

Sher Singh, Shveta Sarda
**Of Work Riots,
Political
Prisoners, and
Workers
Refusing to
Leave the
Factory –
Translated
Through the
Pages of
Faridabad
Workers News
(2005–2015)**

e-flux journal #65 SUPERCOMMUNITY — may–august 2015 Sher Singh, Shveta Sarda
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Since October 27, 2005 workers have walked the streets with placards. When we stand on paths that lead to factories at the start of the morning shift, many stop.

We exchange stories, ideas, and glances; the restlessness of management rises.¹

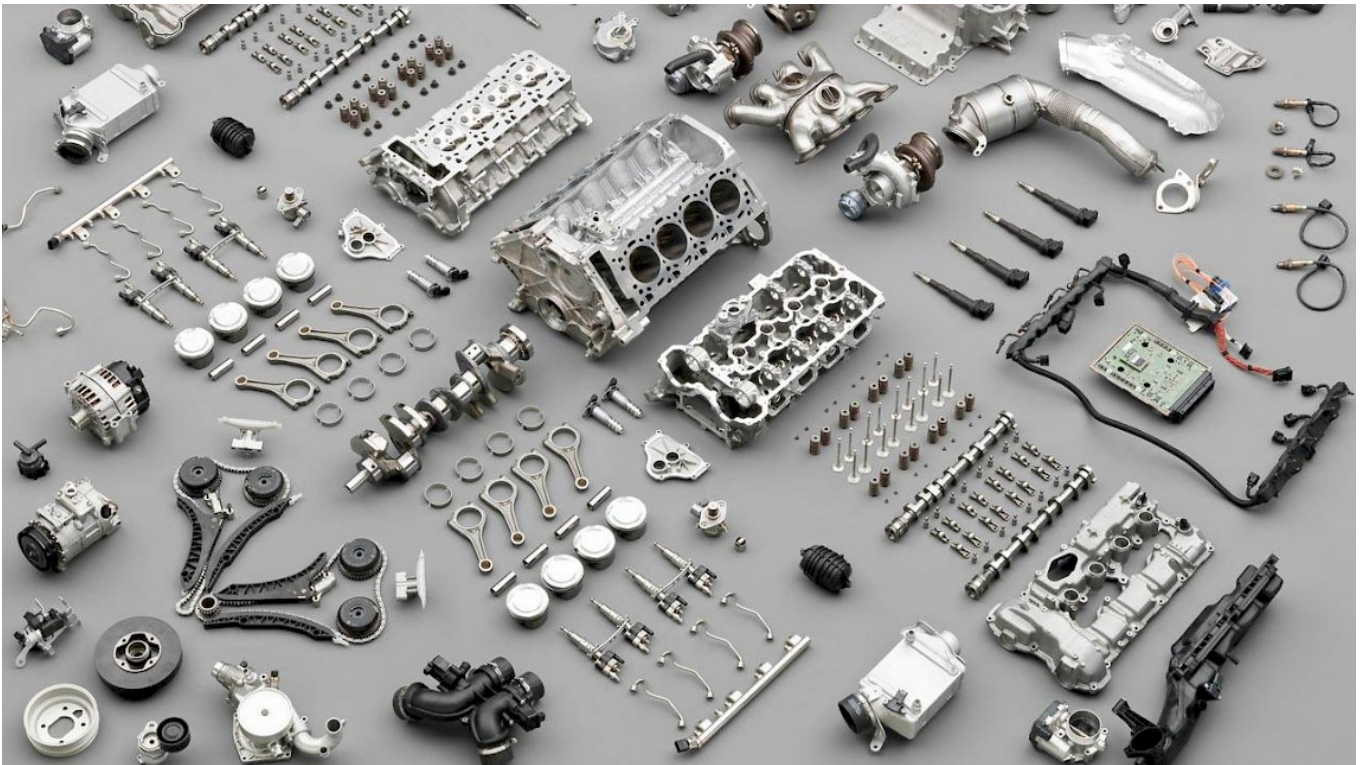
The labyrinthine paper trails of the cloth mill where I, Ram Sagar, worked for thirty years and, like thousands of others, thought myself to have been a worker, have revealed themselves as belonging to seventeen different companies. This started in 1992 when, a year after having been dismissed, I filed a case with the labor court. I won in 1999, but the company didn't comply with the court's order. In 2001, the labor commissioner issued a summons against the chairman-managing director. It's 2005 now, and sixteen summonses and a nonbailable arrest warrants haven't managed to produce a soul in court. We have learned that factories belong to no one; no one owns them; names keep multiplying in documents.

Ownership is only a masquerade; owners do not exist.²

There are 2,500 of us in our factory, which produces auto parts. Hired through four contractors, we are all of a similar age. We make up 90 percent of the factory's workforce, and get along very well with one another. In January 2007, we gathered at the gate and refused to enter the factory. Production stopped for two days. The management singled out those amongst us who they decided had incited the strike, and dismissed them. We stopped work again in August.

It isn't a question of a few instigating many.³

On Friday, December 17, 2010, workers – permanent, casual, those hired through contractors – stopped the production line in a two-wheeler production factory. The scooter line, motorcycle line, welding shop, and machine shop came to a standstill. Workers from B-shift joined A-shift workers. 1,800 permanent workers and 6,500 workers hired through contractors gathered inside the factory. While many workers left in company buses that afternoon, many stayed inside the factory through the night. Around midnight, the company declared the next day a holiday. Buses didn't arrive the next morning with those who had left for the night, and 150 to 200 policemen entered the factory. A few months later, on April 8, 2011, workers on the night shift in a health care-product factory stopped work. When morning shift workers weren't allowed to enter the factory, the 300 to 350 workers who were inside refused to come



These auto parts stand abstracted from a production line and the work force that created them.

out. Workers outside the factory gates passed them food over the walls. On June 4, 2011, at shift change, workers on A-shift didn't leave, and workers on B-shift entered the factory but didn't begin work. They phoned C-shift workers. Permanent workers, trainees, apprentices, and workers hired through contractors – around three thousand workers – gathered inside the factory. Ten days passed. The company hemmed in the factory by raising miles and miles of tarpaulin sheets around it.

Workers refused to leave the factory.⁴

A few months later, on October 7, 2011, at 4 p.m., workers from the A- and B-shifts in this same factory gathered inside the factory yet again. Workers at around ten affiliate factories that make car engines, motorcycles, and other automotive parts also stopped work and refused to leave the factories. While work resumed the next day in some of these factories, workers in four factories did not resume production and stayed inside the factories. Kitchens were set up, since companies had shut down the canteens. There was no work tension. No agonizing about the hour of entry or exit. No stress over catching a ride on a bus. No fretting about what to cook. No sweating over whether dinner had to be served at 7 or at 9 p.m. No anguishing over what day or date it was. October 7--14 was the best time. We talked a lot with each other about things that were personal. We became closer to each other during those seven days than we'd ever been.

It was as if we were seeing each other for the first time.⁵

Workers at a die-casting factory didn't turn up for work on October 16, 2011, a Sunday. The next day they came to the factory, stayed inside the entire day and night, and didn't work. On October 21, workers at a footwear company stopped work at midday. On October 24, 250 workers in the rotary, dyeing, sampling, and finishing departments of a dying and printing factory stopped work and gathered at the gate.

The riddle of "what is it that workers want" keeps deepening.⁶

It was a clear day in February 2012. "Do you know," the official from the fire department asked, holding up the fire extinguisher, "what gas is inside this?" When no one responded, the officer answered his own question, "CO₂ gas. This gas can extinguish any fire, whether caused by electricity, or an accelerant like petrol or thinner. This gas can act on anything that can catch fire, be it rubber or cloth. If you hear the hooter, stop work and run towards an open space immediately." The next day the hooter, which

usually sounds at the start and end of a shift, or at lunch break, sounded at an odd hour – at 10 a.m. Everyone stopped work and rushed out of the factory. HR called security, and security assured them there was no fire. Workers stood where they were, whispering and chatting. They stopped work again at midday the next day, and again at 10 a.m. the day after that.

Everything, everywhere is flammable, and anything can be a spark.⁷

Over the years, thousands of workers from industrial areas in and around Delhi have been arrested and are today's political prisoners. On July 18, 2012, after their actions in June and October of the previous year, workers in the automobile factory attacked factory buildings and managers. The government responded by stationing six hundred commandos in the industrial town. The number of political prisoners rose: 147 workers were arrested without bail and, further, arrest warrants were issued for sixty-five workers. The company fired 546 of its permanent workers and the 2,500 workers it had hired through contractors. And, as if conceding finally that the situation wasn't one of "few and many," in a letter that management sent each permanent worker they fired, they wrote, addressing each one by name: "We can no longer employ you because you have acted both as instigator and participant." In the words of a worker:

"It would have been quite something if what workers did in one factory on July 18 had happened across the entire industrial town."⁸

It's July 2012 and while the management of our factory, which makes medical and surgical equipment, has been missing for a few months, there are other factories where the management may as well be missing. There's a metal factory where workers don't argue anymore: they just stretch the ten-minute tea breaks that the company gives them at 10:30 a.m., 3:30 p.m., and 6:30 p.m. to half an hour each. Supervisors and managers hover around, but they keep their distance. On November 9, four hundred men and four hundred women workers in a footwear factory encircled the managing director at the factory gate. Two hundred police personnel looked on, and finally retrieved him by using batons and water canons at 9 p.m.

If there ever was a consensus, it has been broken. This isn't the time to make petitions; it's the time to make proposals.⁹

On February 21, 2013 at 10 a.m., in an industrial area thick with garment-manufacturing units and printing presses, a handful of workers stepped out from their factory

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फरीदाबाद

मजदूर समाचार

कहत कबीर

क्षणिक, सतही, छिछले
सम्बन्ध मनोरोगों का
आधार हैं, मन की
बीमारियाँ लिये हैं।

यह तलाशने-बनाने के लिए मजदूरों के अनुभवों व विचारों के आदान-प्रदान के जरिये में एक जरिया

नई सीरीज नम्बर 199

जनवरी 2005

मसला यह व्यवस्था है (6)

इस-उस नीति, इस-उस पार्टी, यह अथवा वह लीडर की बातें शब्द-जाल हैं, शब्द-आडम्बर हैं

* राजे-रजवाड़ों के दौर में, बेगार-प्रथा के दौर में मण्डी-मुद्रा का प्रसार बौद्ध में खोज समाज था। छोटे-से ग्रेट ब्रिटेन के इंग्लैण्ड-वेल्स-स्कॉटलैण्ड-आयरलैण्ड में भेड़ों ने, भेड़-पालन ने मनुष्यों को जमीनों से खदेड़ा। कैंदखानों में जबरन काम करवाने, दागने, फाँसी देने के संग-संग बेघरबार किये गये लोगों को दोहन-शोषण के लिये दूरदराज अमरीका-आस्ट्रेलिया जैसे स्थानों पर जबरन ले जाया गया। उन स्थानों के निवासियों के लिये ही जैसे शांति ही आ गई हो। गुलामी जिनकी समझ से बाहर की चीज थी उन अमरीकावासियों के कल्लेआम किये गये। अफ्रीका से गुलाम बना कर लोगों को अमरीकी महाद्वीपों में काम में जोता गया। * फैंकट्टी-पद्धति ने मण्डी-मुद्रा के ताण्डव को सातवें आसमान पर पहुँचा दिया। मजदूर लगा कर मण्डी के लिये उत्पादन वाली फैंकट्टी-पद्धति को भाप-कोयले ने, गाव-कोयला आधारित मशीनी ने स्थापित किया। इसके संग दस्तकारी और किसानों की मीत, दस्तकारी-किसानी की सामाजिक मीत आरम्भ हुई। छोटे-से ग्रेट ब्रिटेन के कारखानों में 6-7 वर्ष के बच्चों, रिजियों और पुरुषों की सूर्याप्य से सूर्यास्ता तक काम में जोता गया और... और बेरोजगार बने-बनते लाखों लोगों के लिये अन्जाने, दूरदराज स्थानों को पलायन मजदूरी बने। * फ्रान्स-जर्मनी-इटली... में फैंकट्टी-पद्धति के प्रसार के संग वहीं भी आरम्भ हुई दस्तकारी-किसानी की सामाजिक मीत लाखों को मजदूर बनाने के संग-संग यूरोप से बड़े पैमाने पर लोगों को खदेड़ना भी लिये थी। अमरीका... आस्ट्रेलिया... लोगों से 'भर गये'। * बिजली ने रात को भी काम के लिये खोल दिया। फैंकट्टी-पद्धति ने हमारी नींद ही नहीं उड़ाई बल्कि मारामारी का वह अखाड़ा भी रचा कि 1914-19 के दौरान ढाई करोड़ लोग और 1939-45 के दौरान पाँच करोड़ लोग तो युद्धों में ही मारे गये। * अब फैंकट्टी-पद्धति में यह इलेक्ट्रोनिक्स का दौर है। फैंकट्टी-पद्धति का प्रसार पृथ्वी के कौने-कौने में और सामाजिक जीवन के हर क्षेत्र में हो रहा है। इस दौर में एशिया-अफ्रीका-दक्षिणी अमरीका में दस्तकारी-किसानी की सामाजिक मीत तीव्र गति से हो रही है। भारत के, चीन के, कोचों तवाह दस्तकार-किसान कहीं जायें? इलेक्ट्रोनिक्स द्वारा दुनियाँ-भर में बेरोजगार कर दिये गये, बेरोजगार किये जा रहे करोड़ों मजदूर कहीं जायें?

विद्यालय-शिक्षा की बुनियादी इकाइयों अक्षर व अंक लिखित आदान-प्रदानों के आधार व जाँच वहाँ हँ बल्कि एकरूपता-स्टैण्डर्डिजेशन-मानकीकरण के माध्यम के रूप में यह व्यक्ति को सकीर्ण व्यवहार में धकेलने और व्यवस्था की निरंकुशता के साधन भी हैं। औजार सहायक की बजाय अभिशाप बन गया है। अक्षर-अंक का व्यापक प्रसार, विद्यालयों का पृथ्वी-व्यापी जाल मण्डी के विस्तार के संग-संग चला है। अक्षर-अंक और मण्डी एक-दूसरे के पूरक-से साक्षित हुये हैं। ऐसे में आइये अक्षर-अंक को कुछ और कुरेद कर देखें।

- अक्षर-अंक के निरिचित रूप। इन रूपों की पहचान और प्रयोग। अक्षर व अंक के नियम-उपनियम। यह स्वयं में अनुशासन लिये हैं। अनुशासन अपने में सकीर्ण व्यवहार लिये है। अनुशासन साहसों का, प्रबन्धकों का प्रिय शब्द है।

- निरिचित रूप, एकरूपता, स्टैण्डर्डिजेशन अक्षर-अंक की ही तरह प्रोडक्ट और उत्पादन-प्रक्रिया में क्षेत्र व उद्योग विशेष से आरम्भ हो कर सर्वत्र व सार्विक बन, विश्व स्टैण्डर्ड बन कर सम्पूर्ण पृथ्वी पर मजदूरों/मनुष्यों को निरिचित आकार-प्रकार के पूर्णों में बदलने को अग्रसर है। दस्तकार की मनमर्जी पर रोक, कुशल मजदूर की मज्जी पर पाबन्दी मारतय में व्यक्ति/व्यक्तित्व के लिये स्थान

सिकोड़ना है। व्यक्ति/व्यक्तित्व के महत्व का विलोप...

- "निरंकुशता का अन्त" इतिहास के पाठ के तीर पर पढ़ाया जाता है। राजा-बादशाहों की मनमर्जी के किस्से और उन पर लगाम के लिये नियमों-कानूनों के महत्व की बातें की जाती हैं। व्यक्ति की निरंकुशता को नियमों-कानूनों के

ऊँच-नीच। आधुनिक ऊँच-नीच। अखाड़ा-मण्डी। विश्व मण्डी। होड़-प्रतियोगिता-कम्प्यूटीशन का सर्वश्रासी अभियान। स्वयं मनुष्यों का मण्डी में माल बन जाना। यह है वर्तमान समाज व्यवस्था।

तानों-बानों में जकड़ कर समाप्त कर दिया गया... विद्यालयों के "सर्व शिक्षा अभियानों" द्वारा अक्षर-अंक की पहचान-प्रयोग में सब को खींच लेना प्रत्येक को क्रेता-विक्रेता में तब्दील करने, हरेक को देचने-खरीदने वाले में बदल देने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका अदा करता है। मण्डी के नियम-कानून "व्यक्ति की निरंकुशता का अन्त" और... और समाज व्यवस्था की निरंकुशता लिये हैं। सामाजिक प्रक्रिया की निरंकुशता ने जगन्नाथ के रथ को बहुत बीना बना दिया है।

- अक्षर व अंक की जुगलबन्दी व्यक्ति को समाज की इकाई के तीर पर स्थापित करने में उल्लेखनीय रोल अदा करती है। विद्यालय में रोल नम्बर, उपस्थित/अनुपस्थित की दैनिक क्रिया मण्डी-मुद्रा-फैंकट्टी पद्धति की व्यक्ति

को अपनी आधारभूत इकाई स्थापित करने की प्रक्रिया को पुष्ट करती है। उत्पादन और वितरण में व्यक्ति का इकाई बनना प्रत्येक का अक्षर-अंक से परिचित होना तो अनिवार्य बनाता ही है, यह व्यक्ति को महिमाभिहित भी करता है। पुरुषों के संग महिलाओं को नौकरी-चाकरी में धकेलने के लिये सिद्धान्त की चाशनी भी...

- सनुदाय के दूटने पर उमरी ऊँच-नीच वाली समाज व्यवस्थाओं में आमतौर पर पुरुष-केन्द्रित परिवार उनकी इकाई बने। विश्व मण्डी की स्थापना के आरम्भिक दौर में, निजी व परिवार के श्रम द्वारा मण्डी के लिये उत्पादन वाले सरल माल उत्पादन में भी परिवार प्राथमिक इकाई बना रहा। फैंकट्टी-पद्धति, मजदूर लगा कर मण्डी के लिये उत्पादन वाली वर्तमान समाज व्यवस्था परिवार को छिन्न-भिन्न कर व्यक्ति को ऊँच-नीच का एक स्तम्भ बनाने को अग्रसर है। संयुक्त परिवार का विलोप-सा हो गया है। पति-पत्नी-बच्चे वाले परिवार लड़खड़ा रहे हैं, दूट रहे हैं...

- व्यक्ति/व्यक्तित्व को एक तरफ गौण-दर-गौण बनाती और दूसरी तरफ व्यक्ति का महत्व स्थापित करती वर्तमान समाज व्यवस्था वास्तव में गौण को महत्वपूर्ण बना रही है। छवि की महामारी... नये सनुदाय आधारित समाज रचना के प्रयासों के लिये यह एक पुकार भी है।

नीति, पार्टी, नेता बदलने से इस सब में कोई फर्क पड़ेगा क्या? (जारी)

मजदूर लाइब्रेरी, आटोपिन झुग्गी, एन. आई. टी. फरीदाबाद-121001 (यह जगह बाटा चौक और पुजेसर के बीच गंदे नाले की बगल में है।)

कब्जे तोड़ता, ढक्कन उछालता जीवन

(क)

लारखों-करोड़ों में औरतें जीवन की नई शैली ढूँढ रही हैं, और नई शैलियों में ढाली भी जा रही हैं। अनेकों प्रकार के प्रयोग, नये जोड़, नये रिश्ते, अनेकों इनकार चक्रवर्ती तूफान के रूप में विद्यमान हैं।

ऐसे में कोई इसे भयंकर, खतरनाक चुनौती के रूप में पेश करे और जिद करे कि औरत को परिवार की ही चौखट में देखा जाये, तो उसे क्या कहेंगे ?

औरतें, बच्ची से वृद्धा तक, नई भाषा, नई परिभाषाओं में अपने को व्यक्त कर रही हैं। इसे कैसे प्रस्तुत करेंगे ?

उन अनाम क्षणों और रेखाओं-धाराओं को चिन्हित कैसे करेंगे जो आसपास को अपरिचित बना देते हैं, पर अन्य प्रवाहों को प्रत्यक्ष कर देते हैं ?

(ख)

हर रोज फैक्ट्री में प्रवेश करते समय एक हजार मजदूर नौकरी से बरखास्त अपने दो साथियों को गेट के बाहर खड़ा देखते। दूधनाथ और रामप्रसाद डिसमिस किये जाने के खिलाफ कोर्ट-कचहरी नहीं गये। गेट के बाहर प्रतिदिन खड़े हो कर काम पर जाते अपने साथियों से दुआ-सलाम करते रहे। फैक्ट्री के अन्दर उन्हें ले कर वाद-विवाद बढ़ते रहे। बढ़ती चर्चाओं के भंवर को थामने के लिये पन्द्रह दिन में मैनेजमेन्ट ने दूधनाथ और रामप्रसाद को ड्युटी पर वापस ले लिया।

ये बात, यह छवि, ये घटना बातचीत में तब उभरी जब इस सवाल पर चर्चा हो रही थी कि — आपके जीवन में कौन से क्षण हैं जिन्होंने जीवन को देखने और समझने की राहें मोड़ दी ?

रूटीन के बहाव में खलल पैदा करने वाले क्षण निरन्तर उत्पन्न होते रहते हैं। हम में और हमारे आसपास जो प्रकाशमान और जादुई है, यह क्षण उसका बोध हमें कराते रहते हैं।

(ग)

दायरों के पार जाना सामान्य है। जीवन में इतनी बहुतायत है कि उसे सीमाओं में बाँधना नामुकिन है। यह बहुतायतता तरह-तरह से खुद को अभिव्यक्त कर रही है, विभिन्न अखाड़ों को नाकारा साबित कर रही है।

“पार जाने” का बोध सब को होता रहता है। तभी एक फैक्ट्री के बीस मजदूर अपनी बातों को गत्तों पर लिख कर हजारों के बीच जाते हैं। तभी नौकरी की सीमा के पार जा कर यूनान में युवक-युवतियाँ सार्वजनिक रसोईघर, सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य केन्द्र, वृद्धों की देखभाल, और सार्वजनिक उल्लास के लिये स्थानों की रचना कर रहे हैं।

किस तरह की तैयारी में रहें ?

क्या सवाल पूछें ?

कैसे प्रयोग करें ?

— ताकि जीवन की बहुतायतता और दायरों के पार जाने की सामान्यता के हम प्रसार-बिन्दू बने रहें। हम अवसर बनें। ■

and started shouting slogans. This drew out around fifty workers from surrounding factories. Within moments, another 1,200 joined them. By 10:30 a.m., the frightened managers of twenty-four factories declared the end of the workday. Within the next half-hour, as more and more factories across the industrial area shut down one after the other, workers gathered outside factory gates. Across the entire industrial area, thousands pelted stones at factory buildings and broke car windshields and placed boulders on their seats. In the words of a worker:

“Who’s to say what spurred the women on more than it did the men, or where the laughter on every face that day came from.”¹⁰

On April 16, 2013 at 10 a.m., tailors working on the second floor of a garment factory stopped work, came down, turned the guards out and locked the main door of the factory from inside. Then they switched the power supply off, shutting down work on all four floors. In August, when banks sealed one of the production units of a footwear company, the chairman and the director of the company asked the hundred workers they had shifted out of that production unit to help them break the lock and resume work there. The workers refused. Starting on August 30, guards employed by a security company started a sit-in at the company headquarters, as well as outside their work sites – the Australian embassy, the offices of UNDP, UNICEF, and the World Bank. At 8 a.m. on September 22, workers in a factory that produces plastic injection molding components gathered outside the factory. Workers from two other automotive-parts factories supported them. They resumed work at 1 p.m. Four days later they stopped work again and gathered outside the factory. On the morning of January 23, 2014, groups of workers went from one factory to another. Workers poured out of factories. They even went into the directors’ office and asked them to come out. Factory after factory closed. Workers went back into the factories when police arrived. When the police left, they came out again.

A simple laugh at the correct moment can produce a crack in the strongest of edifices.¹¹

In 2014, friends came with lots of stories. Around the end of January, a charge sheet from an auto factory in Pune, Maharashtra circulated. In it, the management had charged its workers: “You were laughing, singing, dancing on the production line, changing your position on the line at your own will, stopping the production line on purpose, and you refused to listen to supervisors. This is a violation of the terms of agreement between the company and the union.”

In March, another trend was being praised: workers in garment factories across Bangladesh stopped work suddenly and routinely. Production stopped for many days. There were no leaders; there was no one to negotiate and come to an agreement with. In May, we gathered over tea to listen to a friend who had returned after three years from a construction site in Saudi Arabia. “There are constant tussles at the construction site,” he said. Skirmishes are routine – between workers and foremen, as well as between workers and engineers and managers. Workers, whether we are from Bhagalpur or Gorakhpur, Delhi or Karachi, Lahore or Ludhiana, Dhaka or Pokhra, live together, and we talk to each other all the time in the dormitories – about the lateness of wages, minutes snatched away from a break, the arrogance of an engineer, the shortcomings of the director, an argument following an increase in work speed, an accident, a warning letter issued to a coworker, nonpayment of overtime, or the cooling in the dorm. The tipping point is uncertain, unknown, but always near. Things can spiral out of control any moment. One day, we suddenly decided we wouldn’t leave the dorm and go to work. The vehicles that came to pick us up went back empty. Managers arrived a few hours later and asked us to return to work. No one agreed; no one went. One day turned into ten. On the eleventh day, police arrived and fired shots in the air. No one left the dorm. The same thing happened the next day, and the next. Such refusals happen around six to eight times a year. Sometimes for a few days, and sometimes for an entire month, workers refuse to leave the dormitories.

With every story, trends multiply. Factory rebels on the move are joined by those who do not leave the factory, and then by shop-floor revelers, and soon by those who do not leave their dormitories to go to work.¹²

On November 4, 2014, all of us workers in an electronics factory who had been hired through contractors gathered outside the factory at 6 a.m. Police, security guards, contractors, and managers blocked our path to the factory. We set up a tent 150 meters away from the factory gate, and we were shown a court order forbidding us from going any closer. Upon being approached by leaders of political groups with different dispositions, we gave them the stage, but with this caveat: “We’ll listen to everyone, but we’ll do what we want.” One leader stood at the microphone and invited us to join his political group. “It’s nice of you to have come,” we said, “but we have seen, and understood well, what you did in another factory. Goodbye.” Another leader spoke at great length about the need to

change the government. “We respect your age,” we said, “but not this talk about deferring change to the future.” When groups objected to a speaker who came on stage next, we countered, “This stage is ours. We will decide who can, or won’t, speak.” As the protest stretched on and continued into March 2015, many among us joined different factories. We have active linkages between us. And we have decided, wherever we work, we’ll keep discussions open between us and won’t let any middlemen come into the relations we engender.

Whether alone, or in a cluster, or as a crowd, we become nodes that both relay and occasion the new in entire industrial zones.¹³

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Of Work Riots, Political Prisoners, and Workers Refusing to Leave the Factory – Translated Through the Pages of Faridabad Workers News (2005–2015) 07/08

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