

EDITORIAL

My dear friends,

I don't know why, but when I sat down to write this *Editorial* on **The Social Sector**, I suddenly thought of addressing you as 'dear friends'. It is perhaps because of the theme and the 'mood' it creates! First, I want to ask you to excuse us for being more than a month late in sending you this issue of *Integral Liberation*. Some of us were involved in sessions, seminars and colloquiums, and we got delayed with this publication...

The Editorial Board and some of our friends looked at what is happening in **The Social Sector** of our country today and were inspired to share a few of their concerns and reflections. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Independence, Simon Paul D'Souza carefully read the two Supplements of *The Hindu*, *Independent India at 60*, and expressed his understanding of the political, culturo-religious, economic, social and environmental situation and dynamics. *Do you agree with his views and responses? What would you have written yourself?*

Our friend James David was led to reflect on two major issues affecting our country today, the government policies on the **Special Economic Zones** (SEZs) (or shall we say, Eviction/Exploitation Zones?) and on **Agriculture**. *How many of India's citizens realise the full dimensions of these ongoing disasters? It is truly unimaginable and even frightening!* Stan Swamy, who is working with people's organisations in Jharkhand, also sent a moving note about **displacement**, often done of course in the name of 'development'! *How can our leaders adopt such policies that create so much anguish and misery? Why don't they resign in shame if they cannot govern our country properly? And how can all of us tolerate what is going on without protesting more vigorously?*

Prakash Louis, now in Bihar, is deeply concerned about another vital issue – the problem of unemployment. He thus writes about the great potential of the **National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme** to promote the 'right to work' and 'the right to food', and

also about the severe birth-pangs of this scheme in many parts of the country. *How can our administrators and leaders prevent our people from enjoying their basic rights by their inefficiency, indifference and even corruption? Which of these evils is worse? One could similarly wonder about our country's progress in implementing the rights to information, education and health care...*

Our faithful collaborator, Cynthia Stephen, is particularly taken up of late with **the NGOs** – their tremendous growth and potential, and yet the struggles of many with credibility and accountability. *How can the NGOs defend people's rights if they don't genuinely live the values they proclaim? How can they challenge the corporates, business houses, governments, globalisation and consumerism, without first putting their own house in order?*

John Desrochers makes another significant contribution to our review. He expresses his commitment to India's people and to societal transformation by *his efforts to update our knowledge and deepen our understanding*. He thus reflects on the iniquitous nature of India's growth, our biased development model, the diminishing social sector expenditure, and some other crucial questions like unemployment, indebtedness, poverty, malnutrition, inequalities, children's rights, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the role of the State and its policies regarding the SEZs, Land Acquisition, and Compensation/Rehabilitation. Desrochers' second article on the 2004-5 poverty estimates rightly turns our attention towards the poor and the marginalised and questions both our attitudes and policies.

While reviewing these articles, I was wondering how they can inspire all of us and guide our social commitments. **How can we become more sensitive to people's needs and rights, and make our contribution to the building of a better India more significant? What is the concrete meaning of justice, freedom, equality, solidarity and fraternity for us in India today? What 'pledges' are we 'redeeming' by our daily lives in this 60th year of Independence?**

Ronald Serrao