



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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End Israel's Genocidal War on Gaza! Towards a Sovereign and Independent State of Palestine!



Immediately Lift the Embargo on the Supply of Essential Items!

Stop the War on Gaza and Palestine Immediately!

Indian Government Must Use All Diplomatic Means to Ensure Immediate Cease Fire!

Force Israel to Initiate a Dialogue for a Sovereign Independent Palestine!

All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU) conveys its complete solidarity with the people of Palestine, and calls on the working class of the world to stand against the horrifying war crimes being committed by the Israel including stopping all food supplies, water, electricity and fuel alongside a bombing campaign targeting hospitals, schools, homes, and people. Hundreds of Palestinians, including several children have been detained in the occupied West Bank. The Israeli government has warned millions of Palestinians living in the northern half of Gaza to leave even as it continues with constant bombardment. This clearly is an attempt by the Israel to re-enact another Nakba - ethnic cleansing of Palestinians- that in 1948 saw millions of Palestinians becoming refugees in their own land.

We condemn the US and the western allies of Israel for extending support and providing massive military aid and weapons that will only further the Israel's genocidal war on Palestinians. The US and western allies are complicit in the war crimes being committed against the people of occupied Gaza and West Bank

We all extend our support to the call by Palestinian trade unions to all workers of the world and their unions to unite and boycott manufacturing or loading of weapons and military equipment destined to Israel and its brutal war.

We salute the hundreds of thousands of people across the world standing in support with the people of Palestine through huge rallies in country after country, from France to the UK to Egypt to India. Numerous cities in the US have witnessed mammoth rallies questioning the complicity of the US. In Washington DC, thousands are protesting outside the Capitol while 500 Jews, Rabbis and descendants of holocaust survivors chant "Let Gaza Live!". In Israel too, the people are raising their voice unequivocally holding Netanyahu responsible for this conflict.

AICCTU calls upon the Indian government to urge the Israeli government to initiate direct negotiations towards establishing a sovereign and independent state of Palestine.

AICCTU also demands immediate lifting of the embargo on essential supplies and an immediate end to the war on Gaza and Palestine.

AICCTU appeals to the working class of the globe, to stand up with the people of Palestine, against the pro-war, pro-Israel attitude of their own military industrial complexes and the governments!

- Statement issued by AICCTU HQ

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No To Imperialist Hypocrisy

A JUST AND PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE

The whole world is watching with anxiety and concern the new bloodshed that is unfolding in Israel and Palestine and threatens to ignite the entire Middle East region.

For the WFTU there is no doubt that the root cause of this blood cycle is the ongoing occupation and illegal settlement of the occupied Palestinian territories by Israel and the continuous, daily crimes and the blockades of Gaza that have been committed against the Palestinian people for years. Crimes which are committed with the provocative tolerance and support that Israel receives from

the big imperialist powers, that is, the USA, the European Union and the rest of their allies, and which in recent years have become even more brutal and unacceptable.

The attempt by those who over time turn a blind eye to the crimes and massacres against the Palestinian people and contribute to the maintenance of the occupation and colonization, to present Israel today as a victim of Palestinian aggression, is hypocritical and untruthful to say the least.

For the WFTU it is clear that the only way to secure and consolidate peace and security for the people in Palestine and

Israel, but also in the wider Middle East, is to immediately end the Israeli occupation and settlement in the occupied Arab territories, as provided for in the UN resolutions, and to establish an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and guarantee the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

In this direction, the WFTU will continue to fight and express in all ways its solidarity with the suffering but struggling Palestinian people.

-World Federation of Trade Unions



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Festival of G20 in India:

Saga of Displacement and Humiliation for the Working Class

★ SUCHETA DE

September 8-10 was not normal for the national capital of India. A significant section of the city, especially in the New Delhi area, was converted into controlled and regulated zones. Traffic was restricted, offices closed, security personnel deployed all over the streets of the city. The city breathed cautiously for three days. The context was the G 20 summit in Delhi.

G 20 or the Group of 20 is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 sovereign countries along with the European and the African unions. This platform is meant for intergovernmental dialogue for economic co-operation, action against climate change and sustainable development. Among G 20 nations, India has the lowest per capita income, largest percentage of people living under poverty and lowest score in Human Development Index. Delhi, which primarily held the G 20 summit, has 49% of its population living in slums and unauthorised colonies without any civic amenities.

Set in this real context, the BJP led central government did all to project the picture otherwise, to the world as well as to the people of the country. More than 4100 crores of rupees were spent in



Modi-BJP's G20

Eradicating the poor and feeding the rich



Delhi for G 20 makeover of the city alone. Major portion of the expenditure was for security and beautification. This amount is manifold times more than what other countries like Indonesia, Japan, Germany and Argentina had spent in previous years for hosting G 20. Rs 2,700 crores were spent to revamp the G 20 summit venue at Pragati Maidan and built the extravagant Bharat Mandapam to showcase PM Modi's claimed status of a global leader.

In the run up to the final G 20 summit in Delhi, a massive propaganda exercise went on for the last one year throughout the country. Crores of rupees from public exchequer have been spent on advertisements and hoardings with mega size portraits of the PM. An event of international diplomatic negotiations was turned into a domestic affair of propaganda. The scale of the propaganda around G 20 made it amply clear that the party in power is rehearsing its election

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campaign projecting its frontal face Narendra Modi using public money. The propaganda exercise was named 'People's G 20' by the PM of the country.

Demolished Slums, Displaced Livelihood, Humiliated Poor

Behind the curtain of the propaganda exercise paraphrased as people's G20 was the story of massive displacement of slums and livelihoods throughout the country. More than 200 meetings of G 20 took place in around 60 cities of the country. Each of these cities faced massive anti-poor drive onwards to these meetings.

Report of the Public Hearing on The Forced Evictions Across India and G 20 Events (The Report henceforth) documents the plight of the poor across India in the backdrop of G 20 events. It documents how from Nagpur, Mumbai, Indore, Vishakhapatnam to Udham Singh Nagar, slums

were demolished, vendors evicted from roads and the slums that could not be demolished were hidden behind massive veils. For establishing the pride of Narendra Modi, the poor across cities were forcibly removed from the gaze of the foreign guests. If in Indore all shops along the route of Brilliant Convention were demolished, in Darjeeling the small shop owners and hawkers from the vibrant shopping place of Mall Road were uprooted and not allowed to come back even after the tourism meeting of G 20 was over. Adivasi Bastis were hidden using massive green sheets in cities like Indore and Vishakhapatnam.

Delhi, which was the ultimate destination of the G 20 summit experienced the severest form of anti-poor drive spanning over a period of nearly a year. Flouting all norms of Delhi Urban Slum Improvement Board (DUSIB) or Sudama Singh Judgement of Delhi High Court of 2010

that necessitate proper survey, 30 days' notice period and in-situ rehabilitation before any demolition, thousands of houses, no shanties, were demolished in different parts of the city. The biggest demolition being in the Tughlakabad area where houses close to the Tughlakabad fort were brutally demolished by bulldozers. Residents who have stayed in the area for decades were asked to vacate their houses in January. In April-May, bulldozers started to rampage the area. According to reports more than 46,000 people have been rendered homeless due to the demolition. An on-site visit of the area makes it clear that the number of people actually impacted by the demolition are much more than 46,000. Interestingly, the palace-like residence of BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri remained untouched in this entire episode. People of Tughlakabad area continued to stay under open





sky for months without any rehabilitation package provided by the government. Hundreds of houses, including middle class housing colonies, near Mehrauli Archeological Park were served notice in December 2022 just after India assumed the presidency of G 20. Finally slums near the area were evicted in February. Poor slum dwellers in Tughlakabad and Mehrauli faced the brunt of bulldozers because foreign delegates were scheduled for heritage walk near Tughlakabad Fort and Mehrauli Archeological Park. In a drive to make them invisible, the lives and livelihood of the working class were brutally decimated by the bulldozer governance of Narendra Modi.

Yamuna Flood Plains was another

area that witnessed massive demolition by central government agencies like the DDA. Hundreds of families were evicted from Gyaspur near Nizamuddin between June-August in 2022. More than 3000 people were evicted in Moolchand Basti near the Yamuna flood plain in March, 2023. If archeological sites such as Tughlakabad and Mehrauli were to be cleared off the poor for the purpose of serene heritage walk, Yamuna floodplain was to be 'cleaned' for making Bio-Diversity Parks and recreational places.

The anti-poor drive preceding G 20 not only targeted slums, even shelter homes, meant for temporary shelter of homeless people, built by the government, were destroyed at several places.

The Report indicates that in March eight Shelter Homes were demolished by DUSIB itself. These shelter homes were destroyed so that G 20 dignitaries don't notice the condition of the urban poor shelter homes. In Sarai Kale Khan, for example, the shelter home was demolished because a park was to be constructed near it for the visit of G 20 delegates.

In complete violation of street Vendors Act 2014, Delhi roads were cleared off by forcibly evicting street vendors in an operation by the police. Even after the completion of G 20, the street vendors have not been allowed to restart their livelihood and are forced to roam around the city fearing police action like criminals.

People vs Power

The cruel reality of 'People's G 20' has been borne by the people of Indian cities. All established laws to protect slum dwellers from displacement, to ensure their rehabilitation, to protect street vendors have been flouted by government agencies. The poor has been slapped on the face by massive curtains hung outside their slums to make them invisible. The laws ensuring residential and livelihood rights of the poor have been achieved after years of struggle by the working class and trade unions. The battle to ensure proper rehabilitation and compensation for the poor displaced during G 20 must go on. The humiliation to the poor must be paid back in equal terms in the upcoming Loksabha elections. ■

First National Conference of All India Scheme Workers' Federation

With the resolve to intensify the struggle for the rights of scheme workers, the first all India conference of All India Scheme Workers' Federation (AISWF) concluded successfully on 9-10 September in the auditorium of Gate Public Library in Patna. The flag was hoisted by Comrade Madina Sheikh from Maharashtra. CPIML General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, CPIML Bihar State Secretary Comrade Kunal and AICCTU president comrade Shankar paid rich tributes to martyrs along with the leaders of scheme workers movement from all over the country. The entire place was vibrant with pictures and banners of the energetic struggle of scheme workers.

The conference began with an inaugural session presided by Comrade Shashi Yadav, the outgoing convener of AISWF. Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya addressed the session along with

other guest speakers.

While addressing the conference Comrade Shashi Yadav said, "several important schemes of the country are actually run by around one crore scheme workers on the field. More than 98% of the scheme workers are women. The way the central and state governments are refusing to recognise the rights of the scheme workers is a blatant example of their anti-worker and anti-women attitude. It is the same government that has set a shameful track record of anti women governance. If, on the one hand, the BJP led central government has consistently used its machinery to shield one after another accused of sexual assault, on the other hand, the crucial demand of the scheme workers to be recognised as government workers is being continuously denied. But the scheme workers are emerging as a force to reckon with in their fight against the injustice. Over the past several years, they have built up a vibrant

militant movement in the face of aggressive crackdown by the state. The spirit of the movement of scheme workers for their legitimate rights is indomitable. The scheme workers of Bihar heroically struck work for 32 days in July – August this year. In the coming days, the scheme workers of the country will definitely play a significant role in overthrowing the anti-women, anti-worker Modi regime."

Comrade Rajiv Dimri, the General Secretary of AICCTU said, "The first all India conference of the AISWF is being held in the backdrop of 32 days long glorious strike by the scheme workers of Bihar. The scheme workers of Bihar fought for increase in their honorarium in addition to their basic demands. The fight is far from over. The battle will intensify till the rights of scheme workers are recognised and also with a monthly payment of minimum 28,000 rupees per month. The scheme workers are fighting the



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most militant battle today for equality and dignity of labour. It is this fighting spirit of workers that will overthrow the present regime from power in 2024 elections. The present regime is not only infamous for its betrayal of workers but is also marked by its politics of communal hatred. The unity of workers as manifested in the recently concluded strike of the scheme workers of Bihar, will defeat the regime of communal hatred.”

Comrade Saroj Choubey, General Secretary of Bihar Rajya Vidyalaya Rasoiya Sangh, said, “The scheme workers fighting for their rights are well aware that the Modi government has passed four labour codes with the motive to eliminate all existing rights of the working class. Today’s anti worker regime wants to criminalise unionisation of workers. The scheme workers, while fighting for recognition of their own rights, are determined to strengthen the struggle of the working class of the country against the anti-worker labour codes.”

Comrade Geeta Mandal, General Secretary of Jharkhand Rajya Vidyalaya Rasoiya Sangh, said, “Allowance instead of wages for workers is a shameful invention of a government that systematically disrespects the women and their labour. No where in the world such a vast segment of workers are allowed to be exploited ruthlessly without any wages. We demand wages and not allowance, we demand an end to the government sanctioned scheme of exploitation of workers.”

The delegate session of the conference started in the afternoon of 9th September. Around 500 delegates from different parts of the country deliberated on the report of the conference presented by Comrade Shashi Yadav.

The conference passed the following resolutions-

1. The conference demands that scheme workers must be recognised as government employees and be paid accompanied wages and benefits on par with government employees. The AISWF resolves to organise a comprehensive campaign from October to November, 2023 on the said demands.
2. Around one crore scheme workers of the country, who play a most crucial role in delivering basic services of the government like primary health, school education, women and child development are denied the rights of minimum wages and social security.
3. AISWF will organise a mammoth rally of scheme workers at an appropriate time in Delhi to bring the issues of scheme workers’ struggle to the forefront of the politics of the country.
4. The Federation will expand its work among ASHA, Anganwadi, Mid Day Meal Cooks, Mamta and other scheme workers to further strengthen the organisation.
5. The Federation will initiate the process of consultation with other unions to organise an

all India strike of scheme workers.

6. The Federation resolves to play a pivotal role in overthrowing the anti-worker, anti-women Modi regime in the next Lok Sabha elections.

7. The conference expresses acute concern over the increasing assaults on the autonomy, rights and freedom of women in the country. We demand effective anti sexual harassment cells to be set up at workplaces.

8. The conference salutes the brave struggle of the women wrestlers against sexual harassment and condemns the BJP government’s attempt to shield the accused. We demand justice to each victim of sexual assault in the ongoing violence in Manipur.

9. The conference endorses the call of Mahapadav in every state capital from 26th to 28th November as declared by Samyukta Kisan Morcha and Joint Platform of all Central Trade Unions.

10. The conference extends support to the ongoing struggles of ASHA workers in UP and Haryana.

The conference elected an executive council of 45 members and an office bearer team of 13 members. Comrade Shashi Yadav was elected as all India General Secretary of AISWF while Comrade Geeta Mandal was elected as the President and Comrade Saroj Choubey as the Honorary President. ■

A 1001 Strings for a 1000 Rupee Dole!

Entitlement or Belittlement of Women?

★ POARKODI

Recently, the DMK-led Tamil Nadu government and the Congress-led Karnataka government have implemented a monthly financial assistance scheme of Rs. 1000 and Rs. 2000 respectively for women fulfilling the poll promise.

TN Chief Minister Stalin has claimed it to be a historic step towards social justice in acknowledging the hitherto unrecognised work of women. He stressed that the scheme, under the Dravidian model regime of “everything for everyone”, was brought on the basis of lessons learnt from Periyar, Anna and Karunanidhi, and persistent with the state’s progressive legacy of women’s empowerment like the Equal Right in Properties (Amendment of Hindu Succession Act) for Women, 1989, etc. Implemented on the birth anniversary of Anna and the centenary of Karunanidhi, it is further affirmed as a revolutionary scheme that would lead to a new renaissance in the lives of crores of women.

Well, from the naming of the scheme - after DMK patriarch Karunanidhi, to its twin objectives of helping women to lead a life with self respect by eliminating poverty and improving their living standard, is there anything that is addressed at gender disparity?



In a similar tone, Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah, after launching the “Gruhalakshmi” scheme that provides Rs 2000 assistance for women, has stated that if the fruits of economic development do not trickle down to the poor, cash transfers are an effective tool to raise their purchasing power.

The basic question is whether it is yet another scheme for elimination of poverty or is it for recognition of women’s work at home? The recognition of women’s work cannot be a mishmash of the two even as it could sometimes serve both. While Stalin has repeatedly voiced that it is not an assistance, but women’s right, scores of women have been left outside the purview of the scheme.

In fact, there are more exclusions than inclusions with several criteria for eligibility that leaves more than 50% of the state’s

women population ineligible for the scheme. Only one married woman, above the age of 21, can be nominated from a family. Families with income above 2.5 lakh rupees per annum, domestic power consumption higher than 3,600 units, owning above 5 acres of wetland or 10 acres of dryland, central and state government employees, income tax payers, beneficiaries of social security schemes or welfare schemes like widow pension, old age pension, welfare board pension, etc. are all not entitled for the “entitlement” scheme.

Even out of the 1.63 crore applicants in the four phase enrolment, only 1.06 crore have been identified as eligible. Karnataka has enrolled 1.33 crore women from BPL and Antyodaya cardholders. If the purpose of introducing the scheme is to recognise the domestic work of women, why are a large section of women left out of its ambit? Are

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women above BPL, government employees or beneficiaries of other schemes not doing household work? Recognising some section of women and not recognising the other sections in itself is discriminative and devaluing women's labour.

Is Monetising Domestic Work a Solution?

The discourse on recognition of women's contribution to the society, particularly the domestic labour, has been gaining different hues in the last few years in the Indian scenario. In 2009, the National Housewives Union, the first of its kind in the country, was formed by women's organisations in Kerala to fight for minimum wages and pension scheme. The union's application for registration as trade union was however rejected on the grounds that the Trade Union Act doesn't define household work as a trade or industry and that the government cannot be considered as employer in this case.

In 2012, Krishna Tirath, the then Union Minister for Women and Child Development, mooted a proposal that husbands part a portion of their salary to their housewives as honorarium. This was taken by a storm of opposition from BJP and men's

rights groups from conservative position that this violates family relationship. Women's organisations criticised it for absolving the state's responsibility, discounting the contribution of women to national economy and redistribution of family income as inconsequential to women's lives.

There have been precedents of courts passing orders granting compensation in accidents in which the women succumbed by calculating their contribution at home in monetary terms. The basis of such quantification is not standardised.

In 2021, Kamal Hassan's political party Makkal Needhi Maiyam in Tamil Nadu gave a poll promise to pay salary to housewives bringing back the debate. Following this, the DMK gave a poll promise of Rs 1000 assistance for women in recognition of the domestic labour. The Congress in Karnataka elections this year gave an assurance of Rs. 2000 allowance for women as part of its 5-point charter. In similar lines, Madhya Pradesh government has announced Ladli Behna Scheme with Rs 1000 assistance. The AAP in Punjab is yet to keep up its promise.

Obviously, whatever the tall claims, the financial assistance scheme for women have come as part and parcel of the populist measures of various governments. Even as it is a paltry sum, nowhere comparable or compensatory to the hard labour women put in, it is welcome as it at least provides a marginal relief from the strife of grinding poverty and inflation, but it cannot be a solution to the drudgery of household work or can break the patriarchal power dynamics in the family. Neither will it stop or reduce domestic violence and oppression or empower women to take decisions in family nor will it change the perception of women as burden/liability.

If income is the sole factor for the low social status of women, then large sections of working women should have benefited by now. The state needs to lay emphasis on increasing women's education and employment opportunities and minimise the household work through creating subsidised services for cooking, housekeeping, laundry, child care and elderly care. This will break the gender stereotypes around household work and overturn the conventional role of women in the family. ■

The Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023:

A Critical Understanding of the Apprenticeship System

★ MAITREYI KRISHNAN



On 13th December, 2022, 155 workers were arbitrarily terminated from employment by Yazaki India Pvt Ltd., an Indian arm of a Japanese company that manufactures automobile parts. Despite having worked for 4-5 years, they were termed apprentices and not recognized as workers. Overnight they found themselves unemployed, and on the streets. When questioned about the mass illegal termination, the Management claimed that the workers were not on their rolls, but were apprentices, who they could terminate at will.

Among Yazaki India's 3000-strong workforce, only 130 individuals are designated as permanent employees. Of rest – the majority of about 1500 workers - are

classified as apprentices and the rest termed as contract workers. This classification allows the company to deprive over 95% of its workforce of basic labor rights, such as minimum wages, leave, job security, and social security.

When we examine the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 that was adopted by the 111th International Labour Conference (ILC) held in Geneva from 5th to 16th June, we need to keep in mind the reality of apprenticeships and how they manifest themselves in practice.

The Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208)

The new Quality Apprenticeship Recommendation, hereafter 'Recommendation', on Quality

Apprenticeship was adopted in the 111th ILC with the objective of supporting "opportunities for people of all ages to become skilled, reskilled and continuously up-skilled", and were to serve as regulatory guidelines for apprenticeships.

The ILO had earlier adopted the Apprenticeship Recommendation, 1939 (No. 60), and the Vocational Training Recommendation, 1962 (No. 117). Both of them were superseded by the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 1975 (No. 150), and subsequently by the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195). Due to these juridical replacements, it was found that no existing ILO instruments comprehensively

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address apprenticeships. With an intention to fill this gap, the ILO has now brought in the Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023.

The Recommendations, understands ‘apprenticeship’ as “ A form of education and training that is governed by an apprenticeship agreement, that enables an apprentice to acquire the competencies required to work in an occupation through structured and remunerated or otherwise financially compensated training consisting of both on-the-job and off-the-job learning and that leads to a recognized qualification”.

The Recommendation provides for a regulatory framework for apprentices requiring that the apprentices inter alia (a) receive adequate remuneration or other financial compensation; (b) are not required to work hours that exceed specified limits; (c) are entitled to holidays with adequate remuneration or other financial compensation; (d) are entitled to sick leave; (e) have access to paid maternity or paternity leave; (f) have access to social security; (g) are afforded freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; (h) are afforded protection on occupational safety and health.

It also outlines measures to promote equality, diversity and social inclusion in apprenticeships, taking special account of the needs of persons belonging to vulnerable groups. Furthermore, it mandates member states to establish

a supportive atmosphere conducive to fostering quality apprenticeships.

We now look at whether the Recommendations effectively address the concerns arising from how the apprenticeship system unfolds in practice, using India as an illustrative example.

The Apprenticeship System in India

The Apprenticeship Act was brought in in 1961, just after the Second Five Year Plan, that concentrated on developing the public sector and industrialization. The Statement of Objects to the law notes that “In the context of the five-year plan and the large-scale industrial development of the country, there is an increasing demand for skilled craftsmen. The government considers that it is necessary fully to utilise the facilities available for the training of apprentices and to ensure their training...”.

The law removes apprentices from the definition of workers, thereby excluding them from almost all labour laws. This includes key laws such as the Minimum Wages Act, social security statutes like the Employee State Insurance Act (ESI), and the Employees’ Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 1952, as well as the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, among others. While the stated aim of this law was to facilitate practical training within factory settings, fostering the development of skilled labour and enhancing employment prospects, it soon evolved into a loophole enabling

industries to circumvent legal protections for the workers.

Subsequently, the Apprenticeship Act was amended to increase the ceiling of engagement of apprentices in an establishment from 2.5% to 15%. It was also amended to delink the wages payable to the apprentice from minimum wages, and instead fixed wages ranging from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 8,000/-. Additionally, the revised legislation permitted individuals to serve as “apprentices” for up to three years.

Consequently, situations similar to the one highlighted in Yazaki India Pvt. Ltd., where workers work at the mercy of the employer and can be thrown out of employment at will, emerge.

This experience of apprenticeship and on-job-training is also seen in the functioning of the National Employability Enhancement Scheme (NEEM), which was introduced by the Union Government in 2013. While the scheme was ostensibly introduced to develop a skilled workforce through “on the job training”, it became another route to ensure cheap labour. The workers engaged under the scheme are not considered workers, but trainees and lie outside the protection of law. After 2017, when the scheme was substantially amended, it became a tool for recruiting workers in various industrial hubs, including the Manesar industrial belt, where workers enlisted under this scheme receive only a “stipend” of approximately Rs. 9,000, compared to permanent workers performing the same

tasks who receive wages amounting to Rs. 80,000. Strikingly, workers continue to be designated as trainees even after the stipulated training period expires and are often presented with the ultimatum to either remain as trainees or lose their employment.

While these schemes have the purported objective of ensuring employability of workers, the reality is, clearly, otherwise. Firstly, the system is often manipulated to label workers as trainees, thereby denying them their rightful entitlements. Secondly, concrete measures to secure employment for those who have undergone training are conspicuously absent. It is worth noting that a proposal advocating the reservation of 50% of regular jobs for apprentices after their training was abandoned due to industry-related pressures. Official data on the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, another such skill development scheme, showed that only one out of four persons who underwent the skill training got jobs in the past 8 years. Pertinently, the nature of the jobs they got, and the security of the same is also uncertain.

Significantly, these deceptive practices are closely intertwined with the historical oppression based on caste, as a substantial portion of workers compelled to endure such precarious working conditions hail from Dalit and other marginalized communities.

Gaping holes in the Quality Apprenticeships

Recommendation, 2023 and the perpetuation of insecure jobs

The Indian experience highlights how the concept of apprenticeships and on-the-job training, instead of primarily focusing on enhancing worker skills, often transforms into a means of supplying low-cost labour to industries. This, in turn, results in the denial of even the most fundamental labour rights. In the broader context, workers are compelled to work under precarious and unprotected working conditions.

The Recommendations fails to recognize this vital aspect, and in many ways allows for the perpetuation of this practice, without requiring that those appointed as apprentices are ensured basic rights. While it mandates that apprentices “receive adequate remuneration or other financial compensation”, it does not mandate the payment of a minimum wage. While the Recommendation does mandate that apprentices should be ensured social security, holidays, maternity leave, etc., it falls short of closing the disparity between apprentices and other workers who undertake identical tasks, thereby perpetuating discriminatory systems. It would have been appropriate for the Recommendation to have mandated at the very least equal working conditions, when the same work is being performed.

The second aspect it overlooks is that enhancing employability does not guarantee actual employment and would not solve the

problem of unemployment. The Recommendations acknowledge that quality apprenticeships can lead to decent work and improved employability, but they fall short of taking the step to mandate an obligation to secure employment for those who have undergone training. The fact that the industry opposed an amendment to the law aimed at ensuring that at least a portion of the trained workforce would be integrated into the permanent workforce of the country highlights how the industry perceives such schemes — primarily as mechanisms to provide cheap labour, rather than ensuring that workers are both skilled and able to find employment. The Recommendation, by not imposing any obligations to ensure actual employment, leaves a gap, allowing for the supply of cheap labour to the industry without effectively ensuring job opportunities for those being made “employable.”

The Recommendations has the stated intent of facilitating a transition from the informal to the formal economy and from insecure to secure work. However, it fails to recognize that the solution it proposes is, in reality, exploited to prolong insecure work conditions, and it lacks measures to prevent such misuse. To achieve a meaningful transition, it's not enough to solely ensure the employability of workers; it's crucial to mandate the provision of employment afterward. ■

Massive Rally of Teachers and Government Employees Demanding Restoration of Old Pension Scheme



Delhi's Ramleela Maidan was flooded by a wave of protesters demanding restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) in a massive rally led by National Movement for Old Pension Scheme (NMOPS) and Front against NPS in Railway on 1st October. The rally will be marked in history as nothing but unprecedented due to the sheer size of participation of government employees.

Ramleela Maidan was reverberated with slogans like 'NPS-Privatisation Quit India' and 'Restore Old Pension Scheme' as huge batches of protesters consisting of state and central government employees from different parts of the country started reaching the protest venue in the morning. Such was the zeal of the protesters that long queues of people waiting

to enter the venue were visible till afternoon. True to its name, the 'Pension Shankhnad Rally' (Clarion Call for Pension) made the massive Ramleela Maidan look small in size for accommodating such a huge crowd. The number of people waiting outside the Maidan were almost equal to the number of people participating in the rally. The rally was a culmination of a three month long intense campaign by the above-mentioned organisations. The massive size of the rally has sent out a clear warning to today's ruling regime. The government's response to the popular demand for restoration of OPS can possibly have a significant impact on the electoral outcomes.

The rally truly represented the unity of the Indian working class amidst the country's colourful diversity – in terms of its slogans,

cultural performances and folk songs in different languages – made the atmosphere livelier. Large number of women employees also participated in the rally. Leaders of a range of movements such as the farmers movement represented by Samyukta Kisan Morcha, workers movement represented by different trade unions and political parties expressed their support for the demand of restoration of OPS. Leaders of parties like Congress and Aam Aadmi Party were among speakers at the rally. Vijay Kumar Bandhu, the President of the leading organisation NMOPS addressed the protesters.

CPIML General Secretary Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya spoke at the rally and said that CPIML from the beginning has opposed the NPS that endangers the financial security of retired

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employees. The Modi government is on a spree to sell out all public sector undertakings to private hands. For serving the interest of the corporates, the government is diluting all rights of workers including their right to pension.

While addressing the rally, all India General Secretary of AICCTU, Comrade Rajiv Dimri said that pension is a right earned by the workers by their life long labour. Denial of secured pension is nothing but pushing the employees into an unsecured

future in their old age. The government is trying to trick us by proposing different formulas of pension. Today's rally has made it very clear that the demand is very simple- restore OPS.

Comrade Purushottam Sharma, National Secretary of All India Kisan Mahasabha (AIKM) also addressed the rally and said that the farmers of the country are aware of the pro-corporate, anti-people character of the government. They resisted the farm laws, but their right to proper

MSP is still denied. He added that the farmers movement extends its wholehearted support for the movement of government employees for restoration of OPS.

The need of the hour is that the struggle of contractual workers, the scheme workers and the government employees are integrated in energy and spirit to push back the pro-corporate policy regime of the present Modi led BJP government. ■



Government at Doorstep, People at Outdoors !

★ ATANU CHAKRABORTY

In a tragic incident, 23 migrant workers from West Bengal lost their lives in a bridge collapse in Mizoram on 23 August 2023. All these workers from Malda district were engaged in constructing a bridge at Sairang area, near Aizawl, when it collapsed. Within few days, on 27 August, there was a violent explosion in a firecracker factory in Duttapukur, which was operating illegally for years together in a densely populated locality enjoying total impunity from political leaders and local administration of the North 24 Parganas. Nine workers, including few women, died on the spot. Six of the deceased were migrant workers from Murshidabad district and others were local people.

Recently, an entire family of four migrant workers from Sankosh Tea Garden of Kumargram, Alipurduwar district, lost their lives in an accident in Bengaluru. This family, like many others, migrated to other states not for more decent jobs but for higher wages as wages in tea gardens are abysmally low. They worked in a poultry farm at Bengaluru.

Even the tragic train accidents at Balasore a few months ago had exposed the plight and predicament of migrant workers of West Bengal with maximum number of deaths of migrants



from Sunderbans, South 24 Parganas. The list is endless.

Recently, Mamata Government launched a programme 'Duare Sarkar' (Government at Your Doorstep). Registration of migrant workers was one of its primary objectives. Within a short span, the Secretary of

Home Department informed that 12.15 lakh migrant workers had registered. He stated that the registration process would continue till the end of September.

The WB Government announced a slew of measures, including financial assistance, a call centre and offices to assist around

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an estimated 38 lakh people (unofficial estimate) working in other states. The Govt has constituted West Bengal Migrant Workers' Welfare Board. A portal has been launched for the registration of migrant workers.

Under the welfare scheme, a migrant worker who has met with an accident and become physically challenged will get cash assistance from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1 lakh. In case of natural death, his/her family will receive a compensation of Rs. 50,000 and in case of death due to accidents the compensation will be 2 lakh rupees and if the family intends to bring the mortal remains to their native, they will get Rs 25,000 towards transportation cost, and in case the last rites are performed at the place of their work, Rs. 3,000 will be provided to the relatives. In reality, the welfare board is an euphemism, and benefits will be provided only after accidental death or injury, and the entire concept of welfarism has been reduced to compensation for tragic accidents and not a lifetime and lifelong benefit!

During the Duare Sarkar programme, the state government offered compensation to the wife of a deceased migrant worker. She promptly refused and told the government official, "We don't need money, we want employment." She echoed the aspiration of countless migrant workers of West Bengal.

A report in Telegraph newspaper has quoted a senior government official in Kolkata put the total figure of migrant workers from

Bengal at around 38 lakhs. Another five lakh are working abroad, mainly in Gulf countries.

The last census report of 2011 had mentioned 5.8 lakh migrant workers from Bengal left the state in search of better fortune. The number has leaped with every passing year and has reached an unimaginable proportion. Various reports have revealed that people from not only poorer districts but even economically better districts are migrating to other states in huge numbers. Employment crisis is not the sole reason for this. Abysmally low wages are forcing rural populations to migrate in search of the lowest level of unorganised jobs in other states.

Handbook of Statistics on Indian States, 2020-21, an RBI publication, has revealed that the daily wage of rural workers in Bengal is below national average and is the worst among major states in the country. Stalling 100 days of work guaranteed under MGNREGA in Bengal is not the only reason for rural distress. Even when Bengal was a top performer in MGNREGA, people were reeling under acute poverty in rural Bengal, according to NABARD report - Farmers' Welfare : An Analysis Across States Of India. Average monthly income of farmers' families in Bengal is Rs. 7,573. This places Bengal among the states with lower average income from farming. Only six other states, namely, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Tripura and UP have a lower average income

in the category. Women workers from tea plantation areas are opting to migrate to other states/regions such as Nagpur, Rajasthan and Surat in search of contractual family work.

The Chief Minister of Bengal went on a 12-day tour to Spain and UAE to woo industrialists for investment in the state. During her meeting with the Industrial houses at Barcelona, Mamata underscored three advantages of Bengal that are favourable for international capital. Among the top two, one is highly skilled, knowledgeable and cheap workforce and the second is complete prohibition of strike. She stated that Deocha Pachami will be the biggest coal mine in Asia, and a source of uninterrupted cheap power supply for the industry. The CM of the state, thus, assured the international capital of keeping the wages at low level, and was unashamedly appeasing the corporates. When the entire world is moving towards reducing carbon emission from fossil fuel, Mamata is brazenly making such a proposal.

Mamata's statement of "the 'advantage' of cheap workforce" has further opened up all the doors for unmitigated migration of young rural workforce to other states and is the very source of huge suffering that has befallen upon the rural Bengal. ■

Why Can't Women's Reservation Be Implemented in the Next Election?

AICCTU Statement on Women's Reservation Bill

The Women's Reservation Bill or the The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023 has been passed from both Loksabha and Rajyasabha. Ensuring women's reservation in all decision making bodies, including the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, has been a long standing demand of the progressive women's movement in the country. The present bill passed from the Parliament says 33% seats in Loksabha and Vidhan Sabha will be reserved for women. While a special session of parliament was called and the Women's reservation Bill was presented to show seriousness of the government on the issue, in reality the bill promised no deadline for implementation of the provisions of reservation. The AICCTU supports women's reservation in all legislative bodies and would like to raise the following concerns in regard to the Bill passed by the parliament:

- Why has the implementation of Women's Reservation been made contingent upon the next census and subsequent delimitation of electoral constituencies? It is to be noted that it is the first time in the history of independent India that the decadal census has not been conducted. While the Pandemic is being given as an

excuse by the Indian government, several other countries have successfully conducted their census in this period. One obvious question then arises is why is the implementation of Women's Reservation being made contingent upon exercises that themselves are very uncertain? Why can the reservation not be implemented in the next election? The real intention of the government becomes clear by the blatant dilly-dallying tactics in implementation of the reservation.

- Another pertinent question that must be asked is why the Bill restricts Women's Reservation to Loksabha and Vidhansabhas. Why has the reservation not been extended to Rajya Sabha and Vidhan Parishads?

- The Bill does not address the concerns in regard to representation of women from the OBC and minority communities. It indeed indicates the anti-social justice nature of the present incumbent regime that enjoys a huge majority in the Parliament. It could have addressed the long ignored question of representation of OBCs and minorities in our legislative bodies.

By denying women's reservation in the next election, the Modi

government is trying to please the patriarchal constituency emboldened under the present regime. The assault on women's rights, freedom and autonomy has intensified in the last nine years. The present regime has created a shameful track record of shielding accused of sexual assault and rape. From Kathua, Unnao to Brij Bhushan Saran, the prime accused in complaints of sexual harassment by women wrestlers, the party in power has every time used the governance machinery and political muscle to defend those accused of assaulting women. And at each such instances, the women complainants have been at the receiving end of government sponsored attacks and silencing. We can imagine why the tactics of delaying implementation of women's reservation indefinitely have been adopted by the Modi government.

It is under the same regime that women's labour has been devalued and derecognised consistently. Millions of scheme workers of the country, who are mainly women workers, are being denied basic minimum recognition as workers. It is these women workers who tirelessly work to run important schemes of the government like the NRHM, Mid Day Meal and the ICDS. Yet, these women are not even paid

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minimum wages. They are being denied proper remuneration for their services during the pandemic. Women are pushed into the unorganized workforce, to work under vulnerable working conditions. Millions of other women continue to work without any rights guaranteed. Domestic workers, a workforce that is largely constituted of women do not have any recognised rights.

Their salary, service condition, safety at work place - nothing is guaranteed under the law of the land. The four labour codes brought in by the government further dilute women's rights as workers, even denying them equal remuneration. It is under this regime that a glaring gender gap of 41% has been reported in salaried employment in 2019-20. Economic sectors where women

are majorly engaged have the most precarious work condition.

Denial of equality to women have to be curtailed immediately. The AICCTU demands that Women's Reservation be implemented in the next election with a much wider scope to include women from OBC and minority communities. ■

Defeat the Attempts to Withhold Implementation of
Women's Reservation in the Name of Census & Delimitation!
Ensure OBC and Minority Representation!

No More Dilly Dallying! No More Betrayal!

WOMEN'S RESERVATION NOW!



LABOUR SNIPPETS – OCTOBER 2023

★ LEKHA ADAVI

Doctors' Strike Across England



For the 8th time since March 2023, thousands of doctors across England struck work, demanding for better payment and working conditions, and included consultant doctors and junior doctors. The doctors are employed under the publicly-funded National Health Service (NHS), and it has been said that the salaries are not in tandem with the high inflation rates and cost of living crisis reeling in UK. In fact, there have been massive fund cuts, which has resulted in shortage of staff in the health sector, and additional burden of work for those who continue to work. The lack of resources has also resulted in lesser hospital beds, medical equipment, etc., which has affected critical medical care.

Greek Workers Strike Against Labour Bills



Thousands of workers in Athens, Thessaloniki, and other cities in Greece gathered to protest against

the controversial labour bill that would make employment practices more flexible, which the workers' unions term to be an assault on workers' rights. They observed a nation-wide strike that disrupted public services. The trade unions are protesting against the labour bill as it would deny the workers their rights to safe and dignified working conditions. One of the aspects of the labour bill suggests that it would be legal to work for a second employer for more than eight hours a day, whereas the existing law provides for workers to work for several employers, as long as the working period does not exceed a total of eight hours a day. The proposed labour bill also legalizes so-called “zero-hour” contracts, in which the employer does not guarantee the worker any number of working hours. It abolishes the 40-hour working week and criminalises any action when certain workers are prevented from working during a strike.

Auto-workers strike in America

The United Auto Workers Union in the United States of America have been on protest for over 27 days against three big automobile companies, including Ford, Stellantis and General Motors. About 13,000 workers across the US have been on strike, making this a historic industrial struggle in the USA. The trade union has been demanding an increase in wages and better working conditions, which was adversely affected by the pandemic and the resulting inflation rates. The union is seeking an increase of up to 40% in their wages over a four-year period. The amount is meant to compensate for the low hikes given to the auto workers in recent years and the compromises the union made by letting go of certain benefits after the 2008 financial crisis. The union is also seeking the reinstatement of cost-of-living adjustments and pensions for all workers. It has also demanded shorter work hours, as well as an end to varying tiers of wages for factory jobs. This historic

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strike has crippled the automobile industry, and the companies are lashing back at the workers by laying off close to 5,000 workers! Yet, the workers remain strong in the face of adversity and are carrying on with their fight against the three big companies.

India's Freight Train Drivers Protest

The increased number of train accidents in the country has shone light on the abysmal working conditions of train drivers, especially of the freight trains, in Indian Railways. Long working hours, continuous night shifts and reduced rest intervals have resulted in terrible working conditions, which has resulted in fatal accidents in some cases. Adding to the woes of these drivers is the lack of fresh appointments in railways and contractualisation of jobs. Almost 3.15 lakh posts are lying vacant, and 80,000 sanctioned posts were surrendered. It has been stated that in the past 31 years, over 4.4 lakh jobs in the railways have been slashed. This is despite the demand for manpower only increasing. The track lengths have decreased by 18%, number of coaches by 21% and the number of locomotives by 57%. This has put a disproportionate burden on the existing employees and staff to meet the demands of the people, which is resulting in fatigue and thus fatal accidents.

Union Registration Cancelled Over Contract Workers' Membership



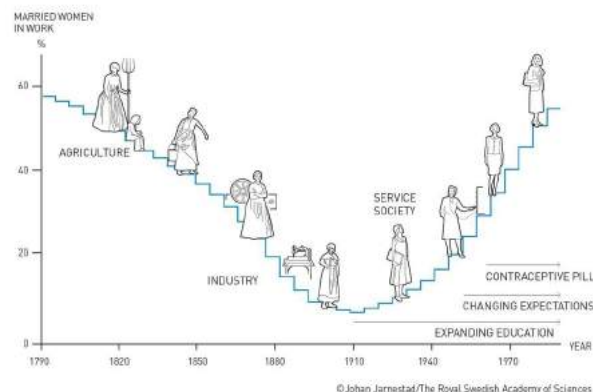
The Labour Department of Haryana cancelled the registration of the Bellsonica Employees Union as they inducted a contract worker as a member of the

union. The Management of Bellsonica approached the labour department stating that the union was violating the norms and sought for the cancellation of their registration. Acting upon the same, the labour department cancelled the registration of the trade union. The workers in Manesar took out a protest rally against the decision of the labour department. While there are about 700 permanent employees in the company, there are over 1,600 contract workers and the union has been fighting for their right to unionise.

Nobel Prize for Gender Gap in Labour Market



Claudia Goldin, an American Economist working at Harvard, has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences who has researched for decades on the history of women's experiences in the job-market. She has written about female labour force participation, origins of gender pay gap, hiring biases against women and evolution of women's legal rights.



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AICCTU Solidarity Message with UAW

Dear Shawn Fain and comrades of the UAW,

Greetings from the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), India.

First of all, from the entire rank and file of AICCTU, we extend our unwavering solidarity and support to the on-going historic strike of United Auto Workers (UAW) against the 'Big Three'. We also congratulate the UAW and its leadership, who have successfully ushered a new era of radical working-class movement in the union.

Post the COVID19 pandemic, in the US, India and across the globe, we witness a new wave of accelerated and aggressive onslaught by the corporate forces. Backed by the governments, the corporate and neoliberal forces under the false flag of 'losses,' are shifting the blame on the poor and toiling masses. On one hand, governments are shedding our millions of public money to bail-out corporate companies, on the other we witness the billionaires becoming richer.

In case of the US, the Ford, General Motors and Stellantis (the Big Three Automobile Companies) made a combined profit of \$21 billion in just the first six months of this year. But the wages of the workers, whose labor and sweat built and shaped the products of the 'Big Three' remain stagnant.

In the veil of crisis, the salaries of workers are either slashed or stagnated, social security benefits are being withdrawn and safety regulations are sacrificed in the altar of corporate profits. In India and other countries of the Global South, the hard-won labor rights and laws are being dismantled and replaced with laws that suit the corporates. As the rich becomes richer, working classes and toiling masses are thrown under the bus of austerity. With skyrocketing prices of essential commodities and unemployment, the new neoliberal onslaught has pushed people into immense suffering.

The growing corporate assault on the lives and livelihood has created a wide-spread resentment among the working class across the world. In past years, we have witnessed several historic workers'



strike actions across the world, including India. In India, the historic farmers' movement in 2020-2021 forced the fascist-neoliberal government of Modi-led BJP government to withdraw the three farm laws aimed at turning the farmers into corporate slaves. Presently, the workers and farmers are unitedly gearing up to resist and thwart the corporate attacks by government of India.

We, reiterate our support to the demands of UAW for new contract with a 32-hour workweek, 42% pay increases (in conjunction with inflation and to match the average pay increases of the CEOs at the three companies) and pension benefits among others.

We, once again congratulate the comrades of UAW for their historic action and we wish all success. We believe that the on-going battle against the 'Big Three,' will mark a new era in history of radical labor movement in the US.

**In solidarity,
AICCTU HQ ■**

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