

REPORT OF THE PUCL (DELHI) FACT FINDING TEAM
ON FARIDABAD INCIDENTS OF 17TH OCTOBER, 1979

In one of the worst orgies of violence in recent times, the Haryana Police ran berserk and killed innocent people in Faridabad on October 17 and are today engaged in concealing and destroying all evidence of their misdeeds, and in misleading the press as to the actual nature of the incidents on that day.

This is the finding of a three-member team sponsored by the People's Union of Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights, Delhi Branch, which toured Faridabad on October 24, met victims of the police firing, visited the spots where the firing took place and talked to relations of those killed by the police and discovered that even though a week had passed since the incidents, the police are still persecuting innocent people.

Contrary to what the police want us to believe, we found out from our talks with those who witnessed the police firing at Neelam Chowk on October 17, when a strike call was given by different trade union organisations, that the provocation first came from the police when Sub-Inspector Brahm Dutt opened fire on an unarmed demonstration of workers which reached Neelam Chowk. The Sub-Inspector had earlier given his policemen orders for a lathi charge to disperse the crowd which was not aware of the imposition of Section 144, promulgated by the police only at 2 a.m. on that day. No public announcement had been made. While some workers were engaged in an argument with the police, Brahm Dutt fired, killing one of the demonstrators on the spot. When the dead man's comrades tried to lift the body, he fired again killing two more ~~more~~ people. This enraged the crowd, who were reported to have pounced upon Brahm Dutt, who later succumbed to injuries inflicted by the mob.

The total indifference of the police and local administration towards basic human rights is described by the employees of a hotel at the Neelam Chowk - the epicentre of the incidents.

"When the trouble started, some policemen took vantage position above the building where the lime shop at Neelam Chowk is situated and started firing on the crowd in the streets. The policemen on the road started beating the people -- including school children -- without any sense of proportion. The panic-stricken people moved to the railway bridge between Neelam Chowk and Mathura Road. Meanwhile a group of CRP Men reached Mathura side of the bridge to trap the crowd on the bridge between the two police forces. The police from both sides started attacking the crowd with gun shots. Many people jumped from the bridge down to a depth of any thing between 25 and 40 ft. The policemen forced those to jump down, who were dangling from the bridge by beating on their knuckles. Also, some were physically lifted and thrown down from the bridge by the policemen."

From the eye-witness reports that we had from several sources, the lack of a properly organised labour force seems to be evident in Faridabad. Those who were present at Neelam Chowk on the day of the incident reported that not a single leader of any Union or political party was to be seen there before and after the incidents. This was corroborated by the C.I.T.U. men whom we contacted at their office. Though largely indicted by various Haryana Ministers for the violence and disturbances, the CITU men appeared unaware of the number of dead, injured and missing. More over, they seem to be ill-informed about the incidents of 17th.

On the other hand, police preparedness much before the trouble started was crystal clear. On the early morning of the bandh, Cr.P.C. 144 was declared at 2 a.m. According to the shop keepers at Neelam Chowk, they were forced to close their shops and keep indoor by the policemen much before the trouble started. "The policemen themselves were preparing for a show down" as one shop-employee puts it.

Evidence suggests that after the death of Brahm Dutt, the police officer, the gun carrying police force went amuck with a deep sense of revenge. One Engineer serving in West Germany who is on a short leave to meet his relatives, told us that he saw a policeman blocking two young school children on their bicycles, returning from their school, unaware of the happenings. They were beaten mercilessly, although this was five hours after the morning incidents. Every one in Neelam Chowk corroborated that there was a worst type of police raj in the whole area following the morning incidents. The policemen entered even shops and residences to beat up uninvolved and innocent citizens. One hotel employee showed us his right hand shoulder, which was hard to move due to lathi-blows, pounced on him by the policemen while he was cooking inside the kitchen. The engineer who came to Neelam Chowk unaware of the incident ran for escape to a nearby house of a stranger to stay there for hours together. From there he saw the policemen firing at people to and downed four. Though the police and administration claimed that no firing took place after 1.00 P.M. on the 17th the gruesome incidents at the residential areas of Press Colony and Punjabi Colony speak otherwise.

The police did not stop at indiscriminately beating up and firing upon people who had either gathered in the demonstration or were watching as innocent bystanders at Neelam Chowk. They extended the range of their

atrocities to areas far away from the scene of the demonstration, and to people who had nothing to do with the striking workers.

We went to Punjabi Colony - 4 to 5 Kms. away from Neelam Chowk, and visited a house on the roof of which two of its residents - Kashmiri Lal Bali aged 42, and Jagdish Prasad, aged 28, were killed at point blank range by the police who took up positions at the landing of a stair case of a house opposite the roof-top. Bali's 12 year old son Anil, who was shot in the abdomen, is still lying in coma at the Safdarjung Hospital. Another boy - 16 year old Surendra Kumar - who was also standing on the roof-top was injured by bullet splinters in the head and back.

The story of Bali's killing, as narrated by his brother-in-law and other relatives - eye-witnesses to the incident - is pathetic. Bali was a mono-printer at the Govt of India press. After his office closed at 4.30 p.m., he came home and was told by his wife that his eldest son, Anil was playing on the roof. Asking his wife to prepare food, he went upstairs to bring down his son. As he reached the roof, a bullet hit his head from across the road. Seeing him fall, Jagdish Prasad who was staying in a room on the same terrace, tried to come out to help him, when another bullet hit his waist and pierced through his abdomen. He later died in hospital. Bali's son, Anil was not next, while the other boy Surender Kumar, also a resident in the same neighbourhood was injured at the same time by splinters from the bullet that pierced Jagdish Prasad.

We also visited the house - belonging to one Lkhpati - from which the police took aim at Bali. It is across the Gurudwara Road, opposite Bali's house - the distance between the two houses being about 75 meters. The Road is a busy thoroughfare and in the evening when the firing took place, children were coming back from their schools. We saw the wooden gate of the house broken by the police who entered the house to go up the stair case and reach the landing from which they took aim.

This was a case of cold-blooded murder, as neither Bali nor Jagdish Prasad, nor the two children were involved in strikes or demonstrations on that day. That the police were keen on hiding all evidence of this murder was obvious from several facts. First, soon after the killing a police party came to Bali's house and wanted to snatch away Bali's dead body from his relatives. After they failed to take it away, a larger police party came headed by the DSP and forced the relatives to part with the body. But in the meantime, Bali's relatives had managed to get a photographer take pictures of Bali's dead body and the scene of the killing. Bali's brother-in-law insisted on an inquiry into the killing, but the DSP said that the post-mortem on the body would have to take place at Gurgaon on the orders of the higher authorities. Bali's brother-in-law then went to the Circuit House, where a meeting was in progress between a Haryana Cabinet Minister Khurshid Ahmed, high police officials and industrialists. When after an hour, the Ministers came out, the brother-in-law requested him to allow him to take Bali's body and perform the last religious rites and cremate him. But both the Minister and the industrialists who were present there rejected his request on the plea "if the body was allowed to be cremated at Faridabad, it will further worsen the industrial relations". Finally, Bali's relatives were allowed to accompany the dead body in a police van (No.HRC 7538) to the cremation ground at Gurgaon.

At the Gurgaon cremation ground, Bali's relatives found that at least six more dead bodies were lying to be cremated. The burning ghat people told them that these bodies were brought by the police from Faridabad and were being secretly burnt there. They remained unidentified. Bali's brother-in-law told us that the same fate would have happened to Bali, had not his relatives insisted on getting back his body. The body of Jagdish Prasad was not handed over to his relatives after his death in hospital, and no one knows what had happened to it. We learnt that the police paid only Rs.350/- to the

cremation ground-in-charge keeping the rest with them. When relatives of the other dead people contacted the doctor at the Gurgaon Civil hospital for post-mortem reports, he pleaded helplessness because of 'limitations'. The relatives were in utter desperation and helplessness. No one - whether political or trade union leaders - came to their rescue. It reminded them the dark days of emergency. One of them quipped: "No wonder that this same Haryana Cabinet withdrawn cases pertaining to the emergency crimes done by Mr. Bansi Lal."

To hide the cold-blooded murder, the Haryana police gave out the story (which was published by at least one prominent New Delhi English daily) that Bali's body was found lying on the street and let fall the false suggestion that his death might have been the result of some family feud.

The story does not end here. On October 22 - four days after Bali's murder - a police party headed by an ASI named Jayanarayan visited the spot. Before killing Bali, the police who had aimed at him from the opposite house, had missed his target and one of the bullets lodged into the outer wall of the neighbouring house. To destroy this evidence, Jayanarayan with his men came on the 22nd, climbed up the wall, and with bayonets dislodged the bullet from inside the wall. We saw the original hole made by the bullet, further extended into a wide gap by Jayanarayan's men. The local people told us that the police were still on the prowl in the area to recover the cartridges of the bullets fired by them in the area on that day, so that they are not later produced by the residents to prove the police misdeed.

The police have also come to know by now of the photographs taken of Bali's deadbody. The photographer is being constantly harassed by the police. He told us that the DSP had threatened him and even offered bribes to get back the film roll from him.

7

Thus, it is evident that the police are busy hiding and destroying all traces of their murderous activities of October 17. Plainclothesmen are prowling all over Faridabad, arresting people whom they suspect of giving out the real story. Reporters have not been allowed to enter the Badshah Khan Hospital where those injured on that day are being treated. We managed to smuggle ourselves into the male ward, and saw at least six persons with bullet injuries.

We were shocked to see four of them - all with their hands or legs in plaster, and in no condition to move - tied down by chains to their beds in a separate corner of the ward and being guarded by armed policemen who were occupying some of the patients' beds. One of the injured was a post and telegraphs employee, who on the day of the firing was on duty on the bridge leading to Neelam Chowk. Hira Lal, Devi Lal, Jagdish K. Pande and Tilak Kapoor (deaf & dumb) with bullet injuries on their bodies - and tied down by chains, were workers who were trapped in Neelam Chowk and shot at by the police. As they could not flee due to their injuries, the police arrested them and are planning to show them up as miscreants who provoked the October 17th incidents. We also saw a 12-year old boy with bullet injuries under arrest. We came to know that at least 3 people who were brought to the hospital on that day, succumbed to bullet injuries.

The scene at the B.K. Hospital at Faridabad - barely 18 kms from the capital of India - reminded us of pictures of the fascist jails of South Africa. Later, visiting the Safdarjung Hospital to see the injured son of Kashmiri Lal Bali - Anil Bali - we found that the medical facilities were better here, and the boy fortunately had been spared the brutal police surveillance that was the lot of his fellow-victims in the Faridabad hospital. The other injured boy, Surendra Kumar also corroborated that he received better treatment at the Safdarjung Hospital from where he was discharged recently after his treatment.

We also visited the neighbourhood of the bridge connecting Neelam Chowk with Mathura Road. During the daylong firing and lathi charge, the police spilled over into the outlying areas and beat up innocent residents of the jhuggis and jhopris. One such victim was 60-year old Bishan Singh - a saintly looking Sardarji with white hair and beard. He showed us the wall of his courtyard broken open by the police who entered the house while he was sitting on his charpoy, and asked him to bring out those who were supposed to have hidden in his room. Bishan Singh said that no one was hiding, and offered to take the police to his room to prove the truth of what he was saying. Not satisfied, the policeman started beating him with his lathi. With an injured leg, old Bishan Singh is now confined to his bed.

A particular target of the police were the children. Wherever we went people complained that children were beaten up mercilessly. We have already mentioned the cases of Bali's son and 16-year old Surinder of Punjabi Colony.

As we watched the bullet-ridden 10-year old Anil Bali lying in a coma in a ward at Safdarjung Hospital, breathing faintly and fighting for survival, we realised with bitterness how the Haryana police was observing the International Year of the Child ! People with whom we talked at Faridabad estimated that from 50 to 120 people were still missing. Among them were a large number of children. There is a widespread suspicion that the police had disposed of the deadbodies by burning them secretly - as evident from eyewitness accounts of the Gurgaon cremation ground - or thrown them into the river.

We found that there is a widespread and growing distrust among the people of Faridabad in the local police force. For one thing, it is evident to all that the police are resorting to falsehood every now and then. Immediately after the Oct.17 incidents, they said that the firing stopped at 1 pm on that day. But all with one voice told us that at Neelam Chowk firing continued till the evening. The killing of Kashmiri Lal Bali and Jagdish Prasad took place after Bali had returned from office - between 4.45 pm to 5.15 pm

As for the number of casualties also, the figure eight given out by the police, is considered far too small by the local people, many of whom are still searching for their missing relatives and friends who are suspected to have been killed.

What has infuriated the people further is the Government's immediate announcement of an award of Rs.15,000 to relatives of the dead sub-inspector. "What about the innocent people who were killed by him and his colleagues?" ask the people of Faridabad. We were told that at every stage, the local industrialists were influencing the police. At the Circuit House meeting where the industrialists, police officials and Minister Khurshid Ahmed discussed the post-firing situation, it was the industrialists who offered to pool the money and give the award to the dead policeman. It was they again who pressurized the Minister not to give Bali's deadbody to his relatives.

We also noticed a widespread feeling that the magisterial inquiry ordered into the October 17 police firing by the Haryana Government would not lead anywhere, excepting defending the police. Many are demanding a judicial inquiry and suspension of the guilty policemen.

The local people complained that none of the major political parties or trade union leaders had bothered to visit the relatives of the dead or the injured. No help has been rendered to the victims in the hospital. The injured boy, Anil Bali was lying alone in a highly critical condition when we visited him at Safdarjung Hospital.

The day of our visit, the Haryana Chief Minister once again repeated his charge from Chandigarh against the CPI(M) and CITU as instigators of the trouble. However, when contacted the CITU people at Faridabad failed to supply us any information regarding the number of casualties, arrests or even as to what actually happened on the 17th. The CITU people when we met seems to be in the grip of panic probably set off by the repeated threats and allegations against them. We also, never

came across a single dead, injured or missing person as a CPM or CITU activists or sympathiser. Also, Haryana Chief Minister's allegations against CPI(M) does not warrant the police action on Mr. Deep Chand Bhatia, the Lok Dal MLA, who was arrested as the main culprit of the incident and reportedly beaten up publicly at Neelam Chowk three days after the flare-up.

A note of caution with far-reaching implications needs to be given on the Haryana Chief Minister's allegation that "outsiders from Bengal and Bihar" are responsible for the incidents. This accusation does not corroborate with the fact that all those injured, dead or missing about whom we could get information were local people. There is an absence of information from the Government pertaining to the state of origin of the "culprits" under custody. If there is any truth in the Chief Minister's allegation about outsiders being the real culprits, judging by the evidences we collected it appears that the Haryana police killed the local innocent people and fail to book the "culprits" from outside. This kind of irresponsible statement coming from a Chief Minister has dangerous implications for other cosmopolitan towns and industrial townships as such statements are likely to instigate tension among people of different provincials living in these towns.

We note that the industrial climate at Faridabad has deteriorated over the years primarily because of the aggressive attitude of the local industrialists who habitually employ 'goondas' in the name of security guards to beat up workers active in the trade unions. On October 17, the 'goondas' employed by the management of East Indian Cotton Mills near Press Colony, Faridabad, chased workers belonging to the union. Eye-witnesses told us that the police were protecting the goondas who hurled stones at the workers.

1. Why is it that no arrests are made when organised goondas (working under the cover of security guards) attack the workers whereas injured innocent victims of police firing are kept under chains in the hospital ?
2. Why is it that authorities in Faridabad impose Sec.144 whenever there is even a notice of a strike in a single factory ?
3. Why is that compensations are paid by the Govt. & the industrialists to the police personnel, while the victims of indiscriminate police firing are paid none.
4. Why is it that seriously injured victims of police firing are kept under chains at the hospital with 3 armed guards?

We feel that:

- 1) Imposition of Sec.144 at 2 a.m., unannounced, was a deliberate provocative step.
- 2) Disappearance of 150 - 200 men and children since the 17th Oct 79, is too much of a coincidence to be ignored for its significance.
- 3) Threats, destruction of evidence and bribes in some instances, by the authorities prove their complicity in the incidents of the 17th.
- 4) Disposal of dead bodies at Gurgaon without proper religious rites and the secrecy surrounding the act tends to prove that the number of dead are much more than what the authorities will make us believe.
- 5) People of Faridabad, workers, shopkeepers, housewives, children, etc. were all in fear of the police and critical of their act.
- 6) To conclude, we feel that the reign of terror let loose by the authorities must end before anything else can be done. A judicial inquiry must be held to inquire into the violent incident of 17th Oct. and the role of the police in it.