Erosion of Women’s Independence and Autonomy in Lockdown

SUCHETA DE

The successive lockdowns in India have caused massive sufferings for the lives and livelihood of India’s working class and the poor. As the government continues to fail in controlling the pandemic and saving lives, ill planned lockdowns, without caring for the livelihood, food security and medical attention for vast majority of Indians, are being imposed time and again. The lockdown has differential impact for different sections of the society. It has been implemented in such a way that it has increased economic inequality and pushed more people down below poverty line. It has further dehumanised the dalits and marginalised sections of the populace. Targeting the Muslims have also increased in the garb of lockdown. And women have been systematically pushed behind. In the present article, we will discuss about the specific impact of the lockdown on women's employment and autonomy.

Gender inequality and marginalisation of women and other oppressed genders is a crude reality of our patriarchal and male chauvinist society. Subjugation of women is a social norm that has been upheld and further bolstered under the present regime. Modi led BJP government is attempting to institutionalise Manuuvad norms for our women in the society by enacting various legislations. Historically, the weapons of women's oppression have been non-recognition of their labour, denial of equal opportunity for women to participate in economically remunerative activities, limiting them in domestic sphere and attack on their right to make decisions for their own lives. The lockdown has intensified all the tools of oppression on women.

Increased Domestic Work and Abuse in Lockdown:

Along with the all-encompassing economic distress in lockdown, power dynamics at home has created added burden for the women members of the family due to increased hours of home stay for all. Several reports have pointed out manifold increase in domestic violence and abuse against women all over the world as well as in India.

Increase in home stay hours have also meant increase in the burden of domestic work and care labour. Given the socially accepted gendered role of women inside houses, the burden of increased domestic work has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of women. CMIE’s data for the period of lockdown in 2020 shows that though average hours spent on domestic work have increased for men as compared to pre-lockdown period, but the increase in average hours spent on unpaid domestic work for women is much higher than that of men. If percentage of men spending 0.5 to 4 hours on domestic work has increased in lockdown, percentage of men spending 0 hours in domestic
work in lockdown has also increased. Not working for running home is not an option for women, while men have the prerogative to avoid domestic work. The impact of the increased burden on women has to be seen with the gendered pattern of unemployment and erosion of economic independence as well as autonomy for women due to lockdown.

**Livelihood and Increased Gender Gap**

Before going into the specific impact of the lockdown on women, it must be remembered that India has been facing consistent increase in overall unemployment and gender gap in employment for last few years, especially since 2014. Data from Periodic Labour Force Survey had shown that unemployment rate in India had reached a 45 years peak in 2017. The PLFS data set also shows 71% of Indian men aged above 15 years are a part of the workforce and only 23% women are engaged as workforce.

The gender gap in workforce participation can be understood from the increasing gender gap in labour force participation rate over last few years. Labour force participation rate shows the proportion of working age population willing to take work. Studies have shown that in India although gender gap in levels of education attained had decreased over the years from 2004-05 to 2017-18, the same in labour force participation rate has increased. Female labour force participation rate in India has decreased from 34% in 2006 to 24.8% in 2020 (Business Standard, March 6, 2020). The increasing gender gap in availability of work (Labour Force Participation Rate) shows how women are being increasingly burdened under social norms and unpaid domestic work. It is not surprising at a time when a political party that believes in the ideology of confining women in domestic sphere is running the government. We have time and again heard BJP leaders throwing anti- women remarks and upholding the ideology of women's subjugation. The orthodox and reactionary Manuvad ideology of the ruling party has reflected in the actual outcome of erosion of women's participation in economically rewarding activities over the years.

When the situation at the employment front was already very grim, the lockdown came as a bolt, destroying livelihood for millions of Indians. Based on CMIE-CPHS data, the State of Working India 2021 report by Azim Premji University has shown that around 100 million Indians lost jobs in the April-May 2020 Lockdown. Even after the lockdown was over, 15 million workers could not return to job even in late 2020.

The job loss that women faced due to lockdown was much higher than men. The State of Working India report by Azim Premji University on the year of Covid 19 Lockdown shows that 61% men were largely unaffected by Lockdown in terms of employment. Among women, the share is merely 19%. After lockdown 7% of the affected men could not recover from unemployment, but among women, the same number was a whopping 47%. This clearly indicates that the women are being made to shoulder major burden of unemployment.

The gendered social role that devalues women's labour has had clear impact on the disproportionate burden of adverse impacts of lockdown on women. Let us look at it more specifically.

Women constitute a major proportion of frontline workers like ASHA, Anganwadi, ANM, Mid Day Meal cooks, nurses and school teachers distributing ration, medical and other services. Their engagements in the most essential works make them more vulnerable to getting infected. But all these workers are not even accorded bare, minimum legal rights as ‘workers’. All the scheme workers are forced to work with petty honorarium. They are not recognised as workers and not provided the legal minimum wages or the benefits of social securities. Gender plays a major role in such blatant non-recognition of the labour of the scheme workers. Women, thus, by joining the workforce under various schemes, take an extra risk to attain economic independence, but their labour is devalued even in their workplace.

Other than essential works, women constitute major proportion of the labour force in hotel and hospitality businesses, wholesale and retail trade and in labour-intensive manufacturing sectors. Globally, these are the industries that were the hardest hit due to the lockdown (Kabeer, Razavi and Rodgers, 2021).

The gendered impact of the lockdown on unemployment and economic vulnerability is as clear as a crystal. In a country like India that has one of the largest gender gap in social and economic well being in the world, the disproportionate burden of the lockdown on women has to be made a political agenda for action. Until and unless the specific impact of the lockdown on women and marginalized genders are recognised by the government and policy makers, any attempt to recover from the lockdown shock is going to be futile. The present political dispensation sitting at the centre has no intention to respect women's existence as equal citizens. It is under their watch that attack on women's autonomy, educational and economic rights have been intensified. It is the workers' and women's movement that must recognise the task and intensify the battle for equal rights for women. The organised intervention of the scheme workers in raising their voice against injustice being meted out to them has been a source of inspiration for the worker’s movement. Intensifying the struggle against anti worker wage codes, formalisation of labour and gender inequality in labour market, thus remains a major task of the day.
The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Global Health Emergency from the novel coronavirus/COVID outbreak on January 21st, 2020. It was only declared a US national emergency on March 13th and, subsequently, billions of dollars in federal funding were promised to fight the disease’s spread. As of June 2021, there have been close to 35 million COVID cases and nearly 615,000 deaths in the U.S., the richest country in the world. COVID related deaths have fallen since January 2021 as millions of Americans have been vaccinated. This article will give a snapshot of how workers were affected, what measures were taken by the government, and who benefitted from the pandemic.

The Guardian newspaper’s project, ‘Lost on the Frontline’ that was released recently, documented 3600 healthcare workers in the U.S dying from March 2020 until April 2021. A key finding is that Asia/Pacific Islanders and black people accounted for nearly 50% of the healthcare worker deaths while accounting for 20% of the U.S. population. Nurses and support staff died in large numbers. 70% of the healthcare workers’ deaths occurred outside the big hospitals, largely, in nursing homes and elderly care facilities. There were widespread shortages of masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), lack of COVID testing and grossly inadequate safety regulations in place.

Immigrant workers, who are close to 23 million, represent 1 in 5 essential workers. These workers were on the frontlines during the COVID pandemic in sectors like medical, agriculture, food services, transportation and health care. 5 million workers who were ‘undocumented’ (they have been disparagingly called ‘illegal aliens’) risked their lives for the country. There are more than 2.5 million workers in the grocery and food industries. United Food and Commerical Workers Union (UFCW) represents 1.3 million workers in grocery stores, meat packing, food processing and other industries. More than 90,000 of these workers have been infected or exposed to the virus with close to 500 deaths. Researchers looked at death records from California Department of Public Health and estimated that during the pandemic there was relative excess mortality in certain professions in the working age group. When 2020 is compared with 2018 and 2019, mortality was extremely high in food/agriculture workers (39% increase), transportation workers (28% increase), and manufacturing sector workers (23 % increase). When they stratified the excess mortality based on race, Latinx workers had experienced 36% increase and Black workers had experienced 28% increase in mortality as compared to 18% increase among Asian workers and 6% in White workers. In all races, food/agriculture workers experienced the highest increase in mortality.

Union Benefits during the Pandemic

The U.S. has close to 160 million people in the workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 9.6 million people in U.S are self-employed. About 25 million people are in government jobs, which includes also the military. More than 120 million workers are in the private sector. The union membership rate in the public sector, excluding the military, is 34.8% vs 6.3% in the private sector. About 1 in 8 essential workers in food services and agriculture and 1 in 10 in healthcare were covered by a union contract. Between April and August 2020, COVID related safety complaints increased by 350% in workplaces per Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Workers represented by unions fared significantly better during the pandemic than non-union workers.
In the private sector, health care, social assistance, transport, warehouses, the job loss rate was lower in the year 2020 than in industries such as leisure and hospitality not represented by unions. International Long Shore Workers (ILWU) represents around 45,000 dockyard workers in the West coast. ILWU has a glorious history of showing solidarity with oppressed people around the world - its workers showed solidarity with Palestine by refusing to unload an Israeli ship in Oakland earlier this month. The union also takes care of its workers well, it negotiated for protective equipment and procedures with its employer Pacific Maritime Association (PMA). This resulted in significantly less morbidity and mortality to their workers. 94% of workers who had a union contract had access to health benefits from employers, compared to 68% of non-union workers per research published by the Economic Policy Institute. 90% of union workers were eligible for pay during sick time, compared to 73% of non-union workers.

**Pandemic Suffering Vs Profits**

Just before the pandemic hit in March 2020, 200,000 workers were filing for unemployment benefits in the U.S. The figure skyrocketed to 2.9 million workers filing for unemployment benefits on March 21, 2020. The unemployment rate jumped in April 2020 to 14.8% a level not seen since the 1930s. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, known as the CARES Act enacted by the U.S. Congress on March 27, 2020 released a $2.2 trillion coronavirus stimulus package. There was one-time $1,200 ‘stimulus’ check for most adults, with $500 more per child. In addition, $600 was added to state unemployment benefits. Combined state and federal assistance were instituted with the intent to enable Americans who lost jobs to have food, heat and electricity and pay rent. However, systemic racism and inequalities continued to plague the system during the pandemic. Only 7% Latinx (people from South and Central American ethnicity) workers received unemployment insurance (UI) although they accounted for 25% of the unemployed. Unemployment rate amongst Black workers has been 73% higher than white workers. Half a million black women and 3.5 million women in total, lost employment during the pandemic last year. Decades of neglect of government unemployment offices has led to inadequate and delayed response to workers’ needs. Even though, $ 9.5 billion was meant for agriculture sector, still a significant number of farm workers, who were undocumented, had no relief.

Due to ongoing hardships, even as COVID cases have fallen across the states, President Biden signed into a law, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 on March 11. This $1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package was passed with the goal of boosting the economy and providing help to ordinary Americans. The act includes $1,400 payments for most Americans as well as other assistance to struggling households. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has been tracking hardships faced by Americans and reports that 20 million adults have not had enough to eat and 10.5 million adults are unable to pay rent. Black and Latinx people were more likely than white people to report lack of adequate food to eat- 15 percent for Black adults and 17 percent for Latinx people, compared to 7 percent of white people.

The CARES act and American Rescue Plan Act have helped Americans to some extent from going hungry, however, benefits are not enough and there is inadequate infrastructure and safety net to take care of the poor and undocumented immigrants. While millions of Americans suffer from unemployment, the inability to pay rent and the lack of free and accessible health care, the collective wealth of American billionaires increased from $2.95 trillion to $4.56 trillion (between March 18, 2020, and April 12, 2021). Amazon founder Jeff Bezos’s wealth has increased to $161 billion while more than 20,000 Amazon workers were affected by COVID.

The late Richard Levins, scientist and Marxist, wrote an article in Monthly Review more than 20 years ago, titled “Is Capitalism a Disease?”. He talked about the poor state of public health care in a technologically advanced country. He also referred to the extremely profitable pharmaceutical industry in that article. The COVID pandemic laid bare everything he wrote from the unpreparedness of the U.S health care system to the massive profits it generated to the pharma companies. The National Institutes of Health, which is publicly funded, developed the technology that helped Pfizer and Moderna pharma companies to make the COVID vaccines. The U.S government has bought the vaccines from the companies to vaccinate the population free of charge resulting in huge profits to the companies. Pfizer reported that the vaccine brought in $3.5 billion in revenue in the first 3 months of 2021.

The COVID pandemic in the U.S is affecting millions of workers and has exposed the contradictions in the capitalist system and intensified the inequalities. The good news is that across the country support for labour unions at this time is extremely high. There have also been several demonstrations across states to highlight the housing crisis and cancel rent payments. Multinational demonstrations to end systemic racism and police brutality have erupted all over the country during the pandemic. While the US is far from any radical transformation in the ‘Belly of the Beast’, these struggles must provide the necessary revolutionary optimism.

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The Sinking Economy and The Zooming Wealth

SAURABH NARUKA

Latest data on Indian Economy released by the government shows that the economy has shrunk for the entire financial year of 2020-21. This is the first full year contraction of the economy in last four decades. While the pandemic and lockdown can be cited as a reason for the contraction, the fall is greater than similarly placed emerging economies in the world. This makes the contraction more worrisome. The Pandemic induced lockdown has certainly pushed the economy downwards, but the pro-corporate policies of the ruling regime has only worsened the situation. The economic burden of the lockdown is thrown on to the common people while relatively richer and corporate masters are favoured through policy measures.

The economy, as per the latest numbers, has contracted by 7.3% in the financial year 2020-21. If we take the economic data of 2020 for the BRICS countries into account, Indian economy contracted much more than other countries in the bloc - Brazil, Russia and China. IMF’s World Economic Outlook (WEO) released in April 2021 noted that the global economy contracted by 3.3 percent owing to the impact of the deadly pandemic in 2020 while Indian economy contracted by 8 percent. India performed much worse than what the world averaged during the pandemic year. Let us have a look at how India managed to perform one of the worst in the world in the Pandemic year.

Modi govt relied on stringent and ill planned lockdown as a measure to control the spread of Covid. The lockdown had its impact in collapsing the economy. But the declared motive to control the spread of the virus was never achieved due to the government’s failure to make necessary arrangements to expand health infrastructure. The vulnerable sections of the population were hit hardest by the lockdown. But the ruling regime absolutely failed in ensuring food security and economic relief to them. India ended up facing worst effects on both fronts - the economy shrank at a rapid pace while Covid spread too continued unabated.

Not Because of Pandemic Alone!

Indian economy was already facing a severe crisis in the preceding years of the pandemic. The Modi’s government policies of demonetisation and GST created a devastating impact. The Pandemic has only facilitated the devastation of the economy that was already sinking.

The economic growth for the FY 2019-20 (the year before the pandemic) was merely 4% while the downward trend began in 2016-17 itself, which was the year of demonetization. The growth rate of Indian economy fell from 8.3% to 6.5% in three preceding years itself, well before 2019-20 when it reached a record low of 4%.

The unemployment rate as per government data in 2018-19, two years before covid pandemic, was around 6%. This was the highest in the last 45 years. The value of Rupee continuously on a decline under Modi regime from Rs 59 against US dollar in 2014 to Rs 73 against US dollar now. Interestingly, export growth has also flattened during the same time defying all economic rationale. Under the Modi 1.0 regime, exports grew merely by 12.61% in contrast to a much higher growth number of 69% in the preceding five years.

The Modi government has only been busy fudging economic data and window dressing to make growth numbers impressive, rather than adopting sound policy measures to ensure economic boost and well-being of the citizens.

The 20 Lakh Crore Jumla

A 20 Lakh Crore relief package was announced with much fanfare by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in 2020 to deal with the crisis induced by the lockdown. It took five press conferences for Nirmala Sitharaman to present the package. While in reality, it was nothing but an eyewash as the real increase from pre-existing govt expenditure was less than 10% of the total package. Only a meagre amount was allocated for temporary cash transfers and for increased ration to people. Rest of the announcements were in the form of expansion of credit along with policy decisions to push through privatization. The whole approach became clear when the govt utilized the lockdown to push anti-worker labour codes, anti-farmer agricultural bills and enlisting PSUs and PSBs for eventual privatization. The failure of the much-hyped relief package of 2020 to handle the crisis emanated from lockdown was so obvious that not even an attempt was made for any such relief during Lockdown in 2021.

Demand Tanked, Stock Market Zoomed

Indian economy has traditionally been driven by private final consumption expenditure and household savings. With economy already shrinking before pandemic...
and lockdown only pushing it further down, what was needed was to tax the rich and spend on increasing public expenditure on welfare schemes and public employment programs, especially in rural areas, to maintain and boost aggregate demand. The government failed to do it and the economic performance worsened still.

The lockdown and the resultant loss of livelihood devastated the working class, daily wage earners, migrant labourers, contractual labourers, household workers and all of unorganised and self-employed workers. While the ordinary workers, farmers and toiling masses continue to suffer, the govt remained hell-bent on pushing through outright privatization, farm bills and labour codes. The message sent out to the ‘market’ was loud and clear. When the economy was, actually, in huge recession, BSE Sensex zoomed 66 percent in FY 2020-21, as if to celebrate the pain of ordinary Indians! This is when Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) study observed that 97 percent of Indians felt their situation to be much worse this year incomparable to any time before the pandemic.

Inflation too skyrocketed in May, 2021 making things further difficult for ordinary people. Retail inflation breached 6% limit. Food inflation also crossed 5%, especially with the increase of food oil prices. Price of petrol and diesel has already crossed Rs 100 per litre in many states. Modi govt has been milking petrol and diesel as a source of tax revenue while continuously reducing taxes on corporates. It is obvious when we look at the components of petrol price fixed by BPCL in Delhi as of June 16, 2021. It is amply clear that the tax burden is being imposed on people by the government. Similar is the case with the Diesel. The petrol pumps can easily be renamed as ‘Tax Vasuli Kendra’ (Tax Collection Centres) since ordinary Indians pay more for taxes on petrol and Diesel than their actual base price.

When Modi government came to power at the centre in 2014, the petrol was priced at Rs 71 and Diesel at around Rs 57 in Delhi. At that time, the crude oil basket of India was priced around $ 109/ barrel. Presently it is hovering only at around $ 67. When the price of crude oil tumbled down in 2020 due to lockdown world over, the Modi Govt did not pass on the price benefits to customers but increased the excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 13 and Rs 16 respectively and increased the pain and suffering of the common people, even amidst the pandemic.

Revival by Increasing Demand

The need of the hour is to revive the economy by boosting aggregate demand. This can only be done by increasing purchasing power of the people, by increasing public expenditure and investment and by slashing down exorbitant taxes on essentials like petrol, diesel and food prices. If the government is concerned about the plight of ordinary Indians, it should have taken steps to reduce income inequality and disparity by taxing the super-rich and allowing money to circulate in the hands of the common people. But the harsh reality is that even in year of pandemic, even when majority of Indians suffered loss of earnings and livelihood, the cronies of Modi government, like Adanis and Ambanis saw a spectacular increase in their wealth.
Sanitation Workers – The Fight for Dignity and Liberation

CLIFTON D’ ROZARIO

[This is an abridged version of a booklet on Sanitation Workers being brought out by AICCTU]

The Covid pandemic has brought to the fore the social realities of sanitation workers, while exposing the casteist, classist, opportunistic lip-service paid to them by the ruling dispensations. As the sanitation workers toil through the pandemic without any safety equipment and under inhuman working conditions, with hundreds succumbing to Covid, all the ruling dispensation had to offer was the tag of “corona warriors” and “frontline workers”. Faced with this situation, the municipal sanitation workers, across the country, are waging a heroic struggle, not just for wages, regularisation and safe working conditions, but, more importantly, for dignity and liberation.

Sanitation workforce is predominantly Dalit, pre-ordained by the caste system to perform these jobs generationally, structurally oppressed and deprived of social dignity, education, proper housing and the fundamental choice of opting for other occupations. This caste-based, hereditary, oppressive work that secures the health of residents of the country, is tasked to the oppressed Dalit communities, who are invariably denied proper wages, job security and social security benefits. Notably, a section of workers also belongs to minority communities as well.

Sanitation work is institutionalised caste:

Every morning, in every village, town and city around the country, even before the sun rises, this workforce, leave their homes to begin their daily compulsory sanitation work. Garbage, and dirt cannot be allowed to collect on the streets and pavements, septic tanks have to be emptied, manholes cleaned, toilets cleansed, since that would lead to health epidemics and thus, a serious crisis. Even the lockdowns did not bring any respite and workers were compelled to work every single day, without masks, gloves or PPE kits, and without even transportation to their work areas.

Babasaheb Ambedkar stated that: “Caste is not just a division of labour, but it is a division of labourers.” Sanitation workers are not merely individual members of this work force out of pure choice; but members, by birth, with inerasable identity and inter-generational continuity, forced into this work by the inexorable evil power of the Indian caste system.

Waste is identified with the people who handle them. Caste prejudices ensure widespread discrimination of workers employed in these jobs. The conditions of these workers best reveal the interplay of relations among genders, class and caste. Urbanisation and capitalism has not undermined caste-based occupations and discriminations but has intensified and varied its manifestations. The sewer worker or manual scavenger from the Dalit community has now become a part of the workforce for “housekeeping” still cleaning toilets in factories, offices, malls and even airports.

It becomes pertinent here to understand that the caste system and the concept of untouchability has manifested itself alongside neoliberalism and urbanisation through various forms of sanitation work. Given this reality, one of the most essential and radical steps in the struggle for justice for workers is the struggle against caste system – the annihilation of caste – as part of the practice of class struggle.

Forms of Sanitation Work

Sanitation work exists today in various forms. Manual scavenging, in its most primitive form, is the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning sceptic tanks, gutters and sewers, and is widely prevalent across India. Some of the worst offenders in perpetuating manual scavenging are, in fact, public agencies, like Indian Railways.

Most households that have toilets do not have connections to the sewerage lines since proper sewerage systems are not in place (According to the 2011 census, only 32.7% households were connected to sewers). This results in excreta being dumped into the open drains or use septic tanks (38.20 % of urban households) or open defecation, again giving rise to manual scavenging.

There are safai karamcharis working in sewerage systems, which has only increased with increase in urbanisation and the underground drainage (UGD) system. A wide range of objects clogs sewers on an everyday basis and the maintenance of the sewerage system involves the physical entry of safai karamcharis into the network of drains through manholes and cleaning human excreta with their bare hands, nothing but another form of manual scavenging.

Then, there are lakhs of Safai karamcharis employed for solid waste management by urban and
rural local bodies to sweep the streets, clean the drains, door to door collection of garbage, etc. Deprived of minimum wages and security of tenure, they are forced to constantly bend and push heavy pushcarts laden with rotten and smelling garbage.

In addition, sanitation workers are employed to clean toilets in individual households. They are also engaged in cleaning community dry latrines, industrial establishments, offices and various other public places. In these places, they are euphemistically called “housekeeping staff”.

In all its forms, the inescapable fact is that it is predominantly Dalit workers, under extremely precarious, undignified conditions, in violation of various protective labour statutes.

Fundamental Issues

Social Dignity of Sanitation Workers:

Sanitation workers continue to live under conditions of social isolation owing to their caste and caste-based occupation. Since this caste-based hereditary profession is seen as dirty, unclean and unhygienic, the workers and their families continue to face ostracisation and social immobility. Further, this affects their morale leading to inferiority complex and further segregation.

Owing to the insecure livelihood of sanitation workers and low wages, their social and economic conditions are extremely vulnerable. They do not have proper housing, are unable to provide proper education for their children, and are unable to access proper health services, caught in a vicious circle of poverty and social/economic disempowerment. In towns and cities, the Safai Karamcharis predominantly live in slums having minimal or no access to basic services such as toilets, water, roads and electricity.

This form of caste-based occupation further results in perpetuating caste inequalities and discrimination, and becomes a social practice rather than an occupation, trapping the community into this practice.

Eradication of Manual Scavenging

Eradication of manual scavenging has to start from delinking the profession of sanitation from the caste, i.e., the lowest strata of Dalits. Manual scavenging exists in the yawning gap between the amount of excreta produced by India’s enormous population and the country’s existing capacity for processing it sanitorily. If that gap is not closed, especially as the government strives to get more than half a billion people who did not previously use latrines to start using them, it will perpetuate the same old practices.

In November 2007, the Times of India carried a brief report titled “’Karmayogi’ swears by caste order.”, which reviewed the yet unreleased book, ‘Karmayog’ by the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in which he is quoted to have said: “At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their (Valmikis’) duty to work for the happiness of the entire society and the Gods; that they have to do this job bestowed upon them by Gods; and that this job of cleaning up should continue as an internal spiritual activity for centuries.”

These perverse ideas that continue to allow manual scavenging to take place, derive their ideological basis from Manu Smriti that is the guide book of Varna system and the inhuman discrimination based on caste. This can only be countered by working towards the annihilation of caste itself.

Conditions of service:

While manual scavengers, including those who clean dry latrines, septic tanks, soak pits, are “self-employed” and receive piece-rate for the work that they perform, most other sanitation workers, including those employed by the Panchayats and urban local bodies to carry out the job of sweeping, cleaning manholes and UGD, etc. are primarily employed through outsourcing or contractors and are denied even minimum wages and have no job, wage or social security. This is the case of the “housekeeping staff” employed in hospitals, MNCs, Malls, all offices, etc. There are permanent workers who work alongside them, but direct recruitment to vacant posts has been stopped since the 1990s when liberalisation was introduced in the country particularly banning recruitment into Group IV jobs as one of the conditionalities of the bail out loans extended by the IMF. Thus, contract and daily wage systems were introduced to this day.

The formalisation of the workforce and dilution, initially, of implementation of labour laws, and subsequent dilution of laws itself, meant that workers employed for sanitation work even in private sector. Thus, most “housekeeping” staff are employed on contract basis. Wage is one major issue for sanitation workers in the country employed under contractor or on daily wage basis.

One of the persistent demands of this workforce is their regularisation by the abolition of the contract/daily-wage system and their absorption into the regular workforce. Another essential aspect to this work is the use of retrograde standards to determine the ratio of sanitation workers to the population, and it is necessary to ensure that there are adequate number of workers for the population.

Farce of Swacch Bharat:

Inescapably in our country, how we think of waste, garbage, excreta, sewage, etc. is grounded in social relations of caste and
the attitudes about ritual purity. Ideas and practice of caste is a dominant aspect in understanding the State's approach to waste management and society's attitude towards the workers employed for this work. The most recent example of this is the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan which exposes the deeply entrenched – deeply casteist – approach to waste/garbage/sewage management and manual scavenging. It focusses on construction of new toilets without any strategy about how they are to be cleared. The construction of these toilets is seldom linked to sewage, drainage and water facilities and solid waste management practices. There has been little or no investment on procuring mechanized sludge and pump machines for physical removal of excreta. Manual scavenging is being institutionalised.

Swachcha Bharat is only a glamour which does not address basic issues. Constructing toilets is not just linked with changing the behaviour of the people but it is linked more and more with the caste based discrimination and economic inequality in the society. Without addressing these two basic issues, there cannot be any Bharat that is Swachch.

No sanitation campaign in India can be successful unless it addressed the issue of caste and untouchability. Any mission that wishes to make an impact in terms of cleanliness and sanitation should fight against the most retrograde idea of pollution and purity, which is the hallmark of the Hindu caste structure.

Resistance:

Howsoever vicious the oppression of these workers is, and historically has been, there have also been battles for rights. In fact, these struggles reflect consistency in some of the demands of workers. Looking back, one recalls the valiant struggles of sanitation workers of Calcutta Corporation in 1920s, when they organised themselves under the banner of the All Bengal Scavengers Union and the Workers' and Peasants Party demanding union recognition, increased wages, housing and latrines, free medicine and treatment, end to corruption of the mafia that controlled their jobs, 15 days of annual casual leave, and paid leave for a month per year. Around the same time the scavengers of Madras Corporation struck work in 1924 demanding increase of wages and supply of 4 measures of rice.

These struggles still continue in newer conditions. AICCTU has waged successful struggles on the issue, notably of abolition of contract system in Karnataka and on the issues of better wages, dignity of labour and better and humane conditions of work across dozens of urban local bodies in Bihar, in Pune Municipal Corporation, apart from other states. AICCTU led unions have been able to involve sanitation and municipal workers in other socio-political and cultural activities too.

However, in today's context these struggles have to be taken up on all levels, especially on the question of dignity and right to other occupations. Unless Dalits and other oppressed communities have access to other jobs, the grip of caste on these sectors will not lessen, the grip of caste related indignities on their lives will not go away.

As a revolutionary organisation, we seek to build a powerful political movement of sanitation workers against Manuvadi Fascism aimed at eradication of manual scavenging and at assertion of their political identity in addition to its nature of a vibrant trade union movement. We Demand:

- Eradicate Manual Scavenging!
- Emancipation of Dalits and Eradication of Caste-Based Discrimination!
- Employ New Generation of Dalit community in Employment other than Sanitation!
- Abolition of contract system and regularisation of all contract workers
- Ensuring regular payment of wages, issuance of wage slips, declaration of weekly off and national/festival holidays, provision of ESI/PF benefits, provision of toilets and drinking water facilities, etc. to workers.
- Increasing minimum wages to Rs. 28,000/–.
- Provision of protective and safety gear. Implements utilized in the cleaning of streets and garbage removal must be upgraded. Push trolleys shall be motorised and the mechanized methods of sweeping be introduced.
- Ensuring complete mechanical cleaning of sewer tanks, soak pits, manholes, sewer systems, etc.
The lethal second wave of COVID has devastated the country’s job market to unimaginable proportions. Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has published data exposing the horrific reality of joblessness during the ongoing pandemic and recorded a loss of one crore employment, one of the steepest falls during the last four months!

But it would be wrong to attribute this present employment crisis entirely to COVID situation. NSSO data had revealed that unemployment rate reached a 45 years peak at 6.1 percent in 2017-18. This was the first survey on employment conducted by a government agency after the disastrous demonetisation was implemented by Modi government. Demonetisation hugely shattered the informal economy of the country. Millions of jobs were lost. It brought the economy to a grinding halt. Renowned economist Jean Dreze commented that demonetisation was like firing bullet on the tyre of a speeding car! After demonetisation, GST was implemented and thus the economy entered a vicious cycle of stagflation. The lockdown has only exacerbated this crisis.

Joblessness and hunger spread faster than the virus in the first phase of the lockdown. Lakhs of jobs lost in the first phase never appeared again. Those who were re-employed, found themselves in more precarious situation than before. The informalisation of jobs was huge and unprecedented. To quote the The State of Working India Report by Azim Premji University, “workers came back into more precarious and informal employment. Nearly, half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work, either as self-employed (30%) , casual wage (10%) or informal salaried (9%) workers between 2019 - 2020.” And then came the second wave and lockdown of 2021. Those left in salaried employment faced the blow on their livelihood harder than last year. CMIE observes, “when the impact of second wave was felt, around 28.4 lakh salaried jobs were lost in the rural areas and 5.6 lakhs in cities.”

There has been a significant shift of workforce to agriculture due to the stress produced by the ill planned lockdown. Reports reveal an increase of nine million jobs in agriculture after the first lockdown was imposed. This huge shift from non-farm to the farm sector is certainly expected to produce unimaginable stress on the already crisis ridden Indian agriculture.

Among non-farm sectors, MSMEs that provided over 11 crore employment and contributed a third of India’s GDP were worst affected, according to a recent article published in Economic and Political Weekly. In May 2020, production dropped drastically from an average of 75 percent of capacity to just 13 percent in the sector. On an average, these firms retained only 44 percent of their workforce in the lockdown, and 69 percent of firms reported inability to survive longer than three months (Impact of COVID - 19 on MSME’s, Udayan Rathore and Shantanu Khanna, EPW, 14 June, 2021).

Construction sector also bled profusely in the lockdown. According to CMIE data, this low paid informal sector shed 88 lakh workers out of job during April May, 2020. Worst sufferers were daily wage workers, with over 1.72 crore losing their jobs and income. Others badly affected industries include manufacturing, hospitality and trade. The job losses in these sectors were 42 lakh, 40 lakh and 30 lakhs respectively. It is to be noted that during the 2nd lockdown (or restrictions as termed by different state govt), most manufacturing sectors were exempted from restrictions and some were operative, albeit with reduced manpower. But, there are reports that employers took recourse to termination and wage cut where reduced workforce was permitted. In many states, contractual workers like school teachers have not received their wages for April - May. CMIE data reveals that between January and May 2021, 2.5 crores of existing jobs have been lost, and the bulk of these losses, about 2.2 crore, was lost during April and May when the second brutal wave of COVID engulfed the country.

Development economist Jean Dreze had warned, “India might be heading towards a serious livelihood crisis, and the situation seems to be the worst this time for the working class.” He further added, “compared with last year, many people have depleted savings and larger debts”.

In spite of repeated advice from all quarters, the Modi government has stubbornly denied to transfer cash to the most vulnerable sections of the population, and on the contrary, imposed GST on mask, sanitizers, and even upon the electrical furnaces of crematorium. Far from bidding a respectful tribute to the departed, Modi is extracting tax even at the time of final farewell of the human beings. This brazenness, this cruelty, this shylockian mentality is unparalleled in the world.
The Politics of Vaccination

MAITREYI KRISHNAN

On 21st June, 2021, the Minister for Health tweeted that India had administered the highest ever single day coverage across the world, with 86.16 lakh on that day.

This is one more in the series of tall claims made by the Government that are mere manipulation of facts and numbers with little actual impact on the ground.

However, data showed that the record of 86 lakh vaccinations was, in fact, engineered by slowing down vaccinations in Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states in the run-up to Monday. There have also been allegations that vaccines were hoarded to ensure a big spike. For instance, Madhya Pradesh recorded 16.9 lakh doses as administered on 21st June, but had initiated a slowdown from June, 17th itself - 338,847 vaccine doses were delivered on June 16, the next four days showed a steeply declining trend: 124,226 doses on June 17, 14,862 doses on June 18, 22,006 doses on June 19, and just 692 doses of the vaccine on June 20. Nationwide, the next day saw a dip in vaccination, with total vaccinations of only 54.22 lakhs on June 22.

From the completely unplanned lockdown that was imposed by the Central Government from 24th March, last year, 2020, to its complete unpreparedness for the second wave, it has acted in a manner that is not only criminally negligent, but also downright cruel and unscientific.

Here, we will look at the vaccine policy of the Government that has undergone several flip-flops. By allowing private profiteering it has failed to ensure universal immunization.

There are various concerns in regard to the issue of vaccination, all of which cannot be covered in one article. Here we will look at three intertwined threads that would help us understand the failure of the government:

i. Improper planning leading to inadequate procurement for internal use coupled with unplanned export.

ii. A distribution process that exacerbated inequality by insisting on vaccine access only to those with technology access.

iii. A neo-liberal pricing policy that did not allow universal vaccination created an environment which deprived the most vulnerable population of vaccination.

Procurement failure – too little too late!

The detection of the COVID-19 virus resulted in steps being taken across the world to come up with a vaccine for the same. India is home to one of the largest manufacturers of vaccines in the world, Serum Institute of India (SII). As early as June 2020, SII had entered into a licencing agreement with Astra Zeneca to supply one Billion doses of the Oxford vaccine to middle and low-income countries. Further, India’s indigenous vaccine, Covaxin from Bharat Biotech was given emergency approval by the DCGI on 02.01.2021

The Government set aside Rs. 35,000 crores for vaccine package. With this budget, at the rate of Rs. 350 a person (the centre pays Rs 150 per dose both for Covishield and Covaxin), 100 crore people could have been vaccinated. However, this has not happened.

One of the main reasons for this failure is that the Central government did not place adequate orders in advance.

In August 2020, the Prime Minister declared that India had worked out a vaccine distribution plan. However, the first vaccine order was made as late as January 2021, and by the time India’s first phase of vaccination rolled out on Jan. 16, the government had bought just 11 million doses of Covishield and 5.5 million from Covaxin.

At the end of February, the government placed another order of 21 million doses with Serum Institute, and another order of 110 million doses in March when infections started to rise. Given the large population of our country, these orders are extremely minuscule. The total vaccine order, as at the end of March, was approximately 160 million doses. This was sufficient to fully vaccinate only 8 crore people out of a total population of 140 crores. In comparison, by January, 2021, Canada, the UK and Chile had procured enough supplies to give each person at least four doses.

In an attempt to build his global image, the Prime
Minister Mr Modi made tall claims about having exported vaccines, saving the rest of the world, while sacrificing the people of India. By the Government’s own claims, a total of 6.6 crore vaccine doses were sent to 95 countries – it had exported more than it had administered to its own people.

Thus, while on the one hand, sufficient vaccines had not been ordered, on the other hand, a large number was being exported fully conscious of the fact that the people of India had not been vaccinated. This cannot be viewed as merely lack of planning, but active callousness.

**The Digital Divide and Inequitable Distribution**

Initially, the Central Government set up a highly exclusionary condition that required registration on the COWIN App for entitlement to vaccination. In a country where only 23.8% of Indian households have access to the internet, such a policy is highly exclusionary and inequitable and resulted in the exclusion of the most vulnerable and downtrodden sections of society, including the working class, those residing in rural areas and those belonging to the Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribes and women.

The Government instead of making sure that all persons have free and equal access to vaccination, showed its elite nature in its affidavit filed before the Supreme Court where it claimed that those who do not have access to digital resources can take help from family, friends and NGOs. It was only after the order of the Supreme Court, that this was revisited. However, the urban rural divide remains and a resident of urban India is likely to receive a vaccine 1.8 times more than someone living in the rural areas.

**Pricing Strategy is an attack on equity**

The effectiveness of vaccination lies in universalization and the failure to ensure that everyone is vaccinated would place at risk, not only those who haven’t been vaccinated, but also those who have been. The pandemic would remain forever as Herd Immunity would not be achieved.

India’s vaccination policy initially started with the Central Government procuring all the vaccines and supplying them at free of cost to the State who, in turn, would disburse them. Government Health Facilities were to provide them at free of cost, and Private Facilities were not to charge more than Rs. 250 per person per dose. However, this changed completely with a “Liberalized Pricing and Accelerated National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy” brought out on 21st April.

As per the same, the Central Government would only purchase 50% of the vaccine manufactured. The remaining vaccines could be sold by the manufacturers – 25% to the State Governments (at a higher rate) and 25% to the private sector. There were also no clear principles laid down as to how the Central Government would allocate vaccines to States/ UT’s. This policy which forced state governments to compete with each other, other countries and private players came under heavy criticism. There was no price limitation placed on how much private players could charge, leading to tie-ups with 5-Star hotels for “Vaccine Packages”, highlighting its vulgarity. The Supreme Court in its order dated 30.04.2021, found that the new policy was not consistent with the right to life and the right to health under Article 21 which would affect the under privileged and marginalized groups. Further in its order dated 31.05.2021, it found that the policy was prima facie, arbitrary and irrational and directed the Government to revisit the said policy.

It was only after this order that the Prime Minister announced on 7th June a shift in the policy, which came into effect from 21st June - 75% of the vaccines would be procured by the Central Government and allotted to the States. It also announced that vaccination would be available for all those above the age of 18 years.

However, this too remain inadequate. 25% of the vaccines remain open for private players, and there is no explanation as to why 100% purchase could not have been resorted to by the Central Government. There is also no information forthcoming on when and from where the vaccines would be procured.

Universal vaccination also requires that we look at compulsory licensing - this would allow more manufacturers to produce the vaccine. In its affidavit before the Supreme Court, the Government states that “Both manufacturers... have taken financial risk in developing and manufacturing these vaccines” and that decisions on pricing must take place through negotiations, “keeping statutory provisions as a last resort”. The lives of people are being sacrificed to safeguard the “financial risk” (the profit motive) that has apparently been taken by the manufacturers. One should not forget that Covaxin has been developed under public private partnership between Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Bharat Biotech International Ltd., despite which the Government is refusing to look at compulsory licencing.

As of 8.45 p.m. on June 19, 16.3% of the country’s population has received one dose and only 3.6% are fully vaccinated. Reports predict a third wave and the new COVID Delta Plus variant is also a matter of concern. Vaccination plays an important role in countering the same.

The Government with its pro-corporate, elite and inequitable policies continues to deprive people of vaccination in violation of our fundamental right to health.
On the 7th June 2021, fire broke out in a chemical factory situated in the village Urawade on the way to the infamous “Lavasa” city, constructed on the usurped lands with active political support of the neo liberal ruling classes and the land mafia in Maharashtra. This fire consumed 15 female and 2 male workers, out of 37 working in a 12 hours shift from 7 am to 7 pm. It became difficult even to identify each of them as the charred remains necessitated DNA tests. They were all from rural families around the factory.

Agriculture in the area was slowly converted by coercive ‘land sale’ into a hub for 700- 800 companies mostly MNCs, Indian and SMEs, tapping in to the swelling ranks of “reserve army of labour”. This is the infamous “Mulshi Pattern” of Maharashtra! (The land mafia with kilos of gold on their bodies operate in the region with impunity, obviously under political patronage, with (7/12?) extracts of the small and marginal farmers in their pockets. And the lands are to be sold for real estate or for industry/ private industrial estates.)

Maharashtra had laid down a policy to acquire, develop and handover the plots to the corporates, with built- in infrastructure. This work was carried out through Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). Farmers’ lands were acquired by MIDC at meagre prices and then leased out to Industries. MIDC was an agent, a facilitator for the corporate, shielding them from the anger of the farmers.

As the neo liberal reforms rolled in, slowly the role of the MIDC was made to shrink and the leaders of the ruling classes in Maharashtra like Sharad Pawar started openly advocating for abandoning agriculture and pushing the corporates to buy Agricultural lands directly. Such industries on private lands follow very few regulations. Lavasa city, privately owned and privately operated, came up as one example of this nexus in the neo liberal reforms. This is commonly called the MULSHI pattern.

The accident?

SVS Aqua Technologies was incorporated in 2012 to manufacture water purifier tablets from chlorine. Its website informs that it employs 51-100 workers. The turnover is reported to be between 100- 500 crores with exports to various countries like the USA, S. Africa, Turkey, Australia, and Sweden. It was given ISO 9001: 2015 certification as well. The factory was constructed as a structure suitable for a warehouse with almost no ventilation, only one door for access, no fire- fighting equipment or proper segregation of
areas for storage, production and packing in 2016. The production activities started in 2016. But, it was registered as a factory in December 2020, given official permission to operate for production of Chloroquine by Maharashtra Pollution Control Board. The factory was registered under PF as well as ESIC in May 2021 and please note the first installments were paid only in June 2021 after the accident. Only 12 out of the 17 workers who died and 4 injured workers are reported to be covered under ESIS. About 5 months back the company started packing sanitizer in the same building, without any permission, violating all norms. No inspections of any kind seem to have been carried out from 2016 to 2021. Under the guise of Ease of doing business the then state government under BJP/Shivsena followed footsteps of the BJP government and waived off all compliances. In fact, the first official to reach that factory ever was the fire-fighting official who came to supervise the dousing of the fire. Hence, it is obvious that there was a political and official patronage as well.

About 700 to 800 establishments in different types of industry sectors and sizes, from MSME to large ones - both domestic and MNCs- have sprung up in recent decades. These are constructed without any respect to building norms or any fire fighting facilities. Fire fighting arrangement and access to the factory were so inadequate that the fire continued to simmer even on the 8th morning. All these industries engage a major chunk of workers on contract. The contractors are politically well-connected, and hand in glove with managements having clout with the state machinery. Sources in the trade union movement in Pune say that such incidents, smaller in scale, are a regular occurrence in the entire PMC, PCMC and PMRDA areas. Surely these are no exceptions and must be a state-wide phenomenon.

In the recent past several such fires and loss of precious human lives have taken place at different places of work across Maharashtra mainly in chemical zone factories. Similar fires have engulfed several Corona facilities and hospitals also. The neo liberal thought and the resultant change in the mind set has gripped the state, its machinery and the ruling class in complete favour of the corporates. Thus these inspections are already being done away with even before the New Labour Codes got operationalized. One shudders to think what is in store for the working class in general and the unorganized contractual workers, men and women in particular, once these codes are let loose.

We demand prosecution of the guilty responsible for the fire, a compensation of one crore to each family, job to dependents, strict compliance of safety standards and severe punishment to erring companies. The nexus of contractors, land mafia, industrialists and the politicians shall also be exposed.

What comes out is the need to educate the working class and prepare it to challenge the neo liberal narrative in the form of the “Mulshi Pattern” while resolutely challenging the fascist regime’s onslaught on the working class in particular by way of the labour codes and on the masses in general. This regime bases itself on the neo liberal narrative and also on the “Gujarat Pattern ”. The interlink needs to be understood and smashed for a safe and non hazardous work life.

From the FB post of Mr. Vidyadhar Date dated 8th June, a veteran Journalist committed to the cause of the working class and the rural/ urban poor.

"In Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference, David Harvey discusses the September 1991 fire at the Imperial Foods chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina, which claimed the lives of twenty-five workers and injured fifty-six more. Harvey notes that the growth of rural industries in the United States has swollen the numbers of factories attempting to take advantage of a “relatively isolated industrial reserve army” left behind by the decline of agricultural employment. He suggests that this expansion of industrial capital into rural areas is part of a broader historical tendency of capital to seek out lower wage locations and non-union workforces, thus undermining the ability of larger groups of workers in core industrial areas to place regulatory constraints on the accumulation process.

Shivaji Only in Lips, Not in Deeds

Historically the region where this pattern is being played out is called MAVAL. The region was the mainstay of the peoples’ king Shivaji’s army. The soldiers were called MAVALE. Legend has it that he played the role of a protector of farmers and women in particular. He ordered: not even a blade of grass of the Ryot should be touched. He cut the hands of a village chieftain in the region when he harassed a woman from a farming community. And look at what the rulers of the present who invoke Shivaji’s name in every alternate sentence are doing to the men and women of the Ryot, how they facilitate the loot under their patronage.
Central Government has published draft Industrial Relations (Central) Recognition of Negotiating Union or Negotiating Council and Adjudication of Disputes of Trade Unions Rules 2021 on 04/05/2021, seeking comments within 30 days. At the very outset, it well exemplifies the callous attitude of the Government in issuing these Rules at a time when the country is worst hit by the second wave of the COVID Pandemic, with more than 3 lakh deaths across the country.

Further, responses to the Rules are being called for at a time when States across the country have imposed total and partial lockdown. Governments across the country have prohibited all non-essential work. How can consultation be held at a time when people are required to stay at home and cannot even come out of their homes, hold meetings, or consult workers? Unions don’t even have access to their offices, and it is at this juncture that the Government is attempting to push though these Rules.

The publication of draft Rules that further weaken the position of the working class at this time in the name of promoting ‘ease of doing business’ is highly illustrative of the design of the government that reduces those individuals in the working class to mere labour, with no rights, amounting to slavery. This is nothing but making this exercise of consultative process a farce. This is also a time when major trade unions are occupied trying to fill the gaps left by government failures, and protect their members from calamity.

The entire Code heavily reduces the protections available to the working class, through targeted attacks on trade unions, attacks on freedom to organise and strike, creation of a category of ‘Fixed Term Employment’, that is devoid of any trade union rights, etc.

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 mandates prior publication of Draft Rules in order to ensure that the necessary sections of society are provided an opportunity to participate in its framing i.e., the consultative process. But the central government is making it a mockery and a mere formality, violating the Section 23 of the General Clauses Act, 1897. It is clear that prior publication is not intended to be a publication in name only, but plays a valuable role.

The fact that the publication is made only in English and not in vernacular languages, effectively disables most workers from any meaningful consultation. This is completely illegal and an attempt to push through anti-worker legislation behind their backs, without even ensuring the mandatory publication in vernacular languages. Workers need additional time for a period after the lifting of the lockdown and once the COVID crisis is under control.

There has been no real opportunity to concerned workers and unions to consider the impact of the Rules. Under such circumstances without prejudice to this, some preliminary comments are below for your consideration.

Promoting Unfair Labour Practices

The Rules themselves effectively legalise the unfair labour practices of the management and the management sponsored unions, in an assault on the right to organise and collectively bargain.

Rule 3, fails to mention important matters including the employment or non-employment of any person, permanency of workmen, overtime work and other such necessary matters. The matters that may be discussed must extend to all matters that fall within the definition of ‘industrial dispute’ or are connected with an ‘industrial dispute’. As it stands, the manner in which this Rule has been framed leaves it open to employers to unilaterally decide on these excluded topics. Another issue is that ‘hours of work’ has been included as a matter to be discussed, which appears to be a design to circumvent the mandated 8 hours of work.

The 30% minimum membership for recognition as sole registered union in Rule 4 is utterly irrational. In fact, the Code of Discipline of 1957 agreed upon by representatives of the workers, employers and government had set 15% as the point for recognising a union. The present act also allows a union with 20% to be represented on the negotiating council. If there is only one union with 15% membership in the establishment, then such a union must be recognised as the negotiating union by the employer.

Rules 5 and 6 are hugely problematic and allows for complete interference of the employer in union activities. The various issues with it are as follows:

- The Rules effectively place the control of verification in the hands of the Management. The
Rules formalise unions that are management-sponsored. Giving powers to the Management from the appointment of verification officer to the preparation of the voters list to the manner of verification is absolutely in favour of employers and against the principle that the management must not interfere in any manner with the functioning of any trade union. These Rules provide for a complete interference of the management in union activities and organizing. The employer taking an active interest in organising a union in itself is an unfair labour practice, that is being formalized by the Rules.

- The employer certainly cannot have the right to decide the eligibility of a union and to check its membership register. The Trade unions act and the corresponding new law both allow only the members of a union to check the membership register.

- Moreover, the Rules provide for the employer to finalise the voter list with approval of verification officer, who is proposed to be appointed by the employer. There is no mechanism / opportunity for workers to raise grievances regarding voters list, and leaves it entirely in the hands of the employer.

- The section 5(3)(ii) confines eligibility for recognition of a union only to those which are confined only to that particular establishment. This may be used to render those unions who have large membership in the establishment ineligible for representation. Recognition only to those unions ‘confined to the establishment’ is a ploy to restrict central trade unions from entering the company or representing workers in the establishment and against the solidarity of workers. This is a clear attempt to bring about fragmentation of unions and is in violation of the fundamental right of the union to organize under Article 19(1)(c) of the Constitution.

- The rule provides that all workers “whose names are borne upon the muster rolls” will have the right to vote in the secret ballot. This definition of apparently excludes contract workers, casual workers, temporaries, fixed term employees, etc. The Rule is attempting to formalize the exclusion of a vast section of workers of non-formal category and is further weakening unionisation of and the right to recognition for the unorganized workers. It also heavily enables and encourages the management and employers to further intensify inhuman exploitation of its workforce. As such, even those whose names are not on the muster roll but who come within the definition of a worker must be given the right to vote.

- Rule 6 allows for list of workers to be sent either by registered post or electronically. This is especially serious when no option has been given to the worker to prefer a physical mode, and it is mandatory to conduct such procedures electronically only. Please note that the majority of the working class does not have access to technology – most don’t have a smart phone and don’t have access to the internet. Therefore, these rules are, in effect, only for the convenience of the management and at the cost of the workmen. It is demanded that a hard copy of the same must also be sent and rules regarding receipt of post must be maintained.

Rule 9 The provision of facilities under this rule is highly inadequate. It is unfair that the members of the negotiating council or negotiating union are to be given waiver from attending duties only when they are to attend a scheduled meeting. All members of the negotiating union or negotiating council, duly authorised, must be given exemption from attending duty for any work connected with an industrial dispute, including but not restricted to attending court, attending the lawyers office, preparing documents, discussing with the workers, etc. besides holding talks with the management. Further, certain facilities are provided only when there are more than 300 workers, which is also improper. It is necessary that proper facilities are made available to all workers employed in all companies of all sizes. For instance, the Maharashtra Recognition Of Trade Unions And Prevention Of Unfair Labour Practices Act, 1971 provides for facilities to be made to hold discussions on the premises of the undertaking with the employees concerned, to meet and discuss, with an employer or any person appointed by him, also to inspect an undertaking any place where any employee of the undertaking is employed.

AICCTU seeks for a total overhaul and revamp of the rules in light of the fact that labour legislation is intended to be welfare legislation that protects the rights of the working class, not defeat their rights.

We seek that our comments are implemented in the spirit of a welfare oriented State. We make it clear that the present Code and rules, if implemented are not only violative of the fundamental rights of workers, but also the Directive Principle of State Policy enshrined in Article 38(2) of the Constitution that mandates the State to strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations. In fact, the Rules will legalise the reduction of workers to mere labour and subjects in a Corporate- Raj, which is contrary to the Socialist state envisioned by our Constitution.
The Social Insecurity Code

AVANI CHOKSHI

I. Introduction

Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, affirms that “everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security”. This right is snatched away by the recent passage of the Code on Social Security, 2020 (CSS). The CSS may seem to increase coverage, but actually dilutes workers’ rights.

II. Attack on Federalism

The Code is also an assault on federalism. The definition says that the central government will continue to be the “appropriate government” even if its share reduced to less than 50 percent in PSUs. The central government pursues its pro-corporate course of privatization but seeks to retain authority over their functioning at the expense of the State Governments.

III. Exclusions of The Unorganised

The current labour laws, by having minimum thresholds for applicability, leave out 80-90% of the unorganized sector workforce. The CSS has included ‘gig workers’ and ‘platform workers.’ However, absolutely no social security rights accrue to them by virtue of the CSS, apart from mandatory registration.

In fact, the CSS says that the government ‘may’ frame schemes for the benefit of these categories of workers (as opposed to ‘shall’ in the 2008 Act). This approach is in stark contrast to the rights-oriented approach of older enactments such as the Inter State Migrant Workmen Act, which is also to be repealed by other labour codes. Similarly, the CSS allows the Government to set up a toll-free call centre or helpline or such facilitation centres as may be considered necessary from time to time, but does not mandate the same. The lack of a justiciable right is crucial in exposing the malafides of the government, which does not mandate any duties or provide any entitlements – no enabling provision has ever been required to frame a beneficial scheme.

The exclusion of rights is formalized further by definitions – for example, certain new categories of workers in the definition of ‘Building and Other Construction work’ appears to exclude workers employed in construction of buildings worth less than 50 lakhs. It is to be seen if it excludes vast number of construction workers from the ambit of coverage.

There are a number of other anti-labour definitional changes. For example, the definition of ‘contract employee’ looks like an easy escape for principal employers to escape liability for workers doing
labour for them, by claiming that they are the regular employees of the intermediaries.

The foundational issue of universal coverage is not addressed by the Code, which maintains high coverage thresholds, resulting in exclusion. For example, EPF is applicable for establishments with 20 or more employees, ESI for 10 or more persons, gratuity for shops with 10 or more employees. Resultantly, there is exclusion of those mass of workers working in micro-establishments, who remain unorganized and deprived of statutory protections.

IV. Opt-Out for Employers

The Code also allows the government to permit the employer to opt out of EPF compliance if the Central Provident Fund Commissioner is satisfied that there is an agreement between the employer and majority of the employees to this effect. This is highly dangerous when unequal power relations are taken into account. For example, the Supreme Court held that non-payment of minimum wages would amount to forced labour irrespective of any agreement with the worker, who may be forced by economic compulsion to agree to such terms. But, on the contrary, the Code says the employer can opt out if there is an agreement. This is against settled principles that the minimum mandatory legal obligations of employers cannot be contracted out or opted out of.

V. ESI

The definition of which components of wages will be used for the purpose of calculating contributions under ESI has been changed, though the interest rate remains the same. Previously, through a number of judgments of courts across India, several components that were considered to be part of wages for calculation are now excluded. The effective wage for calculation of contribution becomes less, thus resulting in a reduction of liability on the employer. Moreover, the employers are given concession by reducing their share which is yet to be prescribed. Even these amounts that go into the fund can then be used in manners yet to be prescribed.

VI. Dilution of rights and Cess

While the CSS retains the payment of cess by builders and others, it provides for a self-assessment by the employer of cess, payment of this amount, and filing of a return. There is no mechanism to test the correctness of the self-assessed amount itself if the return matches. Moreover, the rate of cess and also the interest to be paid for delay are drastically reduced.

VII. Workers Representation

Representation of workers themselves is also tainted, with worker representatives being nominated by the Central Government (See for example, gig workers representatives in section 114 of the Act). In today’s context of a crony corporate government, such a provision is bound to result in a lack of real representation for workers. The Draft Rules show a similar lack of commitment towards real representation – for example, in respect of the constitution of NSSB for unorganised Workers, the Rules uses the term, ‘may’ seek nomination and makes it a mockery. The failure to make adequate representation of workers mandatory is a very serious issue.

VIII. Impact on Women Workers

Rights of women workers are also impacted by the CSS, for example, section 72. This provision says the Inspector / Facilitator ‘may’ pass orders on a complaint on maternity benefit or leave. The repeated use of the word ‘may’ to do away with binding duties on the part of state officials reduces rightful claimants to supplicants.

Another example is that it mandates only one women in a 15 member of Building and other Construction Workers’ Welfare Board. This is a highly tokenistic attitude, which can only undermine any efforts towards real fairness in representation of women.

Finally and crucially, the mandate for equal pay for men and women has been denied by the CSS. Several components of wages are excluded from being paid equally for men and women, including HRA and other allowances and payments. This effectively legitimizes the payment of differential and discriminatory wages to women workers. We must note that the manner in which this has been done clearly indicates that this is a conscious and intentional assault on the rights of women to equality and equal pay.

IX. Inspector-cum–Facilitators

A large portion of compliance and implementation of the Act rests on the shoulders of ‘Inspector-cum–Facilitators’ who may be appointed by the Central Government. Their job is not to initiate action against violation but to give an opportunity to employer. So even if an employer has wilfully committed an offence, the Code legitimises his escape, free of cost, at the expense of the worker. Moreover, in effect, the inspection mechanism is dismantled because it is regulated only electronically based on system logic and not based on regular monitoring of violations and action based on complaints.

X. Reduced Penalties

Penalties for offences by employers have been drastically reduced. Some offences for which imprisonment has been removed, and only fines up to Rs. 50,000 (with no minimum fine), have been imposed, includes deduction of employer’s contribution from employees, illegal reduction of wages, failure to pay compensation, etc.
Effectively, the relevant authority has been given discretion to let off the employer who loot the wages of their workers.

**XI. At the Whims and Fancies of the Government**

Moreover, the CSS gives massive scope for government to set down substantive law by leaving major issues to be prescribed by the government. In the CSS alone, the words “as may be prescribed” are used as many as 123 times! The CSS includes a power to exempt any establishment from any or all of the provisions of the Code or the scheme framed through a notification. In fact, in respect of EPF, the CSS gives the power to retrospectively exempt any class of establishment having regard to its financial position or other circumstances of the case. In effect, any of the beneficial provisions that the government proclaims to have maintained in the Code can be done away with through delegated legislation.

**XII. The Pandemic and the Code**

The attitude of the Government in pushing the Labour Codes through at a time when our country is in the middle of a public health crisis is condemnable. It uses the pandemic to push through various anti-people moves – including the farmer laws, the proposal to amend EIA requirements, the MHAs Committee for Reforms in Criminal Laws and others.

Not surprisingly, the CSS is even self-serving when it comes to the pandemic – it permits dispensation of prior publication of rules and regulations in circumstances of epidemic, pandemic or disaster. It also allows the Central government to defer or reduce PF and ESI contributions of employers and employees.

**XIII. In Lieu of Conclusion**

The entire scheme of the CSS is to preen about higher coverage while consistently negating rights of workers. While this note has looked at some aspects, there are a whole lot of issues that are not covered. Through small changes in terminology, substantive rights of workers have been done away with.

The CSS and the other 3 labour codes must be specifically viewed in the current political context of the government’s attempt to create a lawless society and a fascist state. Workers are one category of persons who are now facing oppression through laws along with several other sections including farmers, religious minorities and other dissenting voices. There is a pressing need for a strong people’s movement against the current dispensation, with the repealing of anti-worker labour codes as one of the demands.
Lessons of the Pandemic:
Jobs, Wages, Housing, Food Security Are Public Health Issues

(Interview with AICCTU National Secretary and CPIML Karnataka Secretary Clifton D’Rozario, who is also an advocate who has consistently argued Covid-19 and lockdown relief cases in the Karnataka High Court. The interview is reproduced with gratitude from The Third Eye, 18 June 2021)

Can we talk about the Right to Food campaign and the issue of food security as part of public health?

The Right to Food campaign is the basic acknowledgement of the malnutrition and hunger that exist in India. It made the courts take cognizance of continuing hunger. I have my differences with that [symptomatic relief] approach: the Right to Food Campaign, I mean, because the courts are never going to address the reasons for chronic poverty. You get the national food security scheme or meals arranged through anganwadis but none of that is enough.

You have to address the reason why I don’t have food on my plate today. It’s not because I am lazy. It’s because I have no work. Or I have work and I work so hard but I don’t get paid commensurate with the work. I don’t have job or social security. If I fall ill, I have to pay through my nose.

If malnutrition is so rampant in our country, it’s neither the children’s fault nor their parents’. We need living wages for the people and more equitable resources.

What did the events of the last year reveal about our food security policy?

When you put the entire country into a lockdown with a four-hour notice, what does that even mean? You can’t say you don’t know. You just don’t care that the majority of the country will not have food to eat the next day. Then it took more than 10 days for the government to come up with the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. Five kgs of rice and two kg of chana for two months. That policy decision was so disrespectful and lacked an understanding of ground realities. When you took away their right to earn, they did not have cash in hand. They had no cooking gas. They could not buy oil or masalas. These are things that people buy on a weekly basis. Anyone who has lived in a daily wage household would know this. By giving just rice and chana, you think you are doing something great.

Cut to this year. Take Karnataka. We are almost now three weeks into the lockdown. When the lockdown was declared, the state government had absolutely no policy for meeting food security needs. Instead, what it has said now is that Indira Canteen food packages will be will be distributed to the poor three times a day. And in rural areas, gram panchayats will distribute food packets to those who need it. You expect the working class to stand in queues every single day, three times a day. From a policy point of view what has the state government learned from last year? Zilch.

When I was recently arguing the matter in Karnataka High Court [concerning the management of the Covid-19 pandemic in the state], I said you can’t make people stand in the queue every day for a meal. It’s disrespectful of people; you are undermining their dignity. You have brought down the lockdown on these people who work hard every single day. You have taken away this ability from them and now you expect them to stand in a damn queue every single day to beg for food.

Or look at the right to shelter. People don’t have money to pay their rent. Last year the central government issued an advisory that landlords should not receive rent for the lockdown period or take a delayed payment. That of course was not implemented. This year there wasn’t even that facade. Lockdowns have been declared in state after state and there is no protection of right to shelter. Already you’re hearing stories of people who are being threatened with eviction.

Or look at loans. Forget about banks. Let’s look at self-help groups. Last year, from our party, we ran this very big karza maafi campaign after the lockdown. We were specifically targeting the microfinance institutions, because [the terms] are insane. You take a loan from a self-help group, if you don’t even pay
one instalment, ten women will land up outside your house to ask you what the hell is happening, you better pay right now. Basically this maana-maryade [status and honour] thing that’s what they play on. Look at the cumulative impact from last year’s lockdown. Look at the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report and you see the massive the job loss, rising unemployment rate, dipping wages. But there is no protection of the working class from loan sharks or from a microfinance institution, nothing. It’s very difficult to find any kind of policy statements or scientific thinking.

Your position is that it’s not possible to fix public health even in the short term without looking at food security, shelter, financial exposure and other factors. When you were arguing in High Court recently what were your recommendations to the Karnataka government?

What we have suggested to the state was cash assistance to be given to families to help them get through these times. We recommended free rations by which we mean free ration kits — you know, rice, dal, masala, cooking oil, cooking gas, whatever fuel that they’re using, all of those things.

We asked that an order be passed under the Disaster Management Act, prohibiting the eviction of any people from their houses for non-payment of rent. We asked for a waiver of all electricity and water bills and a moratorium on all loans on the repayment of any loans to microfinance institutions, private lenders, and of course, nationalised banks.

We also asked that under the National Food Security Act, via the anganwadis, the government meet the nutritional needs of children below the age of six, pregnant women, lactating mothers, and adolescent girls [and these] should be delivered to their doorstep. And also midday meals for school going children. You might ask why do we need to recommend it, isn’t it a statutory order? But they didn’t do it last year. Midday meals were not given in Karnataka to school going children because the schools were closed. The order was that they would give the children equivalent grain, which they can cook in their houses. Our government didn’t do [this] for several months. So we had to move the court to make that happen.

If you think about public health as a larger concept, beyond where we are currently in the pandemic, has there ever been an attempt to make it a reality and think it through in terms of policy?

[If you look at the pandemic] the Kerala model, of course, is a decent one. Their numbers are very, very high, but the deaths are very low. That indicates that at least access to health is being taken care of over there. I’ve not heard a single report of somebody dying because they didn’t have oxygen or didn’t have a bed. The moment they declared a lockdown, they declared a food pack ration kit package for every household. That’s a very respectful way of treating people. There are some indicators of an urban model in Mumbai’s triage system. Those are elements that seemed to have worked right now.

Given the way Covid is spreading to the rural areas, if Uttar Pradesh is anything to go by, there are dire consequences of being not prepared. Every single gram panchayat must have a Covid centre. You cannot expect people to self-quarantine in their houses, given the poverty and very small houses. To ensure quarantine can take place, to ensure that testing can take place, villages must have Covid centres, and at least basic supply of oxygen and medicines. In case of an escalation, people in a village know they can go to the Covid centre and there will be one doctor, ASHA workers and ANM workers who can ensure that this person is taken to a hospital. That’s the most basic thing that needs to be done.

Have any important public health debates shifted from the background to the foreground because of the pandemic?

Given the crisis mode most people are in and that we cannot have agitations at this point, these debates have not become a public discourse. And knowing the middle class, they could well go back to where they were. Right now, they are more than happy going to their private hospitals and trying to get vaccinated.

Still, there is definitely an attempt to talk about the amount of money that is spent on public health infrastructure. If you look at the state of the public health institutions, it’s not the same across the country. In some states [they’re] better and in some places they are absolutely crumbling. Without a doubt [the system] needs an upgrade.

Two, the manner in which oxygen supply and when drugs like Tocilizumab and Remdesivir have been totally centralised. The central government now decides which state gets how much. Even in the case of vaccination, everything is decided by the central government which has basically made a for-profit model. In a federal structure like ours, that is worrisome. The pandemic has only revealed the assault on federalism, the rights of state governments to take decisions. The demarcation of responsibilities and duties has become very muddled. That is something that will have to be sorted out as quickly as possible.

The third thing is our understanding of who works in
public health. ASHA workers and sanitation workers are part and parcel of the public health system. Sanitation workers are called frontline workers. ASHA workers are called healthcare workers. They’re the forefront of this battle against this pandemic, but look at their condition.

Sanitation workers across the country are contract workers, don’t get paid minimum wages and are already working in a very exploitative system. Then the pandemic happens. The garbage that comes from a household where there is a corona-positive person has to be treated differently from other garbage otherwise Covid is going to spread again. Sanitation workers are denied even access to basic protection. They collect with their bare hands, exposing themselves to this pandemic. The number of deaths of sanitation workers is [among other things] because of the lack of basic safety equipment.

And here it is not just a class question, it is also a question of caste and gender. It’s about how seriously the government is concerned about sanitation workers or ASHA workers. Also in hospitals. The majority of nurses are on precarious contracts. As is the Group D staff who are predominantly women; ward boys, lift operators, sweepers, toilet cleaners, gardeners — they are all on contract. Again, they are in the same oppressive working conditions and at the forefront of fighting this pandemic. They are still treated so disrespectfully without any care for their lives. That’s another very serious concern that one hopes is rectified soon.

What would you say are the changes we need to lay a foundation for public health, which are not so obvious when we think about health only in terms of hospitals and drugs?

One, living wages would ensure better public health. We still live in a time where we’re talking about minimum wage, which is nothing but starvation wages -- Rs 10,000, Rs 8,000. The Constitution actually talks about living wages. In our estimate, even a minimum wage at this point at this point will be around Rs 25,000. A living wage would be way above that.

Second, this entire very calculated contractualisation and informalisation of workforce that has taken place over the last 30 years now. If that could be undone, all the wages would automatically go up and they’d enjoy some notion of job and social security, some economic security. If a person is guaranteed a life where you didn’t have to worry about shelter, a public distribution system where you didn’t have to worry about food… For me the idea of ensuring equality in all realms, you know, that’s very fundamental. Many people cannot work for any number of reasons. A monthly guaranteed kind of income for every household ensures that they can live as human beings.

As far as the health system is concerned, I’d say it’s about nationalising the hospitals, especially in times like this. Like Spain did in 2020. If you’re not going to do it, under the Disaster Management Act the government has the power to take over necessary resources. They can say that given the kind of situation we are in, every single health establishment is going to be under the government till we get through this crisis.

Do you feel like massive decentralisation of healthcare, policy and decision-making would help us, if not nationalisation?

I imagine it would but again, it depends where it happens. If it’s going to happen under this particular system [of governance], it’s not going to work. Kerala, to some extent, has a very strong decentralised kind of a governance structure. The panchayats over there are not just rubber stamps. They actually take most of the big decisions from planning onwards. Decentralisation is necessary but there has to be financial stabilisation alongside. You cannot expect a village in a poorer region like north Karnataka, say to them okay now, these three villages, you guys do whatever, everything is in your hands. You have to ensure there is financial stability, they have access to resources to ensure decent living for all of its residents.

The fundamental question here then is how does one address these structural inequalities and the structural hierarchy that exists in our society. That is something that is not going to go away with the one policy decision.

Look at the education system, right? You are basically breeding an unequal race over there. A public health system cannot become egalitarian without a sense of egalitarianism in society.

Fraternity was included in our Constitution for a good reason. It exists in our Preamble. The reason it exists in our Constitution is because our naturalised hierarchies prevent compassion or empathy. I am not saying we should not take any policy steps; we should not do anything until we have fraternity someday [laughs]. I know all this sounds utopian but I am not saying, ‘If an anganwadi is shut down and a child is not getting food to eat, let that child grow up and fight for his rights.’ [What I’m saying is] that in an ecosystem where fraternity, equality, dignity are important, policy decisions will become much easier.
Against Corporatization of Ordnance Factories

Modi led, pro-corporate, BJP government decided to split Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) into 7 corporations on 16 June 2021, once again attempting to convert pandemic crisis into an opportunity for the corporates.

Some 80,000 workers of 41 ordnance factories tried to stall the government’s move to privatise OFB in the guise of corporatization through various forms of struggles, including 5-day long strike action last year. Assurances given by erstwhile Defence ministers were thrown to the wind by the central government. The government took this decision after the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) [CLC (C)] had given, on 15 June 2021, a failure report of conciliation proceedings while 3 federations representing majority of the workers were absent. This is highly authoritarian and against any industrial democracy.

During the time of pandemic, workers of Ordnance factories have shown their commitment to the by producing and supplying PPEs to save the people and the country, while profit hungry corporates are using the situation for loot to increase their wealth manifold.

AICCTU strongly opposes the move of the government to privatise OFB by splitting it into 7 corporations and calls upon Indian working class and the people of the country to foil the move tooth and nail.

When Modi government is on the privatisation spree of all national assets including Railways and all PSUs, AICCTU calls upon all sections of workers to fight back in unison. AICCTU will always remain in the forefront in solidarity with Ordnance factory workers in their struggle against corporatization and privatisation.

Modi’s Black Ordinance to Crush Defence Workers Right to Strike

AICCTU Demands its Immediate Withdrawal!

Calls For United Resistance of the Working Class

In an extraordinary move, the President Of India promulgated "The Essential Defence Services Ordinance, 2021 " on June 30, and prohibited " Strike in any establishment dealing with production of goods or equipment required for any purpose connected with defence, or connected with the armed forces of the Union, or in any other establishment or installation connected with defence".

This draconian ordinance is aimed at prohibiting the indefinite strike, wef, July 26, called by all the Defence Central Federations, under the banner of Joint Action Forum Of Defence Federations including AIDEF - INDWF – BPWS -NPDEF - AIBDEF – CADRA, to oppose the decision of the Central...
Government to corporatise the Defence factories of the country. Under the pretext "to provide for the maintenance of essential defence services so as to secure the security of nation and the life and property of people at large", the Ordinance has come into force "at once".

Such was the urgency of this Ordinance!

The ordinance not only prohibited strikes, but all forms of protest and extended the definition of the strike beyond even the IR Code's Clause 2 (zk), which immediately received the President's assent. The Ordinance defined strike not only as "cessation of work" but also "go-slow, sit down, stay in, token strike or mass casual leave." Even, "refusal to work overtime, any other conduct which is likely to result in.... cessation or retardation or disruption of work in the essential defence services" ' have been brought under the ambit of "illegal strike". Sweeping powers have been given to the police force to break the strike, and the Clause 11 has given licence to the police officers to "arrest, without warrant, any person who is reasonably suspected to have committed any offence under this Ordinance."

Further, this draconian ordinance has provided complete immunity to the officers. The Clause 15 says, "No suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against the Central Government or any Officer" for implementing this Ordinance.

This Pro-corporate, anti-worker ordinance of Modi government is reminiscent of Hitler's Nazi policies. This ordinance has been brought with a clear motive of building a military industrial complex in the country.

Demolishing democratic rights enshrined in the Constitution is one of the most naked acts of the Modi's fascist rule, which should be unitedly opposed and resisted by the working-class movement of the country.

AICCTU Calls upon defence workers to rise in unison and wage militant struggles.

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**AICCTU Solidarity with Defence Workers**

AICCTU held solidarity action programmes in various states on 19 June in support of the call by federations of Defence Employees to hold Protest Day against the decision of corporatization of ordnance factories by Modi Government. The call was fully supported by the platform of central trade unions.

On this day, AICCTU held solidarity programmes in various districts of Bihar including Patna, Bhagalpur and Gaya; Jharkhand including Dhanbad coal belt, Ramgarh and Bokaro; and Bhilai Steel Plant, Chattisgarh. The Indian Railway Employees Federation also issued a press statement in support of Defence Employees' struggle against corporatisation.
Hands Off the 8-Hour Day!
Withdraw the anti-worker Bill!

AICCTU in Solidarity with June 10 General Strike in Greece!

7 June 2021

The working class and toiling masses of Greece will embark on an historic General Strike on June 10 against the anti-labour Bill proposed by the conservative New Democracy (ND) government. The Bill introduces several anti-worker measures, including increasing working hours from 8 to 10 hours per day, scrapping the five-day work-week and curtailing the right to strike. The proposed bill is a barbaric attack on the rights of workers, hard earned through long struggles.

The COVID-19 pandemic has completely exposed the exploitative capitalist system and its profit-hungry nature. The governments in various capitalist countries are shamelessly using the ongoing COVID-induced crisis as an opportunity to snatch the rights of the working class and to ensure windfall profits to the bourgeoisie.

In India, the far-right Narendra Modi led BJP government has scrapped the existing labour laws and arbitrarily introduced new labour codes in the name of “ease of doing business”, which is just a sugar-coated name for carte blanche exploitation of workers. These codes combined, similar to the new labour bill in Greece, attack the 8-hour work day and curtails the right of workers to organize, collectively bargain and strike. The trade unions in India, along with the farmers’ organisations, who have been protesting continuously against pro-corporate farm laws for the last six months, are togethers resisting the anti-worker and anti-farmer policies of the government.

All these measures are nothing but an attempt to push workers and toiling masses into slavery.

AICCTU, on behalf of the working class of India, extends its unwavering support to the working class of Greece and to their resistance against the anti-worker Bill. We extend our solidarity with the General Strike scheduled on June 10 in Greece called by PAME and class unions.

In Solidarity,
AICCTU Head Quarters,
Delhi, India
Dockworkers’ unions and civil society groups across the world, responding to the call of Palestinian trade unions and Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement have initiated ‘Block the Boat’ action against Israeli ZIM ships. On June 4, protesting against the Israeli apartheid policies and crimes against Palestinians, hundreds of people, including members of local dockworkers union (Local 10) formed a picket line preventing ZIM ship from docking in the Port of Oakland in California. They condemned Israel’s 11-day brutal aggression on Gaza, which killed 256 Palestinians, including 66 children and demanded an end to Israeli occupation of Palestine.

In May, similar actions were recently held in South Africa. The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, in Durban expressing solidarity with Palestine, refused to offload cargo from a ZIM ship. Also, in the same month, dockworkers in Livorno, Italy, withheld their services to load a shipment of arms going to Israel.

In United Kingdom, activists from Palestine Action Group occupied the factory of Elbit systems Manchester, after scaling the roof, chaining the gates shut and smearing red paint over the factory’s walls on June 21. Elbit is an Israeli international defence electronics company that develops drone and military surveillance technologies sustaining the Israeli’s military occupation of Palestine.

In Palestine, resistance action continues in West Bank and Gaza against Israeli occupation and annexation plans. In Sheikh Jarrah, where Palestinian families face imminent threat of expulsion, people are keeping up the resistance against daily violence and waves of attacks orchestrated by illegal Israeli settlers and Israeli forces.

On June 10, healthcare workers protested against the raid conducted by Israeli forces at the offices of Union of Health Workers Committee (UHWC), a crucial healthcare provider in West Bank. The Israel forces broke computers and took away hard drives from the offices of UHWC and ordered its closure. On June 11, Israeli forces shot dead 15-year-old Mohammed Hamayel, during a protest in the occupied West Bank village of Beita against illegal Jewish settlement.

With the change of government in Israel, after Benjamin Netanyahu lost the vote of confidence in the Knesset, there are signs of further aggressive shift towards ultra-right wing discourse. The new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, who boasts of being an ultra-nationalist, rejects Palestinian statehood, supports annexing 60 per cent of West Bank, and once supported ‘shoot to kill’ policy on Gaza border.

Meanwhile, international actions like ‘Block the Boat’ and ‘Stop Elbit’ campaign continue to strengthen the global solidarity with Palestine. These actions send a clear message that Israel’s ongoing settler-colonialism, occupation, and violence against the Palestinian people will face a global pushback.
Violation of Labour Rights in Qatar

V. ARUN KUMAR

A head of Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup, various incidents of gross violation of labour rights and silencing of labour right activists have come to the fore. On May 5, 28-year-old Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan national working in Qatar as a security guard was arrested for exposing the labour rights violations. Bidali Noah, writing under a pseudonym, spoke about long working hours, lack of proper wages, inhuman working conditions and accommodations. He was later charged by Qatari authorities with “offences related to payments received by a foreign agent for the creation and distribution of disinformation within the State of Qatar.”

Since, Qatar was awarded the hosting of FIFA world cup in 2010, an alarming number of 6,500 migrant labourers from five countries in South Asia have died (both work and non-work related incidents), including around 2711 from India. Among them, 37 deaths are reported be directly linked to construction of World Cup stadiums.

Qatar’s inhuman labour conditions have been in spotlight since long, especially its treatment of 2 million migrant workforce (about 95 percent of its total labour force) mostly from Asia and Africa. Though in 2017, Qatar in an agreement with International Labour Organization (ILO) agreed to reform its archaic labour laws, including the abolition of exploitative Kafala system. But labour groups point out that little has been achieved to end the rampant labour exploitation and Kafala system. The Kafala system, or sponsorship system where in an in-country sponsor, usually their employer, is responsible for their visa and legal status. The system is a form of modern slavery, where the sponsor-employers, in many cases, take away workers’ passport. Also, under Kafala, employers permission is needed for changing jobs or leaving the country. The confiscation of passport further leaves the workers at the mercy of the employers and any form of struggle for better working condition and wages in Qatar attracts severe retaliation from both the employers and authorities.

Trade unions rights are severely curtailed in Qatar under which foreign migrant workers, domestic and agricultural workers are prohibited from forming unions or participating in strike activities. For long period of time, since 1957, union activities were outlawed in Qatar and were partially restored only in 2004. Despite the threats and ban on strike, in 2019, thousands of foreign workers at two construction companies organised a strike and successfully managed to secure their demands of payment of unpaid wages.

Apart from issues of unpaid wages and inhuman working condition, in most cases, foreign workers are forced to take loan for payment of recruitment fees, pushing workers into debt. Though such recruitment fees are prohibited under Qatari laws, recruitment agencies exploit leal loopholes to exploit the workers by charging large amount of money.

Qatar has also around 173,000 migrant domestic workers, who face severe exploitation in the country. Many face both mental and physical abuse, including sexual violence from the employers. Despite the enactment of Domestic Workers Law in 2017, there had been no respite in the conditions of domestic workers and the Qatar government continue to refuse to accord full working-class status to these domestic workers. 

Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan security guard in Qatar was arrested on May 5 for exposing the labour rights violations.
As a part of an all-India campaign “In Memory of Loved Ones: Count Every Death, Share Every Loss”, jointly organized by intellectuals and social activists across the country, various sections of workers, including scheme workers, railway employees, sanitation and municipal workers and other unorganised and organised sections honoured the memory of people who died during the Covid period by lighting candles and remembering every death.

In response to the call given by the All India Scheme Workers Federation (AISWF), the Bihar State ASHA Workers Sangh (affiliated to AICCTU) organized memorial meetings at PHCs and Sadar Hospitals on 15 June to honour the memory of ASHA workers who died during the period of Covid pandemic. Despite pouring rain, hundreds of memorial meetings were organized across the state. Large number of people remembered their loved ones by offering floral tribute at the portraits of deceased ASHA workers. Similar memorial meetings were held in various places in other states like Uttarakhand, Assam, U.P, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Delhi, etc.

All India Convener of AISWF and the president of Bihar State ASHA Workers Sangh, Shashi Yadav said that it is, indeed, very painful that not even a list of deceased ASHAs has been prepared either by the State or by the Centre. The government is not serious about anything, from treatment to compensation for ASHAs while ASHAs stand firmly in the frontlines of the battle against the Corona pandemic. A large number of ASHA workers died heroically battling Corona on the frontlines, for non-availability of proper safety equipment. The government does not have statistics related to ASHA deaths, while hiding whatever figures they do have. Today, governments are shirking their responsibility of accordng them proper dignity, honour and respect by not providing social security to their bereft families.

Through the memorial meetings, demands were raised for Rs. 10,000 monthly Corona allowance, Health Insurance of Rs. 10 lakhs and Life Insurance of Rs. 50 lakhs for all ASHA workers.

On 17th June, Mid-day Meal workers also organized memorial meetings in various states including Bihar, Jharkhand, W. Bengal.

Railway employees on the call of Indian Railway Employees Federation (IREF) (affiliated to AICCTU), widely organised Memorial meetings on 20th June in memory of common people and Railway workers who have died due to Corona (around 2200 Rly. workers lost their lives) in various zonal Railways. which, among others, include Ambala, Lucknow and Sultanpur of Northern Rly., Allahabad, Jhansi, Agra, Shikohabad and Mirzapur of North Central Rly., Kolkata, Saindala station of Eastern Rly., Howrah of South Eastern Rly., Bhavneshwar and Khurda in East Coast Rly.; Jabalpur and Katni in West Central Rly.; Ajmer in North Western Rly.; Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Bareilly in North Eastern Rly.; Mugalazarai, Dhanbad, Samastipur, Patna, Motihari, Renukut, Kodarma, Gomoh and Saharsa in East Central Rly.; and many Production Units and Workshops like, DLW, Varanasi and DLMW, Patiala; CLW, Chittaranjan; Jagadari Workshop, Northern Rly.; MCF, Raeberili and RCF, Kapurthala.

In Karnataka, the campaign was inaugurated by powrakarmikas (sanitation workers) on 6th June in Bengaluru lighting candles to remember all lost souls and in particular Smt Susheelamma, who passed away on 05.05.2021.

On 20th June, at Basavanagara, Bengaluru, as part of the campaign, powrakarmikas remembered Shri Krishnappa who had passed away in April this year. They demanded that compensation be paid to all persons who passed away due to the negligence of the government.
On 14th June, 2021, the Farmers' agitation, led by Samyukta Kisan Morcha completed 200 days of continuous protest on and occupation of main highways leading into national capital Delhi, for their demands to repeal three farm laws, taking back the Electricity (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021 and legal guarantee for the MSP. They have not only faced bone-chilling cold and winter, destructive storms, scorching summer and now, the onset of rains, have sacrificed almost 500 comrades, but mainly, the out-and-out pro-corporate Central Government that is bent on pushing these laws as well as the four hated labour codes.

June 26th marks the completion of seven month long struggle. There are several struggles, including this farmers' agitation, against the undeclared emergency and authoritarian BJP regime that the country is experiencing today. Even those inhabiting the small island of Lakshadweep are up against these authoritarian ways of the BJP, what to talk of the complete mess they have made in countering the devastating second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is worth noting that June 26th is also the death anniversary of the legendary farmer leader Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. The protests on June 26th included sit-ins at Raj Bhavans in various states in addition to district/tehsil level protests all over India.

The CTUs appealed to all their members to reach out to all the sections of people to join hands in this nation-wide action on 26th June.

We, the CTUs demand that
1. Four labour codes, the three farm laws, the Electricity (Amendment) Ordnance, 2021 be repealed;
2. Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmer produce be legally guaranteed;
3. Universal free vaccination within a specific time frame;
4. 10 kg free food grains per person per month to all needy and Rs.7500/-pm to every non income tax paying family every month;
5. Take back the policy of privatization of Public Sector enterprises and Government Departments;
6. The Government and PSU employees working day and night in the COVID-19 like Railway and Road transport , Coal, Defence, SAIL, BHEL, Telecom and Postal service’s, Banks and Insurance, Electricity, Water, Education and Health services, EPFO, Port & Dock etc be treated as frontline staff and compensate accordingly;
7. Rs 50 lakh insurance to all frontline workers including ASHA, Anganwadi employees, sanitation workers; adequate compensation to the families of the workers who died due to Covid 19.
Front-line Workers Demand Day

Scheme Workers

Tens of thousands of workers under various schemes of the central government observed country-wide Demand Day on 31 May 2021 as a response to a call by “All India Scheme Workers’ Federation” (AISWF), affiliated to AICCTU. Displaying their demand-placards, wearing black badges and raising slogans, scheme workers, including ASHA, Mamta and those in Anganwadi, Mid-day Meal, etc., observed Demand Day at their workplaces (PHCs) and residential areas. They also submitted memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister, Union Health Minister and State Chief Ministers.

On this occasion, AISWF National Convener and AICCTU Vice-president Shashi Yadav said that various sections of scheme workers are being forced to engage in Covid duty without any safety equipment and for a pittance. ASHA workers are being paid only Rs. 1000 as Corona allowance which is not even sufficient to pay rickshaw-tempo fares to move around in villages. Anganwadi workers and helpers are denied of this meagre amount also. Mid-day Meal workers are being forced to work but are not given any allowance. Mamata workers are working directly in Operation Theatres (OTs) but are also denied any allowance. The scheme workers did not even receive even their meagre amount for months and as a result, they are at the brink of starvation. The government considers scheme workers to be bonded labour with no rights and denied them applicability of any labour laws in the country. Scheme workers are getting infected and falling ill, but the governments make no arrangements for their treatment. A large number of ASHA and other scheme workers on Corona duty have died but the governments do not even care to have statistics for this. Worse still, they do not even get the benefit 50 lakhs insurance in case of Corona death.

Municipal and Sanitation Workers and Contract Health Workers

Sanitation and various other sections of Municipal workers and contract Health workers employed in various government and private hospitals observed country-wide Demand Day on 3 June 2021 as a response to a joint call by “All India Municipal Workers’ Federation” (AIMWF) and Contract Health Employees Federation (CHEF), both affiliated to AICCTU. Displaying their demand-placards, wearing black badges and raising slogans, these workers observed Demand Day at their workplaces – gates of corporation offices, hospitals and in residential areas and protested against the complete failure of the Government to ensure their most fundamental and basic demands.

The Demand Day was observed in several states by several thousands of sanitation, municipal and health workers. Sanitation and other sections of Municipal workers demonstrated and displayed their demands placards in several districts of Bihar including Gaya, Siwan, Bhagalpur, Nawada, East Champaran, Motihari, Patna; Bangalore and other districts in Karnataka; Dhanbad in Jharkhand; Coimbatore and Chengalpattu, Tenkasi, Namakkal Kanyakumari, Salem and Tirunelveli districts of Tamil Nadu; Allahabad, Kanpur in U.P.; Bhilai in Chattisgarh, Srikakulam and Krishna districts in Andhra Pradesh; and Telangana, apart from other places.

Various categories of Contract health workers
Frontline workers expressed their anger and resentment against the criminally insensitive and indifferent attitude of the central and state govt.s through their protest in the form of ‘Demand Day’. The governments at the centre and various states are denying all the rights while these workers are engaged in the frontline of the country’s war against Corona and also getting infected and dying in large numbers. They are neither provided any risk allowance, nor any proper safety gear and medical or life insurance.

They are not paid minimum wages, not provided any form of social security. More importantly, they work 24×7 without any security of life or job and under constant threat of termination. They are denied even the most basic of amenities including toilets, drinking water, etc. and are made to suffer in an inhuman and unhygienic working conditions. As if these indignations are insufficient, they are also the victims of the casteist and classist prejudices and biases of the state.

**Black Day observed by Railway Workers**

Railway employees observed “Black Day” on 25th June 2021, at the call of Indian Railway Employees’ Federation (IREF), affiliated to AICCTU, against snatching away of DA (Dearness Allowance) and DR (Dearness Relief) of railway employees by the Modi government, under the garb of financial crisis and Corona Pandemic. The employees throughout Indian Railways organised decentralised, smaller gatherings, displayed demand placards and raised slogans demanding immediate restoration and payment of DA for railway employees and DR for pensioners, with arrears from January, 2020. They also demanded restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for workers who joined Railways on or after 01.01 2004 and also demanded withdrawal of government policy of corporatization and privatization in Railways.

Next Day, i.e., on 26th June, the “Front against NPS” in Railways, organised a twitter campaign demanding restoration of old Pension Scheme (OPS).

The protests on 25th June were held in various zonal Railways. which, among others, include Mugalsarai, Dhanbad, Samastipur, Patna, Motihari, Renukut, Kodarma, Gomoh and Saharsa in East Central Rly (ECR); Allahabad, Jhansi, Agra, Shikohabad and Mirzapur of North Central Rly (NCR); Kolkata, Howrah, Santragachi of South Eastern Rly (SER); Ambala, Lucknow and Sultanpur of Northern Rly (NR); Bhubneshwar and Khurda in East Coast Rly (ECoR); Jabalpur and Katni in West Central Rly (WCR); Ajmer in North Western Rly (NWR); Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Bareilly in North Eastern Rly (NER); and many Production Units and Workshops like, DLW, Varanasi and DLMW, Patiala; RCF, Kapurthala; CLW, Chittaranjan; Jagadari Workshop, Northern Rly.; Kacharapara Workshop; MCF, Raebereili.
Odisha

Angul Sanitation Workers Strike

The sanitation workers of Municipality in Angul, Odisha, demonstrated on 19 June and began their strike against the highhandedness of contractor and executive officer and also demanding immediate payment of pending wages and providing vaccination and masks.

In Municipality of Angul, Odisha, the contractor did neither paid the wages, nor provided any vaccination to the sanitation workers who work even during Covid period. When the contractor did not listen to workers’ demands, the general secretary of the Safai Karamchari Union, along with other members, met executive officer for remedy but the competent officer too refused to listen and on the contrary, accused workers unionisation and union activities. He also abused and threatened the general secretary, Mithun Behera, of termination from the job.

As a protest, workers resorted to stoppage of work, led by the union president and AICCTU National Council Member, Tapan Mohanty. The contractor in order to thwart the strike by workers resorted to the unfair labour practice of bringing some outsiders. But the workers and the union effectively stalled the illegal action of bringing outsiders by the contractor. In order to suppress the movement and to finish off the union activities, the Executive Officer filed FIR against the GS Mithun Behera and two others. Undeterred by the management action, the union also filed counter FIR against the said officer and two other municipal staff. As of now, the work is stopped completely and workers are on strike.

West Bengal

Gearing Up Against the Codes...

The Labour Department of West Bengal government convened a meeting of all Central Trade Unions in the state on the issue of Central Labour Codes. The Labour Minister of the state and all officials of the labour department were present in the said physical meeting held on 21st June 2021.

The meeting started with a brief introduction by the labour commissioner, following power point presentation of all four labour codes. The salient aspects were pointed out, departure from the previous ones were mentioned and grey areas were also noted. In some cases, for example, on the question of framing Model Standing Orders, the power has now been grabbed by the centre violating norms of federal nature of the government structure. After each session, opinions were also sought from the trade union representatives.

All Central Trade Unions suggested to pass a resolution against the anti-worker Codes and the anti-Farmer acts in the state assembly and also insisted that the state government should honour the popular people’s mandate against the policies of Modi government in the recently held state elections.

The leadership of INTTUC, the labour wing of Trinamool Congress, the ruling party, also strongly protested against the labour codes and in unison with other CTU’s, resolved to fight the anti-labour codes. The labour minister indicated a positive approach and requested the trade unions to submit their concrete objection on the codes by the end of this month so as to help to articulate the government stand.

A memorandum of objections to labour codes was also submitted to the Minister and Principal Labour Secretary. Comrade Atanu Chakravarty, state president and Nabendu Dasgupta, state secretary were part of the delegation on behalf of AICCTU. Other central trade unions, CITU, INTUC, AITUC, AIUTUC, HMS, UTUC, TUCC, and INTTUC also joined the all trade union delegation.

Tamil Nadu

Weeklong Campaign against the DMK Government!

Tamil Nadu unit of AICCTU went on a weeklong campaign to highlight the demands of unorganised workers in the state, including workers of
construction, beedi, powerloom, sanitation, civil supplies, electricity, call taxi and transport who are worst affected by Covid Lockdown. Workers of each sector demonstrated a day each since 15 June that culminated in a participation of thousands of workers on 21 June when the first session of the assembly led by DMK government in Tamil Nadu began. Corona relief of Rs.10,000 per month to all workers for a period of 6 months, Supply of food kits with essential commodities through ration shops, Free vaccination to all, Rs.10,000 per month for 6 months from the corpus lying with the construction workers welfare board were the main demands. The demonstrators also demanded relief to other welfare board workers through government grant, declaration of loadmen of civil supplies corporation also as frontline workers with government relief, etc. District units of AICCTU submitted memorandum to the newly elected members of the legislative assembly.

Solidarity with Farmers Protest

As a part of the call of central trade unions to express solidarity to the struggling farmers, AICCTU joined an impressive demonstration of farmers in front of the Raj Bhavan in Chennai. Comrade Eranippan, Honorary State President of AICCTU addressed the gathering of farmers and workers on behalf of AICCTU.

AICCTU district units joined similar demonstrations held at Chennai, Salem, Coimbatore, Namakkal, Karur, Trichy, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Pudukkottai, Dharmapuri and Thiruvallur Districts.

Andhra Pradesh

15-25 June Protests in Andhra

As a part of 15-25 June, 10 days joint protest call by Central Trade Unions, ASHA workers from Chatrai Mandal raised voice against the anti-worker labour codes and for re-enforcing the inter-state labour laws. Comrade Pullarao addressed the protesters highlighting the demand for free supply of free ration, vaccines and health and life insurance facilities for all frontline workers.

Protests were held at Kakinada against the price rise of petrol and essential goods under the banner of CPIML and AICCTU. Comrade G Satyanarayana led the protest along with others.

Victory for RIMS Workers Struggle

The sanitation workers of RIMS hospital at Srikakulam were denied legally due minimum wages of Rs 16,000 per month as per Andhra Pradesh GO No. 549. RIMS sanitation workers, under the banner of AICCTU, won the struggle after a prolonged battle for implementation of the same. Finally, the management was forced to agree to increase minimum wages from the present level of Rs 11,000 to 16,000, as per the GO, along with all attendant benefits, including PF. Hundreds of sanitation workers joined the victory public meeting held at Srikakulam on 18th June which was addressed by the district convener Comrade D Ganesh along with others.

RIMS Workers Demand Regularization

Contract and outsourcing employees of RIMS hospital went on a protest, on 24 June, demanding promised implementation of recommendations of the Pay Revision Commission (PRC) by the state government. The convener of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of contract and outsourced workers D Simhachalam and the Srikakulam district convener of AICCTU D Ganesh led the protest demanding implementation of recommendations of the PRC, pay hike, 10 lakhs health insurance and 50 lakhs life insurance for the contract and outsourced workers.”

AICCTU
Charter of Demands of Coal Workers

“The Coal Mines Workers Union (CMWU), affiliated to AICCTU, submitted its Charter of Demands (CoD) to the Ministry of Coal, on 23 June 2021, for wage agreement in Coal industry. In view of the CIL’s (Coal India Limited) plan for large scale and systematic retrenchment of coal workers, the very purpose of wage negotiation and agreement, in itself, has become a big question mark. Therefore, we demand that the process of privatization of coal industry and retrenchment of workers must be stopped forthwith.

“In view of the extreme importance of the issues to be negotiated and considering the vastness, as well as ever expanding feature of the industry, we demand that all trade unions having considerable influence in various subsidiaries should also be given representations preferably as core members or at least, as invitees.

“The agreement shall cover all categories of employees who are on the rolls of the Coal India, SCCL, IICM, TISCO, IISCO, Coal Washery, Solar Plant, Captive Coal Mines and other Coal companies / Establishments (public and private sector - including commercial mining) and also contract workers, MDO workers in such companies as on 30.06.2021 and shall come into force with effect from 01.07.2021. The Period of agreement shall be for five years w.e.f. 01.07.2021 to 30.06.2026.....”

[The CoD goes on like this for several pages. Those who are interested are requested to read complete CoD by accessing the link in our website, www.aicctu.org]
Obituary

Comrade Ramjatan Sharma

Frontline leader of the CPIML movement, former member of the Polit Bureau, former Bihar State Secretary and popular Marxist teacher Comrade Ramjatan Sharma passed away at the Indira Gandhi Heart Institute in Patna on 6 June 2021 after a heart attack.

His death was a direct consequence of the negligence and lack of basic healthcare in Bihar district hospitals. Comrade Sharma had been based at Jahanabad was living in the office of the party. When he began feeling some pain, he was brought to the district hospital where not even an ECG was done till evening. Doctors shifted him to Patna and ECG was done only at midnight to realise that he had suffered a major cardiac attack in the morning. Tests began, but crucial time had already been lost and he could not be saved.

Comrade Ramjatan Sharma was one of those typical 1970s veterans who spent their entire life building the party, spreading Marxist ideas in rural Bihar and transforming young members into resolute party activists and organisers.

He would have been 79 next month. For the last five decades, he worked as a full-time party organiser, steered the organisation through so many ups and downs, never lost hope and always remained an inspiration to comrades by setting examples with his tireless efforts. The baton is now in the hands of all those young comrades for whom Comrade Ramjatan Sharma was a mentor par excellence.

On receiving the news of his death, the party flag was dipped at half-mast on all party offices. His body was kept at the party legislative office for final tributes.

Inspired by the Naxalbari movement in the 70s and the poor-dalit political-social movement that began in rural Bihar, Ramjatan Sharma left his government job and became part of the movement. He played an important role in the revolutionary peasants’ movement of the Central Bihar in the 80s. He played an important role in establishing the party not only in Bihar but also in other parts of the country.

He had served as the Secretary of the party in the states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. He was the Bihar State Secretary for a long time in the 90s. He was a member of the party Politburo and Chairman of the Central Control Commission. He has also served as the editor of the party publication Samkaleen Lokyudh for a long time and was also in-charge of the party’s education department. His unparalleled role in inspiring students and youth with revolutionary ideology and preparing political activists can never be forgotten.
BLACK DAY OBSERVED ON THE CALL OF IREF ON 25 JUNE 2021

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