



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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★ AICWF - AICCTU

**FIGHT FOR DECENT WAGES,
REGULAR WORK – SOCIAL SECURITY
AND DIGNIFIED LIFE!**



4TH ALL INDIA CONFERENCE

**ALL INDIA CONSTRUCTION WORKERS
FEDERATION (AICWF)**

India's 50 million construction workers are the builders of modern India. They build roads, highways, railway tracks, airports and ports that connect the vast sub-continent and make India one country, spanning all its distances and diversities.

Construction workers are the backbone of the economy as they create the infrastructure necessary for industrial growth. In a globalising economy, it is they who are constructing the new economic zones, the IT cities, the call centres and mega malls that are creating new forms of wealth today. It is they who are laying the cables for a rapidly expanding country-wide telecommunications network.

Yet, these construction workers, who are creating foundation for the new economy are living in semi-bonded conditions with low pay and insecure and unsafe working conditions. Almost one-third of these workers are women and children.

A Gateway to Urban Employment

The government is the largest principal employer for construction workers as it undertakes large scale construction and building work. It is responsible for building the nation's infrastructure and also for its maintenance. But, the government projects are being handed over to private players and we also witness PPP (Public Private Partnership) and BOT (Build Operate and Transfer) models in numerous cases. The role of government's own agencies is being restricted and limited.

Irregular Employment – Blurred Relationship

Workers are employed through the agencies of labour contractors. This contractor is the link between the principal employer and the worker. But, he basically represents the interests of the builders.

There are four methods of recruitment of labour –

1. Direct recruitment of workers by the company of the builder,
2. Recruitment of workers from rural areas through labour contractors,
3. Recruitment of workers from city slums through labour contractors,

4. Recruitment of workers from marketplace (naka / chowk) by principal employers and through contractors or Mistry's.

Market Driven Wages

Irregular and erratic payment or non-payment and under payment of wages is one of the major issues being confronted by the workers. The contractors orally promise a wage when they recruit workers and once the work starts, they delay the payment, pay less than what was promised, and often do not pay at all. Breach of contract or no legal contract, less wages, unsafe conditions, corruption, loot, and cheating are quite rampant in the industry. Such practices that are considered to be a part of rogue capitalist tendencies are being witnessed even in corporate companies and MNCs in the industry.

Women and Children in the Construction Industry

The work in construction sites is invariably divided along gender lines. The types of work that men do are labelled as 'skilled' work and fetch higher wages, than the work women are allowed to do. Women are restricted to head-loading and 'beldari' jobs that involve fetching and carrying of materials and this type of work is labelled as 'unskilled' work. Naturally, 'unskilled' work is paid lesser than 'skilled' work which is understandable. But, we witness a huge disparity in wages for men and women performing same and similar kind of work.

Sexual Harassment

Women who wait in the chowks or naka often find themselves leered at by prospective employers and subject to various indignities. Younger women hired through contractors are more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Sexual exploitation at work site is a regular phenomenon and no protection is offered against it in any manner till date.

MIGRANTS AND BONDAGE IN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Conditions of Bondage

This is an area where little data exists. However, it is self-evident that there are rural communities that are particularly vulnerable and most likely to

accept a raw deal from the contractor or employer, particularly because wage labour opportunities in the rural sector have been shrinking in recent years. More so because of drastic cuts in allocation for MGNREGA. Often, they are hired from distant places and become completely dependent on the contractor because they do not speak the local language and consequently are cut off from the local population.

In several states, migrant workers face the apathy of locals as they are perceived as taking over local jobs. The hostility makes their situation even more vulnerable. In fact, such a possibility of hostility among migrants and locals was orchestrated by BJP to create fear and hate mongering among migrants by circulating fake videos of some stray incident in Tamil Nadu

COVID-19: IMPACT ON CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

The Pandemic and Job Loss

COVID-19 in India also showed that alongside the service sector, construction has been the worst affected sector. The decline in employment was also very sharp. In absolute terms, 34 million workers lost their jobs in the first quarter.

The Exodus

The mass reverse exodus proved that if one was unable to work, then there was nothing left for a migrant in a city, and they had no social community to fall back on.

It is also symptomatic of the exclusion of the migrant population from all social safety mechanisms. It is further unacceptable that the welfare of migrants was not mentioned even once in any of the directives issued by State agencies until it became impossible to avoid the videos and pictures of large groups of migrants walking in deplorable conditions.

THE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AND THE LABOUR LAWS

A Journey Towards Enactment of 1996 Act – More Than A Decade Long Struggle

Owing to the relentless workers struggle, Tamil Nadu

had been a pioneer in forming a welfare board for manual labourers, including construction workers, well before the BOCW act was enacted at all India level.

One of the few strong, independent unions in the construction sector, the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Union (TMKTS), organised a national seminar in Delhi in November 1985 to discuss the situation of workers and the lack of legal protection.

In late 1989, around 4 lakhs signatures were collected from workers demanding a comprehensive law for the construction sector. In March 1990, 20,000 workers marched to the Parliament. AICCTU also vigorously participated in the movement with full spirit and enthusiasm. The Indian Parliament enacted "The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996" and "The Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare and Cess Act, 1996".

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AND NEW CODES

Implication of Labour Codes on Construction Workers

The present central government has been strongly pushing through four anti-worker labour codes that repeal a number of existing hard-won labour laws and labour rights.

The dilution of rights of workers and duties of employers in the Code will only worsen the situation. A concerted effort must be launched by construction workers unions, and other unions in solidarity, to ensure these Codes are not notified.

THE PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

Redefining the Role of Trade Unions

There is a tendency to look at trade unions as agencies to get more. The demands for better wages and facilities continue to dominate at the expense of other considerations. In other words, economism dominates the trade union scene.

Radical unions do not approve of pure bread and butter approach of trade unions. Workers back



Fight for a Welfare Board with comprehensive benefits including ESI, PF, Pension and Free housing!

4TH ALL INDIA CONFERENCE

ALL INDIA CONSTRUCTION WORKERS FEDERATION (AICWF)

8 - 9 JULY 2023, KANYAKUMARI, TAMIL NADU

AICWF - AICCTU



unions which make higher demands and achieve them. All trade unions have to fall in the line. Non-monetary issues get neglected. Some trade unions care more for the interest of their members and less for the interests of the working class, as a whole.

Under these circumstances to fight against economism and fight for social transformation, All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) was formed and started to organise workers in different sectors as a class based vanguards with focus on class struggle for social transformation.

Some Major Struggles

AICCTU-affiliated Building Mazdoor Union at Patna organised a large number of construction workers during the foundation of AICCTU in 1989.

On 27 - 29 June 2008, the foundation conference of AICCTU affiliated All India Construction Workers Federation (AICWF) was held at Patna, attended by delegates from 10 states.

The 2nd national conference of AICWF was held at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi on 26th November 2012,

followed by a massive procession and demonstration before the Parliament next day.

3rd National conference of AICWF held at Ranchi (Jharkhand) on 30th September 2016 with central slogans "Struggle against anti working class policy of Modi led BJP government" and "Against the process of de-unionisation".

Changing Faces of the Movement

The Modi-led BJP government and also the governments at the states are more geared up towards facilitating the bourgeoisie/employers by providing the 'ease of doing business', while the workers' lives are being made much more difficult. In such a situation, we are bestowed with the task of making construction workers movement a political movement that can challenge the powers that be, and that can secure welfare as a benefit provided by the government and the employers. The need of the hour is to develop construction workers as an independent political force, as an independent political movement.

The Class Struggle Centric Union

As most of our work is concentrated in rural or semi-urban areas and where most of the construction workers are engaged in smaller size constructions and also under some small players like mistrys, the scope for any class struggle in true sense, becomes much more limited. In such a backdrop, we need to self-introspect our own work and strive to make the construction workers movement a class struggle centric one. Making our union a class struggle centric organization is the first step towards changing the face of the movement, as a whole.

Reorientation of Construction Labour Movement

Under these circumstances, trade unions need to ponder over reorienting the direction of the construction labour movement. Politicisation of workers and concept of class struggle need to be given a greater emphasis. The construction labour movement in the country needs to be reoriented to confront the changing realities in wake of anti-labour Codes, dismantling of welfare boards and the emerging new challenges.

Some points on which the construction and building workers movement shall focus on:

At the level of construction workers union activities...

- The construction workers unions shall recruit workers to the union first and involve them in trade union activities. Union First, Board next should be a slogan of top priority.
- Assisting workers to get them enrolled in welfare board, as they are members of the union, may be made as a secondary activity.
- In case of any corruption, misappropriation, diversion of funds, refusal to disburse benefits by authorities or others, the union should organize mass of construction workers to fight against it, instead of relying mainly on petitioning through individual workers to get the benefits. In fact, this struggle should be made the primary aspect of our functioning at trade union level.

Aspects of Class Struggle

- Struggles against the state for the expansion of welfare benefits and for strict collection of 3 percent of construction expenses as cess.
- Struggles against the nexus of real estate mafia, bureaucrats, builders and contractors.
- Struggles to hold the owners of the construction, builders and contractors responsible for any death or disablement while on duty or otherwise and also for the welfare. The owners of the construction and builders shall be held responsible as principal employers.

BUILD A RADICAL MOVEMENT OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

In the backdrop of new Labour Codes, particularly the Social Security Code, construction workers movement is at a crossroads. When construction welfare board is replaced by general state welfare boards as perceived by the Social Security Code, the present practice of unions is bound to face a challenge of relevance if welfare board centric practice continued. The trade unions and the workers movement have to reinvent themselves

and their role in the changing scenario.

Modi led BJP government and the RSS are spreading politics of hate and are using construction workers as a pawn in their design to communally divide the country. The fascist forces in power are using construction workers hailing from downtrodden communities and ridden with poverty, as foot soldiers in their hate filled war mongering against minorities.

In such a backdrop, construction workers movement is bound to march on a path of struggle for their rights and benefits and against the communal design of the fascist forces in the coming years.

AICWF and AICCTU will be in the forefront of workers struggles to snatch back the rights and benefits for workers and has resolved to defeat the black fascist forces of reaction and obscurantism.

AICWF and AICCTU resolve to build a radical movement of construction workers and to build a new, egalitarian society.

- Fight for Decent Wages, Regular Work, Social Security and Dignified Life!
- Fight to Reclaim our Rights!
- Let us turn 2023 into a year of waves of militant struggles!
- Let us Resolve to Defeat the Modi Regime in the 2024 elections!

An abridged version of the booklet simultaneously published and released in English, Hindi and Tamil at the all India conference of the All India Construction Workers Federation ■



Make 9th August Country-wide Massive Sit-ins a Great Success!



Let us Turn 2023 into a Year of Waves of Militant Struggles!

Intensify the Battle to Overthrow the Modi Regime in 2024 Elections!

The working class in India today is facing the worst ever attacks on their lives, livelihood and rights. Modi's promise of 'Achche Din' (good times) proved to be a cruel joke on the working people. Now, after 9 years of Modi's rule, the working people are being deceived again with jargons like 'Amrit Kal' and 'New India'. The reality is that it is a state of permanent, undeclared emergency, Bulldozer Raj and the corporate Raj dictated by Modi's friends like Adanis and Ambanis. The worst affected are the toiling masses. The latest figures show that the number of billionaires in India are rising manifold with 166 in 2022 from 102 in 2020 which is ironically the period of Covid-19 pandemic.

More than 40 percent of the wealth produced in India is owned by just 1 percent of the population, while the bottom most 50 percent own less than 3 percent of this wealth.

India has completed 75 years after independence from the British. Since then, the Modi Regime has proved to be the most destructive regime the country has ever seen in terms of nation's wealth and resources, democracy and constitution and secular fabric and rainbow diversity. Today, after more than 9 years of Modi's rule, the country's workers, peasants and all sections of toiling masses stand devastated.

What we now find as a hallmark of Modi's 9 years regime is - record unemployment and price-rise along with the nose-diving economy, massive retrenchment, wage cuts, closures and lock-outs, diminishing wages, withering social security, skyrocketing poverty, pervading hunger, widening inequality, all-out contractualization of work force not even sparing jawans of the Army, privatisation, monetization (NMP) and all out, unbridled sell-out

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of nation as a whole. And to top it all, the most brutal attack on the working class in the form of enactment of 4 labour Code Acts along with 12-hour work-day and fixed term employment is bound to push the working class into slavery. The right to unionise and the right to strike are being snatched away. The legal right to social security and minimum wages is being grabbed away. The corporate stranglehold over the country is becoming much more obvious. This is the Modi's 'Vision 2047' and the so-called dream of new India.

The entire legal and institutionalized social security system is being dismantled by closing down all welfare boards which are conspiratorially replaced by 'e-Shram portal, a mirage of social security. Modi government ridicules social security as 'freebies', while it disburses billions of rupees as concessions to corporates.

From MGNREGA to various government schemes like ASHA, Mid-day Meal and Anganwadi- all welfare schemes are facing drastic cuts in budgetary allocations and are thus being eliminated.

Women workforce is being constantly pushed into informal and precarious work resulting in de-feminisation of the workforce. Women are forced to face sexual harassment and oppression at workplaces, in addition to discrimination in wages. Women workers are being forced to work in night shifts without any proper safety mechanism in place and thus exacerbating their miseries.

Modi government is on a selling spree. It is aggressively selling all assets and properties of the government and the public sector to its close corporate friends. Even the giant network of railways and the infrastructures like roads, ports and airports are not spared in the name of monetisation.

In this scenario of miseries, attacks and devastation, the Modi government and the BJP-RSS combine is hell bent on sharpening communal polarization to divert peoples' attention from the basic issues and to dent the peoples' unity emerging out of various struggles and agitations.

From street struggles to elections - the issues of common people are coming to the fore. The issues including unemployment, poverty, price-rise are

making their presence felt. The working class is forcefully demanding increase in minimum wages, restoration of old pension scheme (OPS), increase in EPS, repeal of labour codes, halt to all-out privatisation and contractualisation and granting government employee status to scheme workers, etc. But the Modi government is responding only by aggravating communal polarisation. In Karnataka, Modi himself responded to these issues by calling upon people to raise the slogan of 'Jai Bajrang Bali'. In view of 2024 Lok Sabha elections and many state assembly elections this year, the Modi regime and the BJP have proposed the divisive issue of Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to create communal polarisation.

But the people of Karnataka responded by ousting the BJP government from the echelons power in the state. The people of the state foiled the communal design of the BJP and the RSS. Now the entire country, the toiling masses should prepare themselves to smash the fascist agenda. The working class of the country must defeat the Modi government, the biggest enemy of working people in 2024 elections.

Towards this aim, the working class must intensify its struggles and at the same time, should build a strong and broader unity with the struggles of other sections of the toiling masses. Only the united struggles of working people can reverse these attacks as was demonstrated by the historic, year-long, farmers' movement in the outskirts of Delhi.

Against the anti-worker, anti-people policies of disastrous Modi led BJP regime, AICCTU will launch a 15-day country wide campaign from 25 July to 8 August which will culminate into a country-wide massive sit-ins on 9th August, the day of the Quit India Movement, called by central trade unions. The platform of central trade unions has prepared an action programme for the year 2023 which will culminate in an all-India general strike and Bandh. The struggling farmer organisations are also extending wholehearted support to the movement.

Let us make these agitational programmes a big success towards overthrowing the Modi government to save democracy and to save our country.

- AICCTU ■

9 Years, 9 Blows: Unveiling the Central Government's Attack on the Working Class

★ MAITREYI KRISHNAN, AVANI CHOKSHI AND CLIFTON D' ROZARIO



The fascist project of the BJP which constitutes a concerted effort to undermine democratic institutions and to promote Hindutva nationalism on the one hand, also engages in overt class warfare of the ruling class against the working class as one of its defining features. This phase of fascism has emerged in a context of global neoliberalism where capital is on the offensive - snatching back whatever gains were made by workers' movements and grabbing whatever resources remain in the public domain through massive campaigns of privatization, land grab and environmental destruction. Alongside neoliberal economic policies that spell doom for the working class, there are nine lynchpins of the nine years of Modi's regime.

Contempt for the working class/ Devotion to the Corporate class:

The Modi government has unabashedly declared its allegiance to the capital class and displayed its contempt for the working class. Bowing to the dictates of the Adanis and the Ambanis, Modi is determined to reduce the working class to slaves

under the ominous sounding slogan of 'ease of doing business'. 9 years after Modi claimed his government "cares for the poor", this regime has established itself as indisputably India's most pro-corporate and anti-people government.

Through words and deeds, Modi's endeavour is to reconfigure the relationship between the employers and the workers into one that is premised on servility and gratitude. In the 2019 election victory speech, Modi famously declared that there are only two castes living in the country - the poor and those trying to pull the poor out of poverty. In his 2019 Independence Day speech, he called out to the people of the country to recognise and honour "wealth creators" and to stop seeing them "with suspicion". Rejecting the basic fact that wealth is produced by the labour power of workers, Modi instead continues to display his devotion to the capitalist class. In fact, a recent Oxfam reports show that by reducing corporate tax slabs and granting concessions to companies, the government lost revenue of 1.03 lakh crore in 2020-21, which is more

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than the total allocation for the entire MNREGA scheme for the year.

The popular description of crony capitalism as Adani-Ambani Company Raj aptly summarises the true character of the Modi government as the government of the super-rich, by the super-rich, for the super-rich.

Attack on Economic Justice: Institutionalising Inequality in Indian society:

The Modi government's economic and labor policies have resulted in alarming levels of social and economic inequality in India. The implementation of globalization, liberalization and privatisation policies over the past three decades has contributed to the growth of gross inequality, but the last nine years have witnessed a pronounced escalation in this disparity. As a result, India now ranks among the countries with the highest levels of inequality.

The concentration of wealth has witnessed an alarming increase. The Oxfam Report - India's "Survival of the Richest: The India Supplement" finds that the top 30% own more than 90% of the total wealth, while the bottom 50% of the population has around 3% of total wealth. With reduction in direct and corporate taxes, and increase in indirect taxes, it finds that the bottom 50% of the population at an All-India level pays six times more on indirect taxation as a percentage of income compared to top 10%. Wealth inequality has stripped 70% of Indians from as basic a necessity as food, with India being one of the hungriest countries in the world, ranking 107 among 121 countries in terms of the Global Hunger Index in 2022!

Attack on Social Justice: Solidifying Caste-feudal and patriarchal structures

The prevailing labor and economic policies of the Union Government sustain and perpetuate caste, feudal and patriarchal structures, further entrenching their dominance within society.

For instance, the new Labour Codes allow for the continuance of the contract labour system in occupations that are caste ordained like sanitation

work, housekeeping work. Consequently, Dalit workers are trapped within a cycle of insecurity forced to work without job security or social security.

Similar is the condition with women workers. Oxfam's India Discrimination Report has found that India's female labour force participation rate has fallen from 42.7% in 2004-05 to 25% in 2021 and attributes it largely due to gender discrimination in wages and opportunities. 97% of women workers are unorganized and work as contract workers, scheme workers, etc. without job or social security benefits. A large number of women workers – ASHA workers, mid-day meal, Anganwadi workers – are denied even the recognition of workers. This has been further exacerbated by the coming in of the Labour Codes, which directly attacks gender equality, eroding even the right to equal remuneration and service conditions.

Unemployment and Growing Informalization – from Jobless to Job Loss Growth

Unemployment is at a 45 year high and the unemployment crisis is pushing entire sections of workers, particularly those from marginalised and oppressed sections, into poverty, debt-traps, hunger and further marginalisation. The promise of 2 crore jobs made by Modi in 2014 has been forgotten. The Union government's economic and labour policies is not even attempting to create jobs, but is in fact aimed at removing even existing jobs or informalizing the formal sector, thereby aggravating unemployment and pushing workers into insecure working conditions. Even the army is not being left out of contractualization, with the Agnipath scheme being brought in.

Today a vast unorganized sector that comprise of 93 percent of total workforce and contributes 65 percent of the GDP are forced to work without any job security, wage security or social security. It is no coincidence that these workers, forced into precarious working conditions, predominantly hail from historically oppressed and marginalized communities. The magnitude of the erosion of rights can be seen by the fact that daily wage earners constitute the largest category of individuals who have been forced to commit

suicide between 2019 and 2021.

Surgical strikes on the working class - Demonetisation (8th November 2016), GST (1st July 2017) and the Covid lockdowns (March 2020)

The impact of these three policies on the working class has been devastating. Demonetisation hugely shattered the informal economy of the country. Millions of jobs were lost. According to the CMIE-CPHS data demonetization resulted in about 1.5 million jobs being lost, during the first four months of 2017. Within months of demonetisation, GST was implemented, which further worsened the situation.

The Covid lockdown that came as a jolt and further heightened this crisis. The 4-hour notice for imposing the Covid lockdown announced on 24th March resulted in workers and their families forced to face impoverishment, starvation and destitution.

Jobless and hungry and tired of this situation, thousands of migrant workers walked back home only to be met with draconian action. In Surat the police resorted to tear gas and lathi charge, and arrests! Uttar Pradesh government collected Rs 21 lakh from thousands of cycles confiscated from laborers going towards their homes in lockdown. Once back home the workers had to protest even for work and food!

Lakhs of jobs lost in the first phase never appeared again. Those who were re-employed, found themselves in precarious working conditions. The Report on the State of Working India by Azim Premji University found that workers came back into more precarious and informal employment, with nearly, half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work, either as self-employed, casual wage or informal salaried workers between 2019 - 2020. The second wave of COVID-19 only worsened the situation.

The Government did absolutely nothing to safeguard workers, instead taking this opportunity to bring in anti-worker laws. Over the Covid pandemic, the BJP government indulged in, what Naomi Klein calls the “shock doctrine” i.e. the brutal tactic of using the public’s disorientation following a collective

shock – wars, coups or natural disasters – to push through pro-corporate measures. Laws relating to labour, agriculture, land ownership, acquisition of lands for industries were all amended by the BJP government. The Labour Ministry of the Union government even issued a communication dated 05.05.2020 to all the State Governments stating that in order to address the “... challenges emerged due to COVID-19 pandemic, it is requested to undertake labour reforms on priority basis”, namely enabling self-certification, reduced inspection system, and amending laws to push workers outside the protection of the law.

Dismantling the existing labour law protections:

The repeal of 44 labour laws and the bringing in of the 4 Labour Codes was nothing short of a declaration of a war on the working class. The fact that it was brought in during a raging pandemic only showed the absolute callousness of the Government.

Aimed to deny workers their hard-earned rights, the Labour Code give legal sanction to the neo-liberal regime of increased privatisation, contractualization and informalisation. From attacking the basic rights of workers to the 8-hour work day, they heavily penalize and outlaw any form of working class action like strikes. They place lakhs of workers outside the protection of the law, dismantle existing social security systems, attack workers’ rights to organise, withdraw several protections to women workers, institutionalised contract labour and institutionalized caste and gender oppressions in the workplace.

The Labour Codes are also an attack on workers rights as envisaged in the Constitution. While the Constitution envisages “living wages”, the Codes institutionalise “starvation wages”; while the Constitution mandates state policy towards participation of workers in management of industries, the Codes institutionalise the dictatorship of the private employer.

Attack on Rural Labour:

The erosion of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) by the Union government is exacerbating the agrarian crisis

in India. In 2015, one year after he assumed office, Modi mocked the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) calling it a “living memorial” to the Congress’ failures, and has thereafter made a concerted effort to undermine the same.

Despite an increase in demand under the scheme, the budgetary allocation has only reduced, with MGNREGA funds being cut by 33% in 2023.

The government’s attack on the MGNREGA is evident in three distinct ways, as highlighted by Jean Dreze - First, the introduction of a mandatory digital app to mark attendance which adversely impacts the workers due to digital illiteracy and connectivity issues. Second, by linking wage payment to Aadhaar and Third, the stagnant wages under the MGNREGA. The introduction of the Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS) would result in MGNREGA workers whose bank accounts are not ABPS-compliant not receiving wage payments. As per official statistics only 43% of the workers are enrolled for the payment system.

Dismantling public jobs:

The systematic privatisation and outright sale of public sector establishments in India, under the banners of initiatives like ‘Make in India’ and the ‘National Monetisation Pipeline,’ have opened up the entire economy to foreign capital.

This transfer of public assets to corporate hands apart from resulting in the concentration of wealth in the hands of corporates, will have dire consequences for workers including job losses and the abandonment of reservation policies meant to protect the rights and opportunities of Dalits and Adivasis.

While on the one hand, the Union government is privatising PSUs and other state assets, on the other hand, it refuses to fill vacancies. According to the Centre’s Department of Expenditure, Pay Research Unit, around 9.83 lakh central government posts were lying vacant, which is 24.29% of total sanctioned posts.

Criminalising the working class:

Over the last 9 years, the Modi government has actively pursued a policy to criminalize the working

class and their struggles.

The migrant workers in Surat, who during the Covid lockdown, protested demanding that they be allowed to return to their homes, were tear gassed, lathi charged and then arrested. Contract workers working at Reliance Energy Ltd., Mumbai and members of the Mumbai Electric Employees Union, fighting against the precarious working conditions and for the basic rights of workers were implicated in false cases and charged under UAPA for their Union activities.

The neoliberal state has systematically forced workers into highly precarious working conditions, promoting the rise of contract work and informalization, which breeds job insecurity. Any attempt by workers to organize for better working conditions are met with staunch resistance. The corporate sector treats the state apparatus, including the police force, as its own “private militia” to suppress such organizing efforts. The thwarting of liberty of the working class has also been codified in the Labour Codes. The Industrial Relations Code, effectively outlaws the right to strike, increasing the punishment for the same.

9 Years of the Fight Back

In the face of the relentless assault by the Modi regime, over the last 9 years the working class has demonstrated tremendous resilience and unity in their fightback. A powerful example of this was seen when thousands of garment workers in Bengaluru spontaneously went on strike in 2016 to protest the Union government’s amendment to the provident fund rules, compelling the government to withdraw the amendments.

The staunch resistance to the Labour Codes, with the Joint Trade Union All India strikes every year, has resulted in the Government not being able to bring the Codes into effect. The spirited struggles of ASHA workers, sanitation workers, and Anganwadi workers have successfully exerted pressure to the Government and secure workers improved conditions.

It is crucial for the working class to continue their struggle and act as a potent force to fight fascism and create a more just and equitable society. ■

Railway Workers' Point of View of Balasore Tragedy

★ NN BANERJEE

A fatal triple train accident of Chennai bound Coromandel Express, Yeshwantpur -Howrah Express and a stationary iron-ore laden goods train happened at Bahanaga Bazar railway station in Odisha. The casualties and extent of damage to the railway assets in this accident surpasses the record of the last three decades. 294 passengers died. About 1200 were injured. Many dead bodies are still lying unclaimed at AIIMS/BBS. The bodies are yet to be identified.

The Commissioner of Railways Safety (CRS) has submitted its report to the Railway Board. A CBI enquiry has been ordered even as the CBI is not equipped with the technicalities of day-to-day functioning of the railways, perhaps, to ascertain deliberate interferences in the system. However, experts, trade union activists and field workers have a different view of the gruesome accident. The ground realities and root causes seem to be far different from the official version/s.

The CRS report pinpointed the lapses of the S&T (Signal and Telecom) department at various stages ultimately fixing primary responsibility on the signal workers and engineers engaged in maintenance work at the station while S&T officer, ADSTE (Assistant Divisional Signal and Telecom Engineer) headquartered at Balasore, was conspicuously absent at the site where boom replacement work in LC gate 94 was being carried out just 2-3 hours before the accident. The contract labour were also deployed for the job. ADSTE Balasore chased workers to complete the job threatening with disciplinary actions just before the approach of Coromandel Express. As the work was going on at some place in the same station, the ADSTE should have ordered halting of the train before the unfortunate spot. We understand that the software which was supposed to detect all out of course operations did not give any indications and the point drive logic has not taken place in last sequence. In fact, workers were sincerely undertaking their assigned job of remaining alone



at a roadside station like Bahanaga Bazar round the clock to attend signal failure at the dead of night. In fact, several posts related to safety were already surrendered indiscriminately. Th unskilled contract workers are forcefully deployed to maintain such sophisticated electronic machines for the shortage of permanent workers. The blame lies with the higher officials who failed to deploy manpower with requisite skills. This is only one part of the story.

Administrative Lapses and Bureaucratic Bungling
The CAG report on railways revealed that the progress made by railways in providing equipment for safe running of trains is far from satisfactory. The CAG, in its March 2021 report, also accused that the central government misused the fund earmarked for the safety on crockery, car rentals, furniture, laptops and foot massagers. Thus, the Modi-led government at the centre has played ducks and drakes with Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK Fund) of one

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lakh crore rupees.

After the accident a thousand fingers are pointed at S&T department and its skilled workers but the workers were caught in grim circumstances that require them to complete the allotted work at the time of approach of a train without providing any helper. In this accident too boom replacement work of LC gate was going on just before the approach of the train. It is curious that there was hardly any involvement of senior officer in the Division or at Headquarters in the ELB (Electric Lifting Barrier) modification work which is interlocked with signalling system and this bureaucratic lethargy coupled with intimidating staff at the site with disciplinary action amounts to negligence of the railway bureaucracy and not the workers.

In 2018, some changes were brought into effect in the related circuit between the Central Relay Room to the North Goomty with 16 flexible wires at the station. Yet the changes were neither reflected in the completion wiring diagram nor the circuit names corrected on the cable terminal rack at the North goomty of the station.

Even, on 16.5.22, there was an identical incident of mismatch between the intended route set by signals and actual route taken by the train at Bankra Nayabaz station of Kharagpur Division on account of wrong wiring and cable fault. Why DRM and Divisional Signal Engineer, let alone the Headquarters bureaucrats, didn't disseminate the information to the ground level forces for corrective measures? Why was safety organisation sleeping? Had such remedial measures been taken to alert the staff this horrendous accident could have been avoided.

Inadequate Fund Allocation for S&T Dept.

The S&T department has been made accountable for this accident. Fund allocation and manpower are two important factors that determine smooth and safe functioning of the signalling system. According to the annual reports published by Railway Board, the percentage of funds allocated remained the same at about 2% over the past 6 years. There is a need to invest fund for laying Optic Fibre Cables (OFC) throughout the signalling system and signalling

functions/gears should be directly connected to the Electronic Interlocking (EI) eliminating intermediate relays to ensure fool-proof safety. The government and the administration officials erred on this score.

The less said the better about huge vacancies existing in signal department which, inter-alia, adversely impact the safe functioning and maintenance of the signalling system. Nearly 3 lakhs posts of group C & D staff are lying vacant, out of which 80,000 posts are related to safety such as Signal-Maintainers, Track-Maintainers, Assistant Loco Pilots, Train Managers, Station Masters, etc. Apart from the existing vacancies, around 2.5 lakh live posts were also surrendered to pave the way for indiscriminate outsourcing/contractorisation of core and non-core activities in the railways. Under any circumstances, core activities of railways related to safety should not be handed over to contractors in the interest of safe movement of train services.

CBI Inquiry for Derailing the Truth

The CBI went to the accident site and started investigating it from the angle of conspiracy and crime. They did not get any such clue. But, in a shocking turn of events, Amir Khan, who happens to be the sectional signal engineer and the team leader of the modification work of LC gate 94 was targeted without any basis. His house at Soro was sealed and CBI officials went to the extent of raiding his ancestral home in Bengal. His only fault was that he was a Muslim and had to undergo torture and harassment. It appears that the CBI was ordered to manufacture clue for sabotage to save the railway minister and other higher officials who are actually responsible for the tragedy.

The passenger safety should get precedence over elite trains and profiteering. But, the Modi led BJP government is only interested in privatisation, contractualization and informalisation which is the root cause of grave violations of safety measures. "Safety first, Not profit" should be the slogan. Otherwise, such tragedies cannot be avoided. The central government, the railway board and the higher officials shall be held responsible for the accident and the witch hunting of innocents should be stopped. ■

Conclusions on Labour Protection in the 111th International Labour Conference: A Critical Evaluation

★ SUCHETA DE



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The 111th session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), an annual forum of tripartite discussion and formulation of conclusions on several issues concerning labour rights in the globe, was held in Geneva from 5th to 16th June 2023. The conference was organised by the of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Representatives of workers, employers and governments from 187 member states participated in the conference.

The conference broadly deliberated on General Affairs of the ILO, Application of Standards, Apprenticeship, Labour Protection and Just Transition to Environmentally Sensitive Economy.

Committees consisting of workers, employers and government representatives were formed to discuss the above-mentioned topics. In this conference, Comrade Sucheta De, the representative of AICCTU, part of the Indian delegation, joined the committee on Recurrent Discussion on Labour Protection. It is more appropriate to look at the history and politics of ILO before proceeding further on evaluating the conclusion of the discussion on Labour Protection.

A Brief Look at the History and Politics of ILO

ILO was constituted after the First World War as a part of peace treaties that ended the war. It was reborn in 1944. Formed in the post-war era,

the ILO, in its initial days formulated that social justice is fundamental for long lasting peace in the world. In a world ravaged by imperialist war, the ILO in the 1940s recognised that capitalist industrialisation has generated mass poverty and must be contained to ensure lasting peace. In order to achieve this objective, the ILO formulated that social reforms within the existing economic and political system should be ensured. In the post-war scenario, where the globe was torn by the imperialist competition between colonial powers, achieving social reform within the existing economic and political system indeed pointed to its aim of reforms within the framework of neo-liberal order today. Also, this approach explains the ILO's attempt of commissioning an enquiry in the newly formed USSR during the 1920s for the stated purpose of disillusioning the workers from taking up arms for revolution.

However, the approach of ensuring social justice through some stated principles of labour rights got hugely diluted through repeated interventions by the United States. The conclusion of the first ILC to ensure eight-hour workday was not ratified by several governments. The ILO, since 1940s, is driven by the principle of organising labour for ensuring productivity. The approach of ensuring sustainable enterprise by ensuring labour rights is a sufficient indicator in that direction.

Today, the world is dominated by the logic of neo-liberal economy where hire and fire is the norm. The logic of ever-increasing productivity has established an economic system where the capital refuses to recognise the workers' right to permanent jobs. The dichotomy between social protection of workers and economic globalisation in a neo-liberal world order is more of a fundamental nature in our times. While terms are dictated by the finance capital led globalisation and its accompanied international financial institutions, ILO, in its labour conferences, generally, sticks to discussions on principles of labour protection. Ratification of ILO conventions is neither mandatory nor followed by any government. The 111th ILC was happening at a time when the world was gradually recovering from the disasters of Covid-19 lockdowns. According to

ILO's own estimates, 114 million people lost their jobs during 2020. We, in India, have witnessed a massive disaster faced by the Indian working class during lockdown. The realities of labour protection in a productivity-centric and profit-centric economic system revealed itself nakedly in this period. While the reports and conclusions of 111th ILC mentions hardships faced by workers during lockdown, a comprehensive critique of the economic system that caused the disaster for workers finds no place in the discussions.

Other than the ILC, the Governing Body is another structure of ILO playing a vital role in decision making. Ten states are members of the Governing Body based on their industrial power, namely Brazil, China, India, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and US. Worker members are nominated through the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) and Employer members are nominated through IOE (International Organisation of Employers).

The ITUC is an umbrella body of trade unions that are known to be traditionally aligning with ruling parties of various countries. Even during discussions in the ILC, perspectives of the ITUC dominated the discussion. The perspective of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the platform of left trade unions, that recognises capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies to be the basis of cruel exploitation of the working class today is structurally marginalised in the discussions of the ILC.

Discussions on Labour Protection: The Perspective of the Indian Working Class

Discussions on different aspects of labour protection in the ILC was preceded by a report published by the office of the Director General of ILO. The Report tells us that formal employment in formal sector has grown faster than in informal sector between 2005 and 2019. Temporary work, on the other hand, has increased significantly.

Our experience from India further tells us that increasingly more number of workers are engaged in informal work. Presently, 93 percent of the

workforce in India are informal. The Government of India is trying to reduce the number just by registering them in e-Shram portal without any guarantee of any social security. The Indian realities, despite being the most populous country with largest chunk of workforce, are not reflected in the ILO declaration to reduce informal work.

The report says that the scope for greater inclusion of workforce under minimum wages is increasing worldwide. The report also claims that scope of coverage of minimum wages has increased in India as well. But, the fact remains that the new labour codes in India attempt to bring down the level of wages by introducing a new category of Floor Wages in place of relatively higher Minimum Wages by making it non-mandatory.

The report mentions stray examples of some Nordic countries and claims that a trend of reduction in working hours is being witnessed in the world. On the contrary, what we witness in India today is the legislative measures by several state governments to increase working hours from 8 to 12. The definition of workday which was hitherto 8 hours is being redefined to reduce the wages for overtime work beyond 8 hours in a day.

The report indicates recognition of paternity leave in some countries such as the OECD countries. In India, on the other hand, the new labour codes aim to free employer from the responsibility of providing even the crèche facility. In several cases, women workers exercising their right to maternity leave are being terminated from services for the fault of pregnancy.

Regarding occupational safety and health, the report identifies existing issues of work-related accidents and hazards but without any solution. Sexual violence and harassment at workplace remain a persisting problem before the working class. While legal provisions of protection from sexual harassment and discrimination exist in several countries including India, the fact remains that protection from sexual harassment is intrinsically related with protection of labour rights and guarantee of continuation of jobs. In a world where arbitrary retrenchment is the norm, protection from sexual harassment and

discrimination appear to be a distant dream. In India, for example, millions of scheme workers who are made to work without recognition of any rights, regularly face sexual harassment at workplace, but without any redressal of the same.

On protection of workers from unfair dismissal, the ILO report says that in several countries like Canada, Georgia and Zambia, the list of prohibited grounds for dismissal have been expanded. On the contrary, in India, companies are being given freehand for arbitrary closures and retrenchment, without even any notice, if the number of workforce employed in the unit is less than 300.

Undeservingly, the ILO report praises the new Industrial Relations Code passed by Indian Government stating that it prohibits discrimination between permanent and temporary workers. In Fact, the Industrial Relations Code abolishes earlier provisions of regularisation of jobs for contractual workers by de-reserving several core activities like sanitation and security as non-core ones and thereby removing all existing protections.

Sanitation work is caste ordained and forms the basis of discrimination. By ensuring perpetual contractualisation of the workforce belonging to the most oppressed caste in India, the IR Code has actually ensured structural discrimination. While scope for regularisation for contractual workers are effectively eliminated, the IR Code has institutionalised informalisation of workforce by introducing the category of “fixed term employment”, a structural mechanism to deny regularisation of services. The ILO document, in order to ensure long term employment, mentions the need to restrict the temporary nature of employment and to restrict excessive renewal of fixed term contracts. But, the IR Code Act has codified informalisation and intensive exploitation of contractual and temporary workforce. It has granted a legal sanction to the existing illegalities.

While the ILO report recognises importance of labour inspection, it also identifies flexible models of labour inspection in the name of changing world of work. One new method adopted by the United States has been mentioned where exemptions from planned inspection has been given to enterprises

that has a track record of ensuring labour rights. On the contrary, the Indian Government allows self-certification by enterprises themselves and has got rid of inspection system itself. Inspectors are renamed as facilitators (for the enterprises). The existing penal provisions for violations are removed by new Codes and inspections are restricted and inspectors are not allowed to go for planned inspections but for a centralised system of random decisions by the computers.

The conclusion on Labour Protection that was adopted after a lot of discussions in the ILC broadly reflect the above narrative. Among relatively new issues that the ILC discussed were the definition of employment relations in case of informal platform workers. Protection of tele workers' right to disconnect is one among the concerns raised by ILC.

Conclusion: Violation of Conventions

Ensuring labour rights to maintain 'sustainable enterprises' is a motive that has been time and again reiterated in the present ILC document on labour protection. Sustainable enterprises are those that function without much of labour unrest. The documents time and again refer to the 'changing world of work'. All put together, it is amply clear that the ILO is willing to accommodate the rights and interests of workers only within a broad framework of protection of interests of the capital.

The enactment of the labour codes in India follows the stated objective of the present government of ensuring 'ease of doing business'. In order to protect the interests of the businesses, the rights of workers in a post-colonial society like India are being snatched away. Surprisingly (or not), the 111th ILC documents find no problem with the labour codes in India that violate several ILO conventions.

Encouraging informalisation of workforce and formulating strategies and principles within that framework is a model dictated by the capital in the neo liberal era. The issues of third world workers, including snatching away of their rights and benefits, are being looked at through the prism of neo-liberal models and labour relations in Global

North. It is quite natural that snatching away of labour rights are considered normal when neo-liberal economy is considered to be a panacea and when the Global North is thriving on exploitation of labour force in third world.

Turning a blind eye to the reality of unequal power relations between nations and between the employers and the workforce only aggravates the sufferings of the working class all over the world.

While ILO conventions and principles continue to work as a standard for labour rights that is supposed to be adapted and adhered to by the nation-states, the ILO's scale of intervention to guarantee the implementation of the same appear to be severely impaired. ■



Campaign with the People of Cuba

WFTU solidarity campaign with the people of Cuba

The World Federation of Trade Unions is organizing a solidarity campaign with the people of Cuba, on the occasion of the 26th of July, the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, spreading the strong internationalist message that Cuba is not alone.

The 26th of July marks the beginning of the revolutionary attempt to overthrow the dictator, Fulgencio Batista, which gave hope to workers all over the world and showed that the people can defeat the exploiters and can create a society free from exploitation. For decades now the Cuban people have been leading and remain a militant example in the struggle against imperialism.

On this day we commemorate the revolutionaries who fought to expel the enemies of the peoples, building for decades an ironclad proof that another society is possible. Their sacrifices should be always remembered and should light nowadays struggles of the working class all over the world against capitalist barbarity.

Decades have passed since the triumph of the Cuban revolution, and the people of Cuba are still fighting against imperialism and its interventions, blockades, and sanctions. The capitalists are raging against revolutionary Cuba which proves that the workers can fight and win them, proves that the working class can accomplish its historic cause and can build a human-centered society free of man-by-man exploitation. A society that, regardless of the sanctions and the embargos, sends help, solidarity, doctors, and medicines to other nations instead of troops and bombs. A society whose growth and development are serving people's needs and not multinationals' speculation. The heroic people of Cuba have overcome all adversities, difficulties, and attacks over the years and will continue to resist.

WFTU denounces the new unacceptable attack of the European Parliament against Cuba. The new resolution of the European Parliament escalates

the EU's attempt to attack and undermine the achievements of the Cuban people, a people that for more than 6 decades has been suffering from the criminal blockade of the USA imperialism and its allies.

At the same time and while the class-oriented trade unions clearly and strongly condemn the murderous blockade, standing on the side of the Cuban people and expressing their unconditional support and solidarity, ITUC and ETUC although they hypocritically speak of human rights and freedoms, with their actions or silence, they are aligned in practice with the imperialist interventions of USA and EU against the unbowed Cuban people.

The WFTU and its millions of workers join their voices with Cuba, demanding an immediate and unconditional end to the embargo and the return of Guantanamo to the Cuban people. The international class-oriented trade union movement unequivocally condemns the current suffocating embargo and the interventionist maneuvers of the USA since the very beginning of the Cuban socialist revolution. We support the Cuban People in their struggle against these unacceptable actions with all our strength and energy, with every means we have at our disposal.

We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the criminal blockade that for 6 decades has been creating serious problems for the economy and the lives of the Cuban people. We support the right of the Cuban People to decide for themselves, freely and democratically, about their present and future, without the intervention of the imperialists.

We call on our affiliates all over the world to express their solidarity and support, by organizing protests and demonstrations in front of American embassies and consulates, under the slogans of the World Federation of Trade Unions:

Stop the blockade now!

The Secretariat, WFTU. ■



[Click Here to Download Cuba Solidarity Poster by AICCTU](#)

An Arduous Struggle of Contract Workers of Jadavpur University

A Leap Forward!

★ RITAM MAJHI



Amidst threat and gradual degradation of the working environment, the Jadavpur University Contract Workers Union is emerging as a majority union in the University. The workers in university fought day and night to secure their minimum wage, ESI/EPF and other basic rights for the last two years,.

It was in January, after numerous protest demonstrations, the general body of the union decided to go on a strike and issued legal notice to the administration. They were also fully prepared to continue the strike indefinitely if the authority refused to accept their demands. Sensing the brewing anger amongst workers, the university authorities, finally accepted major demands, including wage increment and payment and streamlining of benefits like ESI/EPF. They also agreed to issue a notice to ensure immediate disbursement of pending EPF/ESI instalments.

After a series of discussions and meetings with the authorities, it was decided that committees would be constituted to resolve the issues of policy and technical matters arising out of day-to-day work. Tripartite meetings were also planned monthly to address the grievances and to settle disputes. It was a moment of joy and happiness for workers as they never imagined such ‘miracles’ to happen in the recent times. Workers tasted the power of collectivism and cooperation that resulted in changes in working conditions.

Workers Militancy and Student - Worker Unity

In February and March, a series of tripartite meetings of university committee members, agency owners and representatives of the union were held. The representatives placed their sixteen-point charter of demands in the meeting and urged the committee to review the policies which subjugate workers to

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languish in inhuman conditions.

Although the university committee, comprising representatives of authorities as well as major stakeholders of the university, said to uphold the spirit of democracy, justice, and equality, they were mostly unwilling to implement the primary recommendations of the committee, which suggested that the current situation is not only untenable for workers but also snatches their democratic rights; it only benefits third-party agency owners. It was also recommended that workers be given overtime payment as per law, wage increments be streamlined, and workers be permitted paid leave for emergency purposes - these were the longstanding demands for which the union has been fighting tooth and nail.

But it took almost a month to implement the said recommendations. During that time, workers, led by the union, gathered in front of Aurobindo Bhavan, the administrative building, on numerous occasions. Often, they held sit-in protest demonstrations against the gross violation of democratic rights and unpaid overtime work. But in this process, the campus witnessed the birth of an organized force out of the unknown and often forgotten and ignored section of workers, who lead a precarious existence. They emerged as a crucial political force as they created a new language of workers' movement - relentless struggle against contractualization and privatization in the education sector. Apart from fighting for their rights, union members frequently joined seminars and protest demonstrations against NEP, organized by students' groups: such unity between students and workers to save campus democracy were unforeseen in the campus.

Preparing for Bigger Challenges

Definitely these achievements aren't unprecedented, compared to the long history of organized workers' movement in India, but if we are to consider the subalternity of the contractual workers even within the working class (compared to the permanent and high skilled workers with a relative income security) then we would see the significance of these events: these efforts partially relocate the workers from their alienated existence into the body politic and they become an active part of the whole of working class. Thus, it is not only a fight for fare wages, but

it is a struggle against passivity and alienation, it is the struggle against reduction of a citizen into an abstract identity of 'contractual worker' and it is about reclaiming the socio-political self.

On the historic May day, the union members commemorated the martyrs of the Hay market repression in both campuses of the university and after that, workers took to the streets of South Kolkata: citizens, wayfarers witnessed a huge rally by workers raising slogans against the draconian Labour Codes. They marched with their shining red flags and banners held high. After the culmination of the rally, the union organized a street corner meeting where leaders of other workers' organizations and student activists addressed the gathering expressing solidarity with the ongoing movement on campus.

In the new era of working-class movement, the contractual workers are playing a significant role in reshaping the history of working-class politics globally. In our country we are witnessing the unfolding of new political mobilization in private sectors as well as in government sectors and contract workers are often spearheading these movements against central government's anti-people policies. At a fundamental level, these movements are forming dots in different parts of the country which would in near future inevitably connect with each other to emerge as a collective resistance against the cruel exploitation by the global and corporate capital in different sectors. The struggle of workers in Jadavpur University is also snowballing into such a dot and is gearing up for a bigger battle. ■



A Report of the 4th All India Conference of All India Construction Workers Federation (AICWF)



The fourth national conference of All India Construction Workers Federation (affiliated to AICCTU) was successfully held at Kanyakumari, the southern Cape of India on 8th & 9th July 2023.

The venue of conference, Kanyakumari was renamed as comrade NK Natrajan nagar, and the hall and stage were named respectively as comrade Hari Singh-Jaffar Hall and comrade Ponraj - Omprakash Sharma stage.

The two days conference was attended by around two hundred and fifty delegates from states such as Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha, West Bengal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Assam, Karbi Anglong and Uttarakhand.

On 8th July i.e. the opening day of the conference, the federation flag was hoisted by S. Balasubramanian, national President of AICWF. Then the delegates, the leaders of AICCTU, AICWF and guests paid homage to the departed leaders and workers who sacrificed their lives in the class struggle, and to Com. Sugundhan, the former Tamil Nadu state secretary of

CPIML and the state Vice President of AICCTU. The conference paid homage to the workers and common people who died in Balasore train accident and other industrial accidents and natural calamities.

Thereafter, the open session was held, which was presided by S. Balasubramanian. Suseela, construction worker leader from Kanyakumari gave the welcome address.

Shankar V, national President of AICCTU inaugurated the conference.

The open session was addressed by construction workers union leaders of various streams. Comrade K.P. Perumal, Tamil Nadu state president of CWFI (CITU); N. Selvaraj, All India treasurer of All India Confederation of Building and Construction workers (AITUC); and K. Perarivalaan, Organizer general council, Labour Liberation Front and member, construction workers welfare board, Tamil Nadu.

Pazha Aasaithambi, state secretary of CPI-ML Tamil Nadu and Birendra Gupta, CPI-ML MLA of Bihar were special guest speakers. T. Sankara Pandian, state president AICCTU, Tamil Nadu and K Gnanadesikan, state general secretary also addressed the session.

The solidarity message from UITBB (an international confederation of construction workers, affiliated to WFTU) was read out in the session.

The Booklet "Build a radical movement of construction labour" in English and Hindi were jointly released by SK Sharma and S. Balasubramanian in the open session and the first copies were presented to Rajiv Dimiri and Shankar V. Mementos were presented to all guests and leaders. SK Sharma moderated the entire session.

The delegate session was presided by a 9-member presidium comprising S. Balasubramanian, Mahendra Parida, RN Thakur, Prabir Das, C. Iraniappan, Shantilal Trivedi, Susheela, Sangita Devi and Sandhya Panna.

S. K. Sharma placed the general secretary's draft work report. It was taken up for discussion and 26 delegates participated in the deliberations. Finally, after the summing up speech by the General Secretary that took care of all views of delegates, the report was unanimously passed in the conference with some amendments and additions. Rajiv Dimiri, national general secretary addressed this session.

The delegates unanimously elected a 51-member executive committee with 15 office bearers. The conference re-elected S. Balasubramanian as the President and SK Sharma as the General Secretary of the AICWF.

Resolutions

1. The conference supports and gives a call to participate in maha padav (massive sit-ins) called by joint platform of central Trade Unions and independent federations to be held on August 9 in all state capitals and important district headquarters on the burning issues of working class including withdrawal of four labour codes, which are pushing the entire working class of India into slavery. AICWF resolves to hold a two week long campaign from July 25th to August 8 all over India in support of maha padav.

2. The conference calls to hold an intense campaign to be held in all districts for continued enrolment of new members from the month of September to December. All forms of struggle and agitation to be held during the campaign at state

The Office-bearers elected by 4th All India Conference of All India Construction Workers Federation (AICWF) held at Kanyakumari on 8 - 9 July 2023

PRESIDENT

Bala Subramanian

VICE PRESIDENTS

1. Anthony Muthu (Tamil Nadu)
2. Prabir Das (West Bengal)
3. Surendra Prasad Singh (Bihar)
4. Vasudeva Rao (Andhra Pradesh)
5. Rana Pratap Singh (Uttar Pradesh)

GENERAL SECRETARY

S. K. Sharma

ORGANISING SECRETARY CUM TREASURER

RN Thakur (Bihar)

SECRETARIES

1. Mahendra Parida (Odisha)
2. Kishore Sarkar (West Bengal)
3. C Eraniappan (Tamil Nadu)
4. VKS Gautam (Delhi)
5. B Kevat (Jharkhand)
6. PP Appanna (Karnataka)
7. Dasharath Sinhali (Gujarat)

and district headquarters highlighting issues and demands of construction workers.

3. State and district level Educational workshops will be conducted during the campaign period.

BELOW IS THE MESSAGE OF THE AICWF CONFERENCE:

- Fight for Decent Wages, Regular Work, Social Security and Dignified Life!
- Fight to Reclaim our Rights!
- Let us turn 2023 into a year of waves of militant struggles!
- Let us Resolve to Defeat the Modi Regime in the 2024 elections!

- Welfare Board is Ours, Not a Tool for Government Loot!
- Welfare Board is Our hard-won Right, We will not let it be Dismantled!
- Fight for a Welfare Board with comprehensive benefits including ESI, PF, Pension and Free housing!
- Fight for scrapping of Social Security Code and other Labour Codes of Slavery!
- United Struggle against attacks on Livelihood and Rights!
- Red Waves of Struggles Against Communal hatred and Corporate Domination!
- Let us strengthen Solidarity and Unity!

Dear friends,

Despite being the country's second largest workforce and contributing 10% of the GDP, the construction workers today are confronting worst attack on their livelihood and social security among other rights. The promise of 'Achche Din' (Good Times) by Modi turned out to be a cruel joke.

The construction workers achieved a central Act, 1996 and the state level Boards under it through relentless, prolonged struggles, but the Modi government is doing away with it in the name of replacing it by the 'Social Security Code'. The construction workers were able to get, at least, some meagre social security benefits under these welfare Boards, which is in the process of being eliminated by the Code.

The Social Security Code Act – A Design to Snatch the Rights of Workers

Social Security Code Act is meant for snatching the rights of construction workers. At the same time, it dilutes the duties of employers and gives them free hand to act against workers.

For example, the term "building and other construction work" is defined as the ones of a worth of 50 lakhs and above, under the Code, which effectively excludes a vast majority of construction workers who are engaged in working for smaller building worth less than Rs 50 lakhs. Hence, the

social security code is nothing but a design to throw away a vast majority of building and construction workers from the purview of any social security coverage and mechanism.

The Code also prohibits the board from formulating any scheme or measures independently without permission from the central government which is mandatory. Hence the powers of the board is made skewed and toothless.

The Code provides blanket powers to the board to invest the money in speculative market by making benefits to workers vulnerable.

The provisions relating to Cess are heavily diluted with a provision for self-assessment of capacity by the employer himself to pay a cess with much less percentage and with much lesser interest.

The duties of employers to comply with the safety, health requirements and to provide basic amenities like drinking water, toilets, etc., to workers at worksite have been heavily diluted.

The Employees Compensation Act has been reworked in a manner that a large number of construction workers would not be entitled to compensation in case of any workplace injury or death.

The right to double wages for overtime work has been effectively removed.

The government has also plotted with replacing construction labour welfare boards with some portals like e-shram, which offers nothing more than a death benefit of two lakhs and a permanent disability benefit of one lakh. The workers are being forced to depend on insurance companies and schemes for other benefits which is proportionate to the money they part with, out of their pocket. While the Modi government scorns the social security to the toiling masses and the poor as 'freebies', it has given away billions of rupees as concessions to the corporates.

On the other hand, these welfare boards are being used as instruments of government-driven loot. Only a small part of a huge corpus lying with these boards is being used for the benefits of construction workers while a large part is being diverted to benefit

corporate houses in various ways. Till 2019, welfare boards across the country collected a cess of around Rs. 49,688.07 crores and spent only Rs. 19,379.922 crores. This apart, innumerable hurdles are being created in the process of registration of construction workers in the welfare boards. There is more than a crore of construction workers without registration and hence the benefits under the Act.

While the prices of essential items are skyrocketing, there is practically no increase in wages. Rather, wages are drastically declining leading to poverty, disparity and destitution.

A big section of construction workers is migrants, who are most exploited and oppressed besides facing all kinds of discrimination. The reality of their pathetic life came to limelight during the unplanned and cruel lockdown imposed by the Modi regime in March 2020, when they were forced to walk hundreds of kilometres, many dying on the way, without food, water and transport. In the period of lockdown, only 1.23 crore workers, that is less than a quarter, received any welfare benefits.

Women constitute a big part of construction workforce, but they are facing discrimination of wages based on gender, apart from facing sexual harassment.

In mega government projects, the construction workers are forced to live like prisoners, cut off from outside world. The most glaring example is the construction of Central Vista, including the new parliament building.

The Way Ahead – Intensify Struggle to Reclaim Our Rights

The construction workers had won a long battle and achieved legislation of a central act and welfare boards. Under Modi's BJP regime, they are again being compelled to continue their struggle for better wages and living conditions, including clean water, health, education and housing. They are now forced into a situation where they have to intensify the struggle to reclaim their social security and other rights and benefits which are being systematically snatched away by the Modi government.

Today, the entire working class is under attack. Workers are being pushed into the conditions of

slavery through 4 Labour Codes. Every basic right of workers is being snatched away, including the right to form union and the right to protest, upto strike. The stranglehold of the corporate and ruling classes is tightening around the noose of workers.

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We must defeat the Modi government's attacks and evil designs to divide and deceive the working people. We must give a befitting reply and oust this anti-worker, anti-people, pro-corporate Modi government from power in 2024 general elections.

The 4th All India Conference of "ALL INDIA CONSTRUCTION WORKERS FEDERATION (AICWF), affiliated to AICCTU, resolves to carry forward the movement to reclaim the rights of construction workers. Let us make our best efforts and contributions to make the conference a grand success!

DEMANDS

- Double the Minimum wages. Minimum pension of Rs. 10,000 with DA.
- Comprehensive social security including ESI, PF, Pension, Free housing, Education and Health.
- Ensure benefits of welfare boards to workers. Stop weakening and dismantling of welfare boards.

- Make principal employer responsible for workers welfare, deaths and accidents.
- Strengthen the welfare boards by increasing the cess to 3% and allocating 1% of GDP.
- Ensure enrolment of workers in boards offline and additionally online. No infringement of the rights of unions in enrolment.
- Withdraw Social Security Code and other anti-worker Labour Codes.
- 8-hour workday, double OT for extra work, Bonus, Leave, Gratuity, and other facilities on par with regular employees of the Central Govt.
- Ensure strict implementation of legal provisions to stop sexual harassment of women construction workers. Ensure legal benefits to women construction workers, including maternity leave and benefits.
- Ensure safety and legal rights of migrant workers.
- Ensure representation of all central trade unions in welfare boards. Stop NGOisation of welfare boards. No to private agencies to handle the funds of welfare boards. ■

Puducherry State Conference of Construction Workers Union

★ S.BALASUBRAMANIAN

The 23rd annual Puducherry state conference of construction workers union, "Jananayaga Kattumana Thozhilalar Sangam" (affiliated to AICWF - AICCTU) was successfully held on 2nd July at Karikalam Pakkam, Puducherry.

The conference was preceded by a procession for construction workers' welfare board protection rights. The procession was led by Murugan, CWC member, AICWF. Around two hundred workers took part in the procession. After the procession reached the conference venue, AICWF flag was hoisted by union executive committee member Meenakshi.

A 3-member presidium comprising Murugan, Arul, Parijathavalli presided over the conference. S. Purshottaman state secretary, AICCTU delivered welcome address. Eraniappan, the central observer of AICWF inaugurated the conference. Arumugam, the outgoing secretary placed the draft work report. Arul, Puducherry state committee member of CPI-ML and Vijaya, state secretary of women organisation, AIPWA greeted the conference with inspiring speeches. 145 delegate-members took part in the conference.

After the approval of the secretary's draft report, the conference unanimously elected 21 members executive committee including 9 office bearers as S.Balasubramanian, Honorary president; Murugan, President; Arul, Secretary and Vijaya, Treasurer.

S. Balasubramanian National President (AICWF) greeted the newly elected executive committee members and delivered concluding speech.

Some important resolutions passed in the conference are:

1. The conference condemned the NR Congress-BJP led union territory government for its failure to grant pension benefits to construction workers even after more than two decades of formation of construction workers welfare board. It also demanded a minimum pension of Rs. 10000/- with DA.
2. The conference demanded the territorial government to control skyrocketing prices of all essential commodities including building materials.
3. The conference called upon the people of Puducherry to defeat the anti-worker fascist BJP government at centre in the 2024 general election. ■

Tamil Nadu State Conference of Construction Workers Union

★ K GNANA DESIKAN

CLICK HERE TO READ THIS ARTICLE IN BROWSER

Tamil Nadu Democratic Construction Labour Union (affiliated to AICWF-AICCTU) held its 4th state conference at Kanyakumari (NK Natarajan nagar) on 7th July 2023. The conference Hall was named after Comrades Hari Singh and Jaffar and the stage was named after Comrades Ponraj and Omprakash Sharma.

Construction labourers from 15 districts participated including a big contingent of women. Conference began with the flag hoisting by comrade Susheela, AICCTU state leader. Comrades paid tributes to the martyrs including Comrade Sukundan, leader of Leather and Leather Goods Democratic Labour Union and also state Vice President of AICCTU who passed away recently.

The Presidium comprised of Comrades Velmurugan, Abraham, Rajan, Ilayaraja, Philomina, Karmel, Shivaraj, Venkatesan and Soundarrajan conducted the conference with Comrade Antony Muthu as its leader. Com. S.K. Sharma, the national general secretary of AICWF inaugurated the conference. Com. Birendra Gupta, leader of AIARLA and CPI-ML MLA of Bihar assembly greeted the conference as Chief Guest.

Com. K P. Perumal, state president of CWF-I-CITU, Com. N. Selvaraj, state general secretary of Construction workers Federation-AITUC and Com.

Perarivaalan of Labour Liberation Front and also member of state construction labour welfare board addressed as representatives of fraternal unions. A booklet in English named “Building a radical movement of construction workers “ was released on the occasion.

Com. Eraniappan placed the work report before the house. It was unanimously accepted. Conference also elected a 31-member executive committee and 15 Office bearers with Com. Antony Muthu as President and Com. Eraniappan as general secretary.

Com. Asaithambi, state secretary of CPI-ML delivered the concluding speech. Com. Shankar, All India President of AICCTU, Com. S. Balasubramanian, All India President of AICWF, Com. Sankarapandian, state President and Com. G. Desikan, state general secretary of AICCTU, Com. Balasubramanian, state secretary of AICCTU, Com. Revathy, state organiser of AIPWA and Com. Sundarrajan, state president of RYA also greeted the conference.

The resolutions adopted by the conference included scrapping of 4 labour codes, increasing welfare benefits of labour boards and increasing provisions of social security.

Conference resolved to oust anti-labour fascist Modi government in 2024 elections. ■

Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Samyukt Kisan Morcha to Launch Joint Struggles

The plan of action will be declared in a Joint Convention on 24 August 2023 at New Delhi A joint meeting of the Joint platform of Central Trade Unions and Samyukt Kisan Morcha was held on 13 July 2023 in hybrid mode. Both the platforms reiterated their resolve to jointly fight against the anti worker, anti farmer, anti people policies of Modi government.

In addition to the unconditional support and solidarity with the calls of actions of each platforms, the meeting decided to take up a series of joint struggles. The future course of joint action will be declared in a joint convention on 24 August 2023 in New Delhi.

issued by - Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Samyukt Kisan Morcha

Obituary



Let us Uphold the Memory of **Comrade Sugundan!**

Comrade Sugundan, at the age of 75, passed away on 6th July 2023 at Vellore Government Hospital when he was under treatment for cardiac attack. Comrade Sugundan has been a whole time activist of the party for the last 40 years, the state Vice President of AICCTU and also a former state secretary for a brief period in 90s. He was also a delegate to the 11th party Congress at Patna in February and participated in the deliberations enthusiastically.

Comrade Sugundan got attracted towards revolutionary politics, joined the party and became a wholetime activist when he was active as a part of the Simpson company workers union in mid '70s in Chennai. He was active in organising party work in various districts of Tamil Nadu since the underground days. He has contributed to organise agricultural labourers, peasants and workers in various districts.

In his later period, for the last 20 years, he dedicated his life to organise workers in leather and leather goods industries of Ambur – Vaniyambadi belt of erstwhile Vellore district after the demise of comrade A Venkatesan who was fondly known as AV, the founder leader of the union.

Comrade Sugundan has led various struggles of workers of various factories in the leather industry in the belt. He had been an uncompromising leader committed to the cause of developing class struggle and was most concerned about the challenge of developing class consciousness among the working class. He had stood with the party in most challenging times despite his own reservations on some issues.

He had also been active in developing a farmer's organisation in Dindigul district until he breathed last. He has also advised and assisted various political friends to intensify workers and other people's movement irrespective of their political affiliations.

Next to comrade A Venkatesan (AV), Sugundan is another comrade the movement of leather and leather goods industry workers will never forget. We are committed to carry forward his unfinished tasks.

Red Salutes to Comrade Sugundan!

many dying on the way, without food, water and transport. In the period of lockdown, only 1.23 crore workers, that is less than a quarter, received any welfare benefits.

Women constitute a big part of construction workforce, but they are facing discrimination of wages based on gender, apart from facing sexual harassment.

In mega government projects, the construction workers are forced to live like prisoners, cut off from outside world. The most glaring example is the construction of Central Vista, including the new parliament building.

The Way Ahead Intensify Struggle to Reclaim Our Rights

The construction workers had won a long battle and achieved legislation of a central act and welfare boards. Under Modi's BJP regime, they are again being compelled to continue their struggle for better wages and living conditions, including clean water, health, education and housing. They are now forced into a situation where they have to intensify the struggle to reclaim their social security and other rights and benefits which are being systematically snatched away by the Modi government.

Today, the entire working class is under attack. Workers are being pushed into the conditions of slavery through 4 Labour Codes. Every basic right of workers is being snatched away, including the right to form union and the right to protest, upto strike. The stranglehold of the corporate and ruling classes is tightening around the noose of workers.

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AICWF - AICCTU
ALL INDIA CONSTRUCTION
WORKERS FEDERATION



AICWF - AICCTU
ALL INDIA CONSTRUCTION
WORKERS FEDERATION
(Affiliated to AICCTU)

**Make 4th All India
Conference a
Grand Success**

8 - 9 July 2023, Kanyakumari,
Tamil Nadu

NK Natarajan Nagar, Hari Singh - Jaffar
Hall, Ponraj - Om Prakash Sharma Stage

- ▶ **Fight for Decent Wages, Regular Work, Social Security and Dignified Life!**
- ▶ **Fight to Reclaim our Rights!**
- ▶ **Let us turn 2023 into a year of waves of militant struggles!**
- ▶ **Let us Resolve to Defeat the Modi Regime in the 2024 elections!**

-Welfare Board is Ours, Not a Tool for Government Loot!

-Welfare Board is Our hard-won Right, We will not let it be Dismantled!

-Fight for a Welfare Board with comprehensive benefits including ESI, PF, Pension and Free housing!

-Fight for scrapping of Social Security Code and other Labour Codes of Slavery!

-United Struggle against attacks on Livelihood and Rights!

-Red Waves of Struggles Against Communal hatred and Corporate Domination!

-Let us strengthen Solidarity and Unity!

Dear Friends,

Despite being the country's second largest workforce and contributing 10% of the GDP, the construction workers today are confronting worst attack on their livelihood and social security among other rights. The promise of 'Achche Din' (Good Times) by Modi turned out to be a cruel joke.

The construction workers achieved a central Act, 1996 and the state level Boards under it through relentless, prolonged struggles, but the Modi government is doing away with it in the name of replacing it by the 'Social Security Code'. The construction workers were able to get, at least, some meagre social security benefits under these welfare Boards, which is in the process of being eliminated by the Code.

The Social Security Code Act A Design to Snatch the Rights of Workers

Social Security Code Act is meant for snatching the rights of construction workers. At the same time, it dilutes the duties of employers and gives them free hand to act against workers.

For example, the term "building and other construction work" is defined as the ones of a worth of 50 lakhs and above, under the Code, which effectively excludes a vast majority of construction workers who are engaged in working for smaller building worth less than Rs 50 lakhs. Hence, the social security code is nothing but a design to throw away a vast majority of building and construction workers from the purview of any social security coverage and mechanism.

The Code also prohibits the board from formulating any scheme or measures independently without permission from the central government which is mandatory. Hence the powers of the board is made skewed and toothless.

The Code provides blanket powers to the board to invest the money in speculative market by making benefits to workers vulnerable.

The provisions relating to Cess are heavily diluted with a provision for self-assessment of capacity by the employer himself to pay a cess with much less percentage and with much lesser interest.

The duties of employers to comply with the safety, health requirements and to provide basic amenities like drinking water, toilets, etc., to workers at worksite have been heavily diluted.

The Employees Compensation Act has been reworked in a manner that a large number of construction workers would not be entitled to compensation in case of any workplace injury or death.

The right to double wages for overtime work has been effectively removed.

The government has also plotted with replacing construction labour welfare boards with some portals like e-shram, which offers nothing more than a death benefit of two lakhs and a permanent disability benefit of one lakh. The workers are being forced to depend on insurance companies and schemes for other benefits which is proportionate to the money they part with, out of their pocket. While the Modi government scorns the social security to the toiling masses and the poor as 'freebies', it has given away billions of rupees as concessions to the corporates.

On the other hand, these welfare boards are being used as instruments of government-driven loot. Only a small part of a huge corpus lying with these boards is being used for the benefits of construction workers while a large part is being diverted to benefit corporate houses in various ways. Till 2019, welfare boards across the country collected a cess of around Rs. 49,688.07 crores and spent only Rs. 19,379,922 crores. This apart, innumerable hurdles are being created in the process of registration of construction workers in the welfare boards. There is more than a crore of construction workers without registration and hence the benefits under the Act.

While the prices of essential items are skyrocketing, there is practically no increase in wages. Rather, wages are drastically declining leading to poverty, disparity and destitution.

A big section of construction workers is migrants, who are most exploited and oppressed besides facing all kinds of discrimination. The reality of their pathetic life came to limelight during the unplanned and cruel lockdown imposed by the Modi regime in March 2020, when they were forced to walk hundreds of kilometres,



All India Central Council of Trade Unions

Workers Resistance

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