



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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The Call of the May Day 2021



**Assert May Day as the
Day of Worker-Farmer
Unity!**

**Make Modi government
responsible for the
Corona devastation in the
country!**

**Overthrow the Modi led
Company Raj!**

**Intensify Struggles to
Reclaim our Rights!**

We are commemorating May Day 2021 when the second wave of the pandemic is engulfing the entire country exposing the utter failures of Modi led BJP government. Lakhs congregated in the name of Kumbh Mela at Haridwar. Thousands are being mobilised for Modi-Shah greedy election battle to win Bengal. The entire country is looking like a graveyard. People are dying for want of oxygen, medicines and hospital beds. It cannot be called a Covid death anymore as the people are dying because

of the Modi government's failure to be prepared for the second wave. It is none else but the Modi government that is responsible for the cruel and inhuman deaths. But, Modi government is walking on the corpses to ensure greedy profits for corporate giants. Vaccine is being exported at the cost of lives of Indian people. Corporates are allowed to increase the prices of vaccine amidst piling dead bodies. It's the responsibility of the government to provide free vaccines to all but people are being pushed at the altar of corporate profits. Innumerable

deaths, ever increasing poverty and hunger, loss of wages and employment have become the norm. Modi is always on his “Mann ki Baat” and election rallies but not to be seen around in rectifying the systemic failure to address Covid related issues. Modi led BJP government should be held responsible for the Corona devastation in the country.

Migrant labourers are returning in hordes to their native places once again. No employment or wages. Neither can they stay back nor can they go back to their villages. Faced with the grim situation of poverty and hunger on both sides, migrant labourers leave for their native places to fight it out together with their kith and kin.

Even people in their own homes are not able to sustain themselves because of partial and limited Lockdown in various states. People are suffering from hunger and poverty.

We are commemorating May Day 2021 at a time of consistent battle between Modi-led corporate raj and the toiling masses. Each and every right of workers and the people are being snatched away by the Modi regime in the name of Corona and the entire country is being gifted away to Ambanis and Adanis. The dark clouds of privatization, labour codes, farm laws and a heap of draconian laws, that destroy our constitution, are hovering over our country and the working people. The country is, yet again, facing a devastating situation of re-establishment of Company Raj. But at the same time, the ever-growing mass resistance movements of toiling people and farmers are challenging these attacks and the energy emitted by these movements is piercing through these dark clouds of Modi-led destruction. Most notable among these movements is the ongoing five months-old, historical, relentless, determined farmers' movement against farm laws. It has been successful in thwarting the implementation of these laws and has also created a favourable atmosphere and powerful narration against privatization and the corporate world. More importantly, these movements have further reinforced the voices for stopping and defeating the BJP.

In recent times, we have witnessed some more important movements and instances of determined resistance against privatization and corporatization in several PSUs and government sector establishments. Notable being the hugely successful strikes by employees of Banking and Insurance sector in the month of March, 2021, the resolute struggle against the privatization of Vizag Steel plant for more than two months by the employees and the local people, a successful ‘anti privatization Day’ on 15 March, Bharat Bandh on 26 March this year and one-day all-India strike by the working class amid the difficult and challenging situation arising out of Corona and lockdown on 26 Nov last year. 26 November 2020 also was a witness to the beginning

of the ongoing farmers' movement in the country.

For Modi led BJP government, privatization, 3 farm laws and 4 Labour codes actually constitute a comprehensive package to convert our country into “India Pvt. Ltd.” (like, Adani Railways) and to raise an army of slave labour to toil for it. This is a package to establish Company Raj in the country which has been showcased by Modi as “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” (self-reliant India). The entire property, natural resources of our country, i.e., every brick and piece of land, is being handed over to corporates through several clandestine means and methods like disinvestment, FDI, PPP, merger, commercial mining coupled with scores of pro-corporate amendments in laws related to tribals, forest and the land. The 3 farm laws are meant to hand over the entire agricultural land to corporates. But, this process of privatization cannot be completed without raising an army of slave labour. That is why 4 labour codes are passed to ensure mountains of profits to corporate houses by pushing the labour into slavery – after all, Privatization without windfall profits, does not make any sense. The working class of the country is facing an unprecedented and most brutal attack since independence. Labour codes and ruthless privatization constitute two biggest attacks on the working class.

The 3 farm laws will not only destroy the peasantry, clear the way for takeover of agricultural land by Adanis and Ambanis, but will also lead to corporate take-over of food items, destroy the ration system and the food security which crores of unorganized workers and their families are dependent on; while the urgent need is to provide free ration to every unorganized worker in our country. Eradicating and relief from hunger and malnutrition has occupied one of top positions even at international level.

The govt. is in a hurry to implement soon the regime of 4 labour codes after doing away with all existing labour laws which were won through long struggles and sacrifices against the colonial British rulers. Modi and RSS are replacing rule of law with jungle laws; British Colonial rulers with corporate rulers.

These codes will do away with the concept of regularisation and will make entire regular/permanent workforce redundant. In the coming days, employment relations will only be marked by scores of “irregular” employment systems like contract, daily wage, badli, fixed term, etc. Such irregular system of employment is discovered only to deny wages, rights and benefits, applicability or implementation of any law, etc. Obviously, Modi's claim of extending ‘rule of law’ to informal sector is nothing but a big hoax, a jumla.

Curbing the right to organize and the right to strike, legal sanction to 12 hour work-day, determining hours of a work-day at the whims and fancies of employers, freezing the minimum wage (starvation wages) at its lowest in the name of “floor wages”,

institutionalization of 'hire and fire', arbitrary retrenchment, lay-off and closures, doing away with all hitherto operating welfare boards of unorganized workers, freeing employers from the responsibility of social security and shifting it onto the shoulders of workers – all these attacks will be perpetrated through implementing these labour codes. While, at the same time, the toiling masses are already reeling under the impact of cruel lockdown as well as record-breaking unemployment and back-breaking inflation.

Modi govt. shamelessly continued with its designs of onslaughts on peoples' rights and escalating repression even under the pretext of pandemic and lockdown. In the name of 'converting crisis into an opportunity,' people's crisis is being converted into an opportunity for Modi's corporate friends. There is an all-round attack on citizens for even raising the voice of dissent and protest against Modi govt.'s policies. Human rights and social activists are being branded as anti-nationals and are being sent to jails. The constitution, democracy and federal structure are being torn apart. The latest attacks are, designs of imposing Police Raj in Bihar along the lines of Yogi-led U.P. govt. by bringing in Bihar Special Armed Police Act 2021 by BJP-Nitish govt., an unprecedented act in the history of parliamentary system of police thrashing opposition MLAs right inside Assembly, and an act of paralysing the elected govt. of Delhi by according all essential powers to the Lt. Governor.

Privatization and snatching away the rights of people are not the only agenda of Modi-Sangh govt., rather it is just a part of its overall agenda of Hitlershahi and Hindu Rashtra. Communalism is interwoven in this agenda. While the country is being put on sale, communal hatred and poison is being spread among the working masses and communal mobilization is being undertaken to bury their real, essential issues.

Hence, the resistance of working class cannot just be limited against pro-corporate agenda of Modi govt. In equal force, it also has to combat and thwart the all-pervasive communal, fascist agenda of Modi govt.

It is high time and most favourable scenario too for the working class to take a plunge and fight with all its might against the attack in shoulder to shoulder with farmers and other sections of masses and to thwart the Modi govt.'s pro-corporate, anti-worker policy regime, its designs to establish Company Raj and to reclaim our rights.

The worst ever challenge, since the country's independence, is looming large over the working class, the common people and the country under the Modi led BJP regime. Let us march ahead unitedly and convert this massive crisis into an opportunity for a determined resistance and movements.

Let us assert and observe the May Day 2021 as the Day of Worker-Farmer Unity!

May Day Charter 2021

- ▶ Free and Prompt supply of Oxygen to all needy!
- ▶ Free Vaccination to all within a definite time frame!
- ▶ Engage more and more PSUs in production of oxygen. Stop re-opening of killer Sterlite plant in Tamil Nadu under the garb of production of oxygen!
- ▶ Immediately Stop hoarding and black-marketing of oxygen and medicines; Stringent punishment including life-term to hoarders and black-marketers!
- ▶ Impose a Corona tax of 10 percent on corporates!
- ▶ Ensure full Lockdown wages and Rs 10,000/- per month subsistence allowance at least for another six months and free ration (10 kg free food grains per person per month) for all unorganized including agricultural & rural workers!
- ▶ Ensure work under NREGA to all needy people including returning migrant workers!
- ▶ Ensure Rs. 50 lakh life insurance cover to all frontline workers including scheme and sanitation workers, who died fighting Corona, without any condition of direct engagement and an additional Rs. 10 lakh health insurance to them!
- ▶ Ensure availability of protective gear, equipment etc. for all health and frontline workers and those engaged in pandemic-management work including ASHAs and anganwadi employees!
- ▶ Scrap 4 Labour Codes of slavery! Scrap 3 Farm Laws!
- ▶ Arrest all-round Unemployment, Retrenchment! Provide work to every hand, Full wages for every work! NO to 12-hr. work-day!
- ▶ Stop privatisation of Government sector and PSUs, including 100% FDI!

No to corporate onslaught in the name of Corona!

No to slavery, No to corporate, communal, fascist rulers!

Make Modi led BJP government responsible for the Corona devastation in the country!

Long Live May Day! Workers of the World Unite!

Long Live Working Class Solidarity!

Long Live Worker-Peasant Alliance!

Down With Capitalism and Imperialism!

Long Live Socialism!



Central Trade Unions - Farmers Organisations Joint Statement

Workers-Peasants Meeting Resolves To Carry Forward And Intensify Joint Struggles

Against Anti-People, Anti-Farmer, Anti-Worker Destructive Policies Of Modi Govt

The Joint Meeting of the Platform of Central Trade Unions & Sectoral Federations/Associations with Samyukta Kisan Morcha held on-line on 28th April 2021 unanimously resolved to carry forward and intensify the united workers-peasants struggle against the anti-people, anti-farmer, anti-worker destructive policies of the Central Govt.

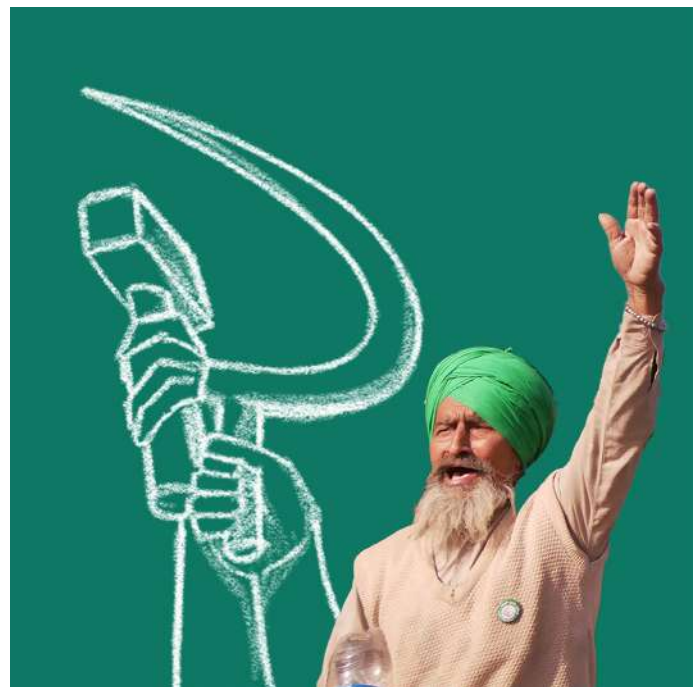
The joint workers-peasants meet appreciated the stronger bond of solidarity emerged between the struggles of the two main productive forces in the country against the outright destructive policies of the Govt at the centre which is acting to destroy peasants' agriculture as well as indigenous manufacturing capacity of the national economy through retrograde Farm-laws, mindless privatisation drives covering all industries, services, natural resources, health and education sector –almost everything. At the same time conditions of slavery is being sought to be imposed on the working people through enactment of Labour Codes along with curbing democratic rights, freedom of expression, right to dissent etc in numerous ways in a total authoritarian direction with a fascistic intent.

Such destructive and barbarous policies are very much reflected in cruel insensitivity of the Govt in addressing the second wave of Covid Pandemic causing numerous preventable deaths throughout the country and the tragically inadequacy of public health network—the grievous fall out of privatisation oriented as well as dismantling and weakening of public health care system. Added to that is the retrograde Vaccine policy announced by the Central Govt. led by Modi to promote profiteering in vaccine sale at the cost of lives of people.

The meeting denounced such barbarous policy of the Govt which is failing in meeting the challenge of Pandemic and demanded scrapping of the pronounced vaccine policy and ensuring free mass universal vaccination for all.

The meeting decided to observe May Day jointly highlighting the demands and rights of workers, peasants and people throughout the country in as many locations as possible.

The Joint workers-peasants meeting decided to carry forward and intensify countrywide united



struggle on all peoples' rights and livelihood issues focussing inter alia the following demands:

1. **Scrap Labour Codes, Farm Laws and Electricity Amendment Bill**
2. **Scrap the disastrous Vaccine Policy and ensure free universal mass vaccination for all**
3. **Ensure MSP at C2+50% rate for all agricultural produce with ensured procurement**
4. **Stop privatisation/disinvestment and corporatisation move**

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) will again meet during middle of May to concretise future course of joint action programmes.

The joint platform of Central Trade Unions

[INTUC AITUC HMS CITU AIUTUC TUCC SEWA
AICCTU LPF UTUC]

*Samyukta Kisan Morcha(40 ORGANISATIONS
TOGETHER OF PUNJAB & NATIONAL LEVEL)*



The Wage Code - 2019 and The Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2020: **An Assault on the Fundamental Right to Minimum Wages**

-Maitreyi Krishnan

The Wages Code, 2019 and the Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2020 puts forward a direct assault on the most fundamental rights of workers. One of these is the right of workers to minimum wages, which this article concentrates on.

Living Wage

The Constitution in Article 43 speaks of a “living wage” for workers and provides that the State shall endeavor to secure, by suitable legislation or economic organization or in any other way, to all workers - agricultural, industrial or otherwise - a living wage and better conditions of work to ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities. Further, Article 39 provides that the State shall direct its policy towards securing – for its citizens, men and women equally - the right to an adequate means of livelihood and that the operation of the economic system should not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment.

Minimum Wage

While, the dream of the Constitution is one of a living wage, unfortunately, the law hitherto, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 only provided for a “minimum wage” to the workers. However, with the coming of the Wage Code, 2019 and the Draft Rules being proposed by the Central Government, even this minimum wage is being denied.

The Supreme Court has held that the concept of Minimum Wages is dynamic, and not static, and that it is to undergo change with the growth of the economy and with the change in the standard of living. The Supreme Court in *Chandra Bhawan Boarding and Lodging vs State of Mysore and Anr* [AIR 1970 SC 2042], held that “the concept of minimum wage is to undergo change with the growth of the economy and with the change in the standard of living. It is not a static concept. Its concomitants must necessarily increase with the progress of society.” The Court in *Workmen Represented By Secretary vs Management Of Raptakos Brett* [AIR 1992 SC 504] held that each category of the wage structure has to be tested at the anvil of social justice which is the live-fibre of our society today.

With the growth and development in society, the wages recognized as minimum wages is required to be increased and its various components is to be developed. In fact, the idea of minimum wage is to

grow into a living wage, which recognizes workers as full human beings and provides enough to ensure their development and participation as full citizens of the country. It is only when the basic needs of workers are met, they would be able to spare time away from the workplace for the building up of citizenship and to participate as citizens.

Less Than Minimum Wage is Nothing But a Forced Labour

The Supreme Court in *People's Union For Civil Liberties vs Union Of India & Others* [AIR 1982 SC 1473], held that where a person provides labour or services to another for remuneration which is less than the minimum wage, the labour or service provided by him clearly falls within the scope and ambit of the words “forced labour” prohibited under Article 23. What we see with the bringing in of the Code on Wages, 2019 and the proposed Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2020 is the complete erosion of this most basic right to minimum wages and a step by the Government that pushes all workers into a condition of forced labour.

Manner of calculating the minimum rate of wages as per the Rules that would result in workers working under conditions of forced labour.

Rule 3 of the Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2020 provides for the manner of calculations of minimum wages and provides the following criteria:



1. **Number of consumption units:** The Draft Rules provide for the “standard working class family which includes a spouse and two children apart from the earning worker; an equivalent of three adult consumption units”. The standard working class family consumption units of 3 has been arrived as follows:

1 (male) + 0.8 (female) + 0.6 (child) + 0.6 (child)
to total to 3 adult consumption units.

Such an assignment of value is gender discriminatory, as it assigns lower consumption to the female adult member of the household. An issue identified as a cause for high levels of malnutrition amongst women, is now being codified. Further, a child’s consumption unit is kept as low as 0.6. That apart, the condition of parents of the workers has been given a complete go-by.

2. **Food:** The Draft Rules provides for a net intake of 2700 calories per day per consumption unit, a recommendation made as far back as 1948. Nutrition Advisory Committees or Expert Groups set up by the The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommend the “Dietary Allowances” in respect of energy (Calories), proteins, fats, minerals, iron, vitamins etc. for various age groups within the population including special groups like infants, pregnant/nursing mothers, children etc. and at the same time recommend dietary allowance by activity groupings also. However, these aspects are given a complete go-by and a net intake of calory prescribed over 60 years ago is used as a standard.
3. **Clothing:** The Draft Rule proposes that 66 meters cloth per year be taken per standard working class family. There is nothing provided for warm clothing, no personal clothing, home textile requirements, footwear, socks and detergents or even stitching charges.
4. **Housing and Shelter:** In the method of calculation of housing, the Government exposes itself in its complete disdain for workers and the working class. The Draft Rule proposes that rent expenditure is not to be calculated by how much it actually costs, but as a percentage (10%) of food and clothing expenditure. Studies have found that people spend a minimum of 50% of their total wages on rent, and the Draft Rules provides for it to be calculated as a ridiculous percentage of the amount spent on food and clothing. The Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 declared by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1988, defined “adequate housing” as “adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic

infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities” – a basic right now being denied to workers.

5. The draft rules also provide for calculation of amount for fuel, electricity and other miscellaneous items to constitute 20 percent of minimum wage and expenditure for children education, medical requirement, recreation and expenditure on contingencies to constitute 25 percent of minimum wage. With increase in privatization in both education and health, fixing constituents at such minor percentage, instead of looking at actual costs expose the real face of the Government.
6. **Provision of revision of Dearness Allowance:** Draft Rule 5 provides that endeavour shall be made so that the cost of living allowance and the cash value of the concession in respect of essential commodities at concession rate shall be computed once before 1st April and then before 1st October in every year to revise the dearness allowance payable to the employees on the minimum wages. Therefore, while inflation continues to take place, the Draft Rules only provides for “an endeavor” to be made to revise the dearness allowance linked to the minimum wage and places no mandatory obligation to ensure such revision.
7. **Provision of a Floor Wage:** Section 9 of the Act and Draft Rule 11 provides for the fixation of a floor wage by taking into account the minimum living standard including the food, clothing, housing and any other factors considered appropriate by the Central Government from time to time of the standard working class family. This entire notion on floor wages envisages a wage which is less than minimum wages and has no place in the law, when the law clearly lays down that workers forced to work for less than minimum wages amounts to forced labour prohibited under Article 23 of the Constitution.

What we see with the coming of the Wages Code, 2019 and the Draft Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2020 is thus a complete destruction of the most basic rights of the working class, and a far cry to the dreams of the Constitution of an equal and just society. ■■■

The plights of being a female tea worker in West Bengal

- Abhijit Mazumdar

(Excerpts of an interview with Sumanti Ekka, a 26 year old tea worker of Darjeeling district, West Bengal, recorded by Saswati Sengupta on 5 April 2021)

Saswati: We're now at the residence of Sumanti Ekka, located at Kaduvita village under Khoribari Block in Darjeeling district. Sumanti could only steal few minutes from her busy schedule of election campaign for this brief interview. She has been nominated by CPI (ML) Liberation as a candidate fighting the ongoing West Bengal assembly polls from Phansidewa (ST) constituency. This assembly constituency is consisted of Phansidewa and Khoribari blocks, remaining major centres of peasant upsurge way back in the late 1960s. Presently the economic activities centre predominantly around both big and small tea gardens.

Sumanti, what sort of demands are you raising during your election campaign?

Sumanti: Look, as a tea factory worker earning a daily wage below subsistence level through 8 hours of hard labour, reality compels me to demand a structured Minimum Wage Schedule for the tea workmen of West Bengal. We've been demanding it through the last 6 years or so, resorted to all sorts of democratic mass movements, but the state government went back on its written affirmation by nullifying the proposals, placed before the MW Advisory Board by all tea trade unions. This age-old nexus between the employers' conglomerate and the state governments of different hue, remained a perennial block denying even the legitimate demand of MW in India's 2nd largest labour-intensive industry.

Saswati: Would you please explain the existing mode of payment of wages in tea?

Sumanti: Just before the declaration of these present phases of polls, the state govt. unilaterally enhanced the daily wages of a tea plucker from Rs. 176 to Rs. 202 by adding a meager amount of Rs. 26 as if like a reward. Whereas, the calculated MW should have been more than Rs. 500 a day! A permanent tea worker has a daily task of plucking 24-26 kgs. of tea leaves. By following the draconian agreement of 2005, the workers are denied even the settled daily wage if they fail to fulfill the given task. A lactating female worker (Nani Mai) or a sick elderly plucker (Lata Bura) often suffers a cut on their subsistence wage as they fail to meet the demands of the manager. Even absentism for consecutive 3 days for a worker, denied sick leave, has a portent of losing wages for a whole week !

On top of that, after the enforcement of Food security Act in 2016 in Bengal the management is also exonerated from their duty of supplying food grains at a subsidized rate of 40 paise per Kilogram of rice and wheat. By way of doing this, the tea management has managed a pilferage of thousand crores over a period of 5 years or so, since the Tea Plantation Labour Act of 1951 enshrines this food subsidy as part of wages.

Saswati: What other deprivation points are there for a male or female tea worker?

Sumanti: For a permanent tea worker the retirement age is 58 years. As it had been the tradition earlier, her descendant (male or female) used to be offered the job as a badly worker. But given the present low wage structure, the able bodied members of a tea worker family are seen on the run to earn better wages in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Mumbai. Because of this spate of out migration under compulsion, the retired worker has to leave his



Tea Workers in North Bengal Observe Demand Day, April 2020

allotted space in labour quarters forthwith. That's why we've also raised the legitimate demand of land patta for permanent workers to stall the threat of possible eviction. Presently, the workmen of a tea estate are also deprived of their lawful quota on firewood, tea leaves, festival largesse etc. on a regular basis.

Perhaps you remember that, tea remained one of the sterling industries of the land where production resumed after a short spell of stoppage during the unplanned Covid Lockdown period. Tea workers were given a sum of Rs. 600 to Rs.1000 for the period of suspension of work, purportedly as a part payment of LockDown wages. But later when the production resumed full swing the same amount was deducted from their fortnightly wages.

Female factory workers are engaged both in day and night shifts without the lawful provision of proper toilet facilities. Even baby crèche has become a rarity in most of the tea gardens. There remains severe scarcity in supply of potable drinking water during the tiresome day's work.

Saswati: What medical facilities are available in tea gardens now?

Sumanti: Very few famed tea gardens still have a semblance of group hospitals and supply of some medicines. But in most of them you won't find even a compounder to dispense medicines in case of common ailments. A registered medical practitioner is always a missing entity. No ambulance is available inside a garden. I personally bore witness to a horrible event few years back while working as a temporary plucker in Maruti Tea Estate, 20 kms away from my home. A female co-plucker one day was bitten by a venomous snake during day time. The snake was stoned to death by other workers on field, but the management turned a blind eye to the suffering female and she died before my eyes unattended by any managerial staff.

Saswati: Whom do you hold responsible for this sordid state of affairs existing in tea gardens? The management, the state or the union government?

Sumanti: Obviously, the garden managements act as the most visible oppressors on daily count. A cut in wages and other facilities enable them to maximize on profit. They still are the beneficiary of the colonial mode of exploitation. But a committed unionized labour force may at times wrestle out an iota of lawful benefits through a process of bargaining.

The state government, the labour department in particular often fails to put the onus on a failing management. Some notorious planters may also be seen to flout the laws pertaining to payment of provident fund and gratuity dues. The state government also tries to hoodwink the workers by making false promises of proclamation of MW structure.

But in present context, I would hold the BJP



Sumanti Ekka

government at the centre responsible for holding on to a nefarious design of denial of workers' hard earned rights, for the explicit benefits of its crony corporate brothers like Adanis and Ambanis. The much touted labour reforms of Modi Sarkar when implemented would remove altogether Tea Plantation Labour Act of 1951 and Tea Act of 1953. A tea worker in near future would have to work for more than 12 hours a day without earning the cash benefits of laboring overtime. Fixed-term employment scheme will deliberately obliterate the idea of permanent jobs. Even the inherent rights of forming a union will be denied outrightly. Hire and fire principle will have a major sway in tea industry, if given an unabated passage.

On the other hand, Modi and his cohorts seem to be hellbent in wrestling state power in West Bengal by employing money and muscle power. BJP's poll campaign rolls out a call to implement Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) in their first cabinet meeting, if they could grab the state power. Following Amit Shah's infamous 'chronology samjhiye' utterances, the NRC-NPR-CAA triad threatens most the life and livelihood of both Adivasi and Mulbasi tea workers who do not have any 'kagaz' (documents) to furnish, proving their legacy status of being Indian citizens.

Saswati: What are the reasons in choosing a left trade union to achieve your rights and privileges?

Sumanti: My choice of becoming a tea worker and joining Tarai Sangrami Cha Shramik Union (affiliated to AICCTU) was predicated on my participation in May Day celebration at garden level, even when I was a kid. My fascination over Red flag had grown on the idea of collectivism and labour power. I can't stand the whole idea of rights and freedom driven down the drains before my eyes. So, my call is for standing united and to fight out this menace of a Labour Code tooth and nail. I find this Modi government spilling out virus like Covid-19 and acting like a pestilence itself.

No Rest, No Leisure, Nothing Else But Work

The Life of IT Employees in Times of 'Work from Home'

- Uday Kiran

"Life of an IT Professional -

Born

Study

Job

'Shall I share my screen?'

'Am I audible now?'

'Correct me if I'm wrong'

'Did you receive my email?'

'Ok, I'll fix the code and send the status by EOD.'

Meeting Deadlines of work.

Death"



This is a meme widely shared by IT professionals among themselves. What else could have been a simpler expression of their misery after all? How else does an IT worker, absorbed in meeting deadlines throughout the day, tell companions what the promised 'highly paid' profession has meant to them?

This simple meme reminds us of the dehumanisation of an industrial worker portrayed in the Charlie Chaplin classic "The Modern Times". The conveyor belts portrayed in Modern Times has metamorphosed into 'Homes' as places of extracting money from the body and mind of the worker. The capitalist continues to thrive appropriating labour from the worker, even when the country is neck dipped in pandemic.

In normal times, IT employees spend a 13 hour work day for their job. This includes employee engagement of 9 hrs by rule, 2 hrs extension for meeting daily deadlines, travelling time to office and preparatory chores. Even this is not enough for the workers to survive in their job. Code solutions for the software they are working upon have to developed before stipulated time come what may. The mental space for the rest of the 11 hours of the day, thus is engaged in solving the equations. 'Competition' is the justification for the inhumanely short deadlines, because 'competition must thrive' is the ideology of capitalism.

As the Covid-19 Pandemic hit the world, 'Work from Home' was the instruction given to the IT professionals. What has this change in work place meant for the IT workers? Has it meant more leisure time at home for the workers who do not have to

travel to office anymore? Most IT employees report that the work load has increased since 'Work from Home' has started operating. The deadlines for fulfilling a task have become further shorter.

The companies, on the other hand, have only gained from the situation. The operational cost for the companies has come down drastically in 'Work from Home' situation. This has resulted in significant growth in the profits of the IT companies. But salaries of the employees have not increased accordingly. In fact, most of the companies have taken advantage of the pandemic and used the opportunity to keep the annual hikes in employee's salary very low. Let us take IT giants Infosys and Wipro for example. The announcements of Q on Q results of Infosys and Wipro have shown around 30% operational profits. But when we look at the announced hike in employee's salary, it is merely 2 to 4% for majority of workforce covered under 2 (met expectation) and 1 (commendable work) ratings of the Bell curve. The hike is 5-7% for very few employees covered by 1+ (exceeded expectations) rating.

Apart from the low hikes, there are no hikes given at all in many of the companies. Thousands of terminations have been recorded in big MNCs. Forcing the employees for voluntary resignations has been the tactics used by such companies for long to avoid the legal consequences. Even the small and medium enterprises have resorted to illegal layoffs and cutting down of wages by 50%, even 100% in some cases, in the name of furlough.

Most of the companies do not provide

reimbursement of internet and electricity bills or the cost to set up required infrastructure for office work at home. In the present 'Work from Home' era, there is no fixed office hour. Employees are now expected to remain logged in 24x7 and be available for work whenever there is a requirement by clients.

Leave approvals have come down as the work from home for 14 hrs/day is treated as a stay at home or a holiday by the employers. The companies rarely support their COVID hit employees. Insurance and health care for the employees are non-existent in today's time.

When it comes to women employees, working mothers in particular, the situation is far more worse. They are doubly burdened with household chores, child care and the task of meeting deadlines for office work. The fact that creches for child care are closed in lockdown are not accounted for by companies while giving task to its employees.

These are times when the lack of unionisation among IT workers become starker. The culture of individual bargaining with the authorities have been consciously encouraged by the MNCs to check the process of unionisation among IT workers. The system of 'performance' evaluation of the employees through bell curve and other means has been designed to keep the employees in constant competition with each other. Those who do not 'meet expectations' can be fired anytime according to the wish of the company.

On the 135th anniversary of the historic workers struggle of Chicago, when we remember the sacrifices of workers to achieve 8 hour work day, let us resolve to intensify the battle against today's regime that has given free hand to companies to deny the workers of their hard earned rights. The task of the day is to help IT workers to make their own union to fight for their own rights. It is time to reiterate that it is the labour of the workers in every sector of the economy, that produces profit for the companies. When anti-worker labour codes have been passed by the parliament, it is time that workers in every sector unionise and strengthen the battle against today's Company Raj. It is time to unite and fight back because today's regime do not spare the tax paying, white collar IT community. The strength of the workers are in unity and that must be forged at all cost.

Work from Home has only intensified the exploitation of IT employees while the companies are reaping super profits by drastically slashing down their expenses in the name of pandemic. IT employees are also forced to work more hours in the name of work from home. IT employees should fight to work for legally sanctioned eight hours and should refuse to work more. WFH is not a boon but a bane.

Long live the revolutionary legacy of May Day!

Long live the Unity of Workers!



Reclaim Workers' Rights - Uphold the fighting legacy!

- Atanu Chakravarty

India is now in the grip of an unprecedented health emergency. The countrywide second surge of coronavirus caught the Modi government napping and exposed the callous unpreparedness of Modi's mode of governance where insensitiveness, apathy and criminal nonchalance are the essential ingredients of this fascist regime. While the WHO cautioned India of an imminent second wave, and predicted it to be more virulent, the despot duopoly had their other priorities and set out for a royal hunt to Bengal with the sole aim of grabbing the state power in the assembly election. It was considered and repeatedly bandied over by the highest office of power that COVID had receded. Shamefully the Election Commission, the hand-maiden of Modi- Amit Shah, in an unprecedented move stretched the assembly elections to elongated eight phases, beginning from 27 March to 29

April, when COVID -2 had started taking its toll. A number of candidates of recognised political parties had fallen victim to Corona virus and the entire state dwindled into the grip of a devastating pandemic.

The second wave of the pandemic has again spelt out a gloom of unimaginable economic uncertainty. But before the advent of the second wave, industrial production got contracted by 3.6 per cent for the second straight month. The manufacturing and mining sector shrank by 3.7 per cent and 5.5 per cent respectively in February 2021 as revealed by the NSO data. It also explained that the growth in industrial production is fluctuating since March 2020.

But our policy makers never took much initiative in identifying and issuing correctives for the ills of our economy that had loomed large much before



the pandemic hit our country a year before. Stubbornly denying steady slowdown in the economy years before the COVID - 19, remained the hallmark of arrogance of the Modi government. Even in January 2021, much after the first phase of the pandemic ravaging all the contours of our economy, the Economic Survey placed by the CEA painted a rosy picture of Indian economic status and predicted a V - shaped recovery, coupled with a real GDP growth of 11 per cent in 2021-22. The budget went a step forward by refusing to acknowledge the loss of millions of jobs, both in formal and informal sectors, ignoring the plight and precarious predicament of the migrant workers. This gruesome spectacle not only shook the nation but had drawn international concern. The informal sector, which constitutes more than 92 per cent of the country's workforce, didn't find a mention in the Finance Minister's budget speech. And the most condemnable aspect is, even as the pandemic pushed innumerable faceless nameless informal workers' well below the poverty line, the budget mercilessly slashed all the scant subsidies it had offered before and curtailed all the hitherto rudimentary social security of these workers. The outlay of MGNREGA was drastically reduced by 34.5 per cent, and the overall budget subsidies stand curtailed by 43%! All the tall claims of economic rejuvenation proved to be false and the fact remained that the Q1 of FY 2020-21 faced an unimaginable contraction of 23.9 per cent followed by a downward slide of 7.5% in the Q2. It's highly intriguing that despite such an annual contraction, the sycophants within the corridors of power claimed that India's economic policies had helped the country significantly to reduce the impact of pandemic on economic growth!

The twin crisis of health and economy is telling upon the employment scenario of the country. CMIE data shows unemployment had reached 23.52%

by the end of April 2020, followed by 21.73% and 10.18% in May and June 2020. Throughout the second half of 2020 the rate of unemployment remained above 6.5 per cent, reaching a peak of 9 per cent in December 2020. Now, Modi has passed the buck on the state governments and different States are trying to combat pandemic by clamping partial lockdown, complete lockdown for a short phase, 144 restrictions, night curfew etc. The Prime Minister has announced to clamp total lockdown only as a last resort. But, the harsh reality is that the migrant workers have lost total trust and faith upon the Union government, the Indian State, and also on the state governments and are returning in thousands to their native places. The unemployment rates have begun to rise again, and for the week ending April 18, 2021, CMIE recorded the unemployment rate at 7.4%! It is generally believed that in terms of secured employment, salaried employees reside in the safest territory. But, the pandemic has shattered this belief. CMIE report shows that the biggest loss of employment in 2020-21 was inflicted upon the salaried people - their job loss was to the tune of 9.8 million. CMIE report also suggests that the present number may swell over to 120 million in job losses, which amounts to 30 per cent of the total population employed across all sectors. Jobs already lost during the first wave have no hope of getting recovered in days to come, and the very idea of a decent job appears a chimera.

India is all set for precarious employment, sans social security and absolutely low wages. Huge army of unemployed will depress the real wages in the future. As of now, reverse migration from urban to rural areas has increased to a great extent. Pandemic is now fast spreading to the villages too, posing a great challenge to the already dwindling health system. Reverse migration is indicative of job losses in urban areas, both among salaried and

non-salaried employees. During the first phase of pandemic, MGNREGA was the last straw to grab at for the vast section of rural population who lost their livelihood. A report of Indian Express revealed that in the FY 2020- 21 more than 11 crore people registered their names under this project and within a span of one year, the number jumped to 41.78% of our country's population! This is the highest spike in the number of job seekers since the commencement of this project way back in 2006-07. If the second surge spreads fast to the villages, the MGNREGA project may suffer immensely, adding severe economic crisis in the rural areas.

The pandemic has also dealt a cruel blow on the vast vulnerable, marginal workforce across the globe, and the degree of the damage is unevenly distributed. Growing income and wealth inequalities is one of the biggest concerns for economic recovery. While the downtrodden, teeming millions were crushed, losing income and livelihood, the fortunes of big corporations and the richest swelled continuously, both in India and across the globe. The list of Indian Dollar Billionaires jumped from 102 to 140 during one year alone, as per the latest report of Forbes. 140 individuals had 22.7% of our GDP of \$ 2.62 trillion! Their combined wealth nearly doubled to \$ 596 billion, up by 90.4% in a year when the country's GDP contracted by 7.7%. It is worth mentioning that two out of 10 Indian plutocrats grabbed their ill-gotten wealth from the healthcare industry during the pandemic, when an overwhelming segment of our population was ravaged by COVID - 19.

Few weeks before ILO published "Global Wage Report, 2020- 21- Wages and Minimum Wages in the Time of COVID - 19". In that report it has been revealed that Indians are among the most overworked workers globally while earning the lowest minimum statutory wage in Asia - Pacific region, barring Bangladesh. In this regard India stands fifth, only Gambia -- Mongolia - Maldives and Qatar have longer working hours than India, the report mentions.

The sheen of Modi's 'development ' plank has torn asunder. The entire nation, the world is witnessing that numerous COVID patients are dying for want of oxygen! The crematoria are seen dotted with an unending queue of corpses. India is gasping for oxygen, and Piyush Goyal, another cabinet minister remaining an unabashed Sanghi is advising Indians to 'breathe wisely'! The utter bankruptcy of Indian health system has exposed its abject failure. Direct cash benefit transfer to the citizens who are below the poverty line, free and universal inoculation to all, free ration, enforcing the employers to protect the wages of

workers' and prohibiting retrenchment at this time of crisis, free availability of all the Covid related medicines, providing PPE as public good are the immediate steps the central government should undertake immediately.

Historic May Day is approaching. On 1 May, 1886, hundreds of thousands of North American workers were mobilised to strike for the eight - hour work day. Chicago was then a key centre of working class organisations, the heart of the left wing of the labour movement with International Working People's Association in the lead. As was to be expected, the working class movement had to face the worst opposition of the capitalist class backed by the police, infamous for their brutality. Four innocent men were executed after being falsely implicated. Among them were August Spies and Albert Parsons, whose only 'crime' was that they were radical labour militants, fighting relentlessly for the rights of workers including the eight hour workday.

The Modi government has forcefully snatched away all the rights Indian working class achieved in the course of their century-long protracted militant movements. The government as an employer denies to recognise more than a million persons engaged in the forefront of delivering essential social services as regular workers. Anganwadi workers, para teachers, the ASHA and Mid-Day meal workers are denied employees' rights. Now, we could again remind them of the ' eight hour song' that used to be sung in 1880's Chicago, whose last lines go something like this :-

"We want to feel the sunshine, we want to smell the flowers;

**We're sure that God has willed it,
and we mean to have eight hours.**

**We're summoning our forces from Shipyard,
shop and mill;**

**eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and
eight hours for what we will. " ■■■**



The Political Economy of Banking Failure and the Design of Selling Out of PSBs Under Modi Regime

-Saurabh Naruka



As millions of the people in the country are battling for life every day in the second wave of Covid-19 upsurge, the NITI Ayog and the Finance Ministry are finalising plans to privatise selected Public Sector Banks (PSBs). This comes as part of the 1.75 lakh crore disinvestment plan for the 2022 financial year. Disinvestment or sell out of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), that the country had built over the years since independence, is the most important marker of the disastrous Modinomics. After several PSUs being put up for sale, now it is the turn of the Public Sector Banks to be sold out. The merger of several PSBs as we have seen since 2014 were the background work done for privatising them.

Undoing Nationalisation of Banks - Modi Regime's Banking Policy

Modern Indian banking sector, as evolved during colonial period, was largely in the form of badly unregulated private banks which used to get busted too often, leading to loss of savings of ordinary Indians. In order to safeguard people's money from failing private banks and to provide bulwark to savings of ordinary citizens, 14 banks were nationalized after independence in 1969. To give further boost to expansion of banking,

especially in rural areas, six more banks were nationalized in 1980. After merger of two PSBs the number of total PSBs in India stood at 19 for a long time.

Nationalisation of banks was a major policy decision in India that helped ordinary citizens of the country to rely on the banking institution. It made banking system accessible in every region of the country. People's hard-earned money became safer with the assurance of government's protection. The number of total branches of scheduled banks in the country increased from 8,187 in 1969 to 59,752 in 1990. Among these, rural branches increased from 17.6% in 1969 to 58.2% in 1990. The number of branches kept on increasing even after policies of liberalisation were adopted in 1990s. As on March 2015, India had 1,20,000 bank branches in the country with considerably proportional distribution in rural, semi-urban and urban areas.

Nationalization also helped in priority sector lending by banks to sectors like agriculture, education and small and medium enterprises. The rapid expansion of the banking system led to resource mobilization by banks which, in turn, contributed to higher savings rate. The Credit-GDP

ratio of banks also witnessed a sharp rise from single digit at the time of nationalization to more than 50 percent in decades of 2010s. The policy of No-Frills account, 90 % of which were opened by public sector banks from 2005 to 2012, made banking system accessible to small depositors. 139 million No-Frills account were opened in the above mentioned period. The total combined profits of PSBs for FY 2013-14, just before Modi government assumed power, was to the tune of Rs 37,393 Crore. The backbone of these profit making PSBs have been systematically broken since then, by the Modi Regime. And these banks are now on the verge of being sold out to private hands.

The Why and How of Banking Disaster under Modi Regime

‘Modi hai to mumkin hai’ (the impossible is possible if Modi is there) was the flagship slogan of the BJP’s 2019 election campaign. Pushing profit making PSBs into losses is probably one of the most tragic implications of the slogan.

From its very inception, the Modi government has been preparing grounds for justifying mergers and eventual privatisation of PSBs in the name of credit quality review. As has been mentioned earlier, the public sector banks were reporting good profits during FY 2013-14 when BJP govt assumed power. The gross Non Performing Assets (henceforth NPAs) of PSBs were at Rs 2.19 lakh Crore (only 4.35% of Gross Credit) in June 2014. NPAs are by definition assets or loans, on which the repayment of installments have remained due for 90 days or more. After Modi Govt assumed power in 2014, the NPAs jumped to 8.97 lakh Crore (14.5% of Gross Credit) in March 2018. While one of the reason for it may be the continuous decline in growth rate of Indian economy due to faulty macro-economic policies such as demonetisation, GST and reduction of fiscal space for government spending. The combined effect of all these policies has resulted in reduced growth numbers, huge job loss, increasing economic inequality, and falling aggregate demand. Under this economic circumstance, what was once a good financial asset may have turned into non performing due to inability of an ordinary borrower to repay the credit.

The inability of an ordinary borrower is only a small part of the story of piling NPAs. The main culprit in the story are the big borrowers. According to data obtained from RBI in 2019, India’s top 30 defaulters account for a third of the total NPAs in the banking sector.

Due to the increasing NPAs, PSBs had reported huge loss in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 financial years. PSBs had in fact achieved an aggregate operating

profit of Rs 1,55,603 crore and Rs 1,53,871 crore in 2017-18 and 2018-19 respectively. However, they had to make aggregate provisions for NPAs and other contingencies of Rs 2,40,973 crore and Rs 2,35,623 crore in 2018 and 2019 respectively. This resulted in aggregate net losses of Rs 85,370 crore and Rs 81,752 crore in 2017-18 and 2018-19 (The Economic Times, December 9, 2019). The figures are no different for the FY ending on March 31, 2020, just around the time of Covid Lockdown. The combined operating profits of PSBs for the year in fact increased to Rs 1,74,390 Crore and it was only after making provision for NPAs and contingencies of Rs 2,00,405 Crore that PSBs had posted a combined loss of Rs 26,015 Crore (Publications, RBI, December 29, 2020).

It is thus amply clear that the PSBs that are showing operational profits, are facing losses because of sky rocketing NPAs. Now the question arises as to what has the Modi government done to address the NPA crisis of banks? Has it made corporate borrowers accountable for the rising NPAs in banks? Has it invoked legal provisions to ensure that the corporates stop looting public banks by not paying back their huge loans? The answer is an absolute NO. The Modi government has continued to ensure credit flow from public banks to corporations despite the emerging banking crisis. Like all other economic policies of the Modi government, its banking policy has also been driven by the intention of ensuring profit to corporates by diverting earnings of ordinary people to their accounts. And now, the crisis created by the pro-corporate policy regime is being used as a justification to merge and sell out Public Sector Banks.

The pro-corporate policies of the Modi government is solely to be blamed for the NPA crisis. Shifting the blame of banking crisis to the functioning of PSBs themselves is a mischief very cleverly done by pro-corporate economists and political dispensations.

We must remember that it is the PSBs which fulfill their corporate social responsibilities to the country such as financial inclusion of the most marginalised and priority sector lending to agriculture, education and small enterprises. We need our banks to be a part of the project of financial inclusion and upward mobility of the marginalised. The private banks are solely driven by profit motive. They have no accountability whatsoever for those who remain excluded in a market driven economy. We can not let our Public Sector Banks, that have played undeniable role in nation building for so long, to get sold out just because the Modi regime wants to satisfy few of its crony corporate friends. ■■■

Condemn the police killing of 5 power plant workers in Bangladesh

-V. Arun Kumar



Protest organised in front of Raju Memorial Sculpture in Dhaka against massacre of workers by police in Banshkhali.

On April 17, 2021, five workers were killed and more than 50 injured when police in Banshkhali, southeast of Bangladesh opened fire on a protest by thousands of contract workers of a coal-based power plant. The workers were holding a protest demanding payment of unpaid wages, better working condition and reduced work hours during the month of Ramzan.

The under-construction 1,320-megawatt power plant, a joint project between S Alam group and China's SEPCOIII Electric Power Construction was announced in 2016. According to environmental groups and local people, the power plant was built without public consultation and does not comply to environmental impact standards.

Despite the protests from local population demanding proper public consultation, the Bangladeshi government allowed the construction of power plant to go ahead. In 2016, police opened fire at protest by locals against the acquiring the land for the power plant project. Four villagers were killed in this police firing.

The Left Democratic Alliance (LDA) and trade union groups protesting against the police killing demanded a proper investigation into the incident, arrest of those responsible for the killings. The organizations also demanded financial compensation equal to lifetime income to the families of the victims, and free and proper

treatment for those who are injured.

The working class of Bangladesh continue to suffer under the impact of government's neoliberal offensive. Low and unpaid wages, poor working conditions, union busting and discrimination are rampant despite assurance of improvement by the government after the Rana Plaza clothing factory collapse in 2013. More than 1,000 workers were killed when eight story building housing various garment manufacturing units collapsed. Just prior to the Rana Plaza disaster, the Tazreen Fashions factory fire resulted in the deaths of over 100 workers.

The use of state violence against union activities and workers protests have long been a tool for Bangladeshi government to suppress the demands of the working class. Last year, during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of garment workers across the country came to streets demanding the payment of unpaid wages. The government refused to hear their demand and instead unleashed police violence against the workers in an attempt to break the protest. A much larger protest in January 2019 by garment workers demanding wage hike faced similar response from the state. Protesters were assaulted, arrested and haunted by state authorities, while the industries dismissed more 7000 workers from their jobs for demanding their rights. ■■■

WFTU General Secretary George Mavrikos

Personal Message To WFTU Affiliates And Friends In India

World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)

www.wftucentral.org

Athens 26.42021

To our comrades, our brothers and sisters in India

Dear comrades

The devastating news that daily we read about India are shocking beyond any human imagination

We are in so much and deep pain to share the news with all of you and your families your beloved ones and all our comrades.

Life has become so uncertain and the responsibilities lays in the hands of the capitalist government of India

that has been proved totally incapable to deal early with the pandemic and protect the people by taking appropriate sanitary measures and provide with full medical care to all citizens.

Once more the King has been proved to be naked.

In all capitalist countries the pandemic of the corona virus came to confirm once again that capitalism can give nothing positive to the Peoples and the young generations.

The only thing it gives to workers, the poor peasants and the ordinary people is pain, misery, exploitation and social injustice.

We have no other way but the path of struggles until the overthrow of this barbaric system.

The WFTU family in the face of this dangerous situation in India, Mexico, Brazil and around the world,

in every corner of the globe, is intensifying its struggle for free public health for all, for safe and free vaccines for all and, at the same time, calls the workers and the people not to stop the class struggle until the abolition of capitalist slavery.

Please protect yourselves your families and your members.

We are with you on this fight, stay strong and healthy.

Until we meet again, receive my personal cordial thoughts, the wishes of all WFTU Leadership and staff from Athens.

George Mavrikos

WFTU General Secretary



REPORTS

Steel Workers Gear up for One Day Strike

-Shubhendu Sen



The stage is all set for one day strike in all units of SAIL (Steel Authority of India Ltd) on 6th May 2021 on the demand of pay revision. All the unions affiliated to central trade unions, namely CITU, AITUC, HMS and AICCTU have already served strike notices to the management. Notices have been served in mines also. So far as INTUC is concerned, it has not served strike notices in steel plants in Bokaro, Bhilai and Durgapur, but has served the notice in Rourkela, Vishakhapatnam and Alloy Steel Plant, Chandrapur. The main demand is pay revision which is pending since 2017. Some non-NJCS (non-recognized) unions have also served strike notices and the workers' mood is clearly in favour of the strike. All the unions

affiliated to AICCTU operating in Bokaro, Bhilai and Raurkela have served strike notices and are fully ready for the strike on 6th of May.

BMS is the only exception which has served a separate notice for one day strike on 3rd May, obviously to subvert the 6th May strike. In Raurkela, a few non- NJCS unions have rallied behind BMS. It goes without saying that all the left trade unions including AICCTU are firm on making 6th may strike a grand success.

It should be noted here that in BSL (Bokaro) two local unions took initiative to raise the issue and gave a call of strike that was to be held on 13-14th April. A few non-NJCS unions, including our union, supported the same. But considering

the question of broader workers' unity and some other circumstantial factors, they have decided to defer their date and synchronized it with the call for 6th May.

As we are aware, the last pay revision in steel sector took place in the year 2012 for a period of 5 years. So, the demand for next pay revision was in the air since 2017 itself. The management was not at all interested for the same and started creating confusions and putting obstructions. On the one hand, they insisted for extending the period for upcoming pay revision from 5 years to 10 years. They were also successful in dividing the trade unions on this question. On the other hand, SAIL introduced an affordability clause, according to which earning profit for three consecutive years by the company was made a pre-condition for any wage revision. But even after fulfilling this condition, it is obstructing the smooth process of pay revision under some false pleas. Unions are willing for a 5 years wage agreement, 15% minimum guarantee benefit and 35% perk. They are demanding payment of total benefits in one go and 9% contribution by the management in pension fund. On all these questions, the management has adopted a very rigid position.

As a result, the NJCS (National Joint Committee for Steel) meeting held on 23rd of April failed. In short, let alone discharging its corporate social responsibility, SAIL is not even willing to discharge its responsibility towards its own

workers and employees. In such a situation, the call for strike is very much valid and justified because it is nothing but a logical culmination of the entire process.

The workers mood can be assessed from the fact that a good number of new and predominantly young permanent workers of Bhilai Steel Plant spontaneously (i.e. not under the direct or indirect guidance of any trade unions) went on a lightning strike on the night of 23rd April to express their dissatisfaction over the failure of NJCS meet. Their demand included Rs. 50,000 Corona insurance coverage for every worker and guaranteed employment to the dependent, in case of death of any employee due to the pandemic. However, their main demand is related to revision of pay structure. Altogether the 5 plants including the URM, BRM, Blast Furnace 8 etc., remained completely shut down. A few more plants were also partially affected during the first spontaneous strike. This is a second such spontaneous strike in the month of April there. The first one was on 3rd April. Even the workers of mines organized such spontaneous strike on 6th of April.

All these developments clearly show that the steel workers in the country are in a mood of restlessness and a new phase of their resistance struggles against injustice by the management has already begun. AICCTU must get prepared to play its role during this phase. ■■■

Book Release

Memoirs of Revolutionary Trade Unionism and A Retirement at Ordnance Factory Trichy, Tamil Nadu

-Desikan

Books on defence civilian employees' trade union movement, defence policies and on Indian American military relations were released in a function at Trichy on 28 April on the eve of retirement of Comrade Azhageswaran, a Marxist - Leninist thinker, emerged from the ranks of working class in defence sector. He was also a renowned trade union leader of ordnance factory, Trichirappalli, for more than 25 years. He was the president of Ordnance

factory employees' Union, affiliated to AIDEF, but represented a trend of revolutionary trade unionism in defence employees' movement. In his stewardship, ordnance factory employees' Union registered many victories against the onslaught of the management.

Comrade. Azhageswaran has written and published total of 9 books in Tamil on government's defence policies, critic of defence production system and on defence

civilian employees trade union movement, etc., and 3 books were released on that day.

The meeting was addressed by All India president of AICCTU Com.Shankar, Com. Balasundaram, CCM of CPI ML, Com. Desikan state GS of AICCTU along with unit level leaders belonging to various unions.

Com.Shankar in his address said that the Modi led BJP government is privatising defence factories under the plea of corporatisation. But, the real aim is to turn the country into a death merchant and to build a military - industrial complex in the country through privatisation. In such a context, we need a militant and revolutionary orientation to the trade union movement in the defence sector. He called upon the defence working class to rise to the occasion and to fight out Modi's fascist intentions by building a powerful defense workers movement with alternative approach, perspective and orientation.

Involving family members in the workers' struggle will provide a social dimension which will be key element in workers' struggles. We are here sharing our experiences on a successful TU stories. But the Modi govt bringing legislations to abolish TUs itself. In such a situation workers, worker vanguards and TUs find out ways to protect TU right itself, com Balasundaram remarked.

Com Desikan recalled the activities of the Defence Contract Labour union, affiliated to AICCTU and his days as its president. He said that minimum social security benefits were ensured at that time because of the involvement and support of the permanent employees in addition to the struggles of contract employees.

Com Azhageshwaran explained the militant

struggles inspired by revolutionary ideas that secured several benefits to OFT employees, including no disparity in OT till now, halt to onslaughts of the management for decades and also mass of workers involvement achieved through the practice of democratic functioning.

His book on defence civilian employees' trade union movement dealt with various aspects of trade union practice in Ordnance factories which included effective use of bipartite and tripartite negotiating mechanism, joint consultative machinery, works committee, also the ways and means of ensuring wider participation of workers in struggles, in grooming trade union activists so on and so forth.

Activists of Ordnance factory employees' Union recalled their association with AICCTU during its formation as a revolutionary trade union centre. They said that its guiding principles inspired the orientation for struggles of the rights of defence civilian employees.

Speakers at the function felt that when the Central government is pursuing a policy of privatising Ordnance factories in the guise of corporatization and when employment of its 80,000 employees are at stake, Com. Azhageshwaran's writings and his trade union experience will be a torch bearer to thwart Government's design and for advancement of trade union movement. Speakers also appreciated his valuable contribution to the trade union movement and wished him to carry forward his social work even after his retirement.

It turned out to be a book release function and also a discussion on revolutionary or alternative trade unionism. ■■■

Jute Industry:

Raging Crisis, Roaring Profits and Plight of Workers

-Atanu Chakravarty

When the pandemic is raging the state with all ferocity, when health system is collapsing fast, the mill owners are closing the jute mills one after another in West Bengal causing severe resentment among workers and throwing thousands and thousands of workers' out of employment.

8 jute mills have been closed so far within a

short span on the pretext of raw jute crisis. Jute industry, one of the pillars of state economy, is highly labour intensive which are run by a section of jute traders who have taken the mills on lease from some other trader / broker for a certain period of time, and their credentials are even unknown to the state labour department.

The jute mill owners have attributed raw jute

crisis and extremely high price of raw jute to the supply side crunch. They either curtail shifts from three to one or closing the mills each passing day. It is the task of the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) to look after the supply - demand side of raw jute, to take steps against hoarders- speculators who create artificial crisis only to increase the price of the raw jute and do profiteering at the time of crisis. On the other, jute owners are placing a number of anti-workers demands, like reducing shifts and workforce, deferring statutory payment (gratuity, STL), increasing workload, engaging more and more contract, casual, informal workers, et al.

The united forum of 21 Jute workers' unions operating in the state, including Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Forum (BCMF), affiliated to

AICCTU, has submitted a joint memorandum to the Labour minister of the state, Central Textile minister, Central Labour Commissioner and the Jute Commissioner to take urgent steps to reopen the closed mills, ensure raw jute supply and to put an end to this ongoing profiteering and import raw jute from Bangladesh.

BCMF has also written a letter to the Director cum Commissioner of ESIC to initiate vaccination of all employees and their families in their workplace and workers' quarters immediately, to enforce SOP in all the jute mills, conduct awareness campaign at this time of grave crisis. ■■■



Obituary

Comrade Bhalchandra Kerkar

Comrade Bhalchandra Kerkar is no more. He fell to Covid19 on 25 April morning in a Pune hospital. We have lost a long-standing well-wisher and close friend of the AICCTU and CPI-ML, a senior leader of LIC employees' movement and member of the Central Committee of Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) of Maharashtra.

He took keen interest in organising a whole range of informal sector workers. He was also founding president of Domestic workers' union in Pune.

He used to closely follow the advances, and setbacks, of the communist movement internationally.

Red Salute to Comrade Kerkar.

Comrade Achintya Sinha

Comrade Achintya Sinha - Senior Member of the All India Secretariat of AIUTUC and a veteran trade union leader, breathed his last at Calcutta on 16 April 2021 at the age of 75 years due to multiple organ failure being infected by Covid19. He was associated for a long period in the trade union movement of the various sections of the working people across the country. His demise is a big loss to the TU movement of country.

AICCTU conveys its deepest condolences.

Red salute to Com. Achintya Sinha!





MAY DAY 2021

WORKER-FARMER UNITY ZINDABAD!



Workers Resistance

Published by

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