

India: Police Chief vows to step up spying on workers

By Arun Kumar
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Amid a wave of strikes and plant occupations, Tamil Nadu's Deputy General of Police (DGP) told a business conference in Chennai last month that the state is intensifying its surveillance of the labor force so as to combat "left-wing extremism."

DGP Letika Saran also urged employers to look into workers' backgrounds and otherwise scrutinize their workforces so as to identify "extremists" and "disgruntled" workers.

Speaking October 23 at a conference on security organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), DGP Saran repeated Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's assertion that "left wing extremism" is India's greatest internal security threat. But whereas Singh has made this claim so as to rally support for Operation Green Hunt, a multi-state counter-insurgency war directed against a Maoist-led tribal uprising in the jungle and highland regions of India, Saran invoked the "extremist" threat to justify state and employer spying on, and repression of, militant workers.

"The major threat we face," declared Saran, "... is left-wing extremism in any form."

"Though they have been kept out of our State borders," continued Saran, "there is always the threat of them intruding into our society through one of the areas they have targeted, and that is the labour force. This is one area of concern ... we know that this is on and in turn we have tried to gear up our intelligence machinery to ensure that such a thing does not happen."

Saran urged employers to invest in surveillance cameras and other gadgets. But she counseled especial vigilance as regards to workers' views and attitudes. "You must check the antecedents of employees," declared Saran. "A disgruntled employee is an easy target for an outsider who has sabotage plans."

The deputy head of Tamil Nadu's police also used the CII conference to announce a plan to expand the state police force by 30,000 over the next three years.

Saran is far from the first Indian official to invoke a purported Maoist threat to justify state repression. In fact the Maoist threat is becoming, like the "war on terror" in the US, a nebulous catch-all menace that India's ruling elite invariably raises in order to justify and overcome opposition to attacks on democratic rights.

Earlier this year, the Andhra Pradesh government mobilized paramilitary forces, including the notorious Grey Wolves, to invade the principal university campus in Hyderabad, claiming that Maoists had infiltrated a popular agitation for the creation of Telangana as a new state within the Indian Union.

The claim that Maoists or Naxalites have targeted "the labour force" and are preparing a campaign of industrial sabotage is a patent ruse.

Since their emergence in the late 1960s, the Naxalites have focused their activity on the oppressed peasantry and in more recent decades the tribals, traditional hunter-gather groups that live in the most remote parts of India. This orientation is in keeping with the Maoists' nationalist-Stalinist perspective which declares the peasantry the principal revolutionary force in contemporary India and the coming Indian revolution to be a "people's democratic", not a socialist, revolution.

On occasion the Maoists make ritualistic references to the working class. But they have systematically shunned the urban and rural workers, failing to mount a political challenge to the domination of the working class by the Stalinist parliamentary parties and their trade union affiliates, and entering into various opportunist alliances with bourgeois parties. In West

Bengal, for example, the Maoists have formed a tacit alliance with the right-wing Trinamul Congress.

But there are very real concerns within Tamil Nadu's government and the Indian elite over a wave of strikes and occupations in the south Indian state. An October 17 Press Trust of India report gave voice to ruling class apprehensions over this new militancy. Titled "Labour disputes rocking 'Detroit' of India," the article read in part, "The city [Tamil Nadu's capital, Chennai] has come to be known as the Detroit of India for its large concentration of automakers, but a series of labour disputes have rocked it, putting a question mark over industrial peace." The article made mention of a number of large recent or ongoing strikes in or near Chennai, including at Hyundai and Nokia plants and at the tire manufacturer MRF.

If the press accounts of Saran's speech are reliable, she made no mention in her speech to the CII conference of the very active role the Tamil Nadu police have been playing in suppressing this worker unrest.

On the orders of the Tamil Nadu government—which is led by the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), one of the components of India's Congress Party-led coalition government—police have repeatedly arrested picketing workers and used violence or the threat of violence to break-up plant occupations. Last Saturday, police threatened to storm a BYD Electronics plant in Oragadam, if workers did not end a two day-old sit-down strike in 30 minutes. (See "India: BYD Electronics fires most of its workforce, after police break up sit-in")

Saran's use of the term "left-wing extremism in any form" underscores that the real concern of the DMK government and police is not terrorism and industrial sabotage, but the emergence of mass working class struggles and the efforts of revolutionary socialists to arm the working class with a political program articulating its class interests in the fight against Indian and global capital.

Saran's remarks to the CII meeting were echoed by those made by a fellow invitee, Lt. General Gautam Bannerjee of the Indian army's Officer Training Academy in Chennai.

He deplored the fact that "a small bunch of people at any place can do a *dharna* (sit-in) and bring a state to a standstill." He then vowed that the military stands

ready to maintain law and order so that India can continue to march ahead economically—a reference to the relative success the Indian bourgeoisie has had in transforming India into a cheap labor producer for world capitalism.

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