

## *Press Release*

June 3, 1999

Over ten years ago a lawyer from Delhi, M.C.Mehta, filed a "public interest" petition in the Supreme Court that the Government be ordered to take steps to clean the pollution in the river Ganga. Over the years the case expanded to cover many issues, from the tanneries at Kanpur to the municipal sewage of Calcutta. Between March to December 1996 the Court also issued a set of orders that related to Delhi, one of which said: ". . . The city has become a vast unmanageable conglomeration of commercial, industrial, unauthorised colonies and unplanned housing . . . The only way to relieve the capital city from the additional burden and pressures is to deconcentrate the population, industries, and economic activities in the city and relocate the same in various priority towns in the National Capital Region (NCR)." In another directive the Court ordered the closure of 168 industrial units on the basis that all these were polluting units. Furthermore, 39,000 other units were issued notices for relocation because they were in nonconforming areas.

These orders have come as a severe jolt to about 4 lakh workers employed in these industries and their families. A common platform was formed by several workers' organisations and their sympathisers to protect their rights. One of the issues that this association has raised is the question of non-representation of workers in the case. They have demanded the formation of a Tripartite Board with mandatory worker representation, and the participation of workers in the planning of the city.

Another on-going case has been brought before the High Court of Delhi by another "public-spirited" citizen, H.D.Shourie, who has argued that thousands of unauthorised colonies have come up in Delhi because of the vested interests of land mafias, politicians, and officials protecting their profits and their vote banks. This has resulted in "Delhi's prestige" being lowered and the "great danger of epidemics breaking out in the city". Hence, he asked the Court to order that these unauthorised colonies be moved out of the capital. Following this case, the Delhi Government has announced several times that these colonies will be regularised, but the Court says that regularisation cannot be permitted until final orders and has also stayed all construction activities. Shourie has further requested that the jhuggi jhonpries be also considered as part of the case. At stake are the lives of a population of over 50 lakh people. Several voluntary groups and resident's associations have demanded that these people be given a fair hearing in the case.

What is common to both these cases is that they have been filed in the "public" interest; common people are being made to indirectly pay for the "illegal" activities of industrialists, mafias, politicians, and officials; the actions of just two prominent individuals are thus affecting the lives of more than two-thirds of the total population of the city; these people are not being given a fair hearing in either of the cases; and the Courts are basing their orders on what is "authorised" under the Master Plans of Delhi.

In reaction, a coalition of environment and citizen's groups have, therefore, challenged the basis of the Master Plan itself. They have raised questions about who is doing the planning, for whom, what are the norms of planning, and what are the notions that planners have about how people actually live in the city. Thus, these organisations are beginning to demand a different kind of planning which meets the real needs of the vast majority of the population that works and lives in the city and actually contributes to its "prestige". An intervention has been filed on the behalf of eight Delhi based organisations, which calls for the rights of live and livelihood to all citizens and demands the formation of an independent tri-partite committee to suggest a pro-citizen plan for Delhi.

As part of a broader mass campaign, the organisations, (which include V Block, Prem Nagar II Welfare Association, C-1 Block, Adarsh Enclave, Aya Nagar, Unauthorised Colonies Federation West Delhi, Nangloi, Ankur, Action India, Kislay, Charvaka, The Other Media) are organising a convention on Electricity, Water, Sewage and Housing in Delhi - "An Alternative Plan" under the banner of a joint platform called 'Sanja Manch'. This will be held at Deputy Speaker's Hall, V.P. House from 1-5 p.m on 6th June 1999 (Sunday). People from all walks of life and various areas of the city have been invited to express their experience and opinions on the way Delhi should be organised. These different views will be put in the form of a memorandum which will be presented to the Delhi Government, so as to represent the voice of the majority in the formulation of different plans for Delhi.

For further information and comments, please contact:

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