



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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MAIN CONTENTS

Page 4

Pre-Budget Consultation With TUs

Page 5

Sordid Saga of
India's Informal Workforce

Page 8

ITI Worskers' Struggle, Karnataka

Page 10

Violation of Workers Rights in JNU

Page 12

Railway Employees Convention

Page 13

Chile Elections

Page 15

Bank Strike and After

Page 16

Time's Up: Scrap AFSPA

Page 18

Transport Workers' Strike in
Maharashtra

Page 21

West Bengal Transport Workers'
Struggle

Page 29

New Pension Scheme Must Go!

Page 31

Labour Snippets

Page 33

Claims vs Reality: Labour Codes

Page 37

The Amazon Behemoth

Page 42

International Working Class
Struggles

Page 44

State Activity Reports

Page 46

Film Reveiw: 1232 Kms:

The resolve of 2022 - Intensify the Battle to Overthrow the Modi-led Fascist Regime!

2021 has been the year of onslaughts against working class and also a determined resistance against the onslaughts by the working class. 2021 has been the year of an exemplary display of workers - farmers unity!

The country witnessed heroic struggles of farmers that is unparalleled in the post-independence history of Indian society. The relentless struggle of determination and stubbornness of farmers, backed by the entire working class and democratic sections of the country, forced the Modi led BJP government to beat an unceremonious retreat. Three corporate farm laws, already passed by the Parliament, were forced to be withdrawn by the Modi government. The farmers struggle, in which around 700 farmers lost their lives, was a great victory not only to farmers but also to the struggling people and democracy lovers of



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the country. In Lakhimpur Kheri, motivated by the arrogant union minister of the BJP, Mr. Beni, his son with his convoy mowed down the peacefully protesting farmers where four farmers and a journalist were crushed and killed. He also led an indiscriminate firing on farmers. The sacrifices of farmers did not go in vain. Thousands and thousands of countless false cases are filed against farmers in various states because of their protest.

The country also witnessed an exemplary unity of workers and farmers which was also unparalleled in the annals of the history. All central trade unions and the entire working class of the country, including AICCTU (All India Central Council of Trade Unions), barring BMS (Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh) owing allegiance to the BJP, expressed unequivocal solidarity to struggling farmers and joined several forms of protests on the streets. Lakhs and lakhs of workers and farmers joined the call by farmers organisations and central trade unions. It was heartening to see red and green flags fluttering all over the country all through 2021. The significance of farmers struggle is that it began as a movement against corporate entry into and against corporatisation of agriculture, against three pro-corporate farm laws, in its own due course, turned into a political movement to overthrow the Modi led BJP government.

Working class of the country also left no stones unturned to fight the battle. Various sectors of workers, particularly of government and public sector resorted to strikes after strikes against the Modi government's onslaught. Various sections of workers were on a war path. Defence workers, Coal workers, steel workers, bank and insurance employees, scheme workers like ASHA, Anganwadi, Mid day Meal, etc., and also various other sections of private corporate establishments and unorganised workers went on strike. The year ended with a massive, successful strike on 16-17 December 2021 by ten lakhs of bank employees against privatisation of banks. The bank employees strike led by United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), comprising nine

unions, forced the Modi government to defer the tabling of the Bank Privatisation Bill (Banking Laws Amendment Bill 2021) in winter session of the Parliament. Railway workers led by Indian Railway Employees federation (IREF) affiliated to AICCTU led an extensive campaign against corporatisation and privatisation of workshops and dismantling of the Railways.

Ford, Hyundai and various other company workers also went on various forms of protests. We also witnessed ever increasing spontaneous outbursts of un-unionised workers right from Winstons in Karnataka to Foxconn in Chennai. Thousands of young women workers who are not unionised courageously confronted the multinational company Foxconn with determination defying the management's threats and coercion coupled with police highhandedness that went to an ugly extent of arresting trade union leaders who expressed solidarity and labour journalists who covered the protest. Sanitation workers of some states too resorted to strike demanding higher wages and better service conditions in Bihar, Maharashtra and various other states. The all-India platform of central trade unions also was planning to go on an all-India strike which had to be postponed to 23-24 Feb 2022 because of various reasons including Covid and the ongoing waves and waves of strikes amidst Covid 19. The year 2021 can also be called as year of strikes.



Last year, 2021, witnessed a chain of onslaughts by the Modi led BJP government against the working class of the country. The working class too retaliated and continues to retaliate by building resistance movements as narrated above. Covid devastated the life of the people at large, including workers. Covid second wave hit at its worst. Resulted in loss of earnings, loss of jobs and loss of livelihood that led to increasing poverty and inequality. Sky-rocketing price rise is already eating away meagre earnings and effective earnings have almost halved for each individual worker. Workers were reeling under poverty while Modi converted it into an opportunity for the capitalist class and mounted onslaughts after onslaughts.

The major onslaught was the legislation of new anti-labour Codes that has been going on for some years and subsequent formulation of central and state rules last year to implement it. All BJP ruled states have more or less formulated rules and all set to implement it while most of the non-BJP ruled states too have already initiated the process. While all public sector companies are already put on outright sales, all government owned infrastructure are also being handed over to private corporate and multinational players which is euphemistically called as “National Monetisation Pipeline”. In order to implement privatisation and to crush the resultant protests against it, the government has already formulated a legislation banning strikes (EDSA - Essential Defence Services Act 2021) in defence establishments and extending the same soon to other PSUs also cannot be ruled out.

The government is pushing forward a Coebbelsian lie that new Codes will cover all 50 crore workers including the unorganised and the workers of informal sector. Actually, the government is only acting as an agent for insurance companies and has topsy-turried the concept of social security. Unorganised and informal sector workers are only offered insurance schemes for which they are to pay out of their pocket. It is not a welfare scheme of

the government that offer health insurance and old age pension. The government is shedding its responsibility towards working people of the country and is also protecting the corporates and establishments from the burden of providing health and old age security to its own employees. The government claims that they are the “New Codes for a New India” but actually they are the “New (Manuvadi) Codes for a Corporate India”.

We are entering into a new year of 2022. The year begins with the working class strike action on 23-24 Feb. 2022. The “Workers Resistance” and AICCTU greets the workers of the country to turn 2022 into a year of waves and waves of protests of the working class. The working class has nothing to lose but for chains. A whole world of workers is waiting on the wings. The working class of the country should take a new year pledge to overthrow Modi-led fascist government from the Indian soil. Immediate task is to defeat the BJP in the forthcoming assembly elections in 2022 in 5 states including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand. ■■

**World Federation of Trade Unions' (WFTU)
New Year 2022 Message**

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*Happy & Militant
New Year 2022*



with Internationalism and Solidarity

Pre-Budget Consultation:

Central Trade Unions Call it a Farce!

Condemn the Policies of the Government!



A pre-budget consultation meeting with Central Trade Unions was called by the Finance Ministry, Government of India, on 18th December, 2021 prior to presentation of Budget 2022-23 in the coming Budget session of the Parliament. The platform of Central Trade Unions, in response to the invitation, sent a letter calling the exercise a ritual and a farce. The CTUs condemned the policies of the government as out-and-out pro-corporate and anti-people. The platform also cited the government's latest pro-corporate and anti-worker, anti-people measures. The CTUs also further reiterated its earlier suggestions for a pro-people Budget.

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Sordid Saga of India's Informal Workforce

★ ATANU CHAKRAVARTY

While the economy is still languishing, the Finance Minister unabashedly claimed that the Indian economy is now on the path of robust recovery and has "put the effects of the pandemic far behind". This was the FM's statement at the "Leadership Summit" organised by Hindustan Times. In the same summit, on 4 December 2021, Home Minister Amit Shah went a step ahead and said, "Indian economy is fastest in the world to come out of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic because of the policy decisions taken by Modi Government".

Sadly, the very next day, on 5 December, Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee brought out the real picture of the Indian economy in his online keynote address to the students of Ahmedabad University and mentioned, "... People in India are in extreme pain" with "small aspirations

of the people becoming even smaller now. The economy is still well below as against what it was in 2019 ... substantially below".

At the summit organised by Hindustan Times, the Finance Minister had unhesitatingly stated that one of the focus areas of the Indian government's policymaking is to "aggressively pursue ease of doing business while at the same time, burden of compliance has to be reduced substantially". This is a clear message to the corporates that all the remnants of labour laws will not be a 'burden' on the corporates henceforth, and the policy of encouraging and expanding ease of doing business will pave the way for "robust economic revival". She did not forget to mention that the government had already waived off Rs 1.45 lakh crore of corporate tax with an aim to boost investors sentiment

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and to revive the economy. This waiver - first implemented in March 2020 and again in April-May this year - was announced with much fanfare, but the government is silent on the billion dollar question of whether or not this financial push actually helped to salvage the battered economy. The Modi government wants to use a combination of these three policy initiatives -

slashing corporate tax, expanding the ambit of ease of doing business and reducing the burden of compliance - to revive the economy, without alleviating the purchasing power of the teeming millions and the aam aadmi. In other words, the government is refusing to address the problem of aggregate demand. All the policies pursued henceforth has only exacerbated the yawning gap of inequality, starkly brought out by the recent World Inequality Report 2022. This report pointed out that India has emerged as the most unequal country with the top 1 per cent of the population holding more than one-fifth of the total national income in 2021.

It is a matter of fact that despite all these efforts, the Indian economy is still below the pre-pandemic level. The mandarins in the corridors of power assumed that India's vast informal sector would grow in tandem with the formal sector, but the pandemic disproportionately bruised India's informal economy. The CEO of CMIE, Mahesh Vyas has pointed out that since the beginning of the pandemic, at least 10 million Indians have lost stable, well-paying salaried jobs. Even a report published by the Azim Premji University titled "State of Working India, 2021" mentioned that most of the people (around 100 million) who lost jobs during the nationwide lockdown in April- May 2020, were back at work by June 2020 but with depressed incomes. As a result, the labour share of GDP fell by over 5 percentage points from 32.5 per cent in the 2nd quarter of 2019-20 to 27 per cent in the 2nd quarter of 2020-21. Of the decline in aggregate income, 90 per cent was due to reduction in earnings, while 10 per cent was due to loss of employment, which reveals that

though most of the workers were able to go back to their work, they had to settle for much lower wages and earnings. Due to depressed economic conditions, monthly earnings of workers fell on an average by 17 per cent. The precarious nature of employment, along with informal forms of employment, increased manifold and it has been found that nearly half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work. This dismal picture of the economy, the impoverished condition of the common person, is beyond the pale of the Modi Government/ They refuse to learn from harsh reality, and thus push the country into a deep abyss.

In this regard, an analysis of the e-Shram portal provides interesting findings. The Ministry of Labour and Employment started registering unorganised workers in this portal, e-Shram, from 24 August 2021. With a rate of registration of 15 lakhs per day, registration on this portal crossed 10 crores by 1 December 2021. The Ministry hopes to document 30 crores more registrations within the next couple of months. Out of nearly one crore registered, the social profile of these informal workers shows that 61 per cent falls in the young age group (between 18- 40 years). This predominance of young informal workers is a significant feature of India's informal economy. Gender wise analysis during the last 13 weeks (before 1 December) shows that out of the total registrations, 52 per cent and 48.6 per cent are male and female respectively. This indicates significant enrolment of women workers. Nearly one in four registrations were reported from West Bengal (23%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (19 %), Odisha (13%) and Bihar (11%). All these four states have reported a higher share of total registrations than their share of the total workforce aged 15- 59 years according to the PLFS (periodic labour force survey). Other states have registered less than 2 per cent of their total workforce aged 15- 59 years on average.

Another noteworthy observation is that of the total registered workers in e-Shram, more than 70% belong to SC-ST-OBC categories,



and majority are employed in the farm sector. By 25 November 2021, around 53 per cent registered were from the agricultural sector, followed by workers in the manufacturing (13 %) and construction (12%) sectors. We can safely conclude from the mentioned data that till now agriculture is the largest employer; overwhelming section of young informal workers belong to the most deprived, neglected social category. Yet, they contribute more than 52-55 per cent of the country's GDP! The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) estimated that the contribution of this sector to the GDP to about 50 per cent (2008) while 92 per cent of workforce was informal and 8 per cent formal. In 2018-19, as per the latest official statistics, India's informal sector accounted for approximately 52 per cent of its GDP. And this is the tragic irony of India's "development" paradigm; innumerable nameless, faceless informal workers are the main contributors of country's GDP, the real creators of wealth. However, all the economic benefits are drained (through the rhetoric of incentives) towards those handful of corporates whose contribution for the economic well-being of the country is highly questionable!

The available database in e-Shram exposes the

alarming pauperism of this enormous wealth creator class. It has revealed that 94.5 per cent registrants have an income of Rs 10,000 or less. One per cent of the registrants have income between Rs 15000-18000 and 0.5 per cent have an income between Rs 18000-21000.

The available data also revealed that 63 per cent of the workers are in the 18-40 age group. The 'gift' of demographic dividend seems to be highly farcical, since a large section of young and middle-aged people in India earn with low monthly incomes. In an attempt to address the migrant worker crisis, the Supreme Court in its June 2021 judgement had ordered the Union Government to create a national database of unorganised workers. However, interestingly, as per data reported by early November, less than 3 per cent registered workers reported themselves to be migrant.

The draconian four labour codes have not only snatched all labour rights achieved through struggles and sacrifices of the Indian working class, they have converted workers into new slaves and built most regressive labour codes premised on "ease of doing business". Bonanza for the corporates, bullets for the workers: this is the sordid saga of India's development paradigm. ■■



Struggle of Workers in ITI Ltd., Bengaluru

★ MAITREYI KRISHNAN



ITI Ltd. is a public sector establishment falling under the Ministry of Communication, Government of India. Workers, who have worked from 3 to 35 years, have been working in the core and perennial work of ITI. Despite such long years of service, they have been termed as “contract workers” and have been deprived of their legitimate rights. They perform the core work of M/s ITI Ltd. and perform the work of engineers, quality assurance, quality test, lab assistance, data processing, finance, driving, office assistance among others. A large number of these workers belong to the dalit community and there are several women workers who have been working for upto 35 years.

ITI has several defence projects, on which these workers perform all the core work including the Advanced Data Processing Research Institute (ADPRI), Defence Communication Network, the Army Static Switched Communication Network

- IV (ASCON-IV) with the Indian Army, etc. These workers are involved in the production, testing, research and development, field trials, installation and maintenance of these devices. Scores of the workers have been sent by ITI Ltd. on on-site defence and nation-building assignments to various parts of the country, including India’s borders. The workers were also involved in the production of 3,000 ventilators last year during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the production of face shields.

The workers working in ITI Ltd., Bengaluru came together and unionized against the unfair labour practices they were being subject to after the first lockdown, when several workers were illegally and arbitrarily stopped, and raised several disputes in regard to their legitimate demands.

On 1 December 2021, 80 workers who were all members of the Union and had raised



industrial disputes were illegally and arbitrarily stopped and not permitted to work. This was despite specific advice by the Regional Labour Commissioner that ITI Ltd. was required to comply with Section 33 of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, and not change the conditions of service of the workers concerned with the dispute.

The sole reason for refusing employment to workers is the formation of the Union and the workers coming together seeking for their legitimate rights. The actions of the management of the Bengaluru plant of ITI Ltd. is illegal and an unfair labour practice prohibited and punishable under law. By throwing workers to the streets, ITI Ltd. is pushing their families to the streets, including their children.

Despite the fact that they perform core and perennial work, they have been deprived of their statutory rights and permanent status by an act of subterfuge. Indeed contractors have come and gone but these workers have continued in service without any interruption for all these years. These workers have dedicated their lives to ITI Ltd. and have been part of various works in defence for the security of the nation.

Against the illegal and arbitrary action of ITI Ltd., the workers are all sitting in protest outside ITI Ltd. from 1 December 2021. They demand that they be immediately permitted to work and that ITI Ltd. should stop the unfair

labour practices it is perpetuating. They have received support from all quarters, including powrakarmikas, sanitation workers, hospital workers, contract workers from other public sectors, and others.

The struggle of these workers is not only the struggle of workers of ITI Ltd. It is reflective of the condition of workers of various public sector enterprises who have despite long years of service continue to be called “contract workers” and deprived of their rights. Various public sector enterprises, including HAL, BHEL and BEML employ large number of workers in this fashion effectively denying them their most basic rights. The public sector, which is supposed to act as a model employer, in fact, acts as a large scale violator of the law. The contract system, which the Supreme Court called nothing but an improved form of bonded labour is practiced and perpetuated. In fact, the recent Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code perpetuated this highly exploitative system by providing that while contract labour cannot be employed in ‘core activities, the definition of core activities excludes sanitation, watch and ward amongst many others’.

The need of the hour is to take serious action against such shameful practices and to give a strong call for the complete eradication of the baneful contract labour system. ■■



Blatant Violation of Workers Rights in JNU

★ SUCHETA DE



*A Protest by JNU Workers under the banner of All India General Kamgar Union (AIGKU- affiliated to AICCTU in 2016.)
[Photo:V. Arun Kumar/ AICCTU Archives]*

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), like any other educational institutions, does not merely comprise of teachers and students, but also hundreds of workers who toil every day to keep the campus functioning. It is workers of the campus who keep the campus clean, run the mess in hostels, keep library and class rooms functional, maintain necessary services like electricity, keep the campus green and beautiful as well as make administrative work possible. Majority of these workers, now a days, are hired on contractual basis through private contractors. And it is the contractual workers of JNU who have been facing blatant violation of their legal rights by the JNU - contractor nexus.

Since the nationwide lockdown in 2020, the violation of workers' rights by the JNU administration has assumed aggressive dimensions. Non-Payment of Wages, Threat, Caste Abuse and Retrenchment are the issues workers confront today.

More than 50% of mess workers of JNU were retrenched as soon as the lockdown was announced. These workers, many of whom are

migrants from different states, were forced to go back home as they were suddenly thrown into a horrible situation of joblessness and hunger. Several others continued to stay back in Delhi paying the room rent, even when they didn't have any income, with the hope that they would be taken back when the campus reopened. While, a full-fledged reopening of campus has still not been declared, many hostel messes started operating as the lockdown was rolled back in a phased manner. Some of the mess workers were called back to work in the hostels where mess facility had started. The JNU administration made these workers work for several months without payment in the name of recovering money that was paid during the first few months of lockdown. This is a blatantly illegal practice as workers were denied wages for work they had done for several months.

While the country was reeling under the death waves of Corona, it was the sanitation workers who worked with commitment to fight Corona without a day's leave so as to keep the campus clean which was an unavoidable necessity to keep everyone else safe when staking their

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own life. But these workers who were at the most vulnerable situation of being infected by the deadly virus were not even given any basic safety equipments like gloves, mask or sanitiser by the contractor or by the JNU. The sanitation workers were forced to handle garbage, to clean toilets and dustbins without the most basic safety gears.

Many of the sanitation workers got infected by Corona in this situation. It was necessary for them to stay home for two weeks when they got infected. Wages for those two weeks were deducted from their salary. It was only after an intervention by the union of the contractual workers, affiliated to AICCTU, that they were given the salary for those two weeks.

To top it all, the sanitation workers are being forced to work for several months together, without any payment. The non-payment of wages has been repeatedly occurring in JNU for the last two years. The lockdown has economically devastated the contractual workers. Non-payment of wages for months together has pushed the workers into a vicious cycle of indebtedness from money lenders with high interest rates. Despite repeated intimation by the workers and their union (All India General Kamgar Union, affiliated to AICCTU), the delay in payment continues.

Frustrated with the situation, the workers engaged in segregation of garbage went on a strike after duly issuing notice to JNU administration and well after submitting their demands. JNU administration that is guilty of repeated violation of workers' rights responded by deducting wages for eight days invoking the clause 'No work, no pay'.

The workers were threatened and abused with casteist slurs, by the representatives of Sudarshan Facilities Private Limited, the contractor, for joining the union and for strike after they ended it.

On 10th of November, the above said new contractor asked workers to submit their identity documents so as to make them appear

as new recruits. In the same set of papers, something similar to an undertaking in the name of 'Seva ki Sarte' or 'Conditions of Service' was also attached. The so-called conditions of service stated that workers will never engage in any union activities or call for any strikes and workers were forced to sign. This is nothing but an unfair labour practice by the JNU and the contractor. When one of the workers, Mr Govind Kumar, pointed out the illegal nature of the conditions he was orally terminated from service while others, who are mostly illiterates, were forced to sign.

Is it a crime for a youth from Dalit community to be educated and be aware of the rights of workers? Is it a crime to make one's own colleagues aware of the illegal nature of the papers and conditions of service being forced on them?

It is the JNU Administration and the contractor who are guilty of violating the legal rights of the contractual workers time and again.

- Sanitation workers are still made to work without payment for months
- No salary slips are given to workers
- Legally mandated bonus is being denied for last three years
- The order of Equal Pay for Equal Work given by the office of Labour Commissioner in 2018 has not been implemented by the JNU, in clear violation of law.
- Unfair labour practices are being resorted to by the JNU admin and Govind Kumar is being punished for raising his voice against the injustice and illegal actions of the management.
- Sanitation workers are being abused with casteist slurs for joining the union of their will and choice and for raising voice for their rights.

The All India General Kamgar Union has been raising their voice in every possible forum against the violation of rights of the workers. It is time that we extend our solidarity with the struggle of contractual workers of JNU. ■■

Railway Employees Convention Calls for Strengthening Worker-Peasant Unity

Extends Support to 23-24 February, 2022 all-India General Strike

★ KAMAL USRI



On the occasion of conference of “RCF Employees’ Union” (affiliated to IREF and AICCTU), a workers’ convention was organised on 18 December 2021 in the premises of the RCF (Rail Coach Factory) situated in Kapurthala, Punjab. The well-attended and highly enthusiastic convention was teeming with the spirit of worker-peasant unity.

The convention, on the one hand, was addressed by leaders of historic farmers’ movement Comrades Ruldu Singh, President of All India Kisan Mahasabha and Manjeet Singh Dhaner, leader of Kisan Union (Dakaunda), on the other, was addressed by AICCTU General Secretary Com. Rajiv Dimri, Punjab Bank employees’ leader Com. Dilip Pathak and leaders of Indian Railway Employees Federation (IREF)- Comrades Sarabjeet Singh, Amrik Singh, Jumerdeen, Ravi Sen, Manoj Pandey, Rajendra Pal, Kamal Usri, among others. The welcome address was delivered by the President of outgoing committee, Com. Paramjeet Singh Khalsa.

The speakers while hailing the historic farmers struggle and the historic victory it achieved by compelling the Modi government to repeal 3 farm laws, underlined the emergence of present juncture of growing worker-peasant unity and unity of various sections of common

people against the disastrous policies of Modi government and called for further intensifying the united struggles to defeat BJP in the coming Assembly elections and to finally achieve the goal of ousting Modi Regime in 2024. The speakers while hailing the Bank workers for their successful two days country-wide strike (16-17 December) against privatisation and ongoing struggles of various sections of working masses, called for making 23-24 February, 2022 all-India general strike of working class a great success and turning into Bharat Bandh. They emphasised upon further strengthening the communal harmony evolved through the farmers’ movement and the need to remain vigilant against continuing communal and divisive designs of RSS-Modi government.

The convention resolved to intensify struggle against privatisation/corporatisation of Railways and simultaneously strengthen the “Save Railways” campaign among common people. The convention extended full support to the call of all-India general strike and IREF leadership declared a week-long country-wide campaign to culminate in big protest demonstrations on 23-24 February, the days of strike.

In the end, after the adoption of report of the General Secretary, a 15-member Central Executive of the union was elected with Comrades Paramjeet Singh Khalsa as Patron, Amreek Singh as President and Sarabjeet Singh as General Secretary.

Throughout the Convention, the cultural teams, Bhagat Singh Vichar Manch, Kapurthala and Sangwari, New Delhi enthused the participants with revolutionary songs and plays. ■■



Chile Elections:

“History is Ours, and People Make History!”

★ V ARUN KUMAR

“*They have force and will be able to dominate us, but social processes can be arrested by neither crime nor force. History is ours, and people make history!*” These were the final words of Salvador Allende, a socialist President of Chile, who was overthrown in 1973 by a right-wing coup organised by Augusto Pinochet and backed by United States.

More than four-and-a-half decades later, the far-right wing forces, to which Allende was referring to, and the remnants of it have begun to crumble under the weight of the united people’s struggle. In 2019, Chile witnessed a historic mass uprising by students and workers against the increasing inequality, right-wing violence and privatisation of public resources. The protest demanded changes in the current Constitution of Chile that was inherited from Pinochet’s bloody dictatorship.

This 2019 movement further consolidated the “social processes,” and in November 2021 General Elections the Chileans vehemently rejected the right-wing forces and elected progressive candidate Gabriel Boric as the next President of Chile. The 35-year-old Boric, a former student leader, represents left wing Social Convergence Party, a part of the Apruebo Dignidad alliance that includes Communist Party of Chile (PCCh).

Boric secured more than 55.86 per cent of the vote, defeating far-right candidate Jose Antonio Kast who secured 44.15 per cent votes. This people’s mandate thus puts an end to the right wing conservative regime of Sebastián Piñera.

As a student representative Boric had played a pivotal role in the 2011–2013 Chilean student protests, at the time of Piñera’s regime, against

rampant privatisation of education and escalating costs of education.

“If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave!”

Until September 11, 1973, the day of the coup, Chilean society was characterised by increased participation of the working class and toiling masses. It had witnessed the rise of public ownership of production that was once controlled by big corporations. All of this changed with the rise of Pinochet regime and Chile was forcefully thrown into the road of neoliberalism. This free-market economy plan was highly influenced by the ‘Chicago Boys,’ a group of right-wing and neoliberal economists, Milton Friedman’s disciples, educated in University of Chicago or its allied institutions with the help of Ford Foundation. The birth of this group was not accidental but by a well-planned strategy of the U.S. (allegedly funded under the US State Department’s ‘Chile Project’ #SI99900030). And the Chicago Boys were involved in coup against Allende. While the Chicago Boys charted the country’s path to free market, Pinochet cleaned the way by eliminating anyone who became an obstacle.

The brutal legacy of neoliberalism instilled by Pinochet dictatorship is visible across Chile, including in the country’s constitution – which the successive governments since 1990s either failed to change or wilfully supported.

Piñera and far-right Presidential candidate Kast had envisioned this neoliberal model as the future for Chile. Both Piñera and Kast were products of the Pontifical Catholic University of

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Chile that laid the foundation for Chicago Boys. Kast, son of a former German officer with ties to the Nazi Party, is an anti-abortionist, anti-LGBTQ and a vehement supporter of Pinochet. He was the only major presidential candidate to stand against the rewriting of Pinochet era constitution.

Meanwhile, the conservative government of Piñera was marred with corruption and acts of state-led violence against protesters. Piñera granted pardon to 10 convicted criminals, who participated in the torture, murder and disappearance of political opponents during the Pinochet's dictatorship.

While previous left leaning governments attempts to break free from the neoliberal tentacles of the post-Pinochet dictatorship era achieved some success, Boric and the left wing alliance has a historic task ahead. It has, for now, managed to stop Chile from sliding back to the Pinochet era barbarism, but with deeprooted neoliberalism, Chile's socio-economic situation is at the verge of collapse.

Chile ranks among the top 20 most unequal countries in the world, with the top 1 per cent holding 33 per cent of the country's wealth. COVID further aggravated the material troubles of the low-income Chileans who make up the majority of the population. In fact, over half of all workers earned insufficient income in 2020 to keep their families above the official poverty line. A year into the pandemic, almost 30 percent of poor Chileans lacked work, while over three-quarters reported being unable to meet the most basic needs.

This crisis was reflected in the 2019 uprising, which Piñera regime initially attempted to suppress unleashing military and state violence. Tens of thousands of people across Chile rose against poverty wages, a privatised pension system that condemns most retirees to undignified old age, and apartheid-like health and education systems. More

than 30 people were killed and hundreds were arrested and subjected to torture. Many cases of sexual violence were reported.

The Left alliance has vowed to take forward the demands of the working class and toiling masses of Chile against the corporate loot and increasing inequality. Their agenda includes increasing public investment in education, health, social security (including pension) and reforming the country's mining sector that has been ruining the lives of people and the ecology. Boric has promised to expedite the process of creating a more inclusive society by ensuring increasing participation of women, non-binary Chileans and indigenous people. The alliance will have to shoulder the historic responsibility of completing the ongoing process of rewriting the Pinochet era Constitution. In Chile, there is no possibility of transforming the society and bridging inequalities without completely dismantling Pinochet's neoliberal tentacles.

"If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave," Boric said during a campaign. *"Do not be afraid of the youth changing this country."*

With the people's mandate, Boric and the Left alliance has a historic opportunity and responsibility to consolidate the anti-neoliberal resistance and complete the socialist revolution process that was derailed by US-backed Pinochet regime

This article first appeared in [Liberation \(Central Organ of CPI\(ML\)\)](#), January 2022 Issue. ■ ■

WATCH:



The Battle of Chile (1975-1979)
by
Patricio Guzmán



Chicago Boys (2015)
by
Carola Fuentes
Rafael Valdeavellano

READ:

Chile Documentation Project, National Security Archive, Declassified files from the USA's Covert Operations in Chile against Allende and in Support of Pinochet.

Bank Strike and After

★ SOMENATH GUHA

The Narendra Modi government at the centre has learnt its lessons from the resounding setback to its policies given by the farmers' agitation. For now they have decided that discretion is the better part of valour. In the face of mounting resistance from the bank employees they have desisted from introducing the Banking Laws Amendment Bill, 2021 in the winter session. Bank strike on 16 and 17th December was a huge success. Barring some new generation banks in some cities, the shutdown was complete. This has forced the government to retreat, at least for the time being.

This bank strike was unique in many ways. According to Kamal Bhattacharya, veteran leader of the AIBEA, the most conspicuous aspect was the massive participation of young employees, both men and women. Obviously the unending chatter about privatization has made the young generation of bankers feel insecure and they have come out in huge numbers to thwart this nefarious move of the government. Another welcome development was the solidarity extended by not only the employees of many financial institutions like RBI, NABARD, and various insurance companies but also the employees of BSNL, power and defense sectors. Obviously no public sector employee is feeling secure in this claustrophobic situation of wholesale sell and privatization that has been initiated by the Niti Aayog.

There has also been a perceptive change in aam aadmi's attitude towards a bank strike. Thanks to the relentless negative propaganda by the

government, public has generally thought that bankers struck work only for their own benefits, regardless of the problems it caused the customers. But times are a-changing. People are realizing that with privatization their hard earned money will no longer be as secure as it used to be in PSBs. They have seen how the customers of private banks like IDBI bank, YES bank, LAXMI VILAS bank have suffered when their banks had turned sick. They are asking why the prime minister is continuously harping on raising the insured amount kept as deposits in banks to Rs 5 lakhs, which was Rs 1 lakh earlier. So is there a real chance of banks failing, as it used to happen regularly during the pre-nationalisation days? What happens to the deposit above Rs 5 lakhs which many customers have? Will that amount be forfeited? Will that amount be used to 'bail in' or rescue the bank in case it fails? These fears have made the customers jittery. Some civil society groups sprang up in support of the strike. In Kolkata an initiative called 'Bank Bachao, Desh Bachao' held joint rallies with the bankers.

But there is no room for complacency. We have seen that this government can stoop to any level to subvert the democratic process. It can bring in an ordinance and get the bill amended through the back door. And of course it can introduce the bill in the budget session. So the movement will continue, with more vigour, assured Bhattacharya. As of now AIBEA will support the industrial strike on 23-24 February. ■■

AICCTU Statement

AICCTU congratulates Bank employees and officers for grand success of the two days united All India strike on December 16 -17, 2021 against the government's bill on the privatisation of public sector banks. We hail the spirited participation of young and women employees in the strike. We Salute the consistent united struggle of bank employees and officers under banner of United Forum of Bank Unions(UFBU).

We firmly stand with the Bank workers and their struggle and demand recovery of huge bad loan from corporate house and withdrawal of proposed Banking laws (Amendment) Bill 2021. Modi government's move of

Bank privatisation enable private companies to gain direct control over the massive financial resources generated through public savings. The working class will never accept Modi government's policy of reversal of nationalisation. The determined, tireless movement of farmers with popular support has forced the Modi government to beat a retreat on the pro-corporate farm laws. Now, the disastrous move of bank privatisation must be stopped by the united struggle of bank employees with the support of common people.

Let us all heighten the struggle to force Modi government to repeal the Bank Privatisation Bill. ■

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Time's Up: Scrap AFSPA

The massacre of coal mine workers by a Special Forces unit of the Army in Oting village of Mon district in Nagaland is a heinous crime, compounded by attempts to cover it up by staging a fake encounter. The attempts by Home Minister Amit Shah and the Army officials to explain it away as a “mistake” cannot convince even the BJP’s own members and allies in the North East.

The armed forces claimed that they ambushed and fired on a truckload of civilians (coal mine workers returning from work), killing six of them on the spot, because they had “credible intelligence” of movement by insurgents. But this excuse is flimsy for more than one reason.

In the first place the killings took place on a busy thoroughfare in broad daylight. In the second place the forces violated protocol by failing to inform and involve the local police forces. Moreover, the armed forces fired without provocation or warning, let alone any attempt to identify the occupants of the truck - and this would be a human rights violation even if the truck in fact carried insurgents.

When local civilians heard of the killings and came to investigate, they say that they found the armed forces in the process of staging an “encounter”. Justifiably enraged, civilians protested at the local army headquarters. Again, the army indulged in indiscriminate firing on civilian protestors, killing seven.



The forces then reportedly fled the scene, firing even at residences of coal mine workers on the way. In total, 15 civilians have been killed so far in the ambush and its aftermath. Many others are severely injured.

This incident is no aberration. In the North East states, as well as in Kashmir, Bastar and other conflict areas, civilian killings staged as encounters are common. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has its genesis in the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance 1942 promulgated by the British to quell the Quit India movement. Shamefully this law with colonial roots has been in effect as an Indian law in the North East since 1958.

The AFSPA provides impunity from prosecution to armed forces on allegations of murder, torture and even rape. This is why, even though the Nagaland police has filed an FIR against the Special Forces in the Oting massacre case, it will be unable to pursue prosecution without sanction from the Central Government - and such sanction is almost never granted. Even in the notorious case where a judicial enquiry found Assam Rifles personnel guilty of the gangrape and murder of Thangjam Manorama in Manipur in 2004, the AFSPA has protected the guilty from prosecution till now.

The people of the North East have long protested against the AFSPA as the chief enabler of military atrocities against civilians. The protest by the women of Manipur at Assam Rifles headquarters where they stripped and held up a banner screaming “Indian Army Rape Us” remains a stinging indictment of the AFSPA. But successive governments of different hues have refused to scrap the AFSPA or hold Army and paramilitary forces accountable for crimes against civilians in the NE, Kashmir, Bastar and elsewhere. Some 1500 cases of fake encounters in Manipur over the last two decades are currently seeking justice in the Supreme Court.

The BJP brands human rights defenders who raise the issue of fake encounters and

rapes by armed forces as “anti-nationals” and threatens them with sedition laws. Leading Kashmiri human rights defender Khurram Parvez of the JKCCS has recently been arrested and faces cooked up allegations under the draconian UAPA law. The JKCCS is known for its meticulous documentation and advocacy of human rights in the Kashmir valley, including many massacres covered up to look like “encounters” just like the one just witnessed at Oting.

Now, even the Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Meghalaya - both BJP allies - are demanding the scrapping of AFSPA, while a BJP leader of Mon district is accusing the Army of firing on him and other civilians and attempting to stage a fake encounter.

Alongside the repeal of AFSPA justice demands the demilitarisation and accountability for past military action and human rights violations. The enquiries into human rights violations in the North East and Kashmir, even when ordered in the past, have been a sham and the perpetrators have escaped unpunished.

Further, the trial in the Oting case as well as other allegations of crimes by armed forces must be held in open civilian court. There must be compliance with International humanitarian and human rights law and constitutional standards in all ongoing armed conflicts.

It is high time the country stands up against military solutions and demands for accountability from the forces. The whole country must rise up in protest to give the AFSPA a final push. As we observe 75 years of independence, it is high time that we get rid of the AFSPA which has its genesis in colonial governance, and ensure justice and accountability for every act of custodial violence in conflict areas.

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State Transport Workers' Strike in Maharashtra

★ UDAY BHAT

Workers of the Maharashtra State Transport Corporation (MSRTC) are on strike for more than 55 days. They are demanding assimilation in the state government services. MSRTC is known as ST in Maharashtra. The then Bombay provincial government established Mumbai State Transport Corporation in 1948 by nationalizing the then existing private services. After the state of Maharashtra was formed in 1960 the ST expanded the services to the entire state reaching even the remotest villages. This was carried out to fulfill the need of Capitalism at that stage of "Development". ST fulfilled transportation needs of the workers from rural hinterland to the cities. It also helped in the expansion of the Co-operative capitalism being propagated at that time. Today ST has 250 depots of big and small size at vantage areas catering to 15000 buses. It has 1 lakh employees most of whom are connected with the rural areas.

To free the common people from the exploitation of the private transport owners, to provide the people public transport at affordable fares and to ensure safe travel were the aims for establishing S T. Not profit but providing service to the masses was the motto. Hence the fares have always been kept lower than the actual costs thus providing subsidies to the common travellers. The senior citizens, students and differently abled persons are subsidized to the tune of 250 to 300 crores per year in the fare. But the inputs like diesel and other consumables are brought at market prices. Toll is paid at the toll plazas. It is burdened with travel and other taxes. ST is in fact the lifeline of the rural Maharashtra. S T means guaranteed service for school and college students, market trips, health checkups, government and other employees. S T has contributed significantly in the development of Maharashtra state. The state government does not provide any concessions to S T for serving the common masses with low fares. During the corona

pandemic the lifeline of the city of Mumbai - the local train service was closed. No one can forget that 1000 S T buses plied in Mumbai along with the BEST municipal corporation bus service. Nearly 200 S T employees lost their lives to corona. After the policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization (GLP) was pushed through from 1990-91 the policy about public transport changed and steps were taken in all the sectors of the economy to spread GLP. The Maharashtra state government started to encourage private bus operators widely following these policies. This was operationalized on two levels. GLP benefited the neo middle classes from all castes and they had excess money in their pockets. Their aspirations and expectations rose to new levels. Instead of taking steps to fulfill these expectations and aspirations and earn money like providing luxury buses the government openly encouraged private operators on the lucrative, income/profit generating long haul routes with near full capacity utilization. On the other hand the feeder services in the rural areas were handed over to unregulated, unsafe private vehicle owners who literally cramped passengers much above capacity. The real intention of the state government is to privatize S T. They have already taken the first steps in this direction by introducing lease model buses on the Mumbai -Pune route. The policy is to push people to privately owned transport system. The ruling class and the ruling clans have an eye on the prime land of the S T depots under the new monetization policy. The push towards these policies is provided by the Indian vehicle manufacturers (2 and 4 wheeler manufacturers, Bus manufacturers like Tata, Ashok Leyland) , their foreign partners (Bus manufacturers Volvo, Scania, Mercedes etc.) and the infrastructure sector foreign and Indian corporates.

The economic crisis which started deepening from the demonetization has further intensified in the corona period. This has pushed the the S T



which was already reeling under the GLP policy to the death bed in last one year. Spiraling fuel costs, increase in the prices of machinery and spare parts, lack of resources to buy new buses and to maintain buses along with the burden of increase in taxes have resulted in increase in the financial burden on S T. S T is expected to bear the losses while fulfilling the social responsibilities, while the government does not provide any subsidy to eliminate the gap thus created. Under the garb of reducing operational expenses the new appointments were made on junior pay scales. This fitted exactly in the GLP policy of huge discrepancies in wages for the same work carried out by 2 sets of employees. Almost 40 % of the S T employees' fall in the junior scale category today. And this has been one of the main reasons for the unrest. This has been exacerbated by a delay of 2 to 3 months in payment of wages and salaries. Over 40 employees have committed suicides. In all these times the recognized union affiliated to HMS and rival unions from INTUC, Shivsena either remained collusive or have been plain anti-employees. The explosion of the unrest amongst the S T employees has to be understood in this context. The strike is solely at the initiative of the employees. They have thrown out all the established unions. The government is trying hard to break the strike. More than 10 thousand employees have been suspended and services of 1800 employees have been terminated. Transfers are being resorted to. Police repression is underway. Now the government is preparing to use MESMA. But the employees have paid no heed to these measures and are steadfast in their demand for absorption in the government service. They see it as the only assurance to a better future and they are in a way right as well.

In the early stages of the strike the B J P leadership actively supported the strike. Thus it was propagated that the strike has been the handiwork of B J P. But when it became clear that the S T employees are unwilling to move even an inch from the demand for absorption it was difficult for B J P, a supporter of privatization, to stand by them. In a way they became a subject of ridicule and their real face was exposed. But the

established unions and the economic policies of the ruling coalition akin to B J P are responsible to enable B J P to occupy the space offered by genuine unrest in the employees.

Today the S T employees are fighting their own battle by creating an grass root organization. The struggle is nearly leaderless so to say. The lawyer, Adv. Gunratn Sadavarte who is helping the employees in the legal work has become their leader. He has guaranteed success through the legal route. Adv. Sadavarte, however, keeps mum on the privatization policies of the state and union governments; He does not utter a word about the changes effected by the union government in the M v Act to allow plying of 6 and 14 seater private vehicles in the reserved operational areas of the S T. Today the S T employees trust him. But in the times to come he will surely be put to test. All the established political leaders and the media has been threatening that S T employees will face the same consequences as the textile workers. In reality, the ruling class political parties are to be held responsible for the misery of the textile workers. After crushing the textile strike these very people have enabled the corporates to sell the mill lands or mint money by carrying out construction of real estate on that land. These leaders are now threatening the S T employees. The textile workers had taken a political step forward from the trade union struggle and had jolted the then government.

Maharashtra State Sarv Shramik Mahasangh, an AICCTU affiliate, has joined hands with Shashank Rao, an old activist friend and a co-participant in other unions to form the "Sangharsh S T Employees Union". The union is actively and firmly with the S T employees in their struggle. The S T employees have challenged the government policy in basic services like public transport. We must support them in this challenge. ■ ■

AICCTU condemns Foxconn's criminal attitude towards its workers and Police Action on workers Demands Arrest of Foxcon's top officials

Don't play with the lives of the workers!

Taiwanese Foxconn company situated near Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu supplies spare parts to Apple-I phone and Amazon's Fire stick employing about 6000 women workers. About 200 workers staying in one hostel provided by company fell ill after taking food on 15.12.2021 and were hospitalized. While many workers were returned after treatment, whereabouts of few workers were not known. Annoyed over the issue workers spontaneously started protesting. Since there was no proper response either from company administration or from Government they squatted en mass at the Chennai - Bangalore highway on 17.12.2021 disrupting traffic. Then only District Collector and other Police officials came to the spot to pacify workers. Workers were anxious to know the condition of their colleagues and administration was unable to disperse them. In the meantime Trade union leaders and worker vanguards arrived in support of their demands. Government instead of arresting the Foxconn top officials for the mayhem, roughed up women workers and arrested union leaders, including CITU District secretary. DMK Government was flayed for its police action by trade unions and left parties including its electoral allies. Workers dispersed only after knowing through video call that the condition of admitted workers is stable.

AICCTU strongly condemns the Police action. Foxconn is known for their anti worker attitude through out its worldwide operations, and this incident

is no exception.

To avoid snowballing of the protest to much larger scale, Government announced that all workers are given 7 days paid leave. Also transportations are arranged by the Government to take them to their native places.

AICCTU Demands:

- Foxcon is to be held accountable and its Top officials are to be arrested.
- Release all those arrested, including trade union leaders and Ms. Vaishnavi, an Independent Journalist.
- Government should release a medical report of all those affected by food poison.
- Government should come out with the time bound report on the condition of working women's hostel.
- A team consisting of representatives from Trade unions also should be permitted to inspect Foxconn factory comprehensively and give report to the Government.
- Government should ensure decent salary, working conditions including clean Hostel to working women. ■■



West Bengal:

Unite to Demand Reinstatement of All Retrenched Workers in Transport

★ **DIBAKAR BHATTACHARYA**

In the last assembly polls in West Bengal, the ruling party had come up with various promises for the transport workers stating that those who have been working as direct contract workers in various transport companies under West Bengal Transport Corporation (CTC, CSTC, WBSTC), NBSTC and SBSTC for a long time will be made permanent. It was also promised that the employees who are working temporarily or through agencies will be made contract workers directly under the company and would gradually be made permanent in the future. They also assured that family members of the deceased workers will be given jobs, duty will be given at the depot near the house, salary/ overtime/ incentive of permanent employees will be increased, workload will be reduced etc.

It's been 8 months since the govt has been elected and none of the promises have been fulfilled. In addition, illegal layoffs are being carried out on various pretexts. WBTC had already started massive layoffs in all its organizations. Over the years, illegal retrenchments on various excuses have been a norm in these transport companies. Even the tripartite agreement (regarding reinstatement of 14 CTC workers) against illegal layoffs of management issued by the state labor department is being violated by the WBTC authority. Hundreds of transport workers are now facing a horrific attack. 89 employees of SBSTC and hundreds of workers from CTC, CSTC and surface transport companies have already been laid off and the number could soon reach upto 400. Despite of thousands of vacancies, workers are being hired on contract, as temporary or agency workers and are being denied equal pay for equal work violating labor laws. Most of the owners of the agencies that have

sprung up overnight are either the leaders of the ruling party or the relatives of some bureaucrats. Even the legitimacy of their contracts with the transport companies is questionable and there had been many discrepancies during the appointments. Hundreds of these workers who risked their lives during the Covid pandemic to keep the transport service running are now being thrown out.

Following the path of central government, the state government is also aiming to privatize the transport sector. This approach was first introduced in the state during the Left Front period (through route and bus franchise). Today it has become even more pronounced by contractualization or hiring of workers through agencies. Hundreds of acres of government land in prime areas of the city, bus routes are being sold to private bodies or corporates at minimal cost where massive financial corruption is also involved. Hundreds of crores of rupees gained from leased or sold assets have not been spent for the revival of the transport industry. Reports of massive corruption with the funds of workers' cooperatives have also come up.

Transport workers have a long history of struggle for their rights in West Bengal. 1025 workers, who were kept as 'casual' for 15-20 years in Left front period, became permanent through courageous struggle led by AICCTU in 2008-09. United workers movement stopped the humiliation faced by drivers and conductors who were often stripped naked on the highways and in the name of 'checking'. Twice during the TMC era, the depots were shut down; transport workers marched to Paribahan Bhawan and forced the management to increase the salaries of the employees by Rs. 2,000 and introduce

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bonus of Rs. 1600 for the agency workers for the first time.

Presently, retrenched and retired workers have been protesting against illegal layoffs and demanding regular pensions. In this situation, all kinds of workers in the transport sector must unite. The conspiratorial plans of the government and the actions of authoritarian, dishonest, corrupt management have brought the state transport industry to the brink of destruction. "I am not being laid off, so why bother?" - this attitude must be rejected by the transport workers. No one will be safe in the future. Therefore, in the interest of transport sector and workers, all the workers and unions of this sector, irrespective of party affiliation, must unite and resist this onslaught. Workers must also be beware of conflicts between unions, factional contradictions and all conspiracies to divide workers, which will ultimately strengthen the hands of anti-labor management.

We all must unanimously demand:

1. All workers who risked their lives to keep the state's transport sector afloat during the Covid pandemic must not be laid off. The pruning should be withdrawn and all must be taken back to work immediately.
2. The tripartite agreement against illegal layoffs of management by the State Department of Labor must be implemented and 14 persons must be immediately reinstated and arrears of wages must be paid.
3. All contract, temporary and agency personnel should be made permanent in the vacant posts.
4. Millions of rupees deposited in workers' co-operatives should not be embezzled. Workers must be reimbursed immediately.
5. A family member of the deceased workers must be immediately employed.
6. Illegal transfers should be stopped immediately. Workers must be posted at the nearest depot.
7. Employees must be paid a bonus of Rs. 4500 as per government instructions.
8. Equal pay for equal work must be ensured.
9. The authoritarian, dishonest and corrupt management should be given exemplary punishment.
10. The government owned public transport sector must not be privatized.
11. Vacant posts must be filled by direct appointment of permanent staffs and not through contract, temporary or agency basis. All contract, temporary and agency workers must be made permanent.

AICCTU affiliated CTC-BDKS, CSTC-SSKU, WBSTC-SSKU unions have strongly protested against the government's privatization plan and illegal layoffs by the authorities. Leafleting and posterling have started at the depots to spread the campaign and build a larger movement in the coming days. The AICCTU believes that a united movement of workers and unions is the only way to save the state's transport sector and resist attacks on workers.

(Translated by Madhurima Bakshi) ■■



ILO Report on Impact of COVID on Jobs in the MSME Sector

★ RADHIKA KRISHNAN

The International Labour Organization recently released a report on the impact of the COVID pandemic on enterprises and workers in the formal and informal economy in India. This report, which essentially focuses on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India, has tried to capture various aspects of the trajectory of the MSME sector in India during the pandemic. It looks at turnovers, outputs, deviations in income, job losses/retentions, nature of financial problems faced, shifts in supply chains, shifts in labour profiles in the sector, institutional support (or its absence) to enterprises and workers. Given that the report tries to capture one of the most traumatic episodes in the Indian economy in the recent past, its significance cannot be underestimated. There is, after all, a crying need to document the actual state of affairs. As we shall see, the ILO report reveals some of aspects of the chaos wrought by the pandemic as well as the abysmal state of the government's response to the same. However, the report also suffers from certain methodological as well as analytical limitations, which we shall see.

Significant Conclusions of the ILO Report

The ILO report focuses on MSMEs because this sector is a major source of employment in India, and any jolt to this sector has a cataclysmic as well as spiraling impact on the economy. There are an estimated 63 million MSMEs in India, most of them micro units. There is a huge variety amongst these MSMEs, in terms of what work they are engaged in, how many workers they employ and the scale of operations. The ILO study is based on a very small subset of the total number of MSMEs in India. It has analyzed approximately 500 MSMEs each in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh

(1525 MSME owners and 3111 workers were interviewed for the report). These states were chosen because they host a substantial section of MSMEs in the country, and the efforts were made to select a sample which is representative of MSMEs in the country. Qualitative interviews were conducted with key stakeholders of the government, the trade unions, and NGOs. The study looked at two questions: firstly, what was the impact of pandemic-related disruptions for both MSME owners and workers, secondly, how effective was the institutional response to these disruptions? Did governments step in to address the disruptions? What were the policy measures and to what extent were they accessible?

The first major pandemic-related disruption was the lockdown announced in March 2020. Both enterprises as well as workers suffered as a result. Supply chains were disrupted, lakhs of workers lost their source of income. The ILO survey was conducted in October 2020, many months after the lockdown. However, the survey reveals that the impact of the lockdown continued in many ways, even though many units had started their operations. 92 per cent of the unit owners said that the lockdown had impacted them. The closure of the enterprises had a cascading effect and impacted their cash flow, supply chains, and availability of labourers. At the time of the survey in October 2020, 65 per cent of the enterprises had started normal operations.

However, 14 per cent were still shut down. One can see regional variations, both between states and within states. Tamil Nadu fared better than UP and Maharashtra. Nearly 86 per cent of the enterprises were fully functional at the time of the survey. 19 per cent of the units in Maharashtra and 16 per cent of Uttar Pradesh units were still shut. Within Maharashtra, in

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Mumbai, 26 per cent of the units were shut. Even in October 2020, 63 per cent of the enterprises were still facing the lockdown impact. 90 per cent units reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted them. Some of the units in the service sector had returned back to normal operations (20 per cent of the enterprises in Agra and 8 per cent in Tiruppur mentioned normal operations). The permanently shut units were in the service industry, primarily providing financial intermediation, transport and hotel services.

Even when units managed to continue operating, they faced multiple problems. Many units could not pay salaries, could not purchase raw materials, had to deal with reduced demands. Many were struggling to repay loans; many units had to keep paying rents even through the lockdown. Again, there were regional variations – these issues were more acutely reported in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra and 80 per cent of the small enterprises and 60 per cent of the micro- and medium-sized enterprises in the services sector mentioned this. Many units also reported a significant decline in turnover. Nearly 75 per cent of the units mentioned that their turnover had declined by 30 to 90 per cent compared to a three-year average. A majority of units also reported in October 2020 that they needed another 3 to 6 months to return to the pre-March 2020 level.

As was expected, the workers in the MSMEs bore the brunt of the lockdown and the subsequent adverse impacts. This is because the most common coping mechanism reported by MSMEs was permanent (12.4 per cent) or temporary (33.3 per cent) laying off of employees. 45 per cent of the enterprises laid off workers either temporarily or permanently. There was a 25 per cent reduction in the number of labourers employed. The reduction was 36 per cent in Maharashtra, 32 in Uttar Pradesh, and 18 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, there was a gender dimension to this phenomenon. More women workers were laid off, in proportion. There was a 54 per cent reduction in the number

of women workers employed in Maharashtra and 37 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. Across the states, the number of enterprises not engaging any labour increased from 5 per cent before March 2020 to 17 per cent at the time of the survey. Again, the number of enterprises indicating no labour increased significantly in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh compared to Tamil Nadu. The number of enterprises not engaging any women labourers increased from 59 per cent to 65 per cent across the three states. In Maharashtra, it increased from 60 to 73 per cent. Most of the enterprises that have laid off workers are from the service industry including enterprises that repair goods, electricity, gas and water supply, hotels, transport, and real estate. Apart from retrenchments, MSMEs resorted to other mechanisms such as more shifts, paid and unpaid leave, loans to workers, decreased salaries, overtime, change in working arrangements, provision of health insurance and organizing transport. Here again, Tamil Nadu performed much better than other states when it came to helping workers; for instance 43 per cent of units in Chennai and 29 per cent of units in Tiruppur provided transport to its workers.

Apart from severe job loss and insecurity, workers had to deal with institutional apathy. There were very few policy initiatives offered, and the access to these initiatives was very limited. According to the ILO survey, 85 per cent of the workers do not have access to any social security. Even those who consider themselves full-time workers have no access to any security. The majority of these were in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The report points out that while the government had initiated some schemes to alleviate the impact of the pandemic, these schemes were not successful. For example, even though most units stressed that they desperately needed access to easy loans, only 15 per cent of enterprises had accessed business loans. 60 per cent did not apply or did not receive any support. This is when 43 per cent of units reported that they had not been able to repay loans, 38 per cent were struggling to pay rents and 47 per cent



were struggling to pay salaries. The proportion of those who did not receive any support was significant across all three states, though Tamil Nadu shows a slightly better track record. Of those who did not avail or receive any support, many were not aware or felt that they might not get it. The support for workers was very limited too, as pointed out by the ILO report.

Free ration was provided by and large by trade unions or civil society organizations, and to some extent under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana. A very small amount of Rs 500 was transferred to some workers through the central government's Jan Dhan Yojana, and even here, workers in UP benefitted from this scheme compared to workers in Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu. The report states that there is no database of workers, and this limits the efficacy of governance schemes. But the fact remains that even if a database were to be available, the amount that the government is offering as support, Rs 500, is a cruel joke. This is barely above the daily minimum wage for a skilled worker, and to see this amount as 'support' is an outrage. Again, the government is offering a mere Rs 1000 to an MSME enterprise as 'support' for reopening. This is yet again a farce and a cruel joke. Overall, the government has completely failed to provide the much-needed low-interest/interest-free loans, tax breaks and relief from rents etc. One sees a structural and institutional apathy at work.

Limitations of the ILO Report

The ILO report suffers from some severe limitations. To begin with, it focuses on a very small subset. Even if there were to be representative of the MSME sector, the fact is that it only captures the first COVID wave. The survey does not cover April-June 2021, during which large parts of the country was brought to its knees by the pandemic. Therefore, the gloomy results reported are likely to be a gross understatement.

Also, the report does not hold the government accountable on multiple occasions. There is just a passing mention of the fact that even prior to the pandemic, the MSME sector was reeling under the twin assaults of demonetization and the rolling out of the GST regime. The report does little to critique the very structure of government schemes that offer a piddly Rs 500 to workers and Rs 1000 to individual MSME units as 'support'. In other words, the focus of the report is on implementation. That being said, the fact of the matter is that even such a report exposes the tremendous blow faced by the formal and informal MSME sector in India. ■■

Insurance not the Solution for Universal Healthcare and Broad-based Social Security System

★ SAURABH NARUKA

The workers in the unorganized sector constitute about 93 per cent of the total work force in the country. Majority of these workers are without any social security coverage, especially security of health and life. The workers' movement has been demanding comprehensive social security measures for the unorganized sector, but the government measures on such an important issue has been piecemeal, insufficient, token and without institutional mechanisms to ensure implementation of even declared health and life insurance programs on the ground. One of the major insecurities for workers in the unorganized sector is frequent illnesses and need for medical care and hospitalization of such workers and their family members. Under the neo-liberal policy regime, health and life insurance has been sold as one way of providing protection to poor households against the risk of falling into poverty because of health-related expenses. However, most efforts to provide health insurance have faced difficulties in both design and implementation. It is understandable that the poor are unable or unwilling to take up health insurance because of its cost, or lack of perceived benefits. But even when the government bears a part of the cost of insurance, the lack of health facilities on the ground, paltry insurance coverage of both life and health insurance and the lack of an effective implementation machinery has shown the limitations of seeing insurance as the only mechanism to address the huge issue of providing meaningful social security to large sections of the unorganized workforce and common people in the country.

Aam Aadmi Bima Yojna

Aam Aadmi Bima Yojna is propagated as an important health and life insurance scheme of the government of India (GoI), administered by

the Department of Financial Services and run by the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), for the unorganized sector workforce of the country. It started in 2007 but the GoI later approved the merger of Social Security Schemes viz., Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana (AABY) and Janashree Bima Yojana (JBY). The merged scheme was renamed "Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana" and came into effect from 1 January 2013. The members and possible beneficiaries under the scheme should be aged between 18 and 59 years. The members should either be the head of the family or earning member of a below poverty line family (BPL) or else should belong to a family marginally above the poverty line and coming under identified vocational groups/rural landless households. Around 48 vocational groups have been identified, which are covered under the Aam Aadmi Bima Yojna, mostly from the unorganized sector.

Low Budget Allocation

The governing legislation to provide social security to the unorganized sector workers is Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. In June 2017, the government has again converged the Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana with the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY). PMJJBY and PMSBY are now providing insurance cover to unorganized workers. PMJJBY provides life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh on payment of premium of Rs 330/- per annum. PMJJBY is available to people in the age group of 18 to 50 years. PMSBY provides insurance coverage of Rs 2 lakh in the case of accidents or full disability, and Rs 1 lakh on in the case of partial disability on payment of premium of Rs 12/- per annum. The scheme is available to people in the age group of 18 to 70 years. The beneficiaries are decided by the respective State/UT governments. The total premium of

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Rs 342/- is shared equally between the State government and the Central government. The total premium now is to be borne by the individual/ State Government under the full premium regime which has been in effect from 1 April 2020. This change in the sharing pattern of premium can mean that the full responsibility, even in case of BPL category, has now been completely shifted to state governments and the Centre has abdicated its responsibility.

It is not difficult to visualize that the paltry amount of health and life insurance coverage is clearly insufficient to meaningfully provide any respite to even BPL households in case of health emergency and loss of earning member of the household. This can be said without going into the analysis of the efficacy of the scheme in terms of the actual relief provided to beneficiaries covered under the scheme.

Funds under the PMJJBY/PMSBY are not allocated to State/UT Governments for implementation. However, the expenditure incurred on social security scheme of PMJJBY/PMSBY from the social security fund maintained by LIC, during last three years towards providing insurance cover is as under:

Year	Expenditure (Rs. In Cr)
2017-18	435.16
2018-19	587.52
2019-20	437.69

The details of the beneficiaries enrolled under PMJJBY and PMSBY are as under:

Year	Beneficiaries
2017-18	2,82,78,851
2018-19	3,36,58,896
2019-20	2,66,53,506

(Source: Rajya Sabha Question 1542 dated 04.03.2020 and PIB Delhi, 22 March 2021)

It is not difficult to understand that the number of beneficiaries covered under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) is minuscule percentage of the large chunk of

the unorganized sector workforce. Moreover the actual expenditure incurred on settling insurance claims by LIC given above shows that the coverage of the scheme is very limited when it comes to the actual implementation.

Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna

Besides this, the central government is claiming that the issue of health and maternity benefits are being addressed through Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna (AB-PMJAY) which according to the government is a universal health scheme administered by the National Health Authority (NHA). The number of eligible beneficiaries under PMJAY as per the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 on the basis of select deprivation and occupational criteria across rural and urban areas and with the States/UTs implementing AB-PMJAY further expanding the coverage of the scheme has come to 13.13 crore families (65 crore people). Around 73 per cent families are claimed to be covered under the PMJAY and State Schemes.

As per the scheme, the beneficiaries are eligible for the free health insurance coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh. PMJAY is an expansion of the previous Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), launched in 2008 to provide health insurance coverage of up to Rs 30,000 per year to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families, unorganised sector workers, and other identified vulnerable groups.

Details of funds for premium payment incurred under the scheme are as under:

Year	Expenditure (Rs. In Crore) Amount of central share of premium released to the States
Sept. 2018 to March, 2019	1849.55
April, 2019 - March, 2020	2992.95
April 2020 - 28th Feb, 2021	1657.25

But the allocation for much celebrated universal health insurance scheme Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna (AB-PMJAY) is pegged and budgeted merely at Rs 6,400 Cr during FY 2019-20. In the revised estimate for the year this was shockingly halved to Rs 3,200 Cr. In the FY 2020-21, even amidst the Covid pandemic, allocation remained the same i.e. a mere Rs 6,400 Crore.

As per the claims submitted under PMJAY till 20 November 2019, 42 per cent were from private Empanelled Health Care Providers (EHCPs) and 58 per cent were from public EHCPs.

The average claim amount in private EHCPs was higher at Rs 17,691 than the

average claim amount in public EHCPs which was Rs 11,050. But the average claim is clearly much lower than Rs 5 lakh limit of health coverage under the scheme, which shows that patients of serious diseases are still not being addressed through this mechanism. Though the total hospitalization as on 20 December 20 2021 under PMJAY as per its website is 2.56 Crores, the hospital empanelment as per the latest available figure on website as on August 2020 stands at mere 22,796 which again emphasizes the shortage of actual health infrastructure for ensuring quality healthcare and high pressure on limited EHCPs currently empanelled.

Besides the PMJAY, the second component under Ayushman Bharat is the establishment of 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) which is supposed to improve the actual delivery mechanism of health services. This is to be done by transforming 1.5 lakh Sub Health Centres (SHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs), the first point of contact to primary healthcare to HWCs by 2022. But for this gigantic task, considering the well-known pathetic state of this SHCs and PHCs, the budget allocation is Rs 1600 Crore for FY 2020-21 which comes to around Rs 1 lakh per health centre. It is no surprise that as per studies across India, only 5 per cent of the estimated population over 30 years of age had been screened for as basic an ailment as hypertension, which speaks volumes

about our basic health infrastructure. The total allocation for the Central Health Ministry, even in the midst of the persisting Covid pandemic in 2020-21 stands at only Rs 73,931.77 crore. Last year, the ministry's allocation was Rs 69,000 crore, which has now gone up by a little over 7 per cent.

Conclusion:

As per the survey published in the Hindu recently on 29 January 2021, India has one of the highest levels of Out-Of-Pocket Expenditures (OOPE) of around 65 per cent on health, contributing directly to the high incidence of catastrophic expenditures and poverty. It suggested that present public expenditure of 1 per cent of GDP on health is very low and should at least be increased to 2.5 to 3.0 per cent of GDP, which can bring out-of-pocket health expenditure to a manageable level of 30 per cent. This should be the real focus of any attempt to strengthen and expand health services infrastructure in every nook and corner of the country. This can provide quality, access and guaranteed health services to every citizen of the country in timely and effective manner, which can ensure assured healthy population that is in much better position to contribute economically to well-being of the country. It will also address the issue of preventive healthcare by early diagnosis of serious diseases. Life and health Insurance based solution, which the central government is presently focussing on, will only encourage privatization and profiteering in even basic services such as health. The Covid pandemic has only shown the limitation of this model; public health infrastructure crumbled under the strain and private hospitals only made pandemic an 'aapda mai avsar' opportunity for hefty profiteering at the cost of vulnerable citizens. All these claims of wide life and health insurance coverage of population remained merely on paper without giving any actual relief to the poor and vulnerable sections of the population. ■■

The New Pension Scheme Must Go!

★ AMREEK SINGH¹



The Atal Bihari Vajpayee led NDA government enacted an ordinance on December 22, 2003, imposing a New Pension Scheme (NPS), based on the vagaries of stock market dynamic and removing the entitlement of the old pension scheme (excluding the armed forces), to those who joined as government employee on or after January 1, 2004. Except for two or three states every other state in India adopted it. The root of the NPS lies in the LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) policies imposed on the country way back in 1991 by the Congress government led by Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh. Every right of citizens of India were allowed to be sacrificed for the sake of private profit seeking. The ruthless privatisation invaded the right to secured pension for employees.

The statement of the then-Finance Minister Mr. Jaswant Sinha while introducing New Pension Scheme in the Parliament in 2003 made the intention of the government very clear. He said that the financial burden,

because of pensions, is mounting on the shoulders of the government; one day, the government would be unable to handle this burden and then, the country's economy is bound to be devastated. He also revealed the government's intention obvious by saying that the government was introducing a new market-based pension scheme based on a fixed deduction rather than a fixed payment in order to relieve itself from this heavy burden. In a way, Mr Jaswant Sinha also made it absolutely clear that the NPS is designed to take a share from hard earned money of employees, rather than to ensure their rights in their unproductive age.

On the other hand, the country's Supreme Court and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have clearly stated that the pension provided to employees is not a charity from the companies or the government, but it is their own benefit out of their investment. This cannot be stopped or diverted elsewhere without their approval. Pension is that portion of an employee's salary that is unpaid to them while they were in service. Despite this, the government designed a pension policy that created an unsecured future for the next generation who were yet to enter the workforce. Today, the new employees believe that those who designed this disastrous scheme have taken away their benefit for the future of post-retirement. Today's employees question that if our MPs, MLAs felt so good about the NPS, why don't they implement it for themselves?

We must evaluate any policy based on its theoretical foundations and the impact it is supposed to create in the society. The theoretical foundation of the NPS lies in the private profit seeking ideology of neo-liberalism. This policy has been designed to

[1] The Author is the National President, Front Against NPS in Railway



facilitate profit seeking by the companies at the cost of secured future of the citizens. Secondly, the experience of the people of the countries, where pension rights were snatched away in favour of private capital, tells us how miserable people can become if their pension rights are taken away. In countries where similar schemes have been implemented since 1974-75, starting from Chile in South America to various other countries of North America and Europe, people's lives are devastated after worldwide economic slowdown of 2008. Most of the companies fled the countries or closed down their shops for the fear of decreasing profits, shedding the responsibility towards the future of their employees.

When the NPS was introduced in India, we started looking at its implications. We began reaching out to workers. Right now, we are witnessing an extremely vulnerable situation into which the senior citizens pushed into. Pensions at the rate of Rs. 523, 753 and 1044 are being given to ex-employees. In states like Bihar, the amount disbursed as pension does not even cross Rs. 100 for many ex-employees.

As soon as the cruel face of the NPS popping out, workers of Indian Railways and several

other government services began organising themselves against the NPS, demanding restoration of old pension scheme. On 20th of August 2017, the 'Front Against NPS in Railways' was formed with the demand to restore 'Old Pension Scheme' in railways. Several other platforms to fight against NPS were also floated in various states. An organisation called the 'National Movement for Old Pension Scheme' was also formed. These organisations went on bigger mobilisations in the national capital throughout the years 2018 and 2019. The pressure, thus generated, forced different opposition parties to take a stand against the NPS.

The perils of the NPS are hidden to no one anymore. Together with the fight against privatization, the fight against NPS will have to be carried forward. Taking inspiration from the victorious farmers' movement, the struggle of the Indian working class for a secured future will only intensify. The Front Against NPS in Railways and the National Movement for Old Pension Scheme have taken up the task of fighting the battle against NPS until its logical end. The movement will not relent until the Old Pension Scheme is restored. ■■

How the NPS robs an employee of his own hard earned money

Under the NPS, if an employee retired at the age of 60 years, 40% of his money accumulated in this scheme will have to be invested in annuity and, if retired before, 80% will have to be invested.

An example - Shri VV Geeteswaran, Loco Pilot of a goods train, Palghat Division, Kerala, joined the service in 2005 and retired on 30 May 2021. His basic pay was Rs. 41,100. At the time of his retirement, total funds accumulated in his NPS account was Rs. 18,37,000 and out of this total amount, he received 11 lakh rupees as onetime payment and Rs. 3400 as pension, which will remain frozen as this scheme is not eligible to get the benefit of Dearness Allowance. Moreover, this amount of Rs 3400 as pension will also decrease in its real value in the coming years in the face of sky-rocketing prices. Now, had this employee retired under Old Pension Scheme, he would have been a rightful beneficiary of Rs. 14 lakh as one-time lumpsum payment and a monthly pension of Rs 25000 with an addition of increasing DA every six months, based on the level of rise in prices. ■■

Labour Snippets – January 2021

★ LEKHA



1. Beauticians Re-start Strike Against Urban Company

In the October 2021, hundreds of women beauticians registered with the 'Urban Company' app, were protesting against low wages and charging of commissions which were as high as 35 per cent. While negotiations between the workers and the Company failed, 50 beauticians have been holding a sit-in strike since December 20th, 2021 outside the company's headquarters at Gurgaon. The company, in turn, has filed an injunction suit against these women workers seeking that the Court bars the women from holding any "demonstration, dharna, rally, gherao, peace march, shouting slogans, entering or assembling on or near the office premises...". It also demanded the court to restrict protestors from circulating any messages on WhatsApp or social media platforms, which may damage the reputation of the startup, which is

in fact, in reference to the WhatsApp group created by the women workers where they discuss their further actions and coordination in regard to their on-going protest.

The striking workers are demanding fixed commission rates, flexibility in working operations, safe working conditions, a stop to arbitrary ID blocking, social security, and transparent policy guidelines.

2. Forest Guards' Precarious Working Conditions

The working conditions of forest guards in wildlife reserves is precarious with no job, wage or livelihood security for these workers who perform essential and crucial work of safe keeping of our forests and wild animals, especially tigers, reported The Wire. These guards work on the frontlines and are employed

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Maruti Workers Strike in 2012 in Haryana, Manesar plant. (Archive)

as 'forest watchers' in both temporary and permanent posts, with permanent posts being very few. While the expanse of these wildlife reserves are huge, the posts of forest guards are very few, thus putting exponential burden on the few who are there. These guards and beat officers patrol protected areas and territorial forests every day, and implement anti-poaching and other protective activities, and also sometimes collect field data for research purposes. Many of these forest guards have lost their lives on duty, which includes attacks by poachers. They receive very low wages and their payment is delayed as well. The workers in Pakke Tiger Reserve went on strike in 2021 for not having been paid for 7 consecutive months, whereas 140 temporary guards of the Tiger Protection Force at Mizoram's Dampa Tiger Reserve also went on strike in April 2021 seeking for their salaries which was delayed for more than 6 months. However, the compensation for the risk they undertake to protect our wildlife reserves and for the essential service they render is disproportionate

and abysmally low.

3. Maruti Worker Gets Bail after 9 Years

One of the 13 workers of the Maruti-Suzuki Plant, who were sentenced to life imprisonment in 2012 after a workers' protest at their Manesar Plant was granted bail by the Chandigarh High Court in November 2021. Rambilas, was charged with attempt to murder of a company official and was serving his term in a Gurgaon jail. While the 13 workers were consistently denied bail by various courts, the release of Rambilas was hailed by the workers who continue to fight for their rights even after the 2012 incident. With very few charges against his name, Dhanraj Bhambi was also rejected bail by the Supreme Court in July 2019 and he continues to languish in jail. Since 2012, two of the 13 workers who were serving life imprisonment have passed away in imprisonment. Pawan Dahia died after being electrocuted, while Jia Lal passed away after suffering from cancer. During the pandemic, some of them were sent home on parole which has ended and they are back in imprisonment. ■■

“New Labour Code for New India”: Continued lies by the Modi Government as it attacks the Working Class

★ MAITREYI KRISHNAN



Protest in New Delhi against Modi government's anti-worker Labour Codes. (AICCTU Archives)

The Ministry of Labour and Employment has brought out a propaganda booklet titled “New Labour Code for New India” which seeks to justify the anti-labour Codes by a series of false claims.

In 2019, in his Independence Day speech, Narendra Modi said that we should not suspect those who create wealth for the nation, and should respect them. He was not speaking of the actual wealth creators - the working class, but of those who fed off the workers and enriched themselves. The Labour Codes that have replaced the 44 labour laws stand testimony to the disdain that the present BJP Government has for the working class. While preaching that the Codes benefit the workers, the Government has taken all steps to further enrich the corporate sector while pushing more and more workers into vulnerable conditions. The propaganda booklet brought out by the Ministry is another effort to continue to peddle lies, and it is necessary to uncover the same. This article looks at some of the claims made and the reality of the situation.

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Standing Orders and the IR Code - Another betrayal of the Industrial Working Class

★ AVANI CHOKSHI

The stated objective of the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, was two-fold - firstly, it was thought to be expedient to require employers in industrial establishments to define with sufficient precision the conditions of employment under them and secondly, that the said conditions be made known to workmen employed by them.

Pursuant to this pre-constitutional enactment, workers in industrial establishments across the country have fought to better their service conditions and achieve better standards of certified standing orders. Importantly, the Act was a tool that served to protect workers from arbitrary action of managements - now, the Rules governing both the workers and the

management were defined and published for all to see.

Not only this, but the Rules could be tested and modified on the touchstone of fairness and reasonableness. While the IR Code maintains this standard of fairness and reasonableness, it brings in a number of anti-labour provisions that further tip the unequal scale in favour of the management.

Model Standing Orders by Union Government Only

Repeatedly through the Codes, we have seen indications of how the Union Government is consolidating power and violating federalism - for example, we see that the term appropriate



STANDING ORDERS AND THE IR CODE

government allows the Central Government to retain control over an establishment even after privatization. In respect of standing orders, the IR Code now mandates that the Model Standing Orders will be prepared by the Union Government. These Model Standing Orders will be applicable across the Board unless and until the certified standing orders come into force in the establishment.

The necessary corollaries of this move are as follows: Firstly, the Union government has the power to impose regressive and anti-worker procedures across the country for all establishments. Secondly, the model standing orders are uniformly applicable in states that are in very different conditions, without being moulded to the realities of the state.

It must be remembered that the welfare of labour, including conditions of work, is a subject that falls within the concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, which means that both the Union Government as well as the State Government are entitled to legislate on the topic. However, the Code is being used as a tool to deprive the states of their constitutional authority.

Importantly, Section 29 states that the Model Standing Orders framed by the Central Government would apply to the establishment from the date the provision becomes applicable to an establishment and till the date standing orders certified under the Code come into force. Therefore, establishments without standing orders would now be bound by these Model Standing Orders made by the Central Government.

Management Proposals are Deemed Certified if Officer Delays!

Another move with far reaching consequences is the proviso the Section 30 (5) whereby, the application for certification of standing orders or modification would be required to be completed within sixty days of procedures of seeking comments and giving opportunity of hearing, failing which such draft standing orders or

modifications in the standing order shall be deemed to have been certified on the expiry of the said period. There is no provision that if the delay is on account of the management or unavoidable for any reason, it may be condoned. Importantly, this provision relates to proposals of the management only on coming into force of the Code. Hence, the worker can be denied of his opportunity to file objections and to be heard on account of no fault of their own.

Pushing Fixed Term Employment even in Standing Orders

For a while, the corporate crony BJP Government has been pushing fixed term employment into labour law, which permits the treatment of workers as dispensable commodities. In Karnataka, in fact, the government notified amendment rules in June 2020 including Fixed Term Employment as a classification of employment. In the First Schedule to the IR Code now, fixed term employment is also included as a classification of employment. This will enable increasing job insecurity for workmen, and sacrifices long term stability of workers for “ease of business”.

Certain Standard Problematic Clauses

Throughout the Codes, certain standard changes have been made that are contrary to the interests of workers, some of which are reflected in the provisions on standing orders as well.

One such change is the repeated shift from mandate through prescription by way of rules which must be placed before the legislature and are also subject to the condition of prior publication, to notification, which is based to the arbitrary discretion of the government and not accountable either to the legislature or to the people. Insofar as standing orders are concerned, the Schedule of the 1946 Act was permitted to include any other matter as prescribed, whereas the corresponding provision in the First Schedule of the IR Code is



any other matter as may be notified. Similarly, the appeal procedure is as prescribed in the Code, which means that the statutory mandate of prior hearing etc. is done away with.

Another standard change is the changing of applicability standards to reduce coverage of beneficial provisions. The Code now reduces the mandate for standing orders from establishments with 100+ workers to establishments with 300+ workers, effectively ensuring that workers in medium size establishments are not entitled to standing orders.

On Subsistence Allowance

Another retrograde change in the IR Code is the deletion of clause 10(3) of the 1946 Act, which provided that if there are more beneficial provisions relating to payment of subsistence allowance under any other law, that would continue to apply notwithstanding anything in the Act. In this regard, in Karnataka, workers are entitled to 90% subsistence allowance if suspension extends beyond 180 days for reasons not directly attributable to the worker in terms of the Karnataka Payment of Subsistence Allowance Act, 1988. However, when the Code comes into force, the Karnataka Act would be inapplicable to workers in establishments covered therein, depriving workers of the more beneficial provisions.

Publication:

Finally, one of the most vital provisions of the 1946 Act, mandating that the text of the standing orders be prominently posted by the employer in English and in the language understood by the majority of his workmen on special boards to be maintained for the purpose near the entrance and in each department of the establishment has been deleted. Under the Code, the only requirement is that the Standing Orders be maintained by the employer in such language and in such manner for the information of the concerned workers as may be prescribed. This distorts the base objective of Standing Orders themselves, namely that

the conditions of employment be made known to workmen employed by them.

Finally the words of the Supreme Court in U.P. State Electricity Board and Another vs Hari Shanker Jain and Others. 1980 AIR 65 must be remembered.

“Before the passing of the Act, conditions of service of industrial employees were invariably ill-defined and were hardly ever known with even a slight degree of precision to the employees. There was no uniformity of conditions of service for employees discharging identical duties in the same establishment. Conditions of service were generally ad-hoc and the result of oral arrangements which left the employees at the mercy of the employer. With the growth of the trade union movement and the right of collective bargaining, employees started putting forth their demands to end this sad and confusing state of affairs. Recognizing the rough deal that was being given to workers by employers who would not define their conditions of service and the inevitability of industrial strife in such a situation, the legislature intervened and enacted the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act... The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act is thus seen to be an Act specially designed to define the terms of employment of workmen in industrial establishments, to give the workmen a collective voice in defining the terms of employment and to subject the terms of employment to the scrutiny of quasi-judicial authorities by the application of the test of fairness and reasonableness. It is an Act giving recognition and form to hard-won and precious rights of workmen.”

The changes made by the Codes effectively dilute these hard won and precious rights of workers and promote disorganization of labour. As such, there is a requirement to mount a legal and political challenge to the Codes. ■■

The Amazon Behemoth - Small Victories, Long Road Ahead

★ TAMARAI

The Amazon Empire

Amazon started in 1994 as an online bookseller and distributor. Since its founding it has become one of the largest corporations in the world with a market capitalization of 1.7 trillion dollars. It has 1.2 million part-time and full-time employees. There are 1093 global Amazon facilities (per data from June 2019), with 477 located in the U.S and, notably, 331 located in India. The exact numbers of data centers for Amazon Web Services (AWS) are not available but are estimated to be 36 in the U.S. and 3 in Ireland employing 10,000 people.

Amazon was leasing jets for its operations until January this year when it announced that it was purchasing Boeing 767-300 jets for its operations. It has 20,000 Mercedes Benz vans which it leases to drivers who are called 'partners'. According to Politico, AWS has hired at least 66 former government officials, more than half of them from the Defense Department. AWS received a \$600 million deal with the Central Intelligence Agency 8 years ago to provide cloud services. This year the National Security Agency awarded a 10-billion-dollar cloud computing contract which has been challenged by Microsoft. In India, Amazon's total revenue in 2018-19 (Economic Times data) was 1.59 billion dollars. It has many retired military veterans in managerial roles in its operations in India and has been working with the Indian state with goals to hire 25,000 more army, air force and navy veterans by 2025.

The Institute on Taxation and Economic policy (ITEP) reported that Amazon in 2020, during the pandemic year, made 24 billion dollars in its worldwide income before tax which was more than in 2019 when its pretax income was 14 billion dollars. While the average American pays 14% in taxes, Amazon paid an effective tax rate of 9.4%

in 2020. The U.S. government in 2017 in keeping with its class character lowered the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, in addition corporations like Amazon have enjoyed several tax credits and breaks. ITEP reported that Amazon received tax subsidies of 7.4 billion dollars from 2018-2020. An economic development watchdog has calculated that Amazon has received 4.1 billion dollars (source: Good Jobs First) in incentives for its warehouses and data services from different states in the U.S. and the federal government since 2012.

Jonathan Rosenblum wrote in the Jacobin "Amazon embodies the next iteration of monopoly capitalism, but presents a challenge a couple orders of magnitude greater than the mass production systems of the last century".

Organizing Against Amazon

While it is a daunting task to organize against Amazon there have been some small victories in the fight against this vicious anti-union and anti-worker corporation in the last few years in the U.S and in Europe. Make Amazon Pay is a coalition of more than 40 grassroots organizations that have come together to coordinate actions and strikes against the behemoth. The coalition has been highlighting the extensive operations of Amazon from oil refinery in Latin America to garment industries in Bangladesh and Cambodia. "Amazon is able to build power by operating on a global level without opposition," Casper Gelderblom, a Dutch trade unionist with Make Amazon Pay, told The Intercept in the fall of 2020. "We have to match the transnational scope of its organization with an internationalist strategy." In March 2021 there was a general strike in Italy by the Amazon warehouse workers. 75% of the 19,000 Amazon drivers participated in the strike.

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Amazon Italia signed an agreement in September 2021 with trade unions to engage with them in the running of operations which was considered a positive outcome of the strike.

Amazon worked with the New York Governor and Mayor in 2019 to build a headquarters in Queens, New York. The deal would have given 3 billion dollars to Amazon in incentives in a city where public housing is in a crisis and there are more than 50,000 homeless people. Mass movement of grassroots organizations and unions opposed this and ultimately won which led to Amazon withdrawing its plans.

The Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama early this year witnessed a spirited unionizing drive. Out of the roughly 5900 workers in this warehouse, 85% are estimated to be Black. The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) which led the union drive described it as a civil rights struggle for dignity in addition to labor rights. Amazon launched a major campaign of intimidation of workers as part of its well-known union busting efforts. In April, when the election to form a union was held, sadly, Amazon scored a victory. Only 50% out of the 5900 workers cast their votes in the election. There were 738 votes in favor of the union and 1,798 votes against unionizing. This was a temporary setback to the labor movement in the U.S. and to organizing workers in the other Amazon warehouses in the world. The RWDSU contested the election result with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The NLRB last month ordered a new union election at the warehouse in Alabama, upholding the union challenge that Amazon's actions did not lead to a fair election process. RWDSU hailed the decision as a victory. RWDSU president Stuart Appelbaum said...“that Amazon’s intimidation and interference prevented workers from having a fair say in whether they wanted a union in their workplace.” A new date for the election to have a union represent the workers has not been decided yet.

The International Teamsters Union in the U.S. which represents 1.4 million workers including

truck drivers and warehouse workers passed a resolution this year recognizing unionizing Amazon as one of the organization’s top priorities. This is a very positive development, the labor movement in the U.S has welcomed this decision. After months of organizing at Staten Island Amazon warehouse the Amazon Labor Union which is not affiliated with any major union withdrew its petition for unionization vote as it was unable to gather 30% of signatures from the workers.

While the road to organize workers at Amazon full of obstructions, there have been small victories. Kshama Sawant, the progressive Seattle City Councilor, from Socialist Alternative, led Tax Amazon ballot initiative. The Seattle City Council in July 2020 passed the JumpStart Tax, a payroll tax on the city’s biggest businesses and highest earners, including Amazon which was a major blow to the corporation. Sawant was accused of using city resources to support the ballot initiative. In May 2021, she had to pay a fine to the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission. She said she was unaware it was a violation. For 16 months there was a concerted effort by the capitalist class to have her face recall for "misfeasance, malfeasance, and violation of the oath of office." On December 17 this year, she officially defeated the right-wing recall effort, she said, " "We have defeated Big Business and the right wing in their attempt to use... trumped-up charges against me personally in order to push back against the success of working-class movements in Seattle."

The U.S. has had a burst of militant strikes this year from healthcare workers, Kellogg's cereal workers, theatrical stage employees to agricultural and heavy machinery workers. Although these strikes have largely been for better wages and work conditions, they have the potential to elevate the political consciousness of large sections of the population. The fight against global corporations like Amazon can succeed only by bridging the labor and community struggles for social justice and building transnational solidarity movements. ■■

Indonesian Court terms Anti-labour Omnibus Law as 'Conditionally Unconstitutional'

★ V ARUN KUMAR

An Indonesian Constitutional Court on 25 November 2021 ordered President Joko Widodo to amend parts of the controversial Omnibus Law. The law aimed to dilute the country's previously existing labour, land acquisition and environmental laws in favour of "attracting more foreign investment." The term Omnibus comes from Latin and means "to, for, by, with or from everything". The Omnibus Law thus brings various legislations under a single document. This is similar to India's new Labour Codes that will replace various labour laws into four codes, and works under the similar model of free access to corporates.

Ever since the Omnibus Law proposal was put forward by President Widodo in 2019, trade unions and environmental groups have been protesting against the law. A series of protests and resistance actions were organised across Indonesia, with workers terming the law as an attempt by the government to trample workers' rights and guarantee corporate profits. More than 400 workers and activists were arrested during the strikes and protests in 2019.

The Omnibus Law abolishes minimum wage by sector, and also removes the fines for companies who delay payment of wages. Under the law, the allowed overtime will be increased to a maximum of four hours in one day and 18 hours a week. Also companies will only be required to give workers one day off a week instead of two.

Further, the law makes it much easier for companies to remove a worker from the job, including denying recourse to an industrial relations dispute agency, and it effectively permits indefinite contract work.



The law is also an attempt to break trade unions and the right to collective bargaining as it allows companies to negotiate contracts with employees individually. As a result, workers' rights to engage in collective wage bargaining will be effectively expunged.

The law also dilutes the previously existing environmental standards. Now, businesses only have to file an environmental impact analysis if their projects are considered high risk.

The Neoliberal Vultures Over Indonesia

Corporate and neoliberal financial institutions had for long been preying on the Indonesian workforce. During the economic crisis in 1998, the country received support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As a precondition for the loan, the IMF demanded that the Indonesian government implement a 'structural-adjustment program,' a framework often used by the IMF and the World Bank to

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break trade unions, enslave workers and keep them without any rights, and to hand over public resources to private companies.

The ground for this neoliberal assault was laid way back in the early 1960s itself, with the beginning of the 'New Order'. The Suharto era witnessed a Western backed genocide of more than 5,00,00 communists, trade union activists and workers across Indonesia. The United States and other western countries provided full support to Suharto's killing campaign and the US government even provided a list of communist organisers to Indonesian death squads.

Prior to the Suharto dictatorship, the then government of President Sukarno with the support of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) had outrightly rejected the attempts by the World Bank and IMF to

intervene in the South East Asian country's economy. Rejecting World Bank aid, Sukarno confronted the US ambassador before a mass rally in Jakarta with the cry: "Go to hell with your aid!"

Soon after, Sukarno's government was overthrown in a military coup organised by Suharto in 1965. In 1966, Suharto reversed all the nationalisation measures of the Sukarno government. In 1966, when the massacre campaign against workers and peasants was at its peak, Suharto adopted a "stabilisation plan" proposed by the IMF. As witnessed globally, the drastic impacts of neoliberal policies led to rising prices, food shortages and increasing unemployment in the country. In 1998, the sufferings and hardship led to mass protests and ultimately the overthrow of Sukarto's dictatorship. ■■

US Tornado Tragedy: How Corporates Push Workers to Death for Profit

★ V ARUN KUMAR

On December 10, a series tornado struck across six US states, killing more than 80 people. It left a trail of death and destruction behind its path, with hundreds of homes and structure razed to ground. Amid the calamity, when everyone was looking for their safety, corporates were trying to churn profits. Among the killed were several factory workers including those working at Amazon ware house in Illinois and a candle factory in Mayfield.

Death of workers at Amazon warehouse in Illinois

Six workers at an Amazon warehouse in Illinois (United States) were killed in the tornado which had led to collapse of the warehouse. According to various reports and worker testimonies, the warehouse management ignored the initial tornado warnings and refused to stop work until it was too late. Furthermore, the warehouse workers had little or no training at all to deal with such emergencies.

Larry Virden, one of the six workers killed in the incident messaged his partner Cherie Jones few minutes before the tragedy and told that the company won't allow them to leave.

He leaves behind four children.

Link of Twitter thread by More Perfect Union on the death of workers forced to be at work during Tornado Disaster-

The deaths in Amazon warehouse have once again put spotlight on the horrific labour practices carried out by the global e-commerce platform owned by Jeff Bezos.

"This incident calls into question so much of Amazon's practices in their warehouses," said Marcos Cenicerros, an organizer at Warehouse Workers for Justice. "This is not the first time we've seen workers suffer at Amazon and we want to make sure that they're not continuing

to cut corners and putting workers at risk."

At Candle factory in Mayfield

A similar but more tragic story is coming out of Mayfield Consumer Products candle factory in Mayfield. The corporate' lust for profit led to death of 8 workers as the company bosses warned anyone leaving the shift will be fired from the job.

One of the factory worker, 21 year old McKayla Emery said that supervisors and team leaders told employees that leaving would probably jeopardize their jobs. "If you leave, you're more than likely to be fired," Emery said she overheard managers tell four workers standing near her who wanted to leave. "I heard that with my own ears."

"I asked to leave and they told me I'd be fired," said another worker Elijah Johnson. "Even with the weather like this, you're still going to fire me?" he asked.

"Yes," a manager responded.

Companies like Amazon, Mayfield Consumer Products and others strive of such unfair and toxic work culture that put productivity pressures (targets) on the workers to ensure that company profits continue to soar, even at the cost of lives of workers. ■■



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International Working Class Struggles

★ V ARUN KUMAR

Food Processing Workers Strike in South Africa



Food processing industry workers in South Africa, under the banner of Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) and the General Industries Workers Union of South Africa (GIWUSA), began an indefinite strike at Israeli-owned dairy giant Clover on 22 November. The striking workers are demanding an end company's attempts to retrench workers and increasing working hours.

Further, the workers are demanding a wage increase of 10%, the unions are demanding that the government take over the company and run it with democratic participation of workers.

More than 5000 workers are participating in the strike that are going on at Clover factories in South African cities of Clayville, Durban, Gqeberha, Polokwane and Cape Town.

John Appolis, General Secreatry of GIWUSA said Clover told the unions three months ago that it intended to save R300 million on labour costs by retrenching 1 000 workers and introducing a six-day work week with compulsory work on public holidays. Clover

also intended to lengthen the work week by making employees work a long 12 hour-day, instead of a nine-hour day, without overtime.

The workers are also demanded withdrawal of Milco SA, which is owned by the Israeli Central Bottling Company from Clover. Clover was purchased in 2019. FAWU and GIWUSA said CBC/Milco SA is "complicit in the human rights abuses and oppression of the Palestinian people" as the parent company operates in Israeli occupied Palestinian territories.

Amid the ongoing strike action, Clover management is trying to break the workers' action by deployed armed private security guards and armored vehicles as an intimidating tactics. But the workers are stands firm their demands and have said that if Clover continues its intimidating actions, they will occupy the factories. ■■

Healthcare Workers Protest in Australia

Hundreds of healthcare workers in Adelaide, South Australia organized protest action on December 14 protesting against unsafe working conditions which they argue put both patients and care-givers at risk. The



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protest was organized by United Workers Union (UWU) and essential workers from two of the city's major hospitals, Royal Adelaide Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital were involved.

Workers are forced into unsafe work practices by hospital authorities. "Essential health workers have placed specific work bans to stop dangerous work conditions where workers are being asked to bend or break safety rules due to understaffing," said UWU's public sector coordinator Paul Blackmore.

The workers pointed that despite the workforce shortages, the Liberal Party government of State premier Steven Marshall is planning to cut down 2,000 jobs in the health sector in the next two-and-a-half years and the health system is being turned into a profit margin for a multinational corporation. ■■

Teachers Strike in Central African Republic

The teachers at the University of Bangui have embarked on a 21-day strike action in the Central African Republic (CAR) demanding pay rise and better working conditions, including staff vacations.

"We demand from the government the improvement of our working conditions on the campus of the University of Bangui, and by improvement of working conditions we mean the increase of our salaries" Eddy Romuald WODE, Head of the teachers' union of the university.

The current strike comes of two earlier protests that lasted for three and eight days. The strike action was initiated after no response from the government headed by Prime Minister Henri-Marie Dondra. ■■

Sanitation Workers at Facebook HQ in UK Calls for Strike

Sanitation workers at Facebook's offices in central London (United Kingdom) have unanimously voted for strike to be organized

on December 24. The call for strike follows months of protests against excessive workloads imposed by their contractor, Churchill Cleaning, and the dismissal of union representative Guillermo Camacho last month.

The workers said that with increase in workload in May, operatives have reported a range of health and safety issues including general exhaustion, back pain, the regular use of painkillers, elevated stress levels, and, in one case, internal bleeding. According to reports, prior to the pandemic, the 22 cleaners, who work eight hour days and earn £10.85 an hour were required to clean five of the office. But after a Facebook office expansion, they are now required to clean 14 floors with no pay increase or additional workers to help.

Camacho, an elected union representative and a cleaner at Facebook's Brock Street office was removed from his job after he organized protests in July this year against the harsh working conditions in which sanitation workers are forced to work. ■■



Activity Reports

Jharkhand

Solidarity March with HEC Workers in Ranchi on 15th December

Joint Trade Unions took out a solidarity March with protesting workers of Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) unit in Ranchi demanding immediate payment of wages and redressal of the demands of the protesting workers. The march started from the Union Office of HEC workers and ended at Elbert Ekka Chowk. Workers affiliated to AICCTU, AITUC, CITU, AIUTUC and other unions participated in the march in large numbers. The workers told that they all support the tool down strike by the HEC workers. The solidarity march reverberated with slogans demanding roll back of attempts

to sell out HEC and payment of wages to the HEC workers. The solidarity meeting was addressed by Comrade Subhendu Sen of AICCTU, Comrade Prakash Viplab of CITU and Comrade Laldev Singh of AITUC. The leaders said that it is utterly insensitive from the part of the central and the state government to not initiate any dialogue with the workers even after 14 days of their strike. The workers are facing great difficulty in running their household due to non-payment of wages. The union leaders said that the unheeding attitude of the Central Government towards the grave crisis that the workers are facing indicate to a larger conspiracy to sell out the company. They demanded that if the central government is unwilling to run HEC, the state government must intervene or take over the company. ■■

Uttar Pradesh

ASHA Workers of UP on the Path of Struggle

★ SAROJINI BIST

The capital of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow, has witnessed continuous protests in recent months- Kisan Panchayat on 22 November, workers' protest for repealing 4 labour codes, midday meal workers' protests, protest for reinstatement of old pension scheme- and on 13 December ASHA workers gathered in large numbers for their demands. Uttar Pradesh ASHA Workers Union, affiliated to AICCTU led the protest and submitted a memorandum to the UP Chief Minister demanding government

employee status for ASHAs; Rs. 21000 monthly salary; Rs 10 lakhs health insurance; Rs 50 lakhs life insurance; maternity and medical leave.

Addressing the dharna (sit-in), National Convener of All India Scheme Workers' Federation (AISWF) Comrade Shashi Yadav said that ASHA workers work under various names across the country and are paid varying amounts, which is a blatant violation of labour laws. ASHAs risked their lives and battled against Covid, but

the government still does not heed to their just demands. The Yogi government, notorious for fake encounters, tried to kill ASHA leader Poonam Pandey in Shahjahanpur. She called on ASHAs to teach a befitting lesson to the Yogi government in the forthcoming election.

The dharna was also addressed by AICCTU General Secretary Rajiv Dimri, ASHA Union state convener Sarojini Bisht, ASHA leader Kamaljeet Kaur, IREF vice president Kamal Usri, AICCTU state president Vijay Vidrohi, secretary Anil Verma and various district leaders of ASHA Union. The proceedings were conducted by Afroz Alam and Anita Mishra.



For years, ASHA workers with their hard work and skills have taken every risk to strengthen the foundations of public health and have made India proud on the world stage by controlling the maternal-infant mortality rate in the country. They have put their lives on the line in the control of infectious diseases and have contributed to the defeat of a horrific pandemic like Covid-19 in the country by fighting it from the front even though they were not provided with equipments as ordinary as safety kits. The success in vaccination for which the government is patting itself on the back is due in a large measure to the contribution of ASHAs. But nobody looks to their rights or needs. They are being made to work night and day at a shamefully meagre honorarium and degrading work situations. But the governments remain silent on their issues. The ASHAs have now taken to the path of struggle to secure their basic rights to make the government listen to their voice.

The dharna was joined by a large number of ASHA workers from across various districts of UP along with many organisations who sent their representatives in solidarity.

Continuing their movement in various forms ASHA workers under the leadership of Uttar Pradesh ASHA Workers Union have launched a “send post card to Chief Minister” campaign from 20 to 24 December highlighting their demands which has received enthusiastic

response from ASHAs across the state.

The demands include:

1. Government employee status for all ASHA workers.
2. Rs. 21000 monthly salary for ASHAs.
3. Paid maternity leave and medical leave for ASHAs.
4. Immediate payment of all arrears including Corona allowance, vaccination, Covid survey and other work.
5. Withdraw cases against Poonam Pandey and all ASHAs.
6. Constitute District level Gender Cells against sexual harassment at the workplace.
7. Curb mistreatment of ASHAs at all levels from dispensaries to hospitals.
8. Arrange common rooms for ASHAs at all dispensaries where they can take rest.
9. Fix working hours for ASHAs; stop burdening them with additional work that is not part of their duty.
10. Free medical facilities for families of ASHAs; guarantee Rs. 10 lakh health insurance for ASHAs. Ensure Rs. 50 lakh life insurance for ASHA workers, who are frontline warriors in the battle against pandemics like Covid. ■■



*Demonstration of ASHA workers under the banner of AICCTU on 21 December, 2021 at Ranchi before the Assembly.
Submitted 7-point charter of demands.*

Film Review**1232 Kms:*****A Formidable Journey of Life Over Death!***

★ RANJANI

The documentary film 1232 Kms is a vivid chronicle of the agonies of the poor migrant labourers in the unprecedented lockdown during Covid-19 in India. The film accompanies the journey of seven migrant labourers to their native homes from Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh to Saharsa in Bihar covering a distance of 1232 Kms. The labourers working in Delhi construction sites decide to leave to their homes after going through the enormous hardships and difficulties of extended lockdowns and left with nothing to fend for themselves. They manage to buy secondhand cycles from the money sent by their families and step into the journey towards home, hope and the familiar world of family and love.

The city that they constructed through their bare hands, the city that gave them sustenance for years, the city that held them the promise of a better future, betrays them at the moment of crisis. There is no food, no work, no house and no belongingness. The city turns into an unfamiliar, alien and inhuman labyrinth. The city's vast population vanishes into holes. The workers are left orphaned under the sky. All of a sudden, they are caught up in a quagmire of starvation or disease that in all likelihood will take their lives.

The workers are faced with a do or die situation. They are desperate to escape from this impending danger of death. And they are terribly worried that their families at the other end maybe going through a lot of suffering all alone in the pandemic. So they risk this journey with the minimum paraphernalia of cycles, clothes, mobile phones and tools.

The film is a testimony to the travails of

migrant labourers in a country that has blindly shut its doors to the poor and deprived at the time of a fearsome pandemic. The grit with which the workers carry on their journey despite hunger, tiredness, sickness and every other trial that they face with the police and the screening camps is the substance of the film.

The memories of their loved ones, the sense of security and belongingness that they harbor about their native and the genuine concern and care for their family keeps this harrowing journey and the film a positive one. The phone calls as a connect to the family that keeps their spirits and determination high and a kind of running commentary-like updates to the family that keeps their families in spirits adds a sense of mutuality to this journey.

In a way, the pain, the despair, the helplessness and despondency are unwinded in the interaction with the filmmaker as much as the other emotions of love and hope. The philosophy of life that guides them through the stark poverty, grim realities and the total abdication of responsibility by the state is ruminated all through the film. At one point, one of the labourers recounts that he felt absolutely upset with the God when they were detained in a place by the police and not permitted to proceed with the journey. Another labourer observes that this disease was brought by the rich but the poor had to face the brunt of it. One of the family members cries over phone that they are being treated as untouchables, not even allowed to fetch water from public hand pumps. Almost all the labourers feel sad and helpless that they are in such a pitiable state that they cannot fulfill



the little expectations of gifts of the kids. One cannot miss the solidarity and cooperation of all labourers in the journey.

The film captures the tribulations of the time as much as the generosity that flew from unknown quarters. People offering food, shelter, water, lift in trucks, repair services despite the restrictions of lockdown and lightening the pain to a little extent. On the other the complete apathy of the officials in handling the migrants is exposed - police beating and detaining the migrants, not providing food for more than a day in quarantine, unclean and unsanitized quarantine facility and so on.

Seven days. Seven journeys. Like the mythical crossing of seven seas and mountains. No, this is not the story of these seven labourers alone. This is a leaf from the story of 30 million migrant labourers who staked reverse migration. Nearly 350 migrant labourers died in the course of their journey. Will the government take any responsibility for the deaths and the huge exodus?

The leit motif of the film *Come Home, O Foriegner!* provides an additional emotional touch throughout the film. Director Vinod Kapri has done a commendable film taking a lot of risk in an unusual situation and handling the theme in a sensitive manner without being intrusive. Music score by Vishal Bharadwaj, Lyrics by Gulzar and Singing by Sukhwinder Sing and Rekha Bharadwaj have lifted the film's effect. ■■



Calendar for Activists

January

Jan. 2: Safdar Hashmi Martyrdom Day (1989)
 Jan. 3: Savitri Bai Phule Birth Anniversary (1831)
 Jan. 12: Surya Sen Martyrdom Day (1934)
 Jan. 16: Com. Mahendra Singh Martyrdom Day (2005)
 Jan. 15: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht Martyrdom Day (1919)
 Jan. 16: Datta Samant Martyrdom Day (1997)
 Jan. 29: Gorakh Pandey Death Anniversary (1989)
 Jan. 30: Gandhi Assassinated (1948)

February

Feb. 10: Bertolt Brecht Birth Anniversary (1898)
 Feb. 11: Com. Anil Barua Martyrdom Day (1998)
 Feb. 13: Faiz Ahmad Birth Anniversary (1911)
 Feb. 18: Naval Revolt (Bombay) Day (1946)
 Feb. 27: Chandrashekhar Azad Martyrdom Day (1931)
 Feb. 28: Anniversary of Gujarat Pogrom (2002)

March

Mar. 8: International Women's Day
 Mar. 10: Savitri Bai Phule Death Anniversary (1897)
 Mar. 14: Nandigram Massacre Day (2007)
 Mar. 16: Rachel Corrie Martyrdom Day (2003)
 Mar. 18: Paris Commune Day (1871)
 Mar. 23: Bhagat Singh Martyrdom Day (1931)
 Mar. 23: Avtar Singh Pash Martyrdom Day (1988)
 Mar. 31: Com. Chandrashekhar Martyrdom Day (1997)

April

Apr. 4: Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated (1968)
 Apr. 9: Rahul Sanskritayan Birth Anniversary (1893)
 Apr. 11: Jyotiba Phule Birth Anniversary (1827)
 Apr. 13: Jallianwalabagh Massacre (1919)
 Apr. 14: Ambedkar Birth Anniversary (1891)
 Apr. 21: Bharathidasan Death Anniversary (1964)
 Apr. 22: Lenin Birth Anniversary (1870)
 Apr. 22: CPI(ML) Foundation Day (1969)
 Apr. 23: Chandra Singh Garhwali Revolt (1930)

May

May 1: International Worker's Day: May Day
 May 5: Karl Marx Birth Anniversary (1818)
 May 7: Rabindranath Tagore Birth Anniversary (1861)
 May 8: Soviet Victory over Nazis (1945)
 May 10: India's First War of Independence Anniversary (1857)
 May 19: Ho Chi Min Birth Anniversary (1890)
 May 24: Kazi Nazrul Islam Birth Anniversary (1899)
 May 25: Naxalbari Uprising Day (1967)

June

Jun. 3: 4: Tiananmen Massacre (1989)
 Jun. 9: Birsa Munda Death Anniversary (1900)
 Jun. 14: Che Guevara Birth Anniversary (1928)
 Jun. 26: Emergency Imposed (1975)
 Jun. 30: Santhal Uprising- Hul Diwas (1855)

July

Jul. 11: Bathani Tola Massacre (1996)

Jul. 11: Thangjam Manorama Devi Raped & Killed (2004)
 Jul. 31: Premchand Birth Anniversary (1880)
 Jul. 31: D.D. Kosambi Birth Anniversary (1907)
 Jul. 28: Com. Charu Mazumdar Martyrdom Day (1972)

August

Aug. 5: Saroj Dutta Martyrdom Day (1971)
 Aug. 6: Hiroshima Day (1945)
 Aug. 9: August Kranti Day (1842)
 Aug. 9: AISA Foundation Day (1990)
 Aug. 11: Khudiram Bose Martyrdom Day (1908)
 Aug. 14: Bertolt Brecht Death Anniversary (1956)
 Aug. 15: Sukanta Bhattacharya Birth Anniversary (1926)

September

Sept. 8: 9: HSRA Foundation (1928)
 Sept. 9: Mao Death Anniversary (1976)
 Sept. 11: AFSPA Passed in Parliament (1958)
 Sept. 13: Jatindra Nath Das Martyrdom Day (1929)
 Sept. 17: Periyar (EVR) Birth Anniversary (1879)
 Sept. 23: Pablo Neruda Death Anniversary (1973)
 Sept. 24: Preetilata Wadedar Martyrdom Day (1932)
 Sept. 25: Rajkumar Bhul (Singur) Martyrdom Day (2006)
 Sept. 28: Shankar Guha Niyogi Martyrdom Day (1991)
 Sept. 28: Bhagat Singh Birth Anniversary (1907)

October

Oct. 8: Premchand Death Anniversary (1936)
 Oct. 9: Che Guevara Martyrdom Day (1967)
 Oct. 10: Com. Nagbhushan Death Anniversary (1998)
 Oct. 15: Nirala Death Anniversary (1961)
 Oct. 26: Com. Ram Naresh Ram Death Anniversary (2010)
 Oct. 27: Punnapra-Vayalar uprising (1946)

November

Nov. 2: Irom Sharmila's Hunger Strike Started (2000)
 Nov. 5: Nagarjun Death Anniversary (1998)
 Nov. 7: October Revolution Day
 Nov. 9: Allama Iqbal Birth Anniversary (1877)
 Nov. 11: Yasser Arafat Death Anniversary (2004)
 Nov. 15: Birsa Munda Birth Anniversary (1875)
 Nov. 29: Com. Jauhar Martyrdom Day (1975)
 Nov. 27: Com. Nagbhushan Birth Anniversary (1934)
 Nov. 29: International Palestine Solidarity Day

December

Dec. 1: Laxmanpur Bathe Massacre (1997)
 Dec. 3: Bhopal Gas Disaster (1984)
 Dec. 6: Ambedkar Mahaparinirvan Divas (1956)
 Dec. 6: Babri Masjid Demolition Day (1992)
 Dec. 11: Subramaniya Bharati Birth Anniversary (1882)
 Dec. 16: Nirbhaya Day of Anti-Rape Protest (2012)
 Dec. 18: Com. Vinod Mishra Death Anniversary (1998)
 Dec. 18: Tapasi Malik (Singur) Martyrdom Day (1998)
 Dec. 19: Bismil-Ashfaqulla Martyrdom Day (1927)
 Dec. 26: Mao Birth Anniversary (1893)



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