

An exchange of letters concerning the state repression of India's Telangana agitation

16 March 2010

The WSWs received a letter criticizing our opposition to the deployment of specialized paramilitary police on the campus of Osmania University in Hyderabad, the capital of the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Below, we are publishing the letter, followed by a reply from Kranti Kumara, the author of the Feb. 25 article, "Indian Supreme Court sanctions police occupation of university campus."

Greetings. I am keenly following the current movement for a separate Telangana state from the existing Andhra Pradesh of India. I am afraid your article may present a wrong picture because you have analysed the police presence in the Osmania University in isolation.

This movement is not a democratic movement of the people. In my view and as per the gist of an earlier article, it is a rivalry between the bourgeoisie of both the regions, both of whom are intensively interested in the highly advanced capital city of Hyderabad, lying in Telangana, that has maximum employment potential in the state. They exploited the discontent and feeling of uncertainty among sections of students and youth in Telangana promising "preferential hiring and other policies that will benefit them over persons hailing from other parts of Andhra Pradesh and other Indian states" as stated in your article. For the same reason the youth of the rest of the state reacted. The agitation in both regions since the beginning of the last December has been violent and scary with high vandalism, destruction and disruption of civic life with several forced general strikes (called *bandhs*).

Police had not responded adequately against the political leaders who instigated the youth. Under government direction, police withdrew criminal cases against the top leaders, but the instigated students have suffered due to the criminal cases.

The February 14 incident is an extreme aberration with no leadership. On earlier occasions, police had been lenient especially to the political leaders who instigated and ordered the incidents. However, the situation that arose out of the students' threat to lay siege on the State Assembly by tens of thousands of students and prevent the presenting of the Annual Budget has been dealt with by the Police with great restraint with least possible damage or injury in spite of the students using intelligent guerilla tactics to surprise, confuse and mislead the Police during their announced march from the University to the Assembly premises. They deployed several hundreds of students as back up, at various strategic points who got into action when one procession failed and finally tried to attack the Assembly premises from the rear when most of the security arrangements were made at the front. Their psychological tactics to frustrate the security forces were remarkable. To me it appeared that there are militant masterminds who advised and prepared the students in this operation. Finally the State Budget was presented unhindered.

The physical layout of the University is worth studying. It is not a secure and restricted campus. A long thoroughfare passes through the University for the general public to pass between two major localities of the city. City

buses and private vehicles pass through without checks routinely. It does not make much sense in expecting permission from the Vice Chancellor for the Police to enter. Though there is no proof announced, there are enough indicators that the Maoists through their emissaries have shown excess interest in the current student movement. The massive student meeting held on January 5th apparently supported by Maoist backed student union PDSU did not have the participation of ABVP, the BJP backed union. ABVP held its own meeting later.

I look for balanced analysis from you to help build unity among the students and working people of both the regions of the State and fight to resolve the real problems people are facing.

With warm regards,

JP

Dear JP,

As Marxists, we are strongly committed to preserving and expanding democratic rights—rights that have been won historically through protracted political struggles.

You criticize our opposition to the mobilization of thousands of armed paramilitary police on the Osmania University campus to suppress the ongoing agitation for the creation of a separate federal state in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh by citing the reactionary and exclusivist character of the Telangana agitation.

As you note in your letter, the WSWs has opposed the Telangana agitation (as well as the counter "united Andhra" movement). We have explained that a section of the Telangana business and political elite are exploiting the popular anger born of poverty, economic insecurity and mounting social inequality to press for a reshuffling of the internal boundaries of India, so that they can harness government patronage and cut better deals with domestic and international capital. (See for example: "India: Move to create new state in Telangana provokes political crisis")

But this does not mean that we are indifferent to how the Indian state deals with this movement and to the fate of the students and others who have been caught up in it.

The Indian state—its government, judiciary and police—have a long record of both brutal repression of popular movements and connivance with Hindu communalists. If the Congress Party-led state government of Andhra Pradesh is suppressing the Telangana agitation, it is not because it cuts across the class unity of India's workers and toilers, but because the agitation, by disrupting commercial activity in India's fifth most populous city, has become a threat to the profits of IT and IT-enabled companies and other major businesses.

The deployment of paramilitary police, including specialized units trained to wage counter-insurgency operations, on a university campus in the heart of a major city and on completely unsubstantiated claims of a risk of terrorist violence sets a deeply reactionary precedent. If not

forthrightly opposed by Indian workers and all organizations that uphold civil liberties, this precedent will be invoked by future governments to justify the repression of student and worker struggles—above all those that advance a socialist perspective.

While you claim that the police and paramilitaries acted with great restraint, the Andhra Pradesh High Court issued a damning indictment of the violence they meted out to students and journalists and ordered the Andhra government to withdraw them.

That is what prompted the Congress Party-led Andhra government to petition the Supreme Court to stay the High Court ruling and thereby allow the continued deployment of the paramilitaries. The Supreme Court did this, although the government failed to provide an iota of evidence to support its claim that Naxalites (Maoist guerrillas) are involved in the agitation at Osmania University. Said the state's counsel, "We have a strong *perception*" that Maoists have infiltrated the university and are creating trouble." [Emphasis added]

Both the Indian government and various state governments, including those of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, and Chhattisgarh, have committed atrocious crimes against tribal and other indigent people including arbitrary killing, torture, land seizure and other human rights violations all under the guise of fighting Naxalites.

Even India's Supreme Court has had to concede that Indian governments and security forces are using charges of Naxalism to justify and cover up human rights abuses.

Just two days after a Supreme Court bench had sanctioned the continued deployment of paramilitary police by the Andhra Pradesh government at Osmania University, a different bench of the Supreme Court reprimanded the Chhattisgarh government for attempting to rubbish a complaint filed by human rights organizations by charging they were in cahoots with the Naxalites. The complainants were demanding the exhumation of 10 tribal villagers who had been murdered by the police.

Addressing the government counsel, the bench said, "First you say they are Naxals, then you say they are sympathisers, then you say they are sympathisers of sympathisers... Why all these innuendos?"

"Don't keep bringing this Naxal issue. The only issue before this court is whether any such incident has happened or not."

The fact that the retrograde Naxalite movement has garnered significant support among the tribals, who are amongst the poorest of the poor, is directly attributable to their exploitation and brutalization over decades by the Indian state and bourgeoisie.

In a fashion similar to the way that Washington utilizes the bogus "war on terror" as a smokescreen for the most predatory imperialist policies, so do governments in India utilize anti-Naxalism and terrorist acts by Islamic groups to pursue deeply reactionary aims.

The current military offensive of the Indian government against the Naxalites (Operation Green Hunt) is, as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has himself more or less conceded, nothing other than an attempt to seize mineral rich tribal lands on behalf of domestic and international corporations. It is also aimed at creating an atmosphere of fear and menace in order to curtail democratic rights.

There may well be Naxalite sympathizers and even members of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) participating in the Telangana agitation at Osmania University. (In the name of completing the democratic revolution, the CPI (Maoist) supports all manner of ethno-linguistic and regionalist movements.) This, however, in no way justifies the mobilization of counter-insurgency troops in the center of Hyderabad and the mounting of a state terror campaign against agitating students. The Indian and Andhra Pradesh state government are equating political sympathizers and the constitutionally-protected promotion of political views with armed guerrillas and insurgency. This is done for no other reason than to suppress the Telangana agitation by force.

Unfortunately, in your letter you adapt to this rightwing amalgam, depicting acts of mass civil disobedience and militant protest as guerrilla-like.

The Indian bourgeoisie and its traditional party of government, the Congress Party, bear primary responsibility for the current political crisis in Telangana.

The Telangana agitation is the product of the social deprivation produced by six decades of independent bourgeois rule and of the foul communal, caste-ist and regional politics promoted by the ruling elite as a means of diverting and neutralizing social discontent.

There is no doubt that a minority of the corrupt politicians and businessmen have monopolized the wealth of Andhra Pradesh. Both the state's peasants and workers have had to bear the brunt of the neo-liberal policies that were ruthlessly implemented in the state under the direction of the World Bank in the 1990s.

It was the Congress Party led UPA government that last December gave its green light for a separate state in Telangana with Hyderabad as its capital. It later backtracked after coming under sustained criticism from the news media and after having suffered a political debacle in the state in the form of the threatened mass resignation of its own state Assemblymen.

The Congress Party has long played a duplicitous role, adapting to and consorting with the Hindu right, and utilizing reactionary movements for its own short-term political gains. Such duplicity spectacularly backfired on it during the "Khalistan" movement headed by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a movement which was initially encouraged by Indira Gandhi so as to undercut another more moderate Sikh-based party.

In direct opposition to the divisive and pro-capitalist politics peddled by the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) and other advocates of Telangana statehood, the WWS and its supporters in India fight to unite the working class on a socialist and internationalist program. Linguistic, regional, caste and communal divisions will only be overcome and the genuine equality among the myriad peoples of South Asia forged through the overthrow of the Indian bourgeoisie and the profit system.

Kranti Kumara



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