NTUI

UNION POWER

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Contents

Gambling on the private sector at the cost of the working class

1 March, 2013, New Delhi: The UPA government is clearly preparing for an election. It has sought to use the Union Budget 2013-14 as an instrument for that advance. There has been a careful attempt to appear to be visibly reaching out across sections of society. In the treachery of its detail the budget hits the working class. The budget while making small money increases in a range of programmes of social provision and protection, offers no programme for job creation or any substantive policy measures to contain inflation that continues to erode the real wage while it commits itself to cash transfers and cuts in subsidies all of which will contribute to further worsening the economic condition of the working class.

The increased tax on the 'super-rich' (incomes of above Rs. 1 crore) and companies is made in the spirit of charity and therefore comes with the promise of being imposed for one year alone. There is no effort to address the long-term 'structural and institutionalised increase in inequality that has come to be built into economic policy over the last decade. There is indeed an increase in taxes on luxuries such as large cars (SUVs). Yet, much of budget making has in fact been taken out of the budget process. In the months preceding this budget government has already put in place a mechanism of reducing subsidies on diesel and cooking fuel (LPG) all in name of fiscal prudence. While so doing, apart from reducing the quantum of subsidised LPG, government has squarely placed the burden on the working class by raising the price of diesel for the railways and state transport services at a rate much higher than for the retail prices. Hence while the increased cost of diesel for bulk goods and public transport is already feeding into the inflationary system by raising the cost of both travel and freight. In contrast the owners of large cars, the tractor owning large farmer and the newly emergent agri-corporation continue to get diesel at a subsidised price. This fundamental inequity cannot be corrected by a one-year tax increase or a 3% increase in the tax on large cars.

What remains unchecked is inflation especially food price inflation, which both the Finance Minister and the Government's Economic Survey 2012-13 released yesterday, confirm, to be still in double digits. Inflation remains unchecked even though the rate of growth of consumption has halved from 8% in 2011-12 to 4% in 2012-13. Rampant inflation has, by the government's own admission, seriously eroded real wages affecting even more the already perilous state of the working class. In addition it augurs poorly for an economy whose growth model is predicated on expanding demand.

The failure after four years in government to legislate a National Food Security Act with universal reach is stark. The budget promises no increase for the PDS (with only an additional Rs. 10,000 crore for administrative costs) signaling that when it legislates it can only be a targeted programme and not a universal one. Furthermore, the budget reaffirmed its commitment to cash transfers which if it replaces provision of food and other basic needs through the PDS it will further inflationary pressures by placing cash in a non-monetary public provision. The inflationary pressure will in turn erode the value of the transfer, making it impossible for the working class to afford what they could under the PDS.

While recognising falling real wages and continuing inflation, government has little to offer the working class. The rates of increase in expenditure in both education and healthcare have only just kept abreast with the rate of inflation. The only promise for social security is to streamline the schemes under various ministries but with no increase in level of fiscal support. The money for the MGNREGS has been frozen at the same level as last year at Rs. 33,300 crores which when in real terms works out to half the real value of the provision in the year 2006-07. The proposal of extending the MNREGA to railway construction also means that government is looking at for reducing its wage bill through the MGNREGA. This in fact would mean a reduction in the number of aggregate jobs available and would create lower wage jobs on government construction projects. This in fact marks the demobilising of employment guarantee.

The budget also lacks provision for regularisation of employees under the ICDS, NRHM, SSA and other programme. The several million employees under the social protection programmes are in fact the only net new jobs, in any sector, that have been created in the last 20 years and the majority of them – Anganwadi workers, ASHAs, ANMs, MDM workers, Para Teachers and such other - who are primarily women who work on honorariums that are way below the legal minimum wage.

In fact the government admits in its Economic Survey that far too many workers are bound to agriculture which cannot sustain them while manufacturing and services are simply not throwing up new jobs. Government, of course, limited by its ideology, sees the lack of skills as the source of the employment gap rather than the failure of capital to create jobs. Agriculture continues to remain in the doldrums with a lack of investment that has caused endemic low productivity. Hence government is left with little choice but to look for ways to promote self-employment through skill development and micro-finance under the National Rural Livelihood Mission without being able to address the vulnerability and unsustainability of self-employment at the bottom of the economy.

While the prospect of new jobs is frozen, government has increased the expenditure or defence equipment by 25% to the tune of Rs. 17,000+ crores or two-thirds the increase in the total health, education and housing spend. The direction of government appears clear that it would rather warmonger in the sub-continent and use the armed forces to put down voices of dissent in the North-East and the Kashmir Valley rather than addressing the causes of dissent.

Government perhaps has little choice but to stoke nationalism since the burden of this growth model has hit both the working- and middle-class. Government seeks to pass the blame for declining rates of growth on to the global economic crisis. Reality is that this government led the integration into the global economy without even addressing the structural constraints of the domestic economy. Not just is the agriculture sector in near permanent regression, the last year - 2011-12 - brought out bottlenecks in the growth of the manufacturing and construction sectors placing excessive reliance on the service sector to maintain the economy on a growth path. This year – 2012-13 – the decline in the real economy has caused deceleration in the expansion of the service sector too. In the absence of an expansion in the real economy the service sector cannot remain evergreen. If India is to regain its rates of growth then it has to address the inherent constraints of private capital in the manufacturing sector.

Nothing exemplifies the structural weakness of the economy as does the external current account deficit (CAD). Even the Finance Minister appears to recognise this. At close to 5% of GDP this is simply unsustainable. In recent years the CAD has been financed primarily by short-term foreign inflows. Export growth has for the most part dried up. Despite the economic slow-down imports have not slowed down. Both oil and gold import growth remains high. Worse still capital goods imports have not slowed down either. The deficit has been further worsened by the spurt in demand for gold that reflects insecurity about the stability of the economy and the resolute lack of confidence in government policy that cuts across class lines. As a result government is dependent on financing the deficit primarily through short-term foreign inflows.

This continued dependence on imports reflects two things: first, the lack of technological capability; and second, the substitution of domestic capital goods by imported capital goods. This latter aspect – substitution of domestic capital goods – largely explains why the domestic capital goods sector has contracted and has become the driver of sharply decelerating manufacturing growth. Therefore increased import competition has dampened both expected corporate profitability and therefore the willingness of the private sector to invest. And no amount of tax-breaks on capital goods expenditure will change that.

Although over some 20+ year industrial production has been restructured in a way that the share of wages halved with a corresponding doubling of the share of profits. This has not translated into a stable expansion in private corporate investment. Large corporates have used continued profitability to successfully reduce their debt-burden and are now cash surplus but are unwilling to invest despite the enormous investment subsidies made available to them. Hence the economy's most stable source of investment has come from the savings of working- and middle-class households that constitute two-thirds of aggregate domestic savings.

In turn government planned capital investment has fallen short in excess of 20%. Government has failed to meet its investment promises ranging from minor irrigation works to heavy industry and infrastructure including electricity and roads. Government has not just been bogged down by charges of corruption, large investment projects have met with resistance since government has failed to address livelihood needs of citizens, most of all the rural proletariat. While government has relied on private sector to drive economic expansion, the private sector has consistently sought to ride on the back of government investment. This is a vicious cycle that government can only hope to change but it lacks the political will to do so.

With the complete collapse of government investment and the withholding of private sector investment beyond household savings, government has placed its reliance on foreign investment. The rush to open up multi-brand retail to foreign direct investment, despite all the averments to the contrary, is driven by this desperation. While government waits for FDI, its followed two roads – first to rapidly increase the short-term borrowings including raising the limits of FII investment in the government bond market. And second to squeeze the public sector. Apart from the veracity of the fact that government indeed disinvested up to the extent of Rs. 16,000 crores in the current quarter (January-March 2013), and coerced the public sector financial institutions, such as the Life Insurance Corporation, into picking up equity in other public sector corporations, it has also extracted another Rs. 5,000 crores in excess of budgetary estimates as dividends from the public sector. What this means is that government has used fiat with public financial institutions, to draw in prudent household savings, into buying discounted public sector equity. It has further jeopardised the public sector's medium- and long-term viability by soaking up its investable surpluses. Furthermore, in the budget year 2013-14 government has relied on an estimate of Rs, 55,000 crores from disinvestment receipts. This budget estimate is more than double the claimed receipts for 2012-13.

The working class is faced with declining real wages, cuts in social provision and their meagre savings for their future being dwindled away to subsidise capital and meet government expenditure while this government, clothed in the political rhetoric of *apka paisa apke haath mein* (placing your money in your hands) is by stealth, committing itself to a neo-liberal road far more than any, itself included, of the past.

National Committee Meeting of NFFPFW
Where: Shramik Disha, Patna
Where: 1-3 March 2013

AFFILIATE REPORT OF GENERAL STRIKE

Large sections of the working class, especially the sections in manufacturing, including those in the large MNCs and public sector banking and insurance joined the two day General Strike along with the vast swathe of workers in the informal sector who gave up two days of their meager wages and supported the strike despite the threat of attack from employers and the government to come down heavily against the strikers. The last minute appeal made by the Prime Minister and the group of ministers to the Central Trade Union Organisations (CTUOs) to withdraw the strike without conceding any of the demands clearly signaled the government's intent to continue on its policy path without addressing the reality of 450 million working people and their families.

NTUI affiliates across the country joined the strike called by the CTUOs ranging from unions of government contract employees such as ANM, ASHAs in Punjab, two lakh anganwadi workers in Maharashtra to over a lakh of construction workers in Tamil Nadu, tea plantation workers in West Bengal, safai workers in Nasik, domestic workers in and around the city of Chennai and Mumbai, to contract workers in public sector undertakings to also those in the private sector including large MNCs and all affiliates in the state of Kerala have once more demonstrated their militant union power to resist capital and government policies in its support.

It was observed in the earlier strikes, that even in the cities and industrial centres where the strike is effective the public demonstrations are for the most part small and insignificant in relation to the number of workers who indeed strike work. Consequently the strike is at best reduced to a day off rather than a display of trade union power. To counter this sit-at-home strike culture, NTUI affiliates, came out across the country to demonstrate their strike power. Rallies and joint trade unions meetings were organized in preparation and also on the days of the strike to ensure participation of members in making the strike effective and vibrant.

In Punjab, ANM and ASHA workers struck work and led massive rallies in Chandigarh, Faridkot and Amritsar on 20 February and in Ropar on 21 February.

Pragatisheel Cement Shamik Sangh (PCSS) and Jan Adharit Engineering Mazdoor Union (JAEMU) joined the strike in Bhilai and Urla (Raipur) industrial areas. In Bhilai, the union distributed pamphlets on 20 February and struck work in the Bhilai industrial area on the 21 February. The AICCTU and TUCI joined the PCSS and JAEMU in the public meeting in Bhilai.

The Kerala state council organized preparatory trade union conventions in Trivandrum on 10 February and in Cochin on 14 February that was attended by representatives from 14 districts of the state. Rallies and meetings were organized at district level in Trivandrum, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Ernakulam and Alappuzha.

In Tamil Nadu, the Working People Trade Union Council (WPTUC) affiliates led a successful two day strike at the Ashok Leyland plants in Hosur and Ennore and a one day strike on 20 Feb in the Simpson Group of Industries, Rane Group of Industries, Ucal Group in both Chennai and Pondicherry, in Lakshmi Group of Industries and Mahi Engineering in Coimbatore as well as in MNCs including Alstom, and at the Valeo plant among others in Tamil Nadu.

Over 500 women members of Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam (PTS) and Garment and Fashion Workers Union (GAFWU) along with Tamil Manila Kattida Thozhilalargal Sangam (TMKTS) demonstrated before the Chennai District Collectors' Office demanding an increase in the minimum monthly wages for garment workers, immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee into Domestic Workers Minimum Wages and increase in wages of rural workers. The common demand of the women workers from different sectors was that for the implementation of the Vishaka Guidelines and settling sexual harassment cases within 90 days and ensuring protection to victims. They also demanded extension of ESI to all garment workers, pensions to women workers registered with the TN Construction Workers' Welfare Board.

In Gujarat, the Chemical Mazdoor Panchayat (CMP) joined other unions to strike work at Apollo industries, FAG bearings, Jord Engineers, Manikchand, Shankar Packaging, Shiv Packaging, Cema lighting in Waghodia industrial area, Munjal Auto and 20 Microns in Baroda, Miranda Tools and Miranda FEW tools in Ankleshwar, powerloom units in Surat. The CMP too joined the joint trade union meetings and demonstrations in Surat, Baroda and Ahmedabad.

All garment factories in Bangalore remained shut – the Garment and Textile Workers Union (GATWU) led demonstrations before factories across the city.

In the public sector: At Balmer Lawrie in Mumbai the strike was complete. Both permanent and contract workers at the Cochin Shipyard led a complete strike too. In Jharkahnd, at the Bokaro Steel Plant and in the Uranium Corporation of India mines, in the departments where contract workers are members of the Jharkhand Krantikari Mazdoor Union (JKMU) the strike was total.

In Maharashtra, all members of the Blue Star Workers Union, Voltas Workers Union, the Sarva Shramik Sangh, DHL Employees Union, Kamani Employees Union, Siemens Workers Union were among those who struck work on both days amidst the opposition to the strike in the state.

Despite the ominous warning issued by the Government of West Bengal, the All West Bengal Sales Representatives Union (AWBSRU) members in pharmaceutical companies including large MNCs, public sector, and in small enterprises struck work in all districts in West Bengal. Sales representaives in the MNCs – Abbott, Ranbaxy (Daiichi), and Novartis joined the strike as well as those in large Indian companies Cadilla, Zydus Cadilla, Torrent and Sun. AWBSRU along with other unions participated in rallies in Tamluk and Malda.

The Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (PBKMS) members began their preparation for the strike by organizing the NREGA Day of Protest on 1 Feb demanding inflation indexed minimum wages for rural workers. This was followed by deputations to government officials in 30 blocks in 6 districts. Members of the Hosiery Workers Unity Centre joined the strike in Kolkata. Brick kiln workers struck work in large numbers in Hasnabad and Mohanpur in N 24 Parganas. The strike in the tea industry this time was very effective.

The Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (PBCSKU) as part of the Coordination Committee of Trade Unions participated in the joint trade union conventions in Malbazar, Kalchini, Jalpaiguri and Siliguri and also joined the joint TU Rallies organized by the Coordination of Trade Unions in Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Malbazar in large numbers on 18 Feb and 19 February in preaparation for the strike and successfully struck work for two day in the plantations in Dooars and Terai regions.

Messages of solidarity from abroad for the strike were received from the membership of the Pakistan Labour Federation - Pakistan, the KMU - Philippines, CUT and CNM-CUT– Brazil, PAME – Greece, CGIL-Italy, CGT –France, First Union - New Zealand and the Coordination of the Initiative for a Left Trade-Union Network - Germany. At many strike locations these messages were read out in translation.

Despite this massive participation in the strike of the militant section of the working class, the two day strike call was uneven. In many industrial and urban centres the strike was ineffective as the call failed to reach the vast millions in the informal sector, including the ever increasing number of contract workers. In many industrial centres, even where employment is dominated by the public sector, the strike had no impact. In some section of the public sector and even the private sector, unfortunately, the strike action was at best a form of tokenism. A large section of the trade union refrained from joining the strike in fear of both retaliation as well as of losing two days of wages. With both railways, most public road transport workers and airlines staying out of the strike, public transport was not affected. Except in small pockets of militancy the strike did not reach the countryside. The left front affiliated trade unions decided to curtail the strike to a one day call in West Bengal using the pretext of celebrating the International Day of Mother Language. It is important at this critical juncture to deepen and democratise the unity of the trade unions beyond the national level and prepare for a strike that displays union power. A nation wide strike that strikes at the core of capital and tells a complicit government to protect the of the working class.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

Centre, states divided on Food Security Bill: *New Delhi, 14 February 2013:* While Tamil Nadu sought exemption from the bill, Bihar, Orissa, Punjab and Gujarat wanted the government to modernise the public distribution system (PDS) before implementing the proposed Food Security legislation. States like Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh wanted universal PDS, Orissa, Kerala and Bihar said the quantity of 5 kg grain per person per month suggested by the parliamentary panel was not sufficient.

The bill introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2011 and sent to a Parliamentary Standing Committee, had initially suggested 7 kg of foodgrain per person a month with rice, wheat and coarse grains at Rs. 3, Rs. 2 and Re. 1 per kg respectively. The Parliamentary standing committee has however suggested reduction of the entitlement to 5 kg grain at the same rates to 75 percentage of population in rural areas and 50 percentage in urban areas at the national level as a single category with uniform entitlement.

NEWS UPDATES

All India day of protest in solidarity with Maruti Workers Union: *New Delhi, 5 February 2013:* An All India Day of Protest was organized across the country in solidarity with the struggle of the Maruti workers against the continued repression of the workers by Suzuki along with the Haryana Government. 147 workers of Maruti remain under arrest and have not been provided bail since July 2012, 66 more have non-bailable arrest warrants against them, 546 permanent and 1800 contract workers have been terminated and not yet reinstated, and continue to face continued police repression.

Militant rallies, sit-in protests, demonstrations, meetings and press conferences were organized jointly in support of Maruti Suzuki Workers Union in different areas in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Jaipur, Ranchi, Patna and Indore, in Ahmedabad and Baroda in Gujarat, in Pondicherry, in Hosur and Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu, in Raipur and Bhillai in Chhattisgarh, in Rudrapur, Haldwani, Haridwar, Ramnagar in Uttrakhand, in Ludhiana, Barnala, Jagraon and Nawanshehar in Punjab, in Lucknow and Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, and in Kaithal, Kurukshetra, Jind and Ambala in Haryana.

Rs 1 lakh for Maruti Workers Struggle Fund

Mumbai affiliates of the NTUI collected over Rs 1 lakh from its membership and others as solidarity collection for the Maruti Suzuki Manesar struggle fund. On 5 February, they held a hall meeting, followed by a press conference, of over 500 people in Dadar attended by Mahavir Dhiman and collected Rs 26,500 in cash. In addition to this the Indian Airports Employees Union paid Rs 30,000, the Blue Star Workers Union collected Rs. 20,000 and the Siemens Workers Union collected Rs 3000.

On 27 February, Com. N Vasudevan met with Maruti workers union representatives in Guragon and handed over the second instalment of Rs. 50,000.

National trade union centres - AITUC, CITU, AICCTU, UTUC, TUCI, AIFTU(New), NTUI, IFTU, and ICTU - organised and participated in the solidarity actions demanding an independent impartial probe into the incident of 18 July 2012 and the role of the management in it; Immediate release of all 147 arrested workers and of Imaan Khan arrested on 24 January 2013; a stop to arrests and police harassment of workers and their families.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

60,000 workers unite and march through Mexico City: *31 January 2013:* About 60,000 workers marched on the streets of Mexico City on 31 January 2013 denouncing the ruling of the Supreme Court on 30 January against the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union (SME) in violation of national labour legislation.

All democratic national unions in Mexico joined the unified action on the Global Days of Action for workers' rights in Mexico on 18-24 February 2013 including a joint press conference, a public meeting, a solidarity caravan, a commemoration silent march in memory of the 65 miners killed at Pasta de Conchos on 19 February 2006, and a march through the capital city.

Workers fight against closure of factories and for the restoration of their jobs: *3 February 2013:* Two leading garment export factories - Joe's Fashion located in Korangi Industrial Area in Karachi and M&J in the Karachi Export Processing Zone – owned by the same owner were closed down illegally last month. Over 5000 worker lost their jobs, most of them have worked in these factories for between 18 to 30 years. The workers formed a joint action committee and along with the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) organised a protest rally on 4 February 2013. Hundreds of workers, mostly women, joined the rally and demanded that the brands take responsibility of such arbitrary actions taken by factory owners.

PRESS STATEMENTS

Holcim commits homicide again

New Delhi, 1 February 2013: An accident at the Balodabazar, Chhattisgarh, cement plant of Ambuja Cement Limited owned by the Swiss Multinational Corporation Holcim, has resulted in the death of 5 workers yesterday at noon. Five workers, which included two apprentices, two permanent workers and a contract worker were killed when the fly ash hopper at the fifth level of the plant collapsed, with the workers trapped under the debris. There are also reports that several workers have been injured. The media and family members of the dead and missing workers were not allowed inside the plant, hence it is not possible to say how many workers are injured and what if any treatment they have received.

The collapse of the fly ash hopper raises serious questions of the company's safety standards in the plant. Workers in the plant confirmed that the fly ash hopper was in a dilapidated condition and had been sealed by the District Collector during a raid some months back. Further, workers also confirm that at the time of the accident the hopper was carrying well over its capacity of 170 tonnes, thereby grossly violating basic safety procedures and standards.

Safety lapses were just not limited to the machinery. The plant does not have a fire clearance and does not have trained rescue personnel to deal with the accident. At the time of the accident, trained personnel had to be called from the nearby plant of UltraTech Cement for rescue. As per media reports, the District Collector and Superintendent of Police visited the plant after the accident, but refused to meet with or take telephone calls from family members of workers or journalists.

An earlier accident in August 2010, at another Holcim controlled ACC Limited cement plant at Jamul, Chhattisgarh, had also led to the death of two workers, when molten coal was suddenly released and fell on the workers who were working on a jammed coal hopper, leading to the fatalities.

Pragatisheel Cement Shramik Sangh (PCSS) has repeatedly bought Holcim management's attention to its negligence of safety protocols and absence of emergency facilities and procedures in place to deal with industrial accidents at cement plants. The higher profits of Holcim correspond with low costs of production where safety standards are compromised leading to loss of lives and also lower labour costs, where in workers have been fighting a legal battle for regularisation. The sole driver for profits in Holcim appears to be to keep wage costs down. For 20 years now, even after a Bilaspur High Court order to regularise contract workers in the plant, the struggle of the workers goes on.

The NTUI stands in solidarity with the workers and the families of the deceased workers and demand:

- The Chattisgarh Police and Chief Inspector Factories, Chattisgarh must immediately lodge FIR's against the management of Holcim owned Ambuja Cement Limited, including the Chairman Mr. N. S. Sekhsaria, the Deputy Chairman Mr. Paul Hugentobler, and the Managing Director, Mr. Onne van der Weijde, must be held criminally culpable and liable for the deaths of the five workers and for the injuries of all the workers involved in the accident on 31 January 2013.

- Holcim management should bear the financial costs of all workers' medical expenses, full compensation for workers' inability to work due to injury and debilitating illness caused due to injury, and compensation to the family of the deceased due to loss of family income.

- The Government of Chattisgarh under the supervision of Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes must ensure that a safety audit is conducted at the earliest, done in compliance with public authority and under public scrutiny, observing highest standards of transparency and accountability and with participation of the union, Pragatisheel Cement Shramik Sangh.

A Vengeful State Executes Afzal Guru

New Delhi, 9 February 2013: Within three months of the execution of Mumbai attack convict Mohammed Ajmal Amir Kasab, Afzal Guru was executed this morning in yet another secret operation in which citizens of the largest democracy were kept in the dark. Government did not even think is necessary to inform the citizen - Afzal's wife Tabassum who filed the petition. Afzal Guru's conviction in the 2001 terror attack on the Indian Parliament was based neither on hard evidence nor on a fair trial and as the judgement said, to satisfy the 'collective conscience of the society'. The fact that Mohammad Afzal Guru was established as a conspirator was based on weak circumstantial evidence, and a confessional statement by him extracted by a repressive and coercive police enquiry, that was not even accepted in court, clearly indicating a judicial sanction of mob justice. Further, with the petition pending in the Supreme Court that challenged a death sentence if not implemented within a specified period of time be commutated to a life sentence, the hurried execution of Afzal reflects the vengeful will of the executive that even denied him natural justice under the laws of the land.

Democratic traditions in India takes pride in the fact that presidential pardon is a part of our constitution and an integral part of our criminal justice system. We recognise that the legal effect of the pardon is not a judicial suppression of a sentence but an decision of the executive in the interest of society at large, and not just a bloodthirsty section of the political class.

The issue of Afzal's clemency has come to being closely linked to the aspiration of the peoples of Kashmir. The imposition of an indefinite curfew, in Kashmir from this morning, marks the next phase of the brutal suppression of the democratic rights of the peoples of the Kashmir valley. This and the burial of Afzal by stealth within the precincts of Delhi's Tihar Jail is ample reflection of government's clear understanding of the wider social and political consequences of its action. This morning's hanging is an attempt by a desperate government in an effort to stoke majoritarian opinion in its favour. Fearing consolidation of majoritarian opinion even the parliamentary left parties have opportunistically acquiesced to it by their virtual silence.

The NTUI opposes all forms of terror, including that unleashed by the state. We also believe that there must be adequate punishment of the guilty, as established by due process of law. Terror affects working people more than anyone else. Any threat to democracy and disruption of social life first affects workers and their livelihood. It also threatens the solidarity of the working class, for it opens up and deepens the inequality within the working class. It on the one hand allows capital to weaken the strength of the working class movement and on the other helps the state to contain and put down democratic dissent.

The NTUI is also opposed to the death penalty, as it does not amount to justice in a civilised humane society. Death penalty cannot be used as retribution — it is the ultimate denial of human rights. Political differences including the assertion of the people's right to self determination cannot be settled through retribution. There is also no evidence to suggest that death penalty serves as a deterrent to heinous crimes and terrorism.

The execution of Mohammad Afzal Guru will have far-reaching consequences for the secular fabric of the country, the possibilities of a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute, and the ability to address concerns of terrorism in the country. To the largest democracy in the world, killing one man has today become more important than the institutions of justice, the values of a democratic society and peace in the subcontinent.

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