



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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The Call of Mahapadav: Dethrone the Modi led BJP Regime!



On 26 – 28 November 2023, the entire country witnessed a spectacular unity of workers and farmers who were marching on the streets in several thousands in various state capitals and staged Worker-Farmer Mahapadav or the Grand Assembly. The massive protest was called by the joint platform of Central Trade Unions and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM).

The Mahapadav was called in defence of the interest of the workers, farmers and common citizens of the country against the exploitative and anti-people regime of Narendra Modi led BJP. The Mahapadav was staged at a time when workers, farmers, the poor and the citizens of the country were confronting an unprecedented attack on their rights and the livelihood. The country is going through a severe agrarian crisis. Farmers are denied even the bare Minimum Support Price, workers are denied dignified life and wages. India's rank in the Global Hunger Index is nose diving further as the universal right to food is being denied. The farmers resisted the disastrous farm laws. The four labour codes aimed at blood sucking exploitation of workers have already been passed by the Parliament. Inflation of essential commodities are burgeoning and the prices of essential items including food items are sky rocketing. The country's resources are being sold out to corporates. The public sector undertakings are under a massive threat of complete extinction. Contractualisation is rampant and the right to regularisation is being refused. Houses of the poor are being bulldozed across the cities and towns. The recent incident of the trapping of 41 workers inside Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi has exposed the horrible conditions under which the workers are being forced to work

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PATNA, BIHAR

where neither the employer nor the government bother to ensure the safety and security of workers. In cities like Delhi, factory fires leading to deaths of workers happen quite often while the government refuses to guarantee the occupational safety.

Protest actions were organized in almost every state capital with the participation of thousands and thousands of farmers and labourers, especially women and youth. All leaders of SKM, Central Trade Unions and Federations participated joined the Mahapadav in various state capitals.

According to the reports received, Mahapadav was held in the state capitals including Chandigarh (Punjab), Panchkula (Haryana), Shimla (Himachal Pradesh), Dehradun and Srinagar (Uttarakhand), Civil Lines and Jantar-Mantar (Delhi), Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), Patna (Bihar), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Kolkata (West Bengal), Guwahati (Assam), Agartala (Tripura), Bhubaneswar

(Odisha), Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Bengaluru (Karnataka), Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and Port Blair (A&N Islands).

In Bangalore, the sit-in was held at the Freedom Park. The protest began on 26th with the hoisting of the national flag and the reading of the preamble of Indian Constitution by Smt. Nagalakshmi from the BBMP Pourakarmika Sangha, affiliated to AICCTU. Alongside members of AIARLA, AIPWA and AISA, more than 3,000 workers from AICCTU took part in the rally. This included pourakarmikas, hospital workers, sanitation workers, factory workers among others. PP Appanna, State Secretary and Clifton, State President addressed the gathering on behalf of AICCTU along with the leaders of other organisations.

In Bhubaneswar (Odisha), the Mahapadav was held in front of the state legislative assembly. Every day 3000 workers and peasants

participated. A 7-member working committee was formed to manage the Mahapadav. Each day a presidium was formed with speakers from SKM and central trade unions. Under the banner of AICCTU sanitation workers, plumbers, carpenters and contract workers, Railway workers, loading and unloading workers, MDM workers, carriage workers and domestic workers participated. Under the banner of AIKM, peasants from different districts in Odisha participated in the Mahapadav. On behalf of AICCTU, Radhakant Sethi, President of AICCTU Odisha, Mahendra Parida, Secretary of AICCTU Odisha and Prakas Mallick addressed the Mahapadav. On the last day a charter of demands was submitted to the President of India through the Governor of Odisha.

In Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, the Mahapadav was held in the Eco Garden. On the first day, there was a good participation of workers organised under the



banner of AICCTU and other affiliated unions, like scheme workers, textile workers, construction workers with a sizeable participation of women workers. Construction workers from Lucknow were very active as volunteers for the smooth conduct of the program for three consecutive days. The state President Vijay Vidrohi spoke on behalf of AICCTU while M. Zaidi and Ramesh Sengar were part of the presidium.

In Ranchi, Jharkhand, the Mahapadav was held in front of the Governor House. It was addressed by General Secretary of All India Kisan Mahasabha, Comrade Raja Ram Singh, former MLA Comrade Rajkumar Yadav, AICCTU leaders like Baijnath Mistry, Suwendu Sen and Vikas Singh, leader of Kisan Mahasabha, Puran Mahato and Scheme Worker Federation leader Geeta Mandal. Three political resolutions including a demand to cancel the agreement to send 90 thousand Indian laborers to Israel were passed in the Mahapadav. On the last day, a demand letter was submitted to the president through the Governor.

In Tamil Nadu, a Grand Assembly was held at Chennai. More than 10,000 workers and farmers attended the Grand assembly every day. Few thousands of workers and farmers stayed at Chennai for both days. Elaborate arrangements were made to accommodate such a massive gathering. On 26th November, the 1st day of the Grand assembly, Comrade Shankar, all India president of AICCTU addressed

the gathering which was presided over by Shanmugam M.P, General secretary of LPF. Other speakers included comrade Balakrishnan, state convener of SKM and Comrade Vijoo Krishnan, National general secretary of AIKS. Com. Shankar vehemently condemned the Modi government’s move to allow private company to manufacture “Vande Bharat” coaches utilising all the infrastructural facilities of the government owned Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in Chennai. He said, the call of the Grand assembly is not only aimed at ensuring rights of workers and farmers, but also to overthrow the Modi led BJP regime at the centre. Com. Chandramohan of AIKM demanded the implementation of agreements arrived at between protesting SKM leadership and the Modi government in the wake of yearlong agitation. He also said, Modi government is working overtime to serve the corporates and it is our duty to ensure the Modi government’s defeat in the coming parliamentary elections. On 27th November- the second day of the assembly, the gathering was addressed by Comrade Eraniappan, state honorary president of AICCTU and Comrade Raja Sankar, state secretary of AIARLA.

The meeting was also addressed by leaders of Bank, Insurance, Central and state government federations apart from unions in IT industry and various other manufacturing companies.

The Grand assembly concluded with a resolve to defeat the Modi



government in 2024 elections.

In Patna, a grand rally of farmers and workers marched to the Raj Bhavan in which masses from 12 farmer organizations and 9 worker organizations participated. Onwards to the Mahapadav, marches were organised in different districts of the state. Several street corner meetings and mass campaigns in nook and corners of towns were organised by CPIML. The intense campaign contributed significantly to the mobilisation for the Mahapadav. On 26 November, the Constitution Day, thousands of people associated with AIKM, AIARLA and AICCTU gathered near the Gait Public Library in Patna. Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, the General Secretary, CPIML addressed the gathering and led a march to join the Mahapadav.

More than ten thousand farmers and workers participated in the Mahapadav on 26 November. AICCTU, AIKM and AIARLA played a leading role in the entire mobilisation. The Mahapadav program in Bihar was an unprecedented success and there was no let-up in participation on three consecutive days. Participation continued to increase till the last day. The programme concluded with a pledge to oust the Modi government in the Lok Sabha elections in 2024.

The Mahapadav was addressed by Comrade Arun Singh, CPI-ML MLA, leaders of Kisan Mahasabha and leaders of AICCTU including Shashi Yadav, Saroj Chaubey, RN Thakur, SK Sharma and Ranvijay, among others. ■

Successful Mahapadav

Congratulations to Workers and Farmers of the Country!

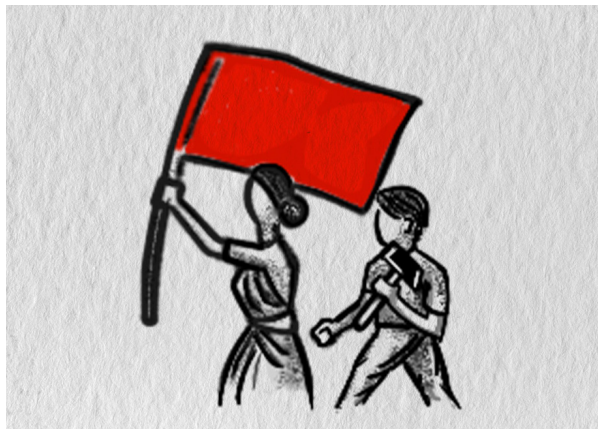
28th November 2023

The Central Trade Unions and Samyukta Kisan Morcha congratulate the workers and farmers for successful three day Mahapadav.

The platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Sectoral Federations/Associations and Samyukta Kisan Morcha congratulate the workers and farmers for the successful Mahapadav for three days from 26th November to 28th November on their pressing issues as per the charter of demands and the action programme adopted in the historic All India Joint Convention of Workers and Farmers on 24th August at Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi. Demands included the fixation of Minimum Support Price (MSP) on farmer's produce on the formula given by Dr Swaminathan Commission, withdrawal of cases on farmer's during 13 month long sitting at Delhi borders, compensation to the martyred farmers' during agitation, punishment to the culprits of Lakhimpur Kheri killings, resignation of Minister of state for home, withdrawal of Electricity Amendment Bill, withdrawal of four labour codes, stop privatisation of Public Sector enterprises, end to corporate loot, filling of sanctioned posts, address the unemployment issue, withdraw the raised prices on essential commodities, provide affordable education and health services, water and basic civic facilities etc.

There was an extensive campaign carried by both the fronts, Central Trade Unions' platform and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha since the joint Convention.

Despite the objections raised, cases registered against leaders and many obstacles created, the massive campaign and then three day Mahapadav has been a great success. Millions of workers and farmers were part of these campaigns and Mahapadav.



The leaders addressed these programmes and emphasized that the BJP led Union Government has failed on all counts making the life of people miserable, worked mainly against the interest of nation to the advantage of corporates of Indian and foreign brand. On the other hand, all out oppressive measures by misusing government institutions and various laws to suppress the voice of any opposition to the government policies has been the hallmark of this rule. The forces of communal divide and hatred are given tacit support from the ruling circles vitiating the peace and harmony in the society.

This ruling regime does not honour Indian constitution and stands with the violators. They do not deserve to rule the great country with diverse beliefs, cultures, languages and social milieu.

The leaders told that after review of Mahapadav programmes, the next stage of agitations would be planned by the CTUs and SKM independently and in coordination.

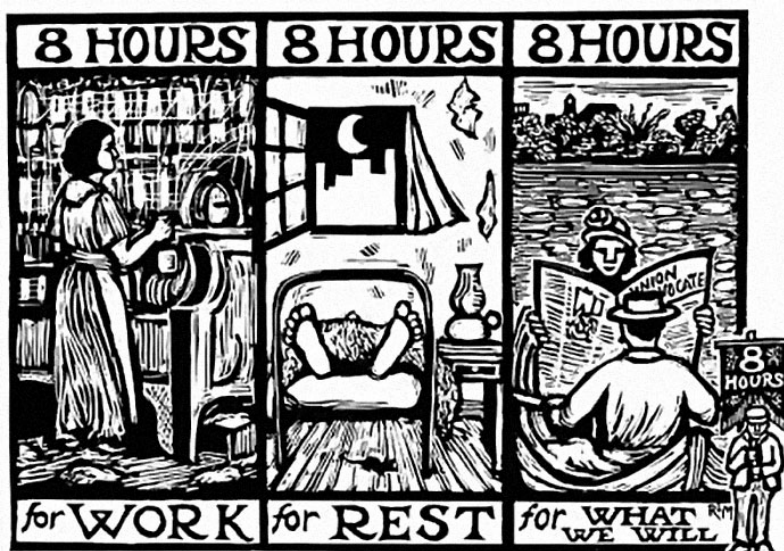
Issued by-

INTUC - AITUC - HMS - CITU - AIUTUC - TUCC - SEWA - AICCTU - LPF - UTUC And Independent Sectoral Federations and Associations ■

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The Fight over the Working Day

★ CLIFTON D' ROZARIO



Co-founder of Infosys Narayana Murthy recently stated that in order to increase work productivity in the nation and increase India's competitiveness, young Indians should put in up to 70 hours a week of labor. Naturally, this comment has caused a stir. However, it is not surprising that business titans like Bhavish Aggarwal of Ola, Sajjan Jindal of Jindal Steel Works Group, and Chairman Emeritus AM Naik of L&T have publicly supported the proposal for a 70-hour work week, citing the nation's low productivity. Congress Leader Manish Tewari, jumped in, suggesting that if "India has to truly become a great power," then one or perhaps two generations must adopt a 70-hour work week "work ethic."

The regurgitating of the debate of the length of the working day

highlights the capitalist ruling class's relentless effort to take away the eight-hour workday, one of the main victories of the decades-long working class struggles of the 19th century.

Unending conflict between capital and labour

Attacks on the working day's duration that have been revived (and renewed) show the capitalist class's never-ending quest to impose its rule and control over employees' time. Marx teaches us that absolute surplus value (exploitation) increases proportionally to the increase in working hours and days. Thus, if a worker produces output to the value of his wages in 4 hours, then the remaining 4 hours she expends her labour (in an 8 hour working day) constitute surplus value for the capitalist, which increases as the working

day is extended. This, however, cannot be limitless as workers have finite working capability, and overwork would result in the destruction of labour power. Yet Marx had warned that "... Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society. To the out-cry as to the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over-work, it answers: Ought these to trouble us since they increase our profits?". And there is always the "reserve army of labour", which can quickly replace a fallen worker.

Marx further argues that the lower the price of labour, the greater must be the quantity of labour, or the longer must be the working-day for the labourer to secure even a miserable average wage i.e. "the lowness of the price of labour acts here as a stimulus to the extension of the labour-time".

Thus, capital seeks to expand the working day for as long as feasible. "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him", said Marx.

The battle over the working day: Whether or not Mr. Murthy's proposal is shocking, it is

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definitely an illustration of how business magnates covertly attempt to mask their greed for wealth by promoting virtue while citing duty, discipline, and patriotism. History, has shown, time and again, that the length of the working day is a product of the struggle between capital and labour, between the capitalist class and the working-class.

However much capital would like to increase the time spent by a citizen as a “worker”; however much capital tries to reduce human beings to machines, it has to contend with the workers’ need and desire for a larger social role, as a citizen, parent, lover, friend, intellectual, romantic among others. Because they are driven by a desire to maximize their profits, capitalists will do everything in their power to extract the maximum surplus labour from the workers, but their ability to do so is limited by the relative strength of the working class.

Struggles across the world since the 1850s brought out the eight-hour day as a prominent concern of labor. The historic May Day struggles on this demand was preceded by the declaration of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions at its Pittsburgh Convention in 1884 that “eight hours shall constitute a legal day’s labor from and after May 1, 1886”. Ofcourse, it was commonly asserted that the contemplated reform was not a complete solution to the problems faced by workers but was definitely a step in the

right direction – towards more leisure, better standard of living and better wages. Writing in the late 1900s, Samuel Gompers, a key trade unionist in the United States, declared, in regard to the movement for 8 hour working day, that in its “magnitude and grandeur . . . will, while benefitting us immediately, be written in golden letters of praise and reverence in time to come. We are making history.”

Indeed, the glorious struggles of the working class compelled the declaration of the 8-hour working day as the norm, one of the basic labour entitlements. A slew of legislations were introduced in various countries mandating the 8-hour working day. The first International Labour Organization (ILO) Director Albert Thomas reported that, “during the years 1918-19 the eight hour day has, either by collective agreements or by law, become a reality in the majority of industrial countries”. The stage was set for the ILO’s first International Labour Standard – the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No.1).

India’s legalised 8 hour working day came with the 1946 Amendment to the Factories Act of 1934 – a result of the Bill introduced by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar as Labour Member in the Viceroy’s Executive Council.

Yet, now we have Mr. Narayana Murthy’s proposal for a 70-hour week almost a century later, epitomising the relentless assaults carried out by the capitalist ruling class globally

against this hard-earned right of the working class.

This attack has been two pronged. Firstly, de facto increase in the number of working hours in the name of overtime or otherwise. Secondly, repeated efforts to dilute the law. This has picked up post the Modi government coming to power. During Covid various governments issued notifications relaxing the number of working hours from 8 to 12 hours – UP, HP, MP, Gujarat and Rajasthan. The Union Labour Ministry issued a communication dated 05.05.2020 to all State governments to do “labour reforms” including increasing daily working hours to 12 hours. Then came the Modi government’s Labour Codes specifically the Code on Wages, 2019 which allows for the work day to be 12 hours including rest period and overtime. This has every potential of being misused by employers to make the workers work beyond the stipulated eight hours. These Labour Codes are currently on hold owing to the opposition from the Trade Unions. More recently the previous BJP government in Karnataka and the present DMK government in Tamil Nadu passed legislations amending the Factories Act, 1948, to allow for extending the working day up to 12 hours a day. These labour changes, it is argued, is necessary if India is to compete with China and become the world’s new manufacturing hub. Interestingly the previous BJP government in Karnataka frankly concedes it has been

done at the behest of Foxconn to bring labour conditions in line with the competitive sweatshops operating in China, Vietnam and Taiwan. Even so, bowing to Trade Union pressure, the DMK government has kept the amendment on hold.

Working longer does not ensure increased productivity!

Inevitability, like Mr. Murthy has done, a correlation is sought to be drawn between longer working hours and productivity. Incidentally this argument was refuted as far back as during the First World War, when nations such as the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and others, who were eager to boost armaments industry production, commissioned studies which proved that the returns from overworked and exhausted laborers quickly decreased. Famously, in 1918, the Ford Motor Company acted on these findings and reduced the working day to 8 hours while increasing workers' wages, to find that production increased, and profits doubled.

India already has one of the most hardworking workforces in the world. The International Labour Organization reports that, in 2023, Indians will have the longest average workweek among the world's ten largest economies. Only Qatar, Congo, Lesotho, Bhutan, Gambia, and the United Arab Emirates have higher average working hours than India, which comes in at number seven in the world. Productivity is low, though. Evidently, the

productivity problem persists despite the already lengthy workweeks. Meanwhile, several other countries like Norway, Finland, Switzerland, etc. which have lower working hours have achieved higher labour productivity.

It is clear that longer workdays will not increase labour productivity, which instead calls for significant capital infusion, technological advancements, more R&D, and better production techniques.

Leaving aside Murthy's false claim that extended working hours in Germany and Japan have resulted in their advancement, it is incredulous that he chooses to place the onerous burden of increasing productivity on the already exploited shoulders of the workers. It is a known fact that advanced countries have witnessed a continuous decline in working hours per worker during the past 150 years. According to reports, the two nations that Mr. Murthy specifically mentioned also exhibit the same pattern. In 1870, there were 68 hours of work per week in Germany; by 2017, that number had dropped to less than 28 hours, or roughly 59% less. In the meantime, the working week in Japan has decreased from 44 hours in 1961 to 35 hours in 2017.

Running workers to the ground

One of the serious impacts of long working hours is on the health of the workers. Several studies have linked long working shifts to negative impact on general health, including problems with cognitive anxiety,

musculoskeletal disorders, sleep disturbance, and stress. There is also the associated fatigue created by excess working hours that "also spreads to other organs affecting the neuromuscular mechanism leading to reduced sensory perception, less attention, reducing the ability of discrimination, weakening the muscles, reducing the gland secretions, reducing the heartbeat or irregular heartbeat, and dilating the blood vessels". There is enough evidence now that that longer working hours badly affect the occupational health of workers.

Moreover in a country like ours, where the workforce is already overworked and underpaid, and also undernourished, Mr. Narayana Murthy's proposal of a 70-hour working week is nothing but a recipe for disaster.

No need to race to the bottom

Working hours tend to decrease when incomes rise and people can afford more things that they enjoy, including more leisure. In fact, in more productive economies, workers work less, while in the less productive poorer economies, workers have to work more to compensate for lower productivity.

Enough data confirms the obvious – shorter working days and better pay improves productivity and even profits. As such, Mr. Murthy's 70-hour prescription comes at a time when there is a growing demand for reducing working hours to 6 hours per day.

Moreover, it is the obligation of the state to ensure that the workers enjoy such working conditions so to ensure their participation as citizens in a democracy.

In effect Mr. Murthy is asking for the State to effectively wash its hands off the workers and turn them into machines for the capitalist class to exploit. What are the consequences of such a deregulatory policy? Dr. B. R. Ambedkar clarified that the argument that minimisation of state intervention would mean liberty, must be tempered by asking to whom and for whom is this liberty? He argued as follows: "Obviously this liberty is liberty to the landlords to increase rents, for capitalists to increase hours of work and reduce rate of wages. This must be so. It cannot be otherwise. For in an economic system employing armies of workers, producing goods en masse at regular intervals someone must make rules so that workers will work and the wheels of industry run on. If the state does not do it the private employer will. Life otherwise will become impossible. In other words, what is called liberty from the control of the state is another name for the dictatorship of the private employer."

Mr. Murthy, a capitalist, does what capitalists do – fight any legal protection that the workers enjoy so that they can be taken back 200 years to the Industrial Revolution era. What is required though is better wages, lesser working hours, job, wage and social security and socialisation of profits. Workers are not just workers – they are citizens with a role to play in a democracy (and not limited to voting once a few years), and a larger role to play in the revolution. ■

Lessons from the Silkyara Tunnel Collapse: Stop Destruction in the Name of Development

★ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA



Forty-one construction workers who remained trapped in a partially collapsed tunnel in Uttarakhand since 12 November, 2023, were finally rescued on the seventeenth day. After machines broke down it was 'rathole miners' (skilled manual earth diggers) who ultimately came to the rescue at great risk to their own lives. In recent times we have seen organised state-sanctioned violence to expel Muslims from Uttarakhand, yet Muslim rathole miners came to Uttarakhand to join this rescue mission. The media and the state and central governments initially paid little attention to the mishap. It was only after the world cup cricket euphoria anticlimactically ended in India's shock defeat to Australia in the November 19 final that the Silkyara tunnel collapse started receiving some attention in the media. The least that must be demanded from the rulers is restraint in 'exhibiting their care and concern' for the rescued workers. Only the other day we saw how insensitive UP ministers sought to hand over cheques in front of camera to the inconsolable mother of Captain Shubham of Agra who had been killed in Rajouri, prompting her to say 'pradarshani mat lagao' (don't make a spectacle).

The rescue operation had been a thoroughly casual affair from the very beginning. The Hyderabad-based Navyug Engineering

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SAVIOUR HEROES

The 12-member team of rat-miners who pulled off the rescue



Munna Qureshi



Monu Kumar



Feroze Qureshi



Nasir Khan



Jatin



Devender Kumar



Wakeel Hassan



Irshad Ansari



Rashid Ansari



Naseem Malik



Saurabh



Ankur. (PTI pictures)

Company (reportedly now being owned by the Adani group), which has the tunnel construction contract, had no wherewithals to deal with an emergency like the Silkyara tunnel collapse. It should be noted that the same company was responsible for the death of twenty labourers in August this year in an accident in Nagpur-Mumbai Samruddhi expressway and a case of culpable homicide has been registered against the company. Yet there has been no monitoring of the company's work in Uttarakhand. An auger machine was brought from Delhi to conduct the drilling and when it ran into trouble a second machine was brought from Indore. When the second machine too developed problems, experts were summoned from Delhi. Yet on the 13th day, all attempts had to be given up on getting the machine running. On the 15th day of the tunnel collapse the National Disaster Management Authority eventually deployed army engineers and rathole miners who finally succeeded in rescuing the workers.

When the Silkyara Bend - Barkot tunnel project was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs in February 2018, it included a mandatory provision for an escape passage. Whatever happened to that provision? Norms have clearly been violated at every stage of construction. No wonder Uttarakhand has been witnessing such construction related accidents increasingly frequently. Five years ago, on 21 December 2018, seven workers had perished in a landslide on the Rudraprayag-Gaurikund stretch of an under-construction road. In July 2020, three sleeping siblings in Khoda village of Narendranagar block of Tehri were crushed to death when the retaining wall of a highway collapsed on their house. On 20 July 2022, two labourers lost their lives and six others sustained critical injuries when an under-construction bridge collapsed in Rudraprayag district.

Such periodic accidents have now become routine features of 'development' in Uttarakhand. Two disastrous campaigns have particularly harmed Uttarakhand since the state was carved out of Uttar Pradesh in November 2000. The idea of turning Uttarakhand into 'Urja Pradesh' or India's energy hub by building a string of hydel power plants and the fad of linking the four key pilgrimage centres - Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri - with faster all-weather road and rail connectivity have unleashed havoc in this Himalayan state. Known as the Char Dham (four pilgrimage centres) project, this faster road connectivity project has been designed to destroy the delicate and ecologically sensitive and earthquake-prone Himalayan ecosystem. To avoid environmental compliance for projects exceeding 100 km, the close to 900 km Char Dham project has been presented as a cluster of 53 separate projects. Allied with the road connectivity project, there is also a 372 km long Char Dham Railway Project with an estimated cost of 72,000 crore rupees and involving the construction of dozens of tunnels. From massive destruction of Himalayan forests to reckless tampering with the fragile mountain system, the Char Dham Road and Rail projects are a complete design of disaster. From Joshimath to Silkyara, the writing on the wall can be read in big bold letters.

Enough warnings have also been issued by experts and courts. Eminent environmentalist Ravi Chopra who headed the Supreme Court appointed expert panel that examined the Char Dham project resigned to register his protest against total inaction of the government. To secure the approval of the Supreme Court, the government had invoked the angle of national security and improved mobility of the defence forces in support of the Char Dham project. The Supreme Court endorsed the project only on condition of mandatory compliance with necessary environmental safeguards. But so far there has been no sign of compliance or course correction. In the name of development, the Himalayan ecosystem continues to be subjected to relentless corporate invasion and plunder. Coupled with the growing intensity of climate crisis, this paradigm of development can only be a recipe for unmitigated serial disaster. The success in saving the lives of the forty-one trapped workers in the Silkyara tunnel must not lead to complacency and resumption of business as usual. The Silkyara tunnel collapse only highlights the urgency of saving Uttarakhand and the Himalayan ecosystem from the ongoing campaign of destruction. ■

Scrap the Uttarkashi Tunnel Project

Punish the Company and the Government Officials



After 16 days, when 41 trapped contract workers were rescued safely from the Uttarkashi Tunnel accident, their families and the people of the country heaved a sigh of relief. We hope that they will get the best kind of treatment.

We congratulate all those government agencies of the country, especially the rat miners who risked their lives to get them out of the tunnel safely. We salute the spirit of the workers who were trapped in the tunnel for so long. This accident shows that the private contract company, with the connivance of the government, has openly violated the rules and ignored the opinion of experts. This accident exposes the government's anti-people, anti-environment and destructive development model.

- We hope that the Modi government will show so the humility not to run a publicity campaign to take credit for this rescue work.
- AICCTU demands that the responsibility for this accident should be fixed and the guilty company and the government officials should be punished immediately.
- This entire project should be scrapped.

- Statement issued by AICCTU

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Outsourcing of Drivers and Conductors Struck Down!

★ AVANI CHOKSHI

“Unions are always looked upon with contempt as if they exist to hamper smooth functioning. But it is untrue. It is essential to have union like a strong opposition party in a democratic set up. The conscience of the ruling party or the management would always remain alert.”

The Madras High Court has recently passed an important judgment on 15.11.2023 in a case filed by Tamil Nadu State Transport Employees' Federation (affiliated to CITU) challenging tender notification issued by the Metropolitan Transport Corporation Limited (MTCL) whereby posts for drivers and conductors were sought to be outsourced.

A. Arguments of the Parties

The union argued that recruitments are governed by a 1992 settlement between the union and the MTCL, wherein it had been agreed that direct recruitment would be done through the employment exchange, with the sole exemption of compassionate appointment. The Union also argued that a number of vacancies had yet to be filled and outsourcing of these terms amounted to breach of settlement, and would lead to industrial disharmony and discrimination.



On the other hand, the government argued that it had taken the policy decision to outsource these posts in view of a severe shortage of drivers and conductors, stated to be due to prolonged absence by those holding posts. The government also pointed out that the contract tenure was one year only, and there had been substantial changes in the 3 decades since the settlement.

B. Findings of the Court

1. Discrimination and inequality in outsourced employment

In a vital recognition of inherent inequalities with the introduction of contract system, the court accepted the argument of the union and held “The one inevitable consequence in outsourcing is that when two categories of drivers are created, the equality as enshrined in the Constitution

of India goes for a toss”

The court went on to state that having different salaries and different service conditions for different drivers would amount to discrimination and unfair labour practice. The court illustratively argued that the discrimination would have a cascading effect, by noting that the Transport corporation could evade liability under the Employees Compensation Act in respect of accidents involving outsourced drivers.

In fact, the practice of paying, identically placed workers, highly disparate wages on the basis of employment status is rampant. Though equal pay for equal work is made a condition of the contractor's licence under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Central Rules, 1971, this is not the actual practice in most work

places. With contractualisation of public employment, workers are paid only minimum wages and not civil servant scales of pay, despite performing the same work. Not only this, but payment of minimum wage is not properly monitored, and very few contract workers are able to fight a legal battle to ensure even bare minimum statutory entitlements.

2. Impact of contractualisation on system of Reservation

Another vital aspect that was considered by the court in quashing the notification for outsourcing was that reservation policy would not be required to be implemented by the contractor.

The fact that contractualisation of labour substantively and inherently dilutes reservation has been repeatedly raised – and judicial recognition of this is crucial. The promotion of insecure labour conditions by the BJP government at Centre and the DMK government at the State must be viewed as a direct assault on the system of reservations that seeks to ameliorate the effect of historical social inequalities of caste. Similarly, horizontal reservations for women, persons with disabilities etc would all be rendered obsolete when the posts no longer exist.

3. Importance of Unions

The Court also discussed the role of unions in the context of the argument of the State that there was perennial labour unrest. It was noted that the general contempt with which unions are seen as if

they hamper smooth functioning is untrue. The Court went on to hold: “It is essential to have union like a strong opposition party in a democratic set up. The conscience of the ruling party or the management would always remain alert.”

The Court also noticed that new employees could also always form a union. In this, the court perhaps failed to recognise that forming effective trade Unions of unorganised / outsourced workers is close to impossible. With a hire and fire regime and reducing accountability of the principal employer, workers who unionise are often victimised and removed from employment. Many of them do not have resources or ability to pursue their remedies. However, the court was right in noting the importance of unions: strong unions lessen the hugely uneven power imbalance and enable workers to fight for statutory rights and beyond.

4. Role of Public Sector Units

Another aspect that was considered by the court was that though private players have thrived in the transportation sector, their motive was profit, and the employees were unorganised with no control over hours of duty or timely wage disbursement. The court differentiated the role of public sector and noted that the sector was organised and in the service of the public, with prescribed code of conduct.

With growing privatisation of public sector, an open disinvestment policy, and the

introduction of profit-motivation in welfare services, the judgement is a timely reminder of the role of the public sector.

5. Recourse for Indiscipline amongst Employees

The Court also rejected the argument of the corporation that justified outsourcing due to alleged rampant absenteeism. It was noted that any misconduct could be dealt with through the disciplinary measures laid down in the Standing Orders. The Court also noted that despite the clear standing Orders, a large number of industrial disputes were filed by drivers and conductors. The court came to the conclusion: “Respondents 5 to 12 may save much through such contractual labour but at what cost is a million dollar question. In my opinion the respondents 5 to 12 are advised to adopt a more transparent and easier process to recruit drivers instead of venturing into the outsourcing mode through manpower agencies.”

C. Conclusion

Neo-liberal policies adopted by the BJP government have clearly revealed the deliberate creation of insecurity of employment, in the name of ease of doing business. This was exacerbated by the attack on working class through amendment of labour laws in the COVID period. The labour codes passed in the parliament are also hugely anti-worker. In fact, even though the Supreme Court has held that payment of less than minimum wages amount to begar (forced labour) and bonded

labour, the Government, through Codes, has sought to implement a floor wage, which is less than minimum wage.

The policy has also been clearly in favour of informalisation of employment, while making bizarre arguments to portray such changes to be in favour of workers. For example, a 2021 report issued by the V.V.Giri National Labour Institute and the Indian Institute of Public Administration, titled 'Impact Assessment Study of the Labour Reforms undertaken by the States' argued that the increasing contractualisation of labour would increase formalisation.

It is well reported that economic inequality is at an all-time high. Policies towards insecure employment only exacerbate this inequality. The corporate

friendly policies have extended from private employers to the government – with insecure tenures extending even to the army with the Agnipath scheme. We see reducing number of permanent posts, a failure to recruit towards vacant posts and an urge towards contractualisation. In this context, we remember where the Supreme Court noted that “Sanctioned posts do not fall from heaven. State has to create them by a conscious choice on the basis of some rational assessment of the need.” The state policy now, however, is antithetical to Article 39 of the Constitution which mandates that “The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing—

(a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;

(b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good;

(c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment;

(d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women”

In this context of state sanctioned insecurity of employment, the High Court judgement in Tamil Nadu State Transport Employees' Federation v. Government of Tamil Nadu is an important reiteration of how labour issues are to be construed – by keeping the best interests of workers in mind. ■

Reverse Flow of Labour?

A Cruel New Normal in Modi's India?

★ ATANU CHAKRABORTY

The Department of Statistics of the Central Government has released the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for July 2022 to July 2023. This survey had claimed that the All India all person labour force participation rate (LFPR) jumped from 49.8 percent in 2017-18 (the year PLFS began) to 57.9 percent, a whopping 8.1 percent in five years.

The worker population ratio (WPR), which measures the ratio

of workers employed to the total workforce rose similarly from 46.8 percent in 2017-18 to 56 percent in 2022-23.

Now, the question arises - which sector has witnessed such a handsome growth?

The LFPR for males rose from 75.8 percent in 2017-18 to 75.5 percent in 2022-23, which is a slender increase. But surprisingly, on the other end, LFPR for females rose astoundingly from 23.3

percent in 2017-18 to 37 percent in 2022-23, an increase of about 60 percent! This statistical figure brings forth an intriguing female work force increase which should be examined at a proper perspective.

By perusing the figures, it becomes evident that the urban LFPR increased from 47.6 percent in 2017-18 to 50.4 percent in 2022-23 - by 2.8 percent. But the rural LFPR increased from 50.7 percent to

60.8 percent during this period, by an amazingly 10.1 percentage points. In rural areas, while the male LFPR increased from 76.4 percentage to 80.2 percentage, the female LFPR leaped massively from 26.4 percent to 41.5 percent signifying a massive, unsubstantiated increase! Does the data want us to believe that the rural economy is developing fast coupled with feminisation of labour force which is actually against the acknowledged trend at all India level? Where lies the riddle? What is the observation of CMIE?

Mahesh Vyas, the Chief of CMIE said, India's workforce is not rising in relation to its increasing working age population and remains largely stagnant at a little over 400 million in the past five years.

A worrisome aspect of Indian economy is reflected in the share of employment in agriculture which is rising significantly from 42.5 percent of the total employed in 2018-19 to 45.6 percent in 2019-20 indicating an unusual, regressive trend of large scale movement of labour from industry or service sector to the agriculture.

The PLFS provides details of 'employment - the nature of jobs, which are divided into three principal occupations - self-employed, regular wage/salary, and casual. The self-employed are further divided into two classes, own account workers and unpaid helpers in household enterprises. The survey shows a huge increase in



the number of self-employed to an all-time high which is 58 percent of the total employed in 2022-23! At this proportion in the total worker base of 580 million, 106 million are unpaid helpers in household enterprises in 2022-23. This wage-less group of workers grew by about 28 million between 2017-18 and 2022-23 and it is noteworthy that ALL of them are women. These self-employed workers, which includes unpaid helpers, earned Rs 4,725 to Rs 5,071 in the last 30 days of survey period. The average casual female worker earned between Rs 259 to Rs 287 per day, or about Rs 7,098 for 26 days per working month. The labour force survey also shows the average regular monthly wages have diminished by over 20 percent in real terms between 2017-18 and 2022-23. For self-employed and casual categories also, the real wages indicated a fall in real terms. No growth in average wages in five years clearly indicate a worsening quality of employment and stagnation of wages in the labour force survey that largely represents

the bottom 60 to 70 percent of the population.

The International Labour Organisation categorically mentioned that only those who are doing 'decent' jobs should be treated as employed. So, it is evident that unpaid workers in the self-employment category which has risen dramatically from about 40 million in 2017-18 to 95 million in 2022-23 should not be treated as employed as per the methodology prescribed by ILO and which is being followed by 92 countries.

A signature of Modinomics is a reverse flow of labour from industry to agriculture when the latter is beset with multiple crises. An overwhelming number of India's workforce is engaged in unorganised sector which faced three major blows of demonetisation, GST and pandemic induced lockdown. The mirage of huge employment, the facade of fastest growing economy, the stark reality of fall or stagnation in wages is the cruel "new normal" of Modi's India. ■

What Happened to Your Promise of Abolition of Contract Labour, Mr. Naveen Patnaik?

★ MAHENDRA PARIDA

Despite the Odisha Government's proclamation, the ambitious goal of regularizing 57,000 contract workers, predominantly engaged in vital sectors such as education, health, home, and welfare departments, has unfortunately not seen the light of the day.

The Odisha government made an official announcement in October, 2022, promising complete abolition of contract system in appointments in the state government. This announcement triggered nationwide discussions, drawing attention to the significance of the issue. Regrettably, even after one year of the declaration, the actual implementation of this decision of abolition of contract system remains elusive. The government departments have not really begun any process for the regularization contract labour.

On the contrary, to add fuel to the fire, the state government announced recruitment of 20,000 teachers on a contractual basis just before the assembly elections. This is nothing but making the failed promise of abolition of contract labour a mockery. A substantial number of workers continue to operate on the basis of outsourcing in various state departments and district offices. The conspicuous silence of the BJD government on the question of their regularisation exposes the fallacy of the promise of 2022.

In an attempt to justify the recruitment of workers on the basis of outsourcing, the government contends that these workers bring a higher level of expertise and effectiveness, particularly in critical sectors such as healthcare and education. However, the stark reality is that the wages paid to these outsourced workers in the state are exceptionally low. Even in skilled positions like lecturers, those who are teaching for decades on contractual basis are only earning a meagre sum of Rs 20,000 per month. In most aided colleges, the dream of job security remains a mirage for the



teachers recruited on contractual basis.

Presently, the outsourced workers are coming together on their demand for basic rights of the working class – equal wages for equal work, job security, and a much-needed salary hike. In response to the growing momentum of their movement, the government did make a revision to the monthly consolidated remuneration of contractual and outsourced workers. Despite this revision, where an individual previously receiving Rs 8,070 now gets Rs 10,100, the wage of contractual workers remains too low. This is a matter of concern particularly in the backdrop of rising prices, which places an additional burden on the already strained livelihoods of these workers.

Outsourced workers are intensifying their movement across 30 districts in Odisha, exerting pressure on authorities not only to revise the pay structure to higher bands but also to eliminate contractualisation from the government departments. The workers are also demanding immediate filling up of 4 lakh vacant posts in Odisha.

The Odisha government must know that regularisation of contractual workers and end to contractualisation are very popular demands of workers today. Any attempt of betrayal of the promise of regularisation is bound to have a telling effect on the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in the state. ■

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Garment Workers in Bangladesh Protest Exploitative Conditions

★ AISHIK GHOSH

Bangladesh's garment industry is the backbone of the country's economy, employing millions of people and generating billions of dollars in annual exports. It has been heralded as a model of economic growth for resource poor countries in the Global South. Participation of women in the industry has been heralded as a breakthrough for women's rights. However, the industry has long been plagued by low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of safety regulations. We have seen the result of deadly negligence of safety by Bangladeshi capitalists in tragedies like Rana Plaza.

The most recent wave of protests of garment workers against such exploitative working conditions began in October 2023, when garment workers demanded a tripling of the minimum wage from 8,000 takas (Rs. 6050) to 23,000 takas (Rs. 17,390) per month. The protests quickly escalated, with tens of thousands of workers taking to the streets in major cities across the country. The government announced a new salary structure in November with a minimum wage of 12,500 taka (Rs. 9,450), but workers have said that these are starvation wages.

As workers' protests spread, the police responded with alarming brutality. The police are so far accused of killing three protestors. The unionists have also been arrested in order to prevent further protests. On the other hand, workers were threatened by armed goons to cease the protests immediately. Factory owners also threatened to shut down production and withhold wages by applying a "no work, no pay" rule. Over the weekend, more than 150 factories closed "indefinitely", as police issued blanket charges for 18,000 workers in connection with the demonstrations. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, a trade body also threatened to withhold recruitment if protests continue.



The global disparities are rarely as evident as in the garment industry. International clothing brands, including Levi's, Zara and H&M have continued to work with exploitative partners in Bangladesh despite international outcry. The typical retail price of a pair of Levi's signature 501 jeans is around \$80, which is more than the current minimum wage of 8,000 taka (\$72.5) per month for garment workers in Bangladesh. The deteriorating working conditions have also meant that some of the metrics by which Bangladesh had progressed is now facing downward pressure. The news agency Sputnik noted that the share of female workers in the garment industry in Bangladesh had fallen from 80% to 60% in recent years because of increased automation in the sector and growing social pressure on women to dedicate more time to work in the household and taking care of their children.

The Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina that faces an upcoming election has sought to use brutal and repressive tactics against both political opposition and the working-class movement in the country. Workers around the world must stand in solidarity with the workers of Bangladesh. ■

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A Dialogue Between Sanitation Workers of India and UK

★ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

A webinar was organized on 18th November jointly by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions, the Cleaners and Facilities Branch of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) and the South Asia Solidarity Group to share and build solidarity between sanitation workers across countries.

The speakers at the webinar included Com. Nirmala, the president of the BBMP Pourakarmikara Sangha (Bangalore), Sucheta De, Vice-President of All India Central Council of Trade Unions and Charlie Macnamara, IWGB Head of Organizing and branch support, Wilson Ayala, IWGB Cleaners and Facilities Branch Chair and Maritza Castillo Calle, Vice-President, IWGB. They were joined by several sanitation workers from London and India.

Com. Nirmala spoke on the experiences of sanitation workers struggles in Karnataka. She detailed the manner of formation of the union in Bengaluru and how it spread to various parts of the state. She said that this is a caste ordained occupation, workers are almost entirely from the Dalit community and almost 90% of them are women. She spoke of the harsh working conditions and the triple oppression of caste, class and gender faced by them. She elaborated the struggles of pourakarmikas (sanitation

workers) for basic rights and dignity and the workers strikes in 2017 and 2022 that resulted in successful elimination of the contract labour system and moving towards secure employment. The struggles of the workers and the union were not only for economic demands, but also for their social dignity. The fight for dignity is a core of our trade union practice because of the caste-ordained nature of the work and also because the entire workforce was only Dalits. Workers are subjected to untouchability, not even provided drinking water, or any basic amenities. We fought for an economic justice together with social justice. We fought for dignified working and living conditions, permanency, fair wages, annihilation of caste and for the emancipation of women.

Com. Sucheta, Vice-president of the AICCTU shared the experiences of the struggles of sanitation workers in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She narrated how AISA, the student's organisation and AICCTU, the trade union came together to fight for the rights of the workers in the campus. She explained the militant movement of thousands of students and workers who came together to ensure the workers' rights. The workers were working in extremely dire conditions, not even being paid minimum

wages. The administration was so adamant in denying workers their rights, terminating them and even rusticated students, but the movement stood strong, and forced the administration of JNU to acknowledge the right to minimum wages of the workers. She detailed the concerted effort of the forces of domination to deny workers their right, to perpetuate caste hierarchies and historical oppression. The fight for the right to dignified working conditions that began in 2009 in JNU continues till date. The union not only ensured payment of minimum wages and provision of social security, but also stopped heinous practices such as manual scavenging inside the campus. All this was possible because of the undaunted fighting spirit of the workers. Sucheta described how sanitation workers engaged on contractual basis in institutions across Delhi were denied of every basic rights. From minimum wages, timely payment, regularisation, ESI, PF, provision of safety equipments, to equal pay for equal work - every single right of sanitation workers is being blatantly violated. Recently, AICCTU led a struggle to ensure minimum wages for contractual sanitation workers in hospitals in Delhi. It is indeed shameful that the administration of Kalawati Saran Hospital Complex in Delhi has retrenched sanitation workers for demanding minimum wages. AICCTU units in Delhi are fighting battles for the dignity and rights of sanitation workers despite facing a series of crackdowns from managements.

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Com. Charles Aprile, an IWGB Organizer who has worked across the Cleaners and Facilities and IWGB Universities Branch spoke about their union that was started about 11 years ago by precariously employed migrant workers, largely from Latin America, who work as outsourced cleaners. The Union has now grown into 12 different branches, working with workers who have been ignored by traditional trade unions in the country. The struggles have been primarily against outsourcing and to demand equal rights for the outsourced workers on par with direct employees. The union emphasises the need to take direct action to demand rights, in a situation where there is racial discrimination and migrant precarity. This includes public shaming of employers by bringing the abuse and illegalities to light, mobilizing people to take action to support workers, conducting strikes and boycott of employers to compel them to meet the demands. He spoke of the similarities to the experiences in India, where there has been a repeated attack against migrant workers and indignity is used to humiliate workers, and the fight for rights is also a fight for dignity.

Wilson Ayala Romero, the Chair of the Cleaners & Facilities spoke of how outsourcing, and the contract system were the ultimate modern exploitation system, where contractors exploited workers and made large profits exploiting the labour of workers. Today, outsourcing companies are offering cheaper services, which means that workers are

pushed further into vulnerability and are forced to work under poor working conditions. Being migrant workers, only adds to their precarity. He spoke of a recent camping that took place in a hospital, where workers were not given the necessary vaccines, and were also facing discrimination in their treatment. Cleaners are forced to work very long hours to make the money needed to survive but are denied even basic rights like sick pay. As a union, the push is to empower workers to be able to raise their voice and demand their rights. He spoke of the importance of this meeting, to be able to share experiences and be there for each other.

Maritza Castillo Calle, the Vice-President of the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain spoke about the manner in which the union fought for their rights and her own transformation from an outsourced cleaner into an activist. She was working as an outsourced cleaner at the University of London, where she suffered a lot of labour abuse, including overworking, precarity, sexual harassment and being treated as a second class worker. Migrant workers don't know their rights, don't speak the language which increases their precarity and the union is important for them to come together to demand their rights. The IWGB has a campaign demanding 3 things – full sick pay, better holiday, better pension equal to the direct staff. The campaign lasted 10 years, which not only fulfilled these demands, but also ended outsourcing and discrimination in the industry.



This campaign resulted in one of the biggest strikes of outsourced workers in the history of higher education in the UK. This fight isn't easy, but with the collective fight of workers and support and solidarity of allies, this injustice can and will be fought.

It was an important conversation where striking parallels, as well as many key differences came out. The manner in which outsourcing has become a common means to deny workers their rights and to perpetuate structural oppression is something that clearly stands out, with the primary fight being against this oppressive system. There was a clear resolve that outsourcing, one of the worst forms of exploitation would have to be brought to an end, and the fight was one for fair and dignified working conditions. This conversation brought out the need for workers across countries to come together and think through ways in which solidarities could be formed across borders. ■

5th State Conference of AICCTU Jharkhand Concludes Successfully

The 5th State Conference of AICCTU Jharkhand concluded with a resolve to defeat the anti-worker Modi government in the upcoming general elections. The conference was held in Kathara, Bermo. The conference hall was named after Comrade Mohan Prasad and the stage was named after Comrade Bhैया Lal Besra and Comrade Laxman Bediya.

The conference commenced with flag hoisting by Comrade RN Thakur and a two-minute silent tribute to the martyrs of the working class movement, innocent Palestinians killed in the Israeli attacks, victims of industrial accidents and natural disasters.

The presidium of the conference consisted of Geeta Mandal, Arun Sahay, Sushila Tigga, Bajjnath Mistri, and Upendra Singh. Comrades by Bhuvaneshwar Kewat, Kartik Hadi, Amal Ghosh and Vijendra Prasad were part of the steering committee.

190 delegates from 14 districts of the state, including workers representatives from coal, construction, steel, scheme, energy, sanitation sectors participated in the state conference. On behalf of the outgoing committee, the state President of AICCTU Jharkhand, Devdip Singh Divakar, welcomed the delegates. The conference

was inaugurated by AICCTU's all India General Secretary Comrade Rajiv Dimri. In his address, he emphasized the crucial role of the labour movement in Jharkhand to overthrow the Modi government. This government has proved to be a big disaster for the toiling masses of the country. The government's abolition of 44 labor laws is the biggest blow to workers today. These four labor codes are nothing but a Code for enslavement of workers as much as Manusmriti which is a code for the enslavement of Dalits and Women. Corporate companies have become the forces of domination today. In the name of privatization, public resources and properties of the country are being sold to private companies. To facilitate the process of privatisation, the policy of national monetization has been introduced. Through communal polarization and by fostering chauvinistic national sentiments, attempts are being made to divide the people and to divert the attention of the working masses from the real issues facing the country. It is only by mobilizing people and by intensifying resistance that the anti-worker regime of Modi Government can be resisted. At the end of his speech Comrade Rajiv Dimri highlighted the importance of mass mobilisation and a strong organisation to

defend the rights of the working class in the face of ever increasing assaults of the Modi led BJP government.

After the inaugural speech, AICCTU's state secretary Shubhendu Sen presented the draft work report for suggestions and discussions. An open session was held on the occasion of the historic 'November Revolution' the next day. The Day of Solidarity was also observed in support of the people of Palestine on the same day. The session was presided by AICCTU leader Comrade Vikas Kumar Singh.

Main speakers included CPIML MLA Vinod Singh, CPIML Politbureau member Jarnadan Prasad along with leaders of other central trade unions including Shyamlal Sarkar, the president of INTUC's coal branch, B.N. Singh, the state president of AIKM, Vijay Bhoyi from CITU, and Iftikhar Ahmed from AITUC.

In the final session, after unanimous approval of the draft report, a new committee under the supervision of the central observer R.N. Thakur was elected. A 41-member committee was formed with Shubhendu Sen as the state secretary, Bajjnath Mistri as the president, and Vikas Kumar Singh as the Working President. Bhuvaneshwar Kewat, Krishna Singh, Amal Ghosh were elected as secretaries, Arun Sahay and Subhash Mandal were elected as Vice-Presidents.

The conference concluded successfully with a call to make the Workers' Mahapadav on 26-28 November a great success. ■

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The Struggle of TANTEA Workers in Tamil Nadu

★ K GNANA DESIKAN

TANTEA is a tea estate in Valparai of Nilgiri Hills, owned by the Tamil Nadu state government. The workers of this estate have been demanding dignified working conditions and increase in wages. AICCTU has formed a union in TANTEA, mainly of women involved in plucking tea leaves, to raise the issue of rights of workers who toil to keep the estate running.

AICCTU has carried out a series of agitational programs on the demands of the workers. When the TN state government decided to close down this tea industry, it was vehemently opposed by all stakeholders including

AICCTU. The state government dropped the move in the face of stiff opposition.

AICCTU also raised the issue of abysmal wages drawn by workers which is much less than their counterparts in private tea estates. The houses built for workers in the estate have become inhabitable due to lack of renovation. Workers are being forced to live in inhuman conditions. The AICCTU is demanding the right to dignified housing for workers. AICCTU took up a campaign demanding increase in wages, immediate renovation of workers' quarters and Bonus in Valparai and Nilgiris.

In the meantime, the Minister

for Forest of TN Government visited Valparai estate and assured workers that the demands of workers will be sympathetically considered. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr. Stalin also announced a 20% bonus for all state PSUs including TANTEA on the eve of Deepavali. He also increased the wages of TANTEA workers to Rs.438 from Rs.375.

After the increase in wages, the TANTEA management instructed plucking of 45 kg of tea whereas the private estate workers are plucking only 35 kg per day. The unions are demanding to end this discrimination and negotiations are on to settle the issue.

AICCTU is resolved to strengthen unionisation among plantation workers including rubber plantation for better working and living conditions. ■



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