

## NEW WAVE OF MILITANT ACTION IN INDIA

By Kailas Chandra

BOMBAY -- More than 1,000,000 industrial workers and employees in public and private undertakings all over the state of Gujarat went on a general strike August 5 in protest against the state government's failure to check spiraling prices of food grains and other essential commodities.

This was the first time Gujarat, home state of Mahatma Gandhi, considered a stronghold of the ruling Congress party, has witnessed such a militant action of workers and middle-class employees.

The general strike was organised by the Mahagujarat Janata Parishad [People's Conference] led by Indulal Yagnik, a Member of Parliament and peasant leader, and the Kamgar Sangarsh Samiti [Workers Action Committee] of Ahmedabad.

In the city of Ahmedabad, capital of the state, police opened fire on angry demonstrators. Four deaths resulted, one a police constable.

The Gujarat police arrested seventeen persons, including Dinkar Mehta, secretary of the state unit of the Communist party, and Ratilal Shah, secretary of the Action Committee. The latter is a Trotskyist.

Considerable significance is attached to the mass demonstrations organised by various trade unions in the state where the left movement has been relatively weak.

Addressing a mammoth public meeting in Ahmedabad on the day of the strike, Indulal Yagnik condemned the police violence and called on the people to throw out the Congress government in the state before Diwali (a Hindu holiday in November). All the leftist parties support this demand, including the recently formed United Socialist party.

More than seventy per cent of the some 100,000 cotton textile workers in the city of Ahmedabad responded to the strike call despite the influence among them of the "Gandhian" trade union, "Mazoor Mahajan." This is a clear indication that the working class, even in the backward regions of the country, is being drawn into the vortex of militant mass action against the government on the food question.

Similar token general strikes were organized recently in the states of West Bengal and Kerala. In Kerala the leadership came from the Communist party, controlled by the "centrist" leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and the Revolutionary Socialist party. The United Socialist party also supported it. The general strike was a spectacular success.

A call for a day's total general strike in the state of Maharashtra on August 12 was issued by the United Socialist party and the trade unions under its control to protest against the failure of the Congress government to solve the food problem. The strike call was backed by both the right and left factions of the Communist party and the All-India Trade Union Congress under their control as well as other left parties, including the Peasants and Workers party, the main opposition group in the state legislature.

The strike sponsors demand that the government should immediately nationalise banking and take over the trade in food grains as the only effective way to bring down prices and check the rampant hoarding among traders. They also demand that prices of agricultural products should be fixed by statute and that the import and export trade should be nationalised.

A new wave of militant action by workers and employees over the food question is evident all over the country. Prices of food grains and other essential commodities have shot up by thirty to fifty per cent during the last year while wages have remained almost static.

The bank employees have been agitating for a twenty per cent increase in wages, winning a partial victory after a "go slow cam-

paign." The big banks conceded a fifteen per cent rise in salaries.

Similar demands are being advanced by the employees of the central and state governments, who number about 6,000,000 nationally.

Under the pressure of the masses, the various central trade-union organisations and traditional left-wing parties have been compelled to combine forces in mass action. Attempts are being made, however, by the Dangeite leadership of the Communist party and by reformist leaders of the Socialist party to contain these struggles within the framework of the constitution. It is doubtful that such attempts can succeed for long. The struggles are bound to throw up a new militant leadership eventually.

Both at the centre and in the states, the Congress party governments are pleading inability to solve the present food crisis. There is an over-all shortage of 5,000,000 tons of food grains each year. Despite large sums of money spent on irrigation and other land development projects in the past fifteen years, the bourgeois state has completely failed to raise food production. The "land reform" has been confined within a capitalist framework.

The Congress government has met this situation by importing food grains from the United States. It is proposed now to increase these imports, a measure that will tie the country's economy still more securely to American imperialism.

Recently measures have been announced aimed against the hoarding of food grains by dealers. Up to now such steps have proved totally ineffective. The truth is that the Congress government has retreated under pressure from the rich merchants who in many states finance and control the Congress party apparatus.