

Statement on behalf of Sajha Manch
on the occasion of the Convention organised by Sahmat
on the Rural Employment Guarantee Act
October 19, 2004

This combined effort by several mass organisations to enact a pro-people Rural Employment Guarantee Act calls for our full support and participation. At the same time, attention has to be devoted to the travails of the urban workers. Especially so because the rate of migration from rural to urban areas is increasing and it is predicted that within 15-20 years about half the population will be in urban centres. But employment opportunities in urban areas are simultaneously decreasing, subject to the same forces of liberalisation and globalisation that are ruining rural economies. Firstly, jobs in the formal sector are not growing as the emphasis shifts from manufacturing to the services sector and these jobs are not being protected under existing labour laws. Secondly, workers are getting thrown out of the formal into the informal sector through mechanisms of closure, privatisation, voluntary retirement schemes, and retrenchment. And thirdly, the informal sector is becoming illegalised through efforts to “clean” the “global” city. Thus, the effort to enhance urban employment cannot succeed merely by promoting a people’s Bill, but requires a political movement to challenge the very process of globalisation. This calls for the joint effort and mutual strengthening of all mass organisations committed to protecting the interests of the people.

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