Rural employment has sharply fallen and this has hit dalits, adivasis and women the most. Mechanisation of agriculture has further compounded the problem. The real wages of agricultural workers, of whom a large proportion are dalits, have fallen in many states. No efforts are made to implement minimum wage legislation even where it exists, and periodic revision of minimum wage is also conspicuous by its absence. The dismantling of the public distribution system has increased hunger to alarming proportions. An overwhelming proportion of the malnutrition-related deaths of thousands of children in several states is from dalit and adivasi families. Thus, the neo-liberal policies have accentuated both the economic as well as the social divide in the country.

5. COMMUNIST STRUGGLES AGAINST CASTE & FEUDAL OPPRESSION

There is no doubt that due to the whole range of alternative policies pursued by the Left-led state governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, the position of dalits and adivasis have markedly improved in these states. But even before the Left came to power in these states, Communist leaders staunchly fought on the issues relating to caste oppression. In Kerala, in the pre-independence period, Communist leaders, while leading class struggles, also led temple entry satyagrahas for the dalits in the teeth of upper caste opposition. In West Bengal, the Communists made conscious attempts in practice to carry forward the rich legacy of the glorious social reform movement in the state. In Tripura, too, the Communists raised the issue of caste oppression as an integral part of the class struggle. In Tamilnadu in East Thanjavur area the struggle led by communists against the class and caste oppression of dalits formed the base for a strong kisan movement.

It was in the great anti-feudal peasant struggles led by the Communists in the 1940s that India for the first time got a glimpse of the possibility of the annihilation of caste and communalism once and for all. Historic struggles like Telangana, Tebhaga, Punnapara Vayalar and others squarely targeted landlordism and imperialism and in this process, they succeeded in forging the unprecedented unity of all toilers, cutting across caste and religious lines. The struggle reached its highest point in

Telangana. Thousands of villages were liberated from landlord rule and actual land redistribution to the landless was carried out. A large number of the beneficiaries of this land reform were dalits and adivasis, who got possession of land for the first time. The remarkable class unity of the peasantry that was forged in this struggle struck the first blows at caste and communal ideology and practice.

In more recent times, the CPI(M) and the mass organisations in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere have been leading a concerted statewide campaign and struggle for the last few years on the issues of untouchability and caste oppression. This is meeting with encouraging public response, with dalits being attracted to the Left.

6. THE POSITION OF DALITS IN LEFT-RULED STATES

The first Communist ministry in Kerala, the Left Front governments in West Bengal and Tripura and the Left Democratic Front regimes in Kerala took up land reforms as their priority task. They combined this by strengthening panchayati raj.

In West Bengal, of the more than 13.81 lakh acres of agricultural land vested in the state, 10.69 lakh acres have been distributed among 26.43 lakh people. The significant feature is that 56 per cent of the beneficiaries belong to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. This is almost double their proportion in the population. Of the land distributed, 4.48 lakh pattas were issued jointly to men and women and 52,000 pattas were meant exclusively for women. It is a creditable record that 18 per cent of the total ceiling surplus land of the country and 20 per cent of the total distributed land of the country is in West Bengal alone.

Besides this, the rights of nearly 15 lakh sharecroppers have been recorded, covering 11.08 lakh acres of land, and 5.44 lakh poor families have been given homestead land. Over 42 per cent of the recorded sharecroppers belonged to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Now nearly 72 per cent of the land in West Bengal is managed by poor and marginal farmers. As a result of land reforms and other measures taken by the Left Front government, agricultural production has increased by 250 per cent and more. Landless agricultural labour has been guaranteed a minimum wage and is provided with work during lean months. A large proportion of the beneficiaries of these measures naturally belong to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In the three-tier panchayat system, the representation of SCs, STs and women

is considerably higher than the reserved quotas in both West Bengal and Tripura. Panchayat Raj institutions in these states are largely controlled by poor peasants and agricultural labourers, unlike in most other parts of the country, where they are in the grip of landlords and rich peasants.

The West Bengal LF government has also initiated a large number of schemes to specifically support dalits and adivasis. Scholarships are provided to 1.1 lakh dalit students and 80,000 adivasi students. 240 hostels for primary and secondary students from the dalit and adivasi communities have been constructed. 32,000 dalit students and 28,000 adivasi students are provided with expenses for living in hostels at the pre-secondary level. An SC/ST Development and Finance Corporation has been established to support poor dalit and adivasi families by providing finance for household-based self-employment schemes. As against the poor national average that we saw above, 26 % of primary teachers and 29 % of secondary teachers in West Bengal come from the scheduled castes. For scheduled tribes, the percentage is 9 and 11 respectively.

The Tripura Left Front government also has a creditable record in the upliftment of the SCs and STs. In 1991, while the overall literacy was 60.44 %, the SC literacy was 56.66 %. The 2001 census figures of literacy are not yet available, but they are expected to show a considerable increase. Female SC literacy doubled from 23.24 % in 1981 to 45.45 % in 1991. A striking feature in the state is that SCs are not confined exclusively to 'Paras' or 'Bastis' like in some other parts of the country. They by and large live and intermingle with each other. There are no bonded labourers among SCs in the state. Provision of minimum wage to agricultural labourers, many of whom are SCs, is stringently implemented. SC families are legally protected against exploitation by money-lenders. Reservations in services, posts and educational institutions are strictly monitored and implemented. All scavengers engaged in carrying night soil by head load were liberated in 1991 itself and special schemes were undertaken for their rehabilitation. In the small state of Tripura, 40,000 SC students are being given pre-matric scholarships by the government. 2000 meritorious SC students are being given the Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Memorial Award each year. The sum of the award ranges from Rs. 400 to Rs. 1500 per annum. 30 hostels for SC boys and girls have been set up. Special schemes have been started for providing housing and medical assistance to SCs. Special development programmes for welfare of SCs are taken up and implemented every three years.

It is as a result of a long process of struggle combined with the above governmental measures, and an intensive ideological campaign by the Party and the Left that untouchability and caste oppression against dalits and adivasis have been reduced to a large extent in West Bengal and Tripura under Left Front rule. Atrocities against dalits and adivasis, which abound in many other parts of the country, are almost unheard of in these two states. Thus, in 2001, at the All India level, there were 33,503 cases of crimes committed against scheduled castes, of which 716 were murders, 1316 were rapes and 400 were abductions. In West Bengal that year, there were only 10 such crimes and in Tripura there were only 2 such crimes. In the same year, at the All India level, there were 6,217 cases of crimes committed against scheduled tribes, of which 167 were murders, 573 were rapes, and 67 were abductions. In West Bengal that year, there were only 2 such crimes and in Tripura there was not a single such crime. All this conclusively shows that it is only a Left alternative that can show the way to ending the age-old scourge of untouchability, caste oppression and social discrimination.

6. IMMEDIATE TASKS

Taking into account the severity of the caste problem, Com. E. M. S. Namboodiripad wrote in 1979, "One has to realize that the building of India on modern democratic and secular lines requires an uncompromising struggle against the caste-based Hindu society and its culture. There is no question of secular democracy, not to speak of socialism, unless the very citadel of India's 'age-old' civilization and culture, the division of society into a hierarchy of castes – is broken. In other words, the struggle for radical democracy and socialism cannot be separated from the struggle against caste society."

On the basis of above understanding the convention calls upon all the units of the Party to take up the social issues as an important task of the Party. Party units should study the position of social oppression in their area and work out the concrete demands to organise campaign and struggles. The mass organisations should take up the specific problems of dalits and organise special campaigns and struggles to achieve their demands.

7. CHARTER OF DEMANDS

This convention sets out the following charter of demands to ensure a better life for the crores of dalits in our country and it calls upon them to join the common movement of all toiling, oppressed and exploited

sections of our country to win these demands and also to effect a radical social, economic and political transformation of our country.

- 1. LAND REFORMS:** The central and state governments must immediately set in motion a process of land reforms whereby land will be redistributed to the landless agricultural labourers and poor peasants gratis. All loopholes in the present laws must be plugged. All schemes to reverse land reform legislation and give away land to multinational corporations and big business houses should be scrapped forthwith.
- 2. RESERVATIONS:** All the backlogs in reserved seats and posts and in promotions for SCs, STs and OBCs must be filled forthwith with special recruitment drives. The three Constitutional amendments made to correct the three OMs issued in 1997 diluting reservations for SCs and STs should be implemented. The pre-1997 vacancies based roster should be restored. A comprehensive legislation covering all aspects of reservation for SCs/STs in employment and education both public and private institutions should be enacted.
- 3. SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN:** Special Component Plan should be properly implemented in all the states with proper allotment of funds according to the population of dalits. A National Commission should be set up to assess the real position of dalits including reservation. The state level commissions should be set up to oversee the implementation of all schemes connected with the SCs including reservation.
- 4. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT:**

Infrastructure development in the scheduled caste areas like road, water, health, culture and other needs has to be given proper importance. When allotting fund for infrastructure development, a separate allotment for scheduled caste areas should be provided.

A comprehensive National Programme of Minor Irrigation for all irrigable but unirrigated lands of SCs and STs through wells, community wells, bore-wells, community bore-wells and tube-wells, bandheras, check-dams, lift, etc., should be immediately undertaken and implemented.
- 5. ROOTING OUT UNTOUCHABILITY:** All forms of untouchability must be rooted out of the country by strengthening the relevant laws, ensuring their strict implementation and most importantly, by launching a mass movement of the people.

- 6. PROTECTION FROM ATROCITIES:** The Central Government should amend and strengthen the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, providing for special courts with judges, investigating officers and public prosecutors unburdened by any other work. Social and economic boycott and blackmail should be included as substantive crimes. Full economic rehabilitation of victims and their survivors must be ensured.
- 7. EMPLOYMENT:** The privatisation drive should be stopped as it leads to loot of national assets, greater unemployment, a curtailment of reservations and also a spurt in corruption. The Central Government should enact a bill to provide reservations in the private sector, which has been a long-standing demand of SCs and STs. Special schemes to provide self-employment to SC youth should be started. The Right to Work should be incorporated as a fundamental right in the Constitution.
- 8. EDUCATION:** The commercialisation of education should be stopped since the massive fee and donation structure of private educational managements is something that socially and economically backward students cannot afford. For this, the central government must increase its own outlay on education to 6 % of the GDP. SC/ST students should be given special scholarships to pursue their studies. The stipends in Social Welfare hostels should be raised and the quality of these hostels improved. Steps should be taken to universalise primary education and expand secondary education. Special measures to curb the drop-out rate among SCs should be undertaken.
- 9. AGRICULTURAL WORKERS:** The Minimum Wages Act for agricultural workers must be stringently implemented throughout the country. A comprehensive bill for agricultural workers is another long-standing demand and it must be enacted without delay. Homestead land must be provided for SCs, STs and agricultural workers.
- 10. RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME:** The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act must be strictly implemented all over the country by involving the people, their mass organisations and the panchayati raj institutions. It should be extended to all districts and also to urban areas of the country.
- 11. PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM:** The public distribution system must be universalised to ensure food to all. Until this is done, BPL ration cards must be issued to all poor families, many of whom are

from SCs and STs. The grain under the BPL scheme should be made available at Antyodaya prices.

- 12. CREDIT:** Agricultural credit to peasants and agricultural workers must be made available at 4 % rate of interest. For SCs and STs in both rural and urban areas, credit facilities should be expanded and the credit given at concessional interest rates.
- 13. BONDED LABOUR AND CHILD LABOUR:** The total liberation and full rehabilitation of bonded labourers must be ensured. The pernicious practice of child labour must be abolished and children properly rehabilitated and educated. Similarly, total liberation and full rehabilitation must be ensured for Safaqui Karmacharis who are engaged in scavenging.
- 14. SCAVENGERS:** Ensure total liberation and full rehabilitation for scavengers (safai karamcharis), ban engagement of contract labour in safai services and other services where SC and ST numerically predominate and instead introduce necessary improvements by involving such Karamcharis; and reactivate the Central Monitoring Committee for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Safai Karamcharis and State, Municipal and District Level communities.
- 15. INTERCASTE MARRIAGES:** Intercaste marriages should be encouraged by giving special subsidized housing and other facilities to married couples immediately after their marriage. We should consciously try to uphold such inter-caste marriages and make them an event of big social participation and sanction.