

Revolutionary "Termites" in Faridabad

**A Proletarian Current In India
Confronts Third Worldist Statism**

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Kamunist Kranti / Collectivities: Presentation and Critical Dialogue

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up lists of workers to be “resigned” and then worked with police to terrorize them into doing so. (cf. *The Company They Keep. A Report on Workers of Jhalani Tools Ltd., Faridabad.* Available from Dr. Sudesh Vaid, D-2, Staff Quarters, I.P. College, Shamnath Marg, Delhi 11054.3 rupees plus postage.) Even today, in legal arbitration by Gedore’s successor Jhalani Tools, management refers to the 1984 events as the year of “Voluntary Retirement”.

8. Copies of the excellent Negotiation pamphlet, LIP, or the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution, are available from Black and Red, P0 Box 02374, Detroit, MI 48202, USA)

9. Most of the following information is from the human rights pamphlet, *The Company They Keep*, cited earlier. While providing useful background information, this pamphlet is marred by excessive legalism and an attempt to show Jhalani Tools as a “human rights” case instead of a more visible instance of a systemic practice.

10. Stan Weir’s views, and those of others like him, can be gleaned from Staughton Lynd, ed. “We Are All Leaders”: *The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930’s*, (University of Illinois Pr.), 1996. The strength of this book is its demonstration, in different contexts, that the CIO was top-down and bureaucratic from the beginning.

11. After the August 1997 UPS strike in the U.S., which if not exactly the victory which most of the left and far-left made it out to be, certainly showed something more than the abject prostration of the previous 20 years of labor routs (UMW 1978, PATCO, 1981; Greyhound 1983; PhelpsDodge, 1984; Hormel P-9, 1986; Jay, Maine 1989, Yale 1995, Detroit News 1996, etc. etc. etc.) , and above all showed a depth of anger over temp work and support for the strike far beyond the UPS workers themselves, papers such as the Wall Street Journal went wild with invective aimed at Sweeney and Carey for having broken with such a nice consensus! Such invective over a strike that resulted in a 10 cents per year raise over a 5-year contract for temps (who had not had a raise in 14 years) is not exactly the tone one would expect from the cowed management, losing sleep over a post-1973 worker rebellion, portrayed by KK.

12. To put things into perspective (again using the American example, although a similar story could be told for any European country): after the 1945-46 postwar strike wave and the 1948-1953 McCarthyite purge of the labor movement, there were indeed important struggles that escaped management and union control, and were harbingers of the 1965-1973 revolt: the 1955 auto strike, the 1959 steel strike, and the perpetual struggle for control of the shop floor in auto. But management and the unions had not nearly lost control of rank-and-file workers as they did in the latter part of the postwar boom, when e.g. members of the UAW had a de facto 4-day work week through massive absenteeism. Whether “unifocal” or “small step”, these are struggles of another era in the days of “lean and mean” management and “just in time” production, which is not to deny the existence of “small steps” struggle in the latter.

4. India of course has not yet been fully integrated into the East Asian capitalist boom of the post-1960's (currently on hold until further notice), as the world financial press somewhat ruefully admitted in fall 1997 when India was, as a result, relatively unaffected by the collapse of the Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian and South Korean currencies, the Hong Kong real estate and stock markets, and the ensuing (and continuing) regional debacle. The global capitalists who are prying open East Asian economies to buy up their assets at bargain basement prices still have the effrontery to tell capitalists in India that they should make haste down the same road, to "take advantage" of globalization. India as a result is, according to the 1991 census (and the following categories, which can describe a child selling Chiclets on a street corner as a "service" worker, should be taken at less than face value) still nearly three-fourths rural, with 73.9% of the population living in villages and hamlets of 5,000 or less, and the remaining 26.1% in towns and cities. The breakdown of the work force shows the same rural preponderance, with 39% peasants and 26% agricultural laborers; in addition to the latter agricultural proletariat, the non-agricultural working class (some of it also rural) shows 7% in manufacture (with an additional 2% in household production), 3% in extractive industries (fishing, forestry, mining), 2% in construction, 8% in trade and commerce, 3% in transportation, and 10% in "other services". The census also mentions 28.2 million "marginal workers" and 55 million children (not including those working directly for their parents) working in agriculture (25 million), "services" (20 million), and 5 million in handloom, carpet-making, gem-cutting and match-making. 29% of the total work force, by these official categories, is made up of women. (These figures are from J. Heitzman et al. eds. *India: A Country Study* (1996), p. 325, a U.S. government handbook.) The annual per capita income is \$324 per year.

In this context, Faridabad, for all its osmosis of urban and rural (for much of its factory work force is, as indicated earlier) drawn from all over India and Nepal, is, for India, a high concentration of industrial workers, who earn between 600 and 1600 rupees per month (\$15-\$40 at December 1997 exchange rates).

5. Just about every political party in India has a trade union affiliate. The Bharatiya Masdar Sangh is the BJP union, and the largest; the INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) is affiliated to the Congress Party; the AITUC (All-India Trade Union Congress) is linked to the Indian Communist Party (ICP); the CITU (Center of Indian Trade Unions) is linked to the Communist Party of India (Marxist); the CPI (M-L) and further breakaways have their unions.

6. "Resignations" are a classic management method of side-stepping India's tough job security legislation; these "resignations" are often extracted, by force, with the help of the unions' goon squads.

7. According to another human rights pamphlet, Gedore management claimed that the 1,500 resigning workers had opted for a "Voluntary Retirement Scheme"; workers claim that the union participated in drawing

Introductory Note

The article grew out of a four-week stay in India in Fall 1997. During that time, I had occasion to spend about a week with members of the Kamunist Kranti/Collectivities (1-footnotes at end) group, first in Faridabad, an industrial suburb of Delhi, and then in Delhi itself. Before meeting them, I knew Kamunist Kranti from their two English language pamphlets, *Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy* and *Ballad Against Work*. These pamphlets, while interesting and important as signposts in the evolution of a current, do not in themselves stand out as unique in the international discussion. It was rather conversations with members of KK, in which they elaborated their perspectives, told me the 20-year history of their group, and provided me with running translations of their Hindi press, which convinced me of their (to my knowledge) relative singularity. The world has its share of revolutionary P.O. boxes, but Kamunist Kranti stands out as one of the few, if not the only ultra-left current with a genuine, years-long working-class presence, not merely in the Third World, but in the world, period. They have evolved over twenty years from Maoism to anti-Stalinist vanguardism to anti-vanguardism through an extended experience of factory struggles in one of India's principal industrial centers. The richness of this experience, and the conclusions which KK has drawn from it, deserve to be better known and debated internationally. I do not by any means agree with all of Kamunist Kranti's most recent formulations, but I do think unequivocally that they deserve a hearing and a response in the international movement. More valuable than anything I could write would be an English anthology of selections from KK's Hindi-language press, which documents more than 15 years of struggles from which they have arrived at their current perspectives. Particularly in a country such as India, where the left is still weighed down by an enormous legacy of statism, in its Congress, Stalinist and Maoist varieties, the appearance of a working-class current that combats this statism head-on is a phenomenon worthy of international attention. If the following article helps bring about further attention to and debate of KK's perspectives, it will have achieved its purpose. To that end, I invite CAN readers and of course KK itself to respond with comments/criticisms of their own.

Faridabad, India, is a Third World working-class town of 1,000,000 inhabitants (300,000 of them factory workers), one of the “cities of the South” in Jeremy Seabrook’s phrase. (2) It is most easily reached by one of those commuter trains one sees in all urban centers of India, seemingly packed at all hours with people hanging out of windows and open doors, and in which one is well advised to start inching toward the door three or four stations before one’s stop. Situated in the southern industrial suburbs of Delhi, Faridabad might strike the casual visitor as a late 20th-century version of Engel’s Manchester. A seemingly permanent haze of smog and pollution (provoking a high rate of respiratory ailments, including asthma) hangs over the city. For block upon block of mainly unpaved streets, old and new factories mix helter-skelter with shanties, more permanent houses and small shops, as well as pools and canals of fetid water and industrial waste. All of these intermingle in crazy-quilt fashion, a hybrid of rural and industrial life, with open fields where water buffalo graze and are milked, and whose dung is gathered dried for fuel. Women wash clothes by hand in the available pools of water, and malaria-infected mosquitoes hover above them. In cities such as Bombay, one finds slums and shanties abutting an ultra-modern corporate office building; in Faridabad shanties and lean-tos are built right outside the (well-guarded) factory gates. Pigs, a kind of alternative municipal sanitation system, roam the streets, eating garbage and the various kinds of excrement which regularly surface from the gutters with the slightest rain. At rush hour, the pigs largely cede the streets to fleets of motorized rickshaws which constitute the main form of public transportation. Small shanties housing six, seven or more people line canals of sludge and industrial waste. Since many are without running water or toilets, not to mention air conditioning, in the 100-plus degree heat of the summers the shanties become infernos in which people have to walk blocks to a public well and have to relieve themselves where they can. In these same summers, strong young men fresh from the Himalayas or the countryside work next to open steel foundries where, by the age of 30, they are husks.

The new capitalist face of Asia takes many forms: the almost Los Angeles-like sprawl of Seoul and Taegu in Korea; the 40-story working-class high rise apartment buildings in Hong Kong and over the border in the “free economic zone” of Shenzhen; the round-the-clock jackhammers of a hundred skyscrapers under construction in Shanghai, and the eerie silence in the night of a hundred other

Shenzhen. Japanese capital outsourced to Korea, and when Korea became too expensive, to Indonesia, and they all live in fear of China. The process, in the West, is most advanced in the U.S. where real incomes have fallen 20%, the work week has increased 20%, housing now takes 40-50% of household income, nearly 1% of the population is in prison or on parole, and something like one-third of the work force is made up of part-timers and temps. Prison construction is the leading growth industry, and prisons are being built with factories in them, to recycle the newly-criminalized downsized work force into 30-cents-an-hour full time semi-skilled and skilled jobs, including computer programming.

This “American model” is now crashing down on what is left of the “welfare states” of western Europe. The long-term disappearance, since 1973, of what Kamunist Kranti calls “unifocal struggles” is the result of this global restructuring. Again and again, this process has crushed worker resistance, no matter how militant, in a single factory or industry or town (most recently, again, in the Decatur, Illinois “war zone”). Capital understands that the game is being played at the level of the total capital; no effective worker strategy has been developed to counter it, and no strategy focused exclusively on the point of production will. “Small steps” tactics, no matter how effective in one locale that still is more like the old “worker fortresses” of the West than like the new killing fields of highly mobile capital, provide no answer. I don’t have the right answer, either, but I think I have the right questions, and Kamunist Kranti has no answer to them.

Notes

1. Kamunist Kranti/Collectivities publications, in both English and Hindi, are available upon request from Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T., Faridabad 121001, India. Also available from the CAN Web site at <http://www.geocitiesacom/CapitolHill/Lobby> 2379 or by mail from CAN in the US.
2. See his *In the Cities of the South*, (Verso), London/New York, 1996.
3. For a factual expose of the real estate strategy for Bombay’s conversion from a textile town into a finance-and-real estate paradise on the Manhattan-Singapore model, written from a human rights perspective but still damning enough, cf. *Murder of the Mills: An Enquiry Into Bombay’s Cotton Textile Industry and Its Workers*, available from Lokshahi Hakk Sanghatana, Laxmi Niwas, 2nd Fl., 697 Katrac Road, Wadala, Bombay 400 031 (50 rupees).

to stuff his job and walk into another one the next week. Or.. we could work for six months and then live on state benefits for six months.” Tell a UPS temp about that today.

In fact, Kamunist Kranti’s point-of-production problem is already contained in their favorite (and, in fact, syndicalist) metaphor about “swarms of bees protecting their honey”. The “honey” of the working class is not in any individual factory, or in the additive sum of all factories; that is in fact a Ricardian, productivist, vols. 1+2 “simple reproduction” view of capitalist production. The “honey” of the working class is in the total social wage in a “vol.3” (and vol.4: Theories of Surplus Value) expanded reproduction of labor power, which includes education, medical care, and social infrastructure (e.g. sanitation, transportation, housing) however different any and all of these things will look in a society freed from commodity exchange. (It is significant that in their discussions with me about the critique of political economy, KK was skeptical in the extreme about including education and medical care in the total social wage; for them, education and medicine only exist to make it possible for the working class to work, as if a completely different kind of education and medicine will not exist in a communist society.) Kamunist Kranti’s almost exclusive factory focus, for all its richness, and its “small step” eschewal of “unifocal struggles” is the radicalization of a consciousness and practice circumscribed by the capitalist fiction par excellence, the individual enterprise.

When workers attempt to paralyze production at one factory, or even all factories, whether through “unifocal struggles” or “small steps”, no matter how radical, they are still merely “negating” the dominant, alienated organization of production; they break with this (very necessary) day-to-day “negation” by posing themselves, as a class, as an alternate basis for the reproduction of society as a whole, not merely in one or all factories, but in all aspects of life, just as capital currently dominates all of life. Kamunist Kranti’s exclusive focus on radicalized forms of “negation” (disruption of capitalist production), however interesting and important, is not enough.

I am no more interested than Kamunist Kranti in name-calling or citation wars from Marx’s Capital. The point is this. For 25 years, world capital has whipsawed workers, and particularly workers in the West, with a global “rationalization” of production, featuring high-tech innovation, eliminating jobs, and the farming out of manufacture to the Third World, also eliminating jobs, all aimed at lowering the total wage bill. Hong Kong textiles replacing Manchester, Shenzhen replacing Hong Kong, and Wuhan replacing

skyscrapers, already completed, and empty; the lunar “interstate” feel of (equally empty) high tech office space, scattered through rice paddies worked by water buffalo, along the freeways of China’s Guangdong province; the weird enormous shopping malls and 30-story skyscrapers that appear as if from nowhere in the smallest provincial towns in rural China, waiting like cargo-cult landing strips for the affluence that has yet to arrive; the Manhattan-like aspirations of Bombay, with its financial district and with its vast stretches of empty textile mills, recently abandoned to deindustrialization and out-sourcing, and awaiting condominium conversion for the benefit of the city’s repulsive, arrogant, parvenu yuppie class, while Hindu fundamentalism makes inroads in the shattered, unemployed former textile proletariat still living in the nearby slums. (3) It is to be seen in India’s “Silicon Valley”, Bangalore, to which Lufthansa (like many Western firms) recently transferred its entire accounting operation for 10% of the cost of the 4,000 high paying jobs it simultaneously abolished in Germany. But most of these places, ones the casual Western visitor is most likely to see, mix patches of an older Asia with the outward signs of the management and consumption of fictitious capital and real estate speculation on a grand scale; to see Asian capitalism in its unrelieved, unvarnished grit, where the untrammled production of surplus value in all its starkness is the business at hand, it is necessary to go to a city such as Faridabad. (4)

But Faridabad, for all that it visually conjures up of the Dickensian rawness of the early phases of industrialization in the West, is nonetheless very much a city of the end of the 20th century. On paper, India has enlightened labor legislation and high job security, which in practice are circumvented in many instances by management collaboration with union goon squads. Faridabad’s working class has had decades of experience with so-called Communist parties and their unions. Faridabad management practices the latest methods of downsizing and devotes tremendous amounts of energy and resources to controlling the work force, a control in which the left parties and unions play a major role. The factories brim with MBA’s with cellular phones, who apply killing speed-up to the assembly lines, and who almost brazenly provoke strikes, with union help, aimed at retrenchment. None of these characteristics particularly distinguish Faridabad from other comparable industrial centers scattered around India (or elsewhere), but it was here that a current with no counterpart in India or, to the best of my knowledge, the rest of Asia, emerged.

Ca. 1972, state repression came down hard on India's Maoist ("Naxalite") movement, a New Left revolt of disaffected middle class students and intellectuals against the bureaucratic sloth and sleaze of post-independence, Congress Party-dominated Indian society, as well as the accommodation of the (then pro-Soviet) Indian Communist Party to these realities. Echoing the Russian Populists of a century earlier, Naxalite cadre gave up urban middle-class lives and went to the rural peasantry, often in remote villages accessible only on foot, to be "fish among the water" of the people. However skewed their perspectives, ultimately drawn from the bureaucratic-peasant revolution of Mao Tsetung (and in this way no different from comparable movements around the world in those years), the Naxalites did have modest initial success among the poorest peasants, until they began exemplary "executions" of somewhat mythical but widely hated "large landowners" (often merely slightly poorer peasants) and made themselves vulnerable to the full weight of state repression. (Nonetheless, repression did not completely annihilate the movement and there are still armed Maoist insurgencies scattered around rural India.)

In 1975, Indira Gandhi's Congress government proclaimed a state of emergency, aligned itself on a generally perceived "pro-Soviet" foreign policy stance, came down hard on strike-prone railway workers and jailed and silenced hundreds of Maoist militants, often presented, in the shrill atmosphere of the day, as "CIA agents" in leftist guise. The earliest origins of Kamunist Kranti are to be found in the fallout and regroupment of the Indian Maoist milieu following the state of emergency, when that milieu had already broken up into various warring factions. But with Mao's death in 1976, the subsequent arrest of the "Four Dogs" or Gang of Four, the official burial one moonless night of the "Cultural Revolution", and the consolidation in power by 1978 of the "capitalist roader" Teng shao-ping and a full blown reorientation to "market socialism", it was getting harder to be a "Maoist", in India or anywhere else. By 1978-79, after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, China's U.S.-backed retaliation on Vietnam's border, and the resulting threat of confrontation between the Soviet Union and China, many of the world's front-line "Marxist-Leninist" states seemed about to go to war . . . with each other. It was in this context that the future nucleus of Kamunist Kranti decided that something was terribly wrong with their earlier perspectives, and embarked on the "long march" out of Maoism to what they are today.

can barely find each other in the phone book. Not to mention the children of these auto, steel and longshore workers, ground up in the casualized inferno of temp agencies and dead-end Macjobs. Not to mention the black ex-auto workers who participated in the 1972 Lordstown, Ohio wildcat, and who are now doing slave labor in Ohio state prison. In Youngstown (Ohio), virtually all steel production shut down in the 1970's and 1980's, and the single largest employer in the city today is a super-max prison.

While it is difficult to find in their writings (particularly in those available in English), KK has a rather bizarre sense of what this has meant for the workers in the West in the past 25 years. When, in discussion with them, I pointed to the accelerating disappearance of the working-class revolt of 1965-1973 (extended by a few years in countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy), and said that this had constituted (particularly in the U.S.) a very successful capitalist counter-offensive and effective response to the earlier revolt, KK insisted that I was focusing only on well-known "unifocal struggles" and that workers since 1973 had shifted to a "small steps" strategy, blacked out in the media. As evidence for this they point to the greatly increased amount of electronic surveillance on the job, evidence that management has still not regained control of the shop floor. While this may be true, a lot of workers after the 1973-75 downturn were happy to have a job, period. KK sees management today as literally trembling at the depth of worker autonomy, (a panic for which I certainly find no evidence in the exultant American financial and business press, where the mood for the past two decades is rather that labor has been KO'd for good, as profits soar.) (11) Whatever truth there is to this (and I doubt there is much; rather electronic surveillance is first of all one of the tools of worker rollback), all these "small steps" have not prevented a 20% fall in workers' living standards since 1973, and 40% for American (black and Hispanic) minorities. But since KK rejects the idea that there was any increase in workers' living standards during the 1945-1973 boom in the West (pointing to longer hours, more travel time, more women obliged to enter the work force), they reject the idea that there was any rollback of struggle after 1965-1973 or that increased living standards and a more favorable labor market had anything to do with the relative ebb phase prior to 1965-1973 (12)

Again, I have no desire to lapse into productivist-technocratic notions of living standards. But I can't help agreement with the Communist Workers Organization (CWO) Internet reply to KK, on the same constellation of issues: "In the 1960's we could tell the boss

factory. The capitalists in Europe and America for 25 years also have a critique of “unifocal struggles” and big confrontations, because in the 1965-1973 period, throughout the West, contrary to what KK might think, the capitalists were LOSING them, and those “unifocal struggles” (such as may 1968 in France or Italy’s 1969 ‘hot autumn’) were also interacting intensely with “small steps” struggles on the shop floor, which the capitalists were also losing. Their strategy since 1973 has been to pulverize, wherever possible, the big units of production which created large-scale concentrations of proletarians (such as one finds in Faridabad today) and replace them with decentralized, “flexible” cottage-type production, a strategy largely realized in the demise of the old “worker fortresses” like Renault-Billancourt and Turin-FIAT which caused them such headaches, as they lost control of the work force and the shop floor.

The (to date largely successful) capitalist strategy in Europe and America for 25 years has been to fragment the old working class, and along comes Kamunist Kranti saying that the problem is “unifocal struggles”! They are rather, from the other end, theoreticians of the same fragmentation, as a strategy for workers, and they have no idea how to combat it because it has not yet hit them as it has hit workers in the West. However astute they may be about how workers in Faridabad have fought back against the snares of their arrayed political, managerial and trade-union enemies, they have no grasp of the way these problems present themselves in Europe and America, where growing numbers of (ex) wage workers have been thrown onto the scrap heap, and even more are being born already in the scrap heap, (as they are in India).

It may seem somewhere bizarre to criticize a working-class current in India for what it says about Europe and America. But since KK claims that its perspectives are without borders, and that the problems of wage-workers are everywhere the same, if KK is wrong somewhere they are wrong everywhere. Their error, once again, comes from a fallacy of linear composition of certain local trends with which they are familiar. (But, to paraphrase Hegel, the familiar is not always the known). To make Faridabad the “known” in this sense, Kamunist Kranti would have to locate it in the global context of this “race to the bottom”. Ex-auto workers in inner-city Detroit can piss on the shop floor all they want, because GM and Ford long ago packed the assembly line off to Puebla and Chihuahua; steel workers who used to hold cake-bakes on the job in Gary, Indiana, are now scattered through the Chicago suburbs, delivering pizzas; the longshoremen of the containerized San Francisco waterfront today

The corruption and cynicism of dominant Indian society cedes nothing in international comparison, however it beggars belief. In many countries at the end of the 20th century, North, South, East, West, the line between official public institutions and blatant criminality has blurred into grey on grey, from the godfathers of French Riviera cities to the seamless continuum of Japanese politicians/yakuza gangsters/police/real estate and construction companies/extreme-right militants who terrorize Tokyo’s casualized labor force, by way of virtual Mafia states like Yeltsin’s Russia or Chervanadze’s Georgia or the drug-dealer states of Asia and Latin America. In India, corruption scandal follows scandal at the highest levels of government, with “investigation” forever bogged down in long and expensive proceedings; local officials twice acquitted on murder charges, with more charges pending on endless appeal, remain in office and openly use thugs to silence critics and opposition. The system reaches down to the lowest Congress Party ward-heeler, who takes a cut as the government store providing subsidized food and fuel to the poor instead sells off its inventory on the black market and hires goons to intimidate those who complain. The idea of going to the police for redressment of such cases could only provoke a belly laugh. Indira Gandhi secretly backed armed Sikh opposition in the state of Punjab to harass her political opponents there; they assassinated her when she left them to hang in the wind. Rajeev Gandhi tried the same thing in Sri Lanka, and suffered the same fate. What does take aback the unapprised visitor (such as this writer) is how deeply this corruption and cynicism reaches into the left-wing parties and trade union movement. It was against this backdrop that Kamunist Kranti had to develop in their reconsideration of all their early perspectives, tinged as they were with the noisy “Marxism” which holds municipal and state power in places such as West Bengal (and Calcutta) or Kerala province in the far south.

In 1982, as the future nucleus of Kamunist Kranti was leaving Maoism behind and beginning to focus their activity on the working class in Faridabad, a strike occurred at the East India Cotton Mills which illustrates in a nutshell the dynamics which they began to generalize into a theory. The mills employed 6,000 workers; management wanted to automate 3,000 jobs out of existence. The Communist Party’s union had been ousted by the workers in 1977, and replaced by a union affiliated with the BJP (Bahartiya Janata Party, the Hindu fundamentalists now the minority ruling party in India)(5). The strike was provoked, as is often the case, over a

seemingly small point, in this case a disagreement over whether the annual bonus should be 19% or 18%. It lasted six months. The strikers were replaced by scabs, and fights and murders broke out among workers; sporadic violence of this kind continued for two further years. Through all of this, the plant continued production with 3,000 workers, exactly the management's goal.

In Kamunist Kranti's conception, the basic paradigm of strikes in India is this: management, as in the case of the cotton mills, wants to achieve wage cuts, layoffs, speedup, automation, whatever. They call in the union and basically say: "we have 2,000 employees; we want to lay off 1,000. We'll announce a plant closing. You people call a strike and stay out for 6 months; we'll re-open with 1,000 workers, and you proclaim a victory. " In what follows, it will be seen how often this scenario is enacted in Faridabad, and in the rest of India. For Kamunist Kranti, the 18-month, 1981-83 Bombay textile strike of 250,000 mill workers, the "strike of the century" led by the (recently assassinated) populist demagogue Datta Samant, which was smashed and led to dozens of mills closing (as mentioned earlier), was just such a management provocation from start to finish.

But Kamunist Kranti goes further, and does not mince words. In their stark formulation: in the 19th century strikes were a weapon of the working class; at the end of the 20th century strikes are a weapon of management. Not just in Faridabad, or in India, but everywhere. Before examining this provocative assertion, let us examine further struggles from which KK drew this conclusion.

1980's Struggles in Faridabad

One of the more paradigmatic episodes illustrating KK's analysis took place at a Faridabad tool factory in the early 80's. (A further struggle of an even more extreme kind is taking place at the same (renamed) plant today, now known as Jhalani Tools.)

In 1982, a struggle erupted at the German-owned Gedore Hand Tools works, consisting of three plants and employing 3,500. The dominant union was the CITU, the affiliate of the CPI (M). Gedore management demanded 600 "resignations" (6) and a 25% pay cut or six months of "special terms" for pay. All demands were rejected. Management attempted a "pinprick" strategy, to which the union responded with a "tools down" strike. Management attempted a lockout, and the union struck. As is often the case, the union called the strike just before payday, ensuring that the workers would go into

downsizing, increase of electronic surveillance at the workplace and in society generally, the lengthening of the work week, speedup, loss of purchasing power and all the elements of the attack on wage workers in the West since the 1960's, and show their more or less exact counterpart in India. Even Bombay has been seriously deindustrialized by out-sourcing and decentralized cottage production which helped shut down its century (or more) old textile industry. Hong Kong has been de-industrialized by Shenzhen, where wages are 10% of Hong Kong wages, and Shenzhen is losing jobs to cities further into China, where wages are about 10% of Shenzhen wages. KK's Ballad Against Work, using examples from India and all over the world, documents this intensification of work by cordless phones, pagers, computer networks, "karoshi" (Japanese for "death from overwork"), "quality control", "agricultural revolutions", on-line work in the home, airline commutes, freeway commutes, mass transit commutes, and domestic piece-work out-sourcing of manufacture, all over the world.

There is doubtless a large element of truth in this. But it is at the same time somewhat breathtaking to hear a current in a city like Faridabad, where a skilled industrial worker earns the rupee equivalent of \$50-200 per month, in a country where 16% of the world's population produces 1.5% of the total world product, say that conditions are essentially the same as in the Western countries where a skilled industrial worker earns \$15 per hour and 16% of the world's population produces over half the world's product. I know that every one of these figures (except for population) is subject to the most withering critical scrutiny, but I still note massive labor emigration TO the West FROM the "Third World", and not in the other direction. It is certainly true that wage workers are one international class and that there is no revolution in one country, but this has been true for a long, long time. It is also true that the conditions of the post-1973 world crisis have significantly blurred the distinctions between "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries, in particular in the accelerating creation of one world labor market (e.g. Lufthansa accountants in Bangalore).

The point, however, is not to quibble about "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries. What is most striking about Kamunist Kranti, as a review of the history of Faridabad struggles recounted above will show, is that for the past 20 years they have been dealing with the kinds of struggles which revolutionaries in the West used to deal with in Detroit, Manchester, Alsace, the Ruhr, and Turin, i.e. struggles primarily centered on the point of production, that is the

reflection on the material already presented and from further conversations with members of KK.

To state my principal criticism as bluntly as possible: Kamunist Kranti, as a current, is overly focused on worker struggles at the point of production. The lessons of their Faridabad experience, however rich, are not as generalizable as KK thinks. They offer only so much, and not enough, to revolutionaries in countries where a large part of the proletariat has never made it to the shop floor, or has more recently been downsized out of it. In breaking totally (and mainly rightly) with “unifocal struggles” in the context of one city, Kamunist Kranti has also broken with the CLASS-FOR-ITSELF, which is a totality, not a sum, and which therefore cannot be a linear addition of affinity groups in a linear addition of factories, but becomes something qualitatively different in direct proletarian dual power political form, presaging actual working-class power over society as a whole, such as the soviets of 1905 (Russia), 1917-1921 (Russia-Germany), or 1936 (Spain). (Kamunist Kranti might of course rightly point out that all the latter examples also ended in defeats, but that would be a fatuous conflation. All struggles short of the final overthrow of capitalism will sooner or later be defeats in some way.)

KK evolved against the incredible inertia of the official left in India (of which the above narrative presumably gives at least a whiff), which is almost hopelessly dominated by the legacy of the Indian Communist Party’s accommodation to the Congress state, and by more radicalized versions of the same which began breaking away from the ICP with the Maoist revolt of the 1960’s. These, in turn, are part of a larger context of statism which besets the left internationally, and particularly in Third World countries. Kamunist Kranti had to polemicize with an environment deeply influenced by statist nationalism, justifying the kind of “anti-imperialist” alliances with the “progressive bourgeoisie” against “comprador elements” and “feudal remnants” at home, and “monopoly capital” abroad, the old tired refrain which has so badly declined in recent decades. Kamunist Kranti evolved in this context to a resolute internationalism, taking care to substitute the term “wage workers in India” for “Indian workers”. All these elements are, in India and anywhere else, a breath of fresh air.

Kamunist Kranti thinks that conditions of wage workers are, today, pretty much the same everywhere, and radically question the distinction between the “developed” and “underdeveloped” world. One does not have to accept blindly productivist- technocratic ideas of development to wonder about this. KK will point to the

the strike with the least possible financial cushion. A month passed, and two contracts were rejected; with a third offer, the union packed the strike meeting and ordered a return to work. The strike continued nonetheless, as strikers occupied their own union hall and demanded the resignation of the leadership, which took place, after which a new leadership took over the CITU. The strikers returned to work, but nine months later management locked out one of the three plants. A “Committee of 15” was formed to get a better agreement, but it was then learned that the new leadership which had taken over in the original ouster had collaborated with management in the lockout, which brought the “Committee of 15”, which had ties to the original leadership, to power in the union. The “Committee of 15” in turn began forcing people to resign by force. Armed police and police trucks were posted inside the plants. On some days as many as 50 workers were forced to resign and beaten by union goons. Many workers went back to their villages to avoid being forced to resign. In this conditions, it took a year to force 1,500 resignations (7), and in May 1985 the struggle was over. Later, the German management sold off the company, which became Jhalani Tools.

The CITU in 1983 was involved in another militant strike in Faridabad, this time at Lakhani Shoes, which then employed 500 workers and is now much larger. The CITU carried out physical attacks on managers and supervisors, but the strike, which lasted for months, ended in defeat. It later came out that Lakhani had paid 35,000 rupees to the Faridabad leader of the CITU. (Subsequently, the CITU was ousted and replaced by unions affiliated with the Congress Party and then with the JP.)

Such union activity is not merely limited to manipulating struggles with management while covertly collaborating with the latter. In 1983, Dewanchand Gandhi, a CITU leader in Faridabad, was involved in a brazen use of union goons for a real estate scam. People from nearby village had occupied land in Faridabad’s Sector 6 and had set up a tea shop, thereby becoming de facto owners. The owner of the land sold it to Gandhi and his brothers. The Gandhi brothers’ own goons would not vacate the land for them because some of them were from the same village as the occupiers. Thus Gandhi organized a union in a nearby factory of 300 young workers, and called a strike. While they were on strike, he used them to forcibly vacate the land and to wall it off, in one night, telling them it was to be the site of a union hall. This accomplished, the workers went back to their picket lines, but the union stopped food deliveries

to strikers. The workers resumed work and left the CITU. Gandhi kept the land.

In the same year, a militant CITU union at J.M.A. Industries called a strike. Bombs were thrown, and the state arrested and brought to trial four strike leaders. Regional CITU leaders came in to replace them and announced a deal. It later emerged that the company had built a new roof on the house of one of the regional leaders; meanwhile, the four local leaders stayed in jail, 18 militants were laid off, and management's aim were imposed.

In 1988, a struggle began at the Bata Shoe Company, a Canadian-based firm also operating plants in Batanagar, near Calcutta, in Bihar, and in southern India. Bata Shoe launched a plan to restructure and diversify into marketing. The offensive began with a lock-out of the roughly 13,000 workers of the Batanagar plant, where both Communist Parties had unions. As part of the strategy, the management of the Faridabad plant went from a 5-day to a 7-day work week, with the cooperation of the CP unions there. A month later, an all-India one-day strike against Bata Shoe was called; two months later, this was followed by a 3-day all-India Bata strike. Four months after the management offensive began, it imposed all 37 of its restructuring demands. The union in the Faridabad plant called another strike in April 1989, and 10,000 workers went out, followed by further strikes later the same year. At the beginning of the management offensive, Bata Shoe in Batanagar had 13,000 workers; at the end, 7,000. (KK points out that at every turn the Indian media gave very favorable coverage to the unions' toothless strike strategy.)

In 1989, at K.G. Khosla Compressors Ltd., a plant with 2,000 permanent workers and 350 casuals, the union signed an agreement with the company in which they gave away the workers' dues ("dues" in India mean severance pay, outstanding wages, pension funds and bonuses. It is common for management to quietly loot these dues in anticipation of a plant closing.) (Six years earlier, in 1983, the INTUC had led a militant strike which was crushed, ending in layoffs. When confronted, the local INTUC leadership said they signed the contract because the national leadership signed, and the national leadership said they signed because the local leadership signed.

Things came to a head in August 1991 as Khosla management declared a lockout, terminating 250 casuals, announcing 326 layoffs of the permanent work force, and offering only the minimum annual bonus of 8.33%, threatening closure of the plant if these demands were not accepted. No wages were paid for August and the lockout

situation where the official left and the trade unions are part of the problem. KK's "termite" strategy has succeeded in opening a space for genuine worker discussion in an industrial city of 300,000. Their members have been beaten up many times by goons of the left parties and the unions, but more recently their tactics of making themselves a less visible target have paid off. (Addendum, August 2000: in 1999 some attacks against KK resumed. For details write the Majdoor Library at the address in Footnote 1.)

Once again, many if not all of Kamunist Kranti's most recent ideas have been articulated before, and elsewhere. (The issue here is of course not originality; it is substance.) The critique of work in KK's *Ballad* echoes similar ideas articulated by *Zero Work* and *Midnight Notes* over the past 25 years. Stan Weir and his collaborators in the U.S. have for several decades argued that workplace affinity groups and horizontal communication among plants are the natural and real self-organization of workers and are an alternative to vertical unionism and vanguards, even if they do not reject unionism per se, as Kamunist Kranti does. (10) Back in the 1950's, the *Facing Reality* group in Detroit around C.L.R. James attempted to publish a factory based newspaper written by and for workers, although they never (to my knowledge) achieved the shop floor presence, quantitative or qualitative, of Kamunist Kranti. I am sure there are further examples of which I am unaware. On the other hand, I have never encountered another tendency which states so unequivocally that today "strikes are the weapon of management", nor have I ever encountered such a systematic rejection of what KK calls "unifocal struggles" as guaranteed defeats, however many defeats, in India and just about everywhere else, can be pointed to in recent decades. It is around this problematic, having laid out their ideas as judiciously as I can, that I begin my "comradely criticism" (as opposed to a full-blown critique) of Kamunist Kranti.

Criticism of Kamunist Kranti

Kamunist Kranti's two English-language pamphlets, *A Ballad Against Work* and *Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy*, are the two main theoretical statements by which the current is known internationally. As stated earlier, I think that for all their interest, they do not reveal clearly the uniqueness of what KK is about in its real presence in Faridabad, and space prevents me from taking them up in detail here. What follows flows rather from a

workers, they learned that “bees united in a hive can easily be put off by smoke and their honey taken away. But if affinity groups of bees swarm about, no one dares touch their honey”. KK’s critique of their earlier methods, and of those of all would-be vanguards, is aimed at what they call “unifocal struggles”, i.e. big confrontations where the whole spectrum of repression from state, army, police and management to “Marxist-Leninist” parties and unions can zero in on a big target. They point to most of the struggles recounted above as examples of such unifocal struggles. They counterpose to them the actions of small “affinity groups” that paralyze management attacks without becoming vulnerable targets. Workers assigned to work dangerous machinery for which they are not trained, instead of openly refusing and making themselves vulnerable to discipline and dismissal, work the machinery, let it break down, paralyze the factory, and force management to establish guidelines for training. Workers denied bathroom breaks from the assembly line start pissing on the shop floor and win bathroom breaks. They confront management over in-plant complaints in groups and refuse to delegate leaders who could be singled out or co-opted. When management started locking a factory gate at 8:00 AM sharp, workers, knowing that many busses arrived nearby only at 8:15, gathered at both sides of the gate during the shift change, preventing anyone from going in or out, until management abandoned the policy. At Jhalani Tools, when workers sensed that management was preparing to loot the enterprise in classic fashion, they went in small groups to the local labor department, flooding it with complaints about non-payment of wages and publicized the situation to the whole Faridabad working class with roadside placards, generalizing an awareness through the whole city of these looting tactics.

In Kamunist Kranti’s post-1992 break with “preach-teach” practice, they aim at a completely different kind of multilateral communication with workers. They stopped selling their newspaper and (as part of a critique of commodity relations), began giving it away at factory gates, but only to those who asked for it, and accepting contributions for further publication. In this way their circulation stabilized at 5,000. They are often approached by workers who write stories for the KK paper on developments in a specific plant. Individual workers in trouble with management come by the Majdoor Library for suggestions and help. KK and their newspaper are widely known in Faridabad, even by people who do not agree with them or work openly with them, as an alternative network of information and “small steps” strategy and tactics to deal with a

began in early September, lasting 8 months and breaking worker resistance.

A similar downsizing was pushed through at Thomson Press, a printing plant in Faridabad, which reduced its personnel from 1700 to 900 between June 1989 and June 1991.

In 1987, Thomson brought in a new manager, replacing one who had had a close working relationship with the Congress-affiliated INTUC. The new manager preferred to introduce the JP-linked HMS, to the relief of the workers, who hated the INTUC leader. The new HMS leader was himself a dismissed Thomson worker. To start off the new regime, the company agreed to make casuals permanent.

In 1989, however, Thomson demanded 200 layoffs and the new HMS leader signed a giveback agreement. In August 1990, the workers responded by bringing back the old deposed leader. In response to this, the company announced the closing of one of the plant’s printing operations, cutting jobs. Two factions of workers formed around the two leaders. The state government exacerbated the division by cultivating ties to the INTUC leader, and fights broke out between the two factions. In March 1991 management suspended all production because of the fighting. Whereas the media had given wide coverage to the situation up to that point because of the state’s ties to the INTUC leader, there was a complete blackout of news on this lockout. Both leaders convinced the Thomson workers to leave the factory during the lockout, and that night the management removed machinery from the plant. The lockout continued for 70 days, at the end of which the HMS leadership announced that the workers did not want a fight. The plant reopened, with a very bad agreement in effect, and over the next 4-5 months 800 workers were forced to resign.

Relevant Struggles Elsewhere In India

One icon of the official left in India is the worker buy-out of Kamani Tubes Ltd. in Bombay, the Indian variant of the French LIP strike of 1973 (8), or the more recent ESOP’s (Employee Stock Option Purchase) in the U.S. Kamani Tubes Ltd. was taken over in 1987 by its work force of 450, after 60 workers were laid off. The workers raised the buyout funds by taking out mortgages, and received support from the Bureau of Industrial Finance and Reconstruction. The Kamani Tubes experience of self-managed austerity is still used as a paradigm by India’s NGOs and official left,

and has been copied in a few other well-publicized instances, such as the Kanoria Jute Mill in Calcutta after 1993.

Not all workers' struggles in India, however, are successfully contained or manipulated by the unions. In 1989, 35,000 textile workers in Kanpur, an old industrial city in Uttar Pradesh, revolted against all local unions and blocked the railway lines through the city, taking turns by shift. 100 trains were cancelled, and the government conceded their demands in 5 days.

In this case, in contrast to the nation-wide, union-controlled Bata Shoe strikes, government propaganda and the media weighed in heavily against the action, and trade union officials also attacked it. (In 1977, just after Indira Gandhi's state of emergency had been lifted and the anti-emergency Janata Party had taken power, the government had fired on Kanpur textile workers inside the Swadeshi Cotton Mill, killing between 30 and 150 workers and running off all trade union leaders. The textile mill had been nationalized shortly after the shootings.) In 1989, however, an impending election year militated against government violence. Nonetheless, once the struggle had died down, the government announced a retrenchment program and pushed it through over the next 4 or 5 years.

Similarly, in December 1988, at the No.7 mining area at the Dhanbad Coal Mines in the state of Bihar, the piece-rate workers, fed up with the unions and their goon squads, revolted. They drafted demands and started a hunger strike at the union regional headquarters, and surrounded the regional management offices with slogans denouncing both corrupt management and corrupt unions.

In July 1990, another struggle outside and against union control erupted. 5,000 miners from the Munidih mines of the Bahrat Coking Coals Ltd. (BCCL) struck on their own. The police opened fire, killing two miners. All unions opposed the strike, and denounced the influence of "outsiders". Management refused to negotiate, until Aug. 7, when 2,000 workers surrounded BCCL headquarters and forced talks, in which management persisted in pressing charges against the strikers. On Aug. 10, fighting erupted with police, and union goons threatened workers. Under this pressure, 50-60% went back to work, but after an Aug. 17 solidarity demonstration that mobilized 1,000 workers, management caved.

The workers at Bengal Jute, living under the "Marxist" state government of the CPI(M) in West Bengal, were not so fortunate. Bengal Jute operates 49 jute mills, in which the CPI(M)'s own union, the CITU, and the INTAC were dominant. In 1984, in a previous strike, management had agreed to no layoffs of 250,000 workers, but

vanguard and good leaders. By December 1997, they had published the first issue of their (monthly) newspaper entirely written by factory workers.

In 1984-85 Kamunist Kranti withdrew from intervention and threw its energies into a fundamental theoretical reconsideration of perspectives. In their 1984-85 study group phase, they read through the three volumes of Capital and discovered Rosa Luxemburg's Accumulation of Capital, which they embraced, with some qualifications. In 1990, they published an abridged edition of Luxemburg's book, intended to begin a debate with the Indian left; they found no takers, and ran up against the common "I've only read Vol. 1, and that was a long time ago" illiteracy which is hardly limited to India. The study of Capital and of Luxemburg showed KK the utter poverty of the Lenin-Hilferdig-Bukharin "monopoly capital" - "anti-imperialist" economics (in contrast to the critique of political economy) in which they, and most of the international left, had been immersed.

In their pre-1992 "preach-teach" phase, KK sold a monthly newspaper at the factory gates in Faridabad which by 1990 had reached a circulation of 1000. The paper was made up of accounts of stories the kind related above. Their 1990 publication of Luxemburg's Accumulation of Capital and their maintenance of the Majdoor Library in the heart of industrial Faridabad were further parts of what they see today as their "educational" outreach. But almost no one was interested in debating Luxemburg with them, and few workers used the written material available in the library.

The turning point came in 1992 when they published an anthology (in Hindi only) of the best articles in their newspaper from the previous decade. The idea was to provide a tool for struggle to combative workers. Instead, workers thumbed through it, put it down, and said "This stuff is for leaders", i.e. specialists. This response to their whole previous "preach-teach" phase that led KK to an even more radical questioning of any kind of vanguardism. The struggles in which they had been involved since 1979 were a litany of union provocations of workers, often in conscious collaboration with management, to achieve management goals. They had again and again seen rank-and-file leaders pulled into the same mode of behavior. On the other hand, KK's very real ties to affinity groups on the shop floor made them acutely aware of how workers acted to counter these provocations and noisy scenarios of defeat.

What KK saw, and further evolved as the alternative to any kind of vanguardism, was a strategy of "small steps". From Faridabad

view, workers in India (and not merely in India) confront a set of interlocking rackets: corporate management, unions, the left political parties, the state at every level from local to national, labor boards and labor courts (where workers pursue legal redress for flagrant violation of the law for up to 15 years, and when they happen to win, find that the company's assets have been looted three times over by management, banks and state officials). None of these phenomena, in themselves or taken as a whole, are unfamiliar to many, far from the Indian context (and KK would deny that there is anything specifically "Indian" about them). In Faridabad thousands of workers see all unions, including oppositional currents in unions, and left-wing political parties as uniformly on a continuum with all the other interlocking parts of the racket, as merely further forces against which they have to defend themselves by refusing to be provoked into confrontations that are rigged in advance. This is what KK means when it says that, in contrast to 100 years ago, strikes are today the weapon of management. KK tells stories of management calling in groups of perceived "troublemakers" and insulting them in the most personal way, calling them wimps and cowards who stand there and take such insults, while the workers refuse to be provoked; in the middle of the management's tirade the police van, which had been called in advance, pulls up at the factory gate. For KK, part of the unions' strategy in working with management on retrenchment schemes is the calling of sometimes violent strikes and confrontations in order to set in motion a "struggle scenario" in which the result is always defeat for the workers.

As I said at the onset of this article, neither KK's published (English-language) theoretical writings nor even its assessment "on the ground" of the official left and the unions in their main arena of intervention particularly distinguish them from a number of other groups in the international ultra-left milieu; what does seem to me to be unusual, if not unique, is the depth of KK's presence in a big working class center, and their evolution of a strategy to combat their enemies. This strategy is what gives meaning to their self-description as "termites", quietly eating away at the foundations of the left spectacle of opposition, and the whole hoopla of the high-visibility, losing struggles the latter promotes.

KK refers to their pre-1992 vanguardism (even when it became anti-Stalinist vanguardism) as their "preach-teach" phase, when they still conceived of themselves as essentially addressing workers from a revolutionary tribunal. In that earlier phase, they confronted "bad vanguards" and "bad leaders" with the idea of becoming a good

subsequently managed to retrench 110,000. In June 1992, the two unions launched a strike demanding the reinstatement of the laid-off workers; during the ensuing, failed strike by its own union, the CPI(M), with state power, said nothing.

1990's Struggles in Faridabad

Lakhani Shoes, which currently operates 19 plants in Faridabad, had been the scene of mass layoffs in 1983 (described earlier) and 1988. By the mid-90's, it had become a joint venture with Reebok, using a large number of casuals in very hard work with low pay, rapid aging on the job, and loss of fingers. Many workers are Nepali, with a young work force because of the previous mass layoffs.

In these conditions, in May-June 1996, the workers decided to organize and went to the Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS), mentioned earlier as the union affiliate of the Janata Dal. In July-August 1996, management suspended the union activists, and in September the union called a strike. Permanent, casual and contracted workers all struck. The strike continued into the spring of 1997, when workers began to disperse. The management resumed work using new hires, with the ex-leaders from the HMS as the labor contractors. A court order demanded that strikers stay 100 yards from the gates, and all strikers were ultimately fired.

In June 1995, a new struggle erupted at the East India Cotton Mills in Faridabad, where the 1979 strike was one of KK's first formative experiences in the working-class milieu. In 1995, the mills employed 3,000 workers in two factories. When some equipment was dismantled and workers complained, six of them were suspended. 2,500 workers walked out and the six were reinstated.

Management, however, wanted 600 layoffs. Without leaders among the workers, they were unable to control the work force. In the run-up to a confrontation over the layoffs, hunger strikes took place, and a group of rank-and-file leaders, demanding a "good contract", took over. In June-July 1996 295 workers were forced to resign. Management floated a voluntary retirement scheme which found no takers. On July 10, they declared a lockout. 18 days later, the lockout was lifted and an agreement to resume work was signed, with 18 days pay lost.

In August, management simply paid no wages, and on Sept. 12 declared a lockout in both plants, backed up by the arrival of the police. In an unusual move in a lockout situation, the rank-and-file

leaders told the workers to leave the factories. The lockout continued into the fall, with the workers dispersed. The rank-and-file leaders threatened to close down Faridabad if the lockout did not end before Diwali (a Hindu festival). At the same time they avoided demonstrations because they were afraid of losing control. The leaders tried taking the case to the Supreme Court. In January 1997, the smaller plant reopened, but two months later resumed the lockout, with management still demanding 600 layoffs. As of December 1997, the lockout continued.

The (ongoing) struggle at Jhalani Tools Ltd. is one of the most recent struggles in which Kamunist Kranti has been involved, one of the most dramatic, and the one about which I have the most documentation so, at the risk of overkill I will give it more space. Jhalani Tools provides an unusually clear illustration of what Faridabad workers (and workers in other parts of India) are up against.

Workers everywhere are familiar with asset-stripping by management. But most workers in Europe and America, when their company goes bankrupt or is absorbed in a leveraged buyout, at least expect to be laid off with a final paycheck, collect some unemployment compensation, and perhaps eventually some part of a pension. Of course in the fly-by-night sweatshops of Los Angeles and New York, as in similar maquiladora operations on the US-Mexican border, there are constant cases of companies folding up and disappearing while owing workers weeks of pay. But there have to date been few cases of decades-old, well-known “mainstream” companies operating for nearly two years without paying any wages.

Not so in Faridabad. Jhalani Tools Ltd.(9), the successor to Gedore Hand Tools (cf. above for the account of the 1982-85 struggle there) has not paid wages to 2183 workers since March 1996. Since there has been no hiring at Jhalani since 1978, (and the forcible “downsizing” of the work force in 1984) these 2183 employees have been at Gedore/Jhalani for a minimum of 20 years. They are the target of an asset-stripping strategy that is not uncommon among Indian firms.

Jhalani Tools is not merely attempting to loot two years of back wages; it is also looting money owed workers for two annual bonuses, three years of “leave-travel” allowance, 3 years’ payments to the group medical plan, and other “contracted” benefits. It is able to blackmail workers in this way because of the difficulty, not to say

impossibility, for them to find other jobs by walking away from their “legally guaranteed” employment.

After reducing staff almost by half by goon terror in 1984, as described earlier, Jhalani in 1989 colluded with the union to ram through a contract containing three secret clauses that were withheld from workers (the contract was read aloud, minus these clauses, at a gate meeting). The clauses linked wages to production targets (requiring a minimum of 200 tons before any wages would be paid), absolved the company of the obligation to pay workers when production was impossible because of electricity blackouts or raw materials shortages, and gave the company the right to assign work irrespective of job classification.

Even after pay had been docked for electric outages and materials shortages, these clauses remained in a new contract pushed through in 1993. Pleading poverty from various causes, Jhalani Tools in December 1995 got an “ad hoc committee” to agree to a 50% pay cut until further notice. The company began paying wages months in arrears and finally, in March 1996, stopped paying wages altogether, largely blaming work stoppages and indiscipline for the company’s problems, using further endless salami tactics and maneuvers, and blithely ignoring the occasional labor board and court decisions in the workers’ favor (the latter hardly being news).

Seasoned by decades of these tactics by management and the unions, Jhalani workers refused to be provoked into a set-up strike or other easily-targeted actions and instead took their case to the Faridabad working class as a whole with roadside informational pickets. (For further details cf. KK’s response to this article published in CAN, Fall 1998). As of this writing (March 1998), the standoff remains unresolved.

Faridabad Struggles and the Evolution of Kamunist Kranti: 1979-Present

When the future nucleus of Kamunist Kranti began its focus on Faridabad in the late 1970’s, the group was still recovering from Maoism; it remained within some kind of vanguardist perspective until ca. 1992, at which point it evolved to its current, anti-vanguardist “affinity group” outlook. The preceding sketch of some of the major struggles which shaped KK’s evolution gives some idea of the environment in which they were evolved. In Kamunist Kranti’s