

The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

Stop the Riots in Gujarat Resist the Fascist VHP

(Statement of the Central Secretariat, Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, Indian Section of the Fourth International, 4th March, 2002)

On 27th February, several compartments of a train were set on fire near Godhra in Gujarat. The train was carrying many “kar sevaks” of the Viswa Hindu Parishad. For several months, the VHP has been whipping up communal tension and targeting Muslims with its renewed focus on temple building at Ayodha at the site where the Babri Masjid had stood till 6th December 1992. With a BJP dominated government at the centre (and in UP till recently) as well as a BJP government in Gujarat, the VHP had had ample support. Its forces had carried on extremely provocative activities without any hindrance. Without in the least condoning the Godhra massacre, it must be set in the perspective of continuous Hindutva provocations – provocations that had goaded some people of the minority communities evidently beyond endurance and had led to such a reprehensible act. Even the S.P. of Godhra was compelled to admit as much, when he said it was difficult to say who was more responsible – the kar sevaks who had been giving daily provocations or the people who set fire. But the way Godhra is being projected as an ISI plot, while the subsequent carnage is justified as natural Hindu response, shows the real face of the Hindutva-fascist outfits in power.

The Inquilabi Communist Sangathan unreservedly deplores the torching of the train compartments leading to a large number of deaths. While warning the people of minority communities that this cannot be any legitimate response, and condemning the action, we also need to situate it in the proper context. There has been continuous violence against Muslims in BJP ruled provinces (also elsewhere, but particularly in those states). In recent times, the promulgation of POTO has targeted Muslims – even when communalists have been attacked, only the Muslim communalists of SIMI have been the target, while the Bajrang Dal or the VHP have not had a single hair on their heads touched.

The immediate reaction of Hindu communalist and fascist forces has been to talk, as usual, of Hindu tolerance and its abuse by the perfidious Muslims. The truth is quite different. Massive riots have been unleashed, with the epicentre at Gujarat and tremors being felt as far away as Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. The organised lumpen-gangs and storm troopers of the Hindutva brigade went on the rampage for two days. The promulgation of curfew did not halt them. By the afternoon of 1st March, even the government was admitting to formally 150 deaths, a figure that rose to over 300 by the end of the day. The former Congress M.P. Ehsan Jaffrey has been burnt to death in Ahmedabad. Prof. Bandoorkwallah’s house was burnt down in Vadodara. In both cases, despite repeated urgings, the police played the role of silent spectators. In Naroda, near Ahmedabad, a thousand strong crowd surrounded a slum, dragged out people, and burnt 67 of them alive. In every case, where the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, has at all bothered to comment, he has asserted that if the sequence of events is rationalised, then the blame cannot fall on the VHP etc. Modi patted the police on the back; AND CLAIMED THAT Jaffrey was responsible for his own death, because he had opened fire. What is a man, facing a violent mob, and having found the police non-responsive to his plea for help, supposed to do? The home minister of Gujarat, it is to be noted, is a VHP leader, Gordhan Zadhapia. Ahmedabad Police Commissioner P.C. Pande, in open justification for the communal role of the police, stated that the police “were not insulated from the general social milieu”. After allowing 36 hours to pass without any serious intervention (the same pattern as in 1992 after the Babri Masjid destruction) now the army is being deployed.

By declaring a curfew, the government had formally taken the position that the situation was serious. But nothing was done beyond the formality. And it is not only the state government, but equally the Central Government, that is to be held responsible. We have opposed the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance. But the government which claimed it was needed in India’s interest, why did it hesitate to apply it to the VHP? The kar sevaks and the VHP as a whole have been treated as extremely reasonable

forces by the Central Government – naturally, since the VHP is part of the Sangh Parivar as is the BJP. So each case of intensification of communal provocation by the VHP has been met by warnings to Muslims not to lose their cool while the VHP has been given still more elbowroom.

At the time when the Central Defence Minister George Fernandes was to pass through sensitive areas of Baroda, women from the minority community in several areas were desperate, since for three days they had not had any access to milk, vegetables or other essential items to feed their children. At night they could not sleep because of threats and mobs moving around freely in those areas. In desperation women from one mohalla of Wadi area decided that they would stop Mr. Fernandes and request him to listen to them. They went out of their homes as his cavalcade with several cars and police vehicles moved from the curfew installed area. They tried to wave hands and made gestures to stop him but the big shot did not stop. Immediately after his car left the local police attacked all these women, beat them with batons and used vulgar sexual abuse for trying to “tarnish” their image in the eyes of Fernandes. This led to fear among women and their family members that if this could happen when Mr. Fernandes was just a few meters away, what would happen to them at night ! Unfortunately this is not an isolated stray incident. In several places women have suffered abuses and violence in the hands of police.

We demand immediate action against who so ever is responsible for this incidence and safety of all those women and their families.

Since women and children suffer most in absence of necessities, we also demand that the collector/ district magistrate of the relevant places should take necessary action to see that the supply of milk, vegetable and other necessities reaches in all the curfew affected areas. There should not be any discrimination on the bases of caste and community for making such necessities available to people.

On 2nd March, local TV cable operators in Gujarat were instructed to block Star News Channel as they were showing the ground reality where government’s utter failure was shown by continuous violence. On the same day, Union Home Minister, BJP leader, and Gandhinagar (Gujarat) MP, L. K. Advani finally found time to visit Gujarat. He started off by asserting, without a shred of proof, that the Godhra incident was preplanned. He also asserted that police in Gujarat were perfectly fine, and rejected all criticisms of the police.

Even as violence continues, there is a ray of hope from people’s initiatives at some places forming peace committees, involving people from both communities and having daily meetings so that no outsider also comes and creates any tension in the area. There are instances of majority community people saving their neighbours following minority religion.

As a matter of principle, we believe that the state should not be given the right to curtail civil liberties of anyone, because such empowerment is a weapon that the state is likely to turn against the oppressed. We also believe that communalism, a product of reactionary capitalism utilising often pre-capitalist ideologies, cannot be extirpated by the bourgeois state. Only a resurgent working class, exercising its hegemony over the other oppressed, can successfully achieve that goal. However, this is different from the question of tackling communal riots. A communal riot of the scale unleashed by the VHP currently cannot be tackled directly by the working class at its present stage of disunity and weakness. In order to defend human lives and conditions of existence, the governments, both at the state and the centre, must be compelled to take a firm stand.

We demand:

- ❑ Immediate and effective application of the army to stop all riots.
- ❑ The sacking of Gujarat Home Minister and Chief Minister for their failure to apply the law of the land and to stop riots, indeed, for their complicity in the riots.
- ❑ The arrest of all VHP leaders under the ordinary criminal laws.
- ❑ The scrapping of POTO.
- ❑ The weeding out of all communalist elements from the police.

We call on working class and democratic/human rights movements activist in India and abroad to publicly voice their concerns, and to mobilise against the fascists. We urge that messages of condemnation, and demands for action, be sent to the National Human Rights Commission at the address given below: The National Human Rights Commission, Sardar Patel Bhavan, Sansad Marg, New Delhi-110001. tel (011) 311560; 3348478 fax (011)3340016