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India

# Condemn the State Terror in Lalgarh

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**Lalgarh is invaded. Lalgarh is bloody. In the name of stopping Maoist activities, the combined forces acting on behalf of the Indian state have declared war on the people with such alacrity, and have established a nightmare of terrorism in village after village, that words fail us in our attempt to condemn them.**

We believe that in the name of tackling the Maoists, the government is seeking to negate the legitimate demands [1] of the Lalgarh movement, and at the same time to annihilate that movement and its leading organization, the Peoples' Committee Against Police Atrocities (Polisi Sontras Birodhi Janaganer Committee). In this context, we want to remind the government that for the so-called "decline of the law and order situation" in Lalgarh, [2] the state and the central governments are both responsible. The people of that region have been compelled to take the path of protest and resistance because of the long years of ill-treatment, exploitation as well as the recent spate of police tortures.

Had the least alacrity comparable to that which is being displayed to establish the "rule of Law" been shown in improving the quality of life of the people of Lalgarh, then there would have been no question of civil disobedience. The immense funds that are going today to discipline insubordinate masses, had they been spent in order to supply drinking water, water for irrigation, or to set up primary schools or health centres in the Lalgarh area, then people would not have been compelled to engage in a rebellion as they have done today, and the "cause" of unleashing the current ferocious military operation would not have arisen. If the billions of rupees that are wasted in order to provide security for ministers, bureaucrats and members of parliament had instead been spent in order to provide minimum comfort for the masses of common people, then the security of the bigwigs would not have been disturbed at all.

While the basic security needs of the people of India today call for food, clothing and housing for all, the Prime Minister of the country declares (and all the parliamentary parties lend their voices to the chorus) that the Maoists are the principal security threat. This lays bare their mentality, and the nature of will and sincerity behind their plans.

We demand the revocation of the ban on the CPI(Maoist) [3] by the Union Government. We simultaneously demand that the state government must not apply the ban order. We also oppose the demand being made from certain quarters, including the Trinamool Congress, [4] that the concerned area should be declared a "Disturbed area". We believe such authoritarian steps will restrict the scope of democracy and further complicate the situation, while easing the path of establishing the reign of the police over the broad masses.

Alongside this, we declare unhesitatingly that we can in no way approve of certain types of incidents being caused by the Maoists in the name of establishing the right of the people or waging the peoples' emancipatory struggles – deeds such as the killing of individuals, passing "death penalties" through, or in the name of, peoples' courts, causing landmine explosions, killing, beating up members and sympathizers of opponent political parties and threatening or terrorising their family members, obtaining bonds from them, and so on. In our opinion, such activities give rise to an anti-democratic political culture, they trample underfoot human feelings, harm the possibility of widest mobilizations for the peoples' legitimate struggles, lower reliance on the people's own fighting power, and at the same time they hand over to the state power an excuse to repress the legitimate struggles of the people. All this has indeed happened this time.

With grave concern, we have noted that though the PCAPA has repeatedly announced that it is not a Maoist organization and that it does not acknowledge responsibility for the activities of the Maoists, still the PCAPA leadership has failed to fully dissociate itself from such activities. In a few cases, referring to the plea of "peoples'

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anger”, they have protected such activities. While expressing our solidarity with the Lalgarh movement, we appeal to the PCAPA to reconsider this issue.

At the end, we demand from the government that it must move away from its strategy of repressing mass struggles and silencing the language of anger and resistance by the power of its guns. At the same time, we demand that the government must respect the anger and the spirit of protest of the people of the region, sit down to negotiate with all concerned forces including their representative organizations, and accept their legitimate demands.

We appeal to the people to join protests and resistance campaigns against the barbaric muscle-flexing by the state against the fighting people. Let us unite to demand:

- \* Immediately halt the military expedition to Lalgarh
  
- \* Stop repression and harassment in the villages on all the people, including women and children
  
- \* Accept the legitimate demands of the people of Lalgarh area
  
- \* Negotiate with the Peoples' Committee Against Police Atrocities
  
- \* Rescind the ban on the CPI (Maoist)
  
- \* Unconditionally release all those arrested on the charge of, or suspected of, being Maoists
  
- \* Make public the amount of public money squandered by the state in the Operation Lalgarh

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Protibadi Udyog, Mazdoor Mukti Committee, Radical Socialist, Sramajeevi Samiti, and Prosit Das, Jogin, Kaustav De, P.R. Ghosh [\[5\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) The Lalgarh movement began in November 2008. A Maoist landmine blast took place when a fleet of cars were carrying the Chief Minister of West Bengal, several other state and central government ministers, and other dignitaries. The occasion was the inauguration of the Jindal Steel Plant. The police immediately swung into action. They needed to produce scapegoats. Adivasis (“tribals”) of nearby areas provided the convenient supply. There were days of brutal repression and random arrests. Among the first to be arrested were three teenage students, Aben Murmu, Gautam Patra and Buddhadeb Patra, who were returning from a village festival during the night. They were charged with sundry charges including waging war against the state, conspiracy, attempt to murder, using dangerous weapons and obstructing justice. Then, on November 4, police arrested Dipak Pratihar of Kantapahari village, and when his wife Lakshmi, who was pregnant, interceded, police also beat her up brutally. She had to be hospitalized. The officer in charge of the Lalgarh Police Station, Sandeep Sinha Roy, and the Superintendent of the district Police, Rajesh Singh, unleashed a reign of terror in 35 villages. Raids were conducted throughout the evening of November 6. Numerous women were brutally kicked and beaten up with batons. Among the injured, Chitamani Murmu lost the use of one eye. Reacting to this police brutality, a mass resistance struggle developed.

The adivasis of India are one of the most oppressed and downtrodden groups of people in the country. The demands of the adivasis were so “earthy” and original that the administration did not know how to respond. The demands were that the superintendent of police Rajesh Singh

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should publicly apologize by holding his ears and doing sit-ups, a traditional Indian way of punishing errant youngsters, the guilty policemen should crawl on the streets of the villages where they had tortured people, rubbing their noses on the ground, again another traditional way of humiliating wrongdoers, and Rs 200,000 compensation for the injured and assaulted. The demands were aimed at stressing the need for adivasis to be treated with dignity and respect, which the state does not, treating them as they had been treated by the colonial state. Eventually, when the Polisoi sontras Birodhi Janaganer Committee (PCAPA) was formed, it issued a thirteen point charter of demand (appended). Although these demands have since been modified to an unconditional oral apology from the police superintendent and punishment for the policemen involved in the raids, the administration has arrogantly refused to accept these demands, for how can the public face of the state apologise to “tribals”?

[2] The Maoists were one of the components of the agitation in Lalgarh. Gradually, they made it difficult for other parties to function. In the case of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the dominant partner of the ruling Left Front, Maoists targeted their cadres, killed a few, asked for ransom from a few, and compelled others to declare publicly that they were giving up CPI(M) membership in order to be permitted to live in the locality. Such incidents were used by the administration and the ruling class generally through the media to propagate that the law and order situation had totally collapsed in Lalgarh. Maoist intellectuals, for their part, have sought to justify such incidents in two ways – by using a “Third Periodist” rhetoric, calling the CPI(M) “social fascist”, and by claiming that such punishments were given by so-called people’s courts.

[3] The original Maoist movement in India was long split into many fragments. The three major organizations calling for immediate armed struggle using the strategy of a “protracted people’s war”, the CPI(ML) Peoples’ War Group, the CPI(ML) Party Unity, and the Maoist Communist Centre, negotiated with each other for several years and eventually formed a united organization, the CPI(Maoist). This organization has been fighting the state for all of its existence, and the state has been using its activities as a plea to curb democratic rights across much of the country, especially where the adivasis live, since it is best implanted among adivasis in several parts of Eastern and Central India. In June 2009, the Union Government banned the CPI(Maoist), an act that enables it to use harsher laws, including long spells of arrest for any activist suspected of or accused of being a Maoist, regardless of specific charges against them.

[4] The Trinamool Congress is a West Bengal based right wing populist party, led by Mamata Banerjee, the current Railway Minister of the Union Government. Banerjee is the most ferocious bourgeois opponent of the CPI(M)-led Left Front, which has ruled West Bengal since 1977. In the elections of 2009, many Maoist groups (those that do participate in elections), a Stalinist party named the Socialist Unity Centre of India, and a large number of intellectuals supported her in their anger at the CPI(M). for a detailed analysis see Kunal Chattopadhyay and Soma Marik, “The elections and left-wing politics in India”, *International Socialist Review*, Issue 66, July-August 2009. It is widely suspected, and at one stage conceded by a leader of the CPI(Maoist), that while they formally claim to reject elections, they too assisted Banerjee’s party in Nandigram. On Nandigram, see Kunal Chattopadhyay, “an Open Letter to Tariq Ali”, in <http://www.socialistdemocracy.org/Correspondence/CorrespondTheBankruptcyOfTheAntiGlobalisationIntellectuals.html>

[5] This leaflet was issued by a small group of organizations and individuals who felt that pushing forward socialist politics called for presenting a critique of Maoist politics while primarily opposing state terrorism. Protibadi Udyog (Protest Initiative) is a united front organization functioning for nearly ten years both in local issues and over anti-globalisation struggles. Indian members of the Fourth International were closely involved in setting it up. Mazdoor Mukti Committee (Committee for the Self Emancipation of the Working Class) is an anti-Stalinist revolutionary organization functioning for nearly three decades in West Bengal. Radical Socialist is a small effort at regrouping Trotskyist and other anti-Stalinist revolutionary Marxist activists in India. Sramajeevi Samiti is a small anti-Stalinist organization, coming out of the Revolutionary Socialist Party. The individual signatories have all been active in the radical milieu and were involved in Lalgarh solidarity work.