

**Resolution Adopted
At the National Convention for Food Security
Convened by the
Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of
India, Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Bloc**

This National Convention for Food Security being held in New Delhi on July 1, 2010:

Expresses its deep concern

at the relentless increase in the prices of essential food commodities including wheat, rice, edible oil, sugar, pulses and vegetables which has led to an intensification of deprivation among large sections of the population at a time when global reports show that India continues to have the highest numbers of malnourished and undernourished citizens in the world, the largest numbers of underweight children, anemic women and people who are victims of hunger. India is ranked a low 66 out of 88 countries in the Global Hunger Index

It strongly condemns the unwarranted decision of the Central Government to hike the prices of petroleum products like petrol, diesel, cooking gas and even kerosene which will have a cascading impact on prices and shows the utter arrogance and callousness of the Government to the acute distress caused by food inflation

This Convention supports the call for Bharat Bandh on July 5 against the price hikes in cooking gas, kerosene, petrol and diesel and appeals to people cutting across political lines to support the Bandh call to force the Government to reverse this anti-people decision

Holds that

The policies of the Central Government are in the main responsible for price rise and the attempts to blame State Governments is nothing but a shield by the Central Government to conceal its own utter failures to control prices and reverse its wrong policies

These wrong policies include:

(1) the deliberate weakening of the public distribution system (PDS) and the subsequent erosion of the important role of the PDS to act as a countervailing pressure against high market prices. This is a policy designed to make consumers dependant on the market,

thus putting millions at the mercy of profiteers and black marketeers.

(2) the Government's refusal to restore allocations of foodgrains to the States which have been reduced on an average by 73 per cent in the last five years with some States like Kerala suffering a cut of over 80 per cent. Even though the Central Government has a huge buffer stock of 60 million tonnes, in a most inadequate decision the Government has now decided to release just 3 million additional tonnes of foodgrains to the States in the next six months but at prices which are still higher than the APL prices by 42.7 per cent for rice and 38.52 per cent for wheat. The Government prefers that the foodgrains should rot in the open or be eaten by rats rather than ensure that it be distributed at affordable prices.

(3) permitting future trade in essential commodities including wheat, several varieties of pulses, edible oils, even vegetables like potatoes. The huge increasing volume of trade in futures in commodity exchanges impacts on spot prices by pushing up these prices reflecting naked profiteering, yet the Government has refused to ban future trade in essential food commodities

(4) the administered hikes in the prices of petrol and diesel which have had a cascading impact on the price of other commodities. The Central Government's taxes on petroleum products and diesel constitutes a significant portion of the present price structure of these commodities bringing substantial revenues to the Central Government while the people suffer the impact in increasing prices.

This Convention demands price control measures of food items which are an integral part of any policy which seeks to ensure food security by

(1) strengthening the public distribution system and restoring allocations to State Governments at APL issue prices (2) ban on future trade in essential commodities (3) cut in prices of petrol and diesel (4) strong measures to curb blackmarketing and profiteering in essential commodities

This National Convention on Food Security

Strongly criticizes

the Central Government delay in bringing an effective legislation to ensure food security to our citizens. On the contrary the draft being discussed by the Group of Ministers will lead to food insecurity not food security since it reduces the present allocations, cuts the

numbers of those eligible and virtually scraps the present Antodaya system.

Worse, the present draft by making the system of targeting and division of the population into above poverty line (APL) and below poverty line (BPL) a part of the law, actually legalizes exclusion of vast sections of the poor on the basis of highly dubious definitions of poverty. In that sense this present draft and the conception of food security it represents will be a step backwards and if accepted it will do much more damage than if there was no law at all.

This Convention condemns

the present low level politics going on in the name of poverty estimates and definitions and the bargaining going on as to how many families may be included or excluded as if it is not the lives and futures of millions of people at stake but the price of a commodity in the market place. The issue is not at all whether " at least some more people should be included in the BPL" to keep this or that leader happy, but the entirely unscientific basis of the present exercise. This is further shown in the widely differing estimates of poverty by three officially constituted committees which range from 77 per cent to 50 per cent to 37.5 per cent (for rural India) of the population.

In a country where the vast majority of people are in the unorganized sector with no fixed income and no protection against price rise, when it is estimated by the Government's own Commission on the unorganized sector that 77 per cent of the population have an expenditure level of less than twenty rupees a day, the requirement of a universal system of public distribution to guarantee foodgrains and other essentials at fixed affordable prices is self-evident.

This Convention reiterates

That only a universal public distribution system can guarantee at least minimum food security which means scrapping the present targeted system and divisions of APL and BPL on issues like food, health, education.

It demands

That the Government bring a revised Food Security Bill in the coming session of Parliament with the following minimum features:

1. It should be a universal right

2. It should guarantee at least 35 kg of foodgrains per nuclear family

3. The price of foodgrains must be fixed at two rupees a kilo. The choice should include millets (coarse grains) which are a staple food in many parts of India and are highly nutritious.

4. It must have provisions to ensure food security to pre-school and school going children through a legal guarantee for mid-day meals and allocations for the ICDS

5. It must ensure the inclusion of a range of other essential commodities, at controlled prices as is being done by several State Governments

This Convention

Recognizes the crucial role played by farmers in ensuring food security. It stresses that land reforms and distribution of surplus land to the landless accompanied by requisite allocations for development of that land will give a big boost to food security apart from helping millions of landless to increase their means of livelihood and in this context it condemns the total absence of land reform on the agenda of the central Government

The low growth rate in agriculture reflects the lack of priority given to the development of agriculture and the rights and welfare of the farming community by the Government. This Convention demands a substantial increase in expenditure to build the rural infrastructure, for provision of electricity, irrigation facilities, extension services for the farmers.

The Government's indifferent approach to self-sufficiency in foodgrain production is reflected in its policies to encourage cash crops for export purposes. The recommendations of the Farmers Commission headed by M.S. Swaminathan had made extremely valuable and farmer friendly recommendations to meet the conditions of acute distress facing Indian farmers reflected in the large numbers of farmer suicides, while making recommendations to also ensure food self-sufficiency. However the Government has not implemented those recommendations.

The callousness of the Government is reflected in its cut in fertilizer subsidy by over 3000 crore rupees. The present crisis in seed availability, the huge increase in the price of seeds, the monopolies being established by big seed corporations, the increasing costs of inputs for foodgrain production are making agriculture non-viable for substantial sections of farmers in our country, 70 per cent of whom are small or marginal farmers. These are dangerous portents

of what lies in the future if India has to once again become dependant on expensive imports of foodgrains and be held ransom by powerful food corporates.

This Convention demands a pro-farmer set of policies which will ensure inputs at controlled prices, a fair price for produce, a stronger network of procurement centers, encouragement for production of foodgrains and pulses. It demands a special package for adivasi farmers most of them working on most unproductive plots of land to encourage through fair prices and procurement, the production of millets and coarse grains suited to dry and non-irrigated land.

This Convention resolves to intensify the struggle to reverse the policies of the Central Government which have led to increasing misery of the people, price rise and food insecurity and for an effective food security legislation based on a universal system of public distribution as described above.

This Convention calls for a month long campaign and struggle throughout the month of August starting from the village and block level and in town and city mohallas to take the message to the people. These campaigns may include dharnas, padyataras, jeep jathas, processions, prabhat pheris, demonstrations and gheraos and may be decided at the local and State level.

The call of this Convention is to reach out to the mass of people to assert their rights to food security and control of price rise.

Change Government Policies!

Stop the loot of the poor through price rise!

Scrap Targeting! Stop excluding the poor in the name of APL!

Establish a Universal Public Distribution System

Bring the Stocks out of the Godowns!