



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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WORKERS MANIFESTO 2024

Overthrow the Fascist Modi Regime! Fight for Workers Rights and Dignity!

The 2024 Loksabha Elections are declared. The election will be held in 7 phases from April 19 to June 1. As the most populous nation of the world with an estimated population of 143 crores prepare to elect the next government, it is important for every citizen to arrive at an informed decision that should uphold the well being of people over money and muscle power of the ruling forces.



Last 10 years of the BJP regime led by Narendra Modi has been disastrous for the working population of the country. The BJP has used its majority strength inside the parliament to implement policies that facilitate profit mongering of the corporates at the cost of economic well being and rights of the people. Four anti-worker Labour Codes designed for decimating legal rights of workers are passed by the parliament. Unemployment rates and price rise are skyrocketing while real wages of people are steeply declining. Bulldozer governance that displace people

from their houses and livelihood options has become the symbol of the Modi regime. International institutions estimate that India has 94% of its workforce as informal workers. These workers are not only out of any formal contract with the employer, but also are deprived of any social security measure. The precarity of the Indian working class was witnessed in its nudity during the two years of pandemic Lockdown. The fact that Indian workers who toil to keep the country's economy running are the first ones to be dispensed off when a crisis hit, was clearer than ever as millions of workers were retrenched from jobs within hours of declaration of the Lockdown. They were forced to walk thousands of kilometres to reach their villages as no social protection was accessible to them. The essential anti-worker and pro-corporate nature of the ruling regime was further exposed as the Modi government found an opportunity in the disaster to adopt the anti-worker Labour Codes.

As the next Loksabha election is around the corner and the workers who have been at the receiving end of the anti-worker policies of the ruling government for last 10 years get an opportunity to use their right to vote, let us unite to demand a dignified life for all.

Withdraw the Anti-Worker Labour Codes:

In September 2020, as the country was still crippling under the devastating impact of the Lockdown, the Modi led BJP government passed three labour codes - the Industrial Relations Code, Code on Social Security and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. The Code on Wages was passed by the parliament in 2019 itself. These codes were supposed to replace 44 existing labour laws that were formulated assimilating several demands of the working class movement for over a century to ensure rights for the working class.

The Code on Wages passed by the present government provides several provisions for employers to escape payment of minimum wages to

the workers. It introduces the concept of floor wage which is much lower than minimum wages. The Code dilutes enforceability of minimum wages. This code also opens up avenues for violating the principle of 8 hour work-day accepted internationally. It facilitates overwork without payment of overtime wages.

The Code on Industrial Relations (IR) is designed to facilitate employers to terminate workers without any notice or accountability. It institutionalizes the regime of hire and fire, thus destroying any semblance of industrial democracy. It introduces the concept of 'fixed term' employment that necessarily makes permanent jobs a distant dream for the majority of the workforce in India. This Code also weakens the workers' right to unionisation and recognition of trade unions to negotiate with the employer for their rights and benefits. The IR Code significantly weakens measures of redressal for workers in case of violation of rights. Under this Code, the labour courts are done away with and the government has been given a significant amount of power to overturn decisions of the Industrial Tribunals.

The Code on Social Security entails a massive crackdown on existing provisions of social security for workers. For example, this code makes all existing social measures like ESI, PF, gratuity, pension, maternity benefit and other benefits dependent upon notification by central and state governments. In fact, the Code makes the workers responsible for their own social security relieving the employers of the same. This code also excludes a huge number of workers from being covered under social security and reduces employer's liability towards the social security funds such as ESI and PF.

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Condition Code is probably the most elaborate one in diluting existing provisions of occupational safety. The code not only dilutes the provision of defining hazardous work, but also excludes around

80 percent of the workforce from the purview of the codes. This code enables the employer to refuse proper working conditions to its own workforce to such an extent that the employer is now being relieved of the responsibility of providing mandatory creche.

In totality, the four codes, if implemented, will give a free hand to the employers and corporates to exploit workers by denying proper wages, social security and dignified working conditions. The workers and farmers of the country have time and again demanded withdrawal of the four disastrous Codes.

Ensure Minimum Wages of Rs 35,000 per month: The union government has not fulfilled its mandate to revise minimum wages prevailing in the country for more than five years as mandated by the law. Given the present situation of standard of living of Indian workers as well as of reducing access to health and education, the basic rate of minimum wages must be increased to Rs 35,000 per month. All workers including scheme, platform, domestic and other informal workers must be brought under the purview of minimum wages.

Restore the Old Pension Scheme: In 2004, the BJP led government withdrew the pension scheme that ensures old age pension at the rate of 50 percent of last drawn salary. Under the New Pension Scheme, the possibility of a secured pension after retirement has been done away with. The NPS not only makes old age pension vulnerable to market fluctuations, but also provides only a pittance in the name of pension which is much lesser than the pension under the Old Pension Scheme (OPS). Right to a dignified and secured future of Indian workers must be the basis of policy making and not corporate profit mongering. The OPS must be brought back for every salaried person. For all other workers, including workers under EPS 95, a monthly pension at the minimum rate of Rs. 10,000 per month linked with DA must be ensured.

Health Insurance and Provident Fund for All Worker: Access to health insurance guaranteed by the government like the ESI must be made accessible to all workers including workers in the unorganised and informal sector. Likewise, the benefits of PF, the retirement benefit, shall also be made available to all workers including unorganised and informal workers.

Dignified Employment as Fundamental Right: Employment with dignified wages, working conditions and social security must be recognised as a fundamental right of every Indian citizen in the working age population. An Urban Employment Guarantee Act must be enacted and the scope of MNREGA must be expanded to 200 days per year with wages of Rs. 600 per day. The government must not be allowed to ignore the serious situation of unemployment in the country.

Stop Demolitions, the Recognise Right to Housing: Dignified proper housing for everyone must be guaranteed. The new government must prohibit demolition of houses without proper rehabilitation in nearby areas. Proper accommodation must be provided for every working person near the area of their present residence or work.

Roll Back National Monetisation Pipeline, Stop Selling Out Public Sector Undertakings: The last 10 years of Narendra Modi led union government can definitely be identified as a regime of privatisation of the country's infrastructure and public sector undertakings which we built over decades to become a self reliant, independent country. The Modi government has introduced a scheme of National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) which is essentially a design to sell out the country's major infrastructure to private corporate companies. Railways, defense, roads and power sector comprises 66% of the total monetisation scheme. It is well known that these sectors generate the largest employment in the country. The other sectors designated by the government to be handed over to private hands are telecom, aviation, ports, natural

gas, petroleum product, warehouses and stadiums. By selling out these major sectors that have been the source of a large number of employment, the Modi government is not only planning to destroy these sectors for facilitating private profit mongering, but also ensure that they no longer remain a source of jobs that the youth of India aspire for. We are already seeing massive unrest among the youth against non-fulfillment of posts in railways and other government sectors.

Along with NMP, the plan of disinvestment through which the government has announced to withdraw public investment from PSUs and open up Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) for purchase by corporates. This reckless act of privatisation is destined to cause a havoc in the lives of youths by denying them a scope for any dignified employment. The Adani Group, a well known favourite of the present regime, is offered relaxation in all rules to handover coal production in the country.

The National Monetisation Pipeline and proposal of Disinvestment must be rolled back. The proposal of Foreign Direct Investment in all sectors including defence must be rolled back. The government must be held accountable for maintaining the country's major production and infrastructural resources. Future of the country's economic well being and opportunities of dignified employment must not be compromised for the sake of profit mongering corporates.

Recognise Scheme Workers, Domestic Workers and Platform Workers as “Workers” with Associated Benefits: More than one crore scheme workers are running major schemes of the government for primary health, education, childcare and nutrition. Yet, these workers are denied any legal rights and are not even recognised as “workers” by the union government despite street protests throughout the country by millions of scheme workers. Similarly, domestic and platform workers are also denied any legal right. While the government continues to propagate that

these workers can be included under social security schemes in the new codes, the reality is that no employer-employee relation has been recognised and the government continues to deny their basic rights such as minimum wages, health insurance and social security. The scheme workers must be recognised as government employees and their rights including wages and other benefits must be guaranteed on par with government employees. Right to minimum wages, ESI, PF, pension and other benefits must be recognised for domestic workers and platform workers as well.

Fulfill All Vacant Government Positions, Halt Contractualisation: Around 30 lakh government positions are lying vacant as per latest reports. In the last ten years, the Modi government has systematically destroyed the employment in various ways, including surrender of posts, unfilling vacancies and by delaying any recruitment. Rampant corruption and paper leaks in recruitment exams have also become a normal in the present regime. Rather than filling vacant positions, the present government has introduced rampant and indiscriminate contractualisation, even in such an important department like army where the national security is the most important concern. Agnipath scheme is not an exemption but a rule. Fixed term employment is another form of creating insecure jobs with hire and fire as a norm. This trend must be reversed. All vacant government positions must be filled immediately and all contractual workers must be regularised. The ratio of permanent and irregular workforce in any department or industry shall be fixed.

Indian Workers Being Exiled to War-torn Countries

Recently, several reports appear detailing of usage of Indian Labour in the war. The workers are being exported to war-torn countries like Israel in the name of employment opportunities through agreements between governments. The working class should oppose all such attempts by the Modi-led BJP government.

Revoke UAPA, Stop Criminalising Workers:

The Modi led BJP government is indiscriminately and brutally throttling all voices of democracy. New Labour Codes also allow using black laws like UAPA and new criminal laws against the working class. Some such attempt to jail drivers for 7 years confronted a massive strike and resistance which ultimately forced the government to put the section on hold. One does not know if it is only until elections. Some workers in reliance power company in Mumbai were put behind bars under UAPA. New criminal laws are bound to be invoked against toiling masses in the coming days. The government should be halted from such brutal usage of black laws including UAPA and new criminal laws.

Punish Perpetrators of Communal Violence and Hate Mongering: We have seen in the last ten years how hate speeches targeting Muslims and subsequent communal violence have rocked different parts of the country. In most of the cases, the perpetrators are given freehand to spread communal venom. State institutions have remained mute spectators, and on several occasions become

protectors of the hate mongers and rioters. The state is playing the politics of hate. A Government that has unleashed a policy regime to take away hard earned rights of workers, has been consistently trying to create division among the working population in the name of their religion, caste, food choices and festivals. The state must stop protecting communal rioters and acts against those who spew communal venom and spread rumours creating communal hatred.

Let the Lok Sabha Election, 2024 become an opportunity to claim the rights of workers and hold the betrayers of people accountable.

Save the Democracy!

Save the Constitution!

Save the Workers!

Strengthen the left and democratic voice in the Lok Sabha elections 2024!

Defeat the Modi led BJP Government!



- 14th April, 2024
- 133rd Birth Anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar



Dr. Ambedkar and India's Working Class Movement

★ RAMAYAN RAM

14th April, 2024 will mark the 133rd birth anniversary of Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In today's juncture, when dilution of workers' rights are being justified in the name of 'ease of doing business', it would be more appropriate to look at the vision of Babasaheb on the rights of India's workers.

There are three significant phases of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's tryst with India's labour movement. The first phase comprises the strikes in textile mills led by Girni Kamgar Mazdoor Union during 1928-29. This phase is marked by Ambedkar's initial engagement with the communist trade union

movement and his recognition of the deep-entrenched caste biases inherent in the workers' movement. During the second phase, in 1966, Ambedkar established the Independent Labour Party, a consequential move driven by his profound understanding of the intricate interplay between caste and class. While he comprehended the economic dimensions of class-caste exploitation, his focus remained steadfast on mitigating caste discrimination first to build up a class based unity of workers. The third phase of Ambedkar's engagement with the labour movement was during his tenure as a representative of workers in the Viceroy's Council of the interim government from

1942 to 1946. During his tenure, he showcased his instrumental role in shaping pro-labour legislation and policies for the Indian populace. Through these intersections, Ambedkar's commitment of advocating the rights and welfare of the labourin class resonates as a defining aspect of his multifaceted legacy.

Dr Ambedkar started his political journey as a working class leader with the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1936. His decision to be in political life was inspired around contesting elections of provincial assemblies as per Government of India Act. Prior to this, he gained recognition as a Dalit leader, emerged from numerous struggles of Dalits, such as leading the fight to access water from Chavdar Lake, securing entry to Kalaram Temple, and advocating Dalit representation in round table conferences. Through ILP he was trying to build unity of workers on class identities. In an interview of 15th August 1936 to Times of India, he said that the fundamental aim of ILP is to advance the welfare of labouring classes. Ambedkar said, "Our organisation advocates the implementation of equitable goals and policies aimed at the emancipation of the labouring class, whose interests and relationships are prioritised by our party. The deliberate choice of the terminology, such as 'labourer,' over 'depressed classes,' underscores our recognition that individuals from marginalised communities, including Dalits, are encompassed within the broader labouring class." In his party manifesto, he declared "Our party aims at safeguarding industrial workers, preventing unjust dismissals from their jobs, and ensuring fair promotion opportunities. We're committed to reducing work hours, ensuring fair wages, paid leave, and improving living conditions. Additionally, we seek to enact legislation for bonus, pension, and retirement benefits. We'll also push for social insurance to protect workers during illness or accidents. Our party will strive to build affordable and low-cost housing for the workers."

In the Bombay Legislative Assembly, the ILP

secured 15 seats which was much below Ambedkar's expectations. He continued as an opposition leader to oppose the anti-labour policies of the Congress party. The main contention was the opposition to Industrial Dispute Bill 1938, which was tabled by the government to deny workers their right to protest. The bill stipulated that if the government declared a strike as illegal, the participants of the strike would have to face 6 months imprisonment. Ambedkar asserted that this legislation would turn workers to slaves, labelling it the "Workers Civil Liberties Suspension Act." This law was even harsher than the Trade Dispute Bill of 1929. In September 1938, Ambedkar's Independent Labor Party and the Communist Party's AITUC led a massive strike against this law. Over one lakh workers joined the strike.

Earlier in January 1938 Ambedkar led a movement for the rights of rural agraricultural labourers. In the rural areas of Maharashtra the exploitative practices such as Khoti and Vantandari were prevalent for years. Khot were brokers, who acted as tax collectors from farmers on behalf of the British government. The Khot used inhumane measures to extort taxes. Similarly, the Vatandari system was widespread across various regions of Maharashtra. In this system, the government allocated land to Dalit labourers as a form of donation. However, in exchange, landless individuals were compelled to engage in bonded labour in the fields owned by landlords and tenants. In Maharashtra, the majority of Vatandars, or bonded labourers, were Mahar Dalits. In January 1938, Dr. Ambedkar initiated a movement in conjunction with the Congress Socialist Party to oppose Khoti and Watandari systems. This movement saw significant participation not only from the Mahars but also from a considerable number of farmers belonging to the Kunbi community. Twenty thousand farmers assembled and led a procession in Bombay. Dr. Ambedkar's efforts consistently emphasised an inclusive understanding of class and caste through the Independent Labor Party (ILP). However, during this era, the Communist Party refrained

from openly supporting him, as the leftist leadership perceived Ambedkar's advocacy for caste issues as detrimental to the class solidarity of workers.

In reality, there was no organic solidarity between the labouring classes, along class lines, due to the caste discrimination inherent among Indian workers for years. Since 1928-29, Dr. Ambedkar has been asking the communist trade unions he has been working with to challenge the practice of untouchability and caste discrimination among workers and educate the non-Dalits about the discriminatory practices associated with the caste. He observed that the left leaders themselves were ambiguous on the caste question and were not able to convince workers about the problems of casteist practices. In 1928, amidst the fervour of the Bombay textile workers' strike, prominent left trade union leaders met Dr. B.R. Ambedkar urging for solidarity with the movement. While Ambedkar pledged his support for the strike, he articulated a crucial issue that the left unions should demand Dalit workers access to jobs in weaving departments of the mills. Notably, within textile mills, Dalit labourers were systematically excluded from this particular department which were deemed to be honourable, due to the requirement of mouth-held thread handling—a task deemed eligible only for upper castes and Maratha labourers. Dalit workers were assigned tasks of thread holding and cleaning. Ambedkar's insistence on eradicating this discrimination underscored a significant progress in the working class movement. Unfortunately, the communist unions and their leadership remained indifferent to this question. In 1928, a collaborative strike led by the left union, Girni Kamgar Sangh and Ambedkar's union endured for six months.

Subsequently, the Bombay Government established a three-member committee to investigate and address the workers' grievances. Following the committee's report, Dr. Ambedkar penned an article in the newspaper Bahishkrit Bharat, wherein he said "The demand of untouchable classes to work as

weavers in textile units is a matter of personal dignity. This demand was among the seventeen demands presented by the strike committee. Surprisingly, factory owners did not oppose it. However, objections arose from Maratha labourers, while the owners remained indifferent. In reality, owners were concerned solely with the completion of cloth production and the resultant profit, regardless of the caste of the workers. The issue lay in the objections raised by certain workers regarding untouchables working alongside them in the weaving section. What response could owners provide to such objections? Untouchables were permitted to work in other units, but were prohibited from the weaving department of textile units where wages were higher. The argument presented was that the presence of untouchables, such as Mahars and Chamars, in textile units would compromise the castes of Maratha labour, as weaving involved mouth contact."

Dr Ambedkar observed caste biases as an obstruction to the class unity between the workers. On February 12, 1938, during his keynote address at the Dalit Labor Conference of Railways in Manmad, Nashik, Dr. Ambedkar delivered a seminal speech. It is in this address that he identified two main enemies of the Indian workers - Brahminism and capitalism. Emphasising his stance, he elaborated that Brahminism doesn't merely mean the privileges and power enjoyed by Brahmins, but the suppression of liberty, equality, and fraternity. And this thought is pervasive even beyond Brahmins. This demonstrated Dr. Ambedkar's insightful comprehension of both the potentials and limitations of the labour movement in India. To fortify the unbreakable unity of the working class, he advocated the eradication of casteism and also the caste system.

Dr. Ambedkar advocated reforms for rights of women workers. In 1929, the Maternity Benefits Act was enacted in the Bombay Provincial Assembly, a legislation co-drafted by Dr. Ambedkar and NM Joshi. Additionally, on August 7, 1942, Dr. Ambedkar



realm often translates to liberty for landlords and capitalists to raise costs and increase working hours, while simultaneously decreasing wages for workers. Therefore, granting unrestricted autonomy to agriculture and industry without state socialism would result in a monopoly of private stakeholders, jeopardising the fundamental rights of civilians. Dr. Ambedkar regarded the welfare state's role to be essential for the success

proposed reducing working hours from 14 to 8 in the Viceroy's Executive Council. During the Seventh Labor Conference, Dr. Ambedkar emphasised the need for equal pay for equal work, paving the way for gender equality in workplaces. As a representative of workers in the council, Dr. Ambedkar visited the coal mines in Bihar and Maharashtra, gaining first hand insight into the lives of mine workers. He lifted the prohibition on women from working inside the mines. To extend maternity benefits among mine workers he proposed the 'Maternity Benefit Bill for Women' in the Central Assembly. This bill subsequently became a legislation providing eight weeks of maternity leave benefits for women. In independent India, these legal provisions were included in the comprehensive Maternity Benefits Act of 1961, ensuring the provision of all aforementioned benefits.

In 1946, Dr. Ambedkar resigned from the portfolio of labour member and presented a draft on "State and Minority" to the constitutional assembly. In this draft, he advocated nationalisation of agricultural land and supported state socialism. He argued that the labouring class should not be left at the mercy of private stakeholders, as private employers would never allow them to exercise their fundamental rights to unionise and strike. Many constitutionalists argued that the state should not intervene in the private, social, and economic affairs of the people, fearing it may infringe on personal freedom. Ambedkar countered it by observing that the state's non-intervention in social and economic

of democracy. That's why, amidst industrialization, he refused to compromise on the fundamental and democratic rights of workers and farmers. Private industries and market economies struggled against such rights. Therefore, the state socialism, with its checks and balances and controls on agriculture and industry, became crucial in safeguarding the rights and interests of workers. This is why Dr. Ambedkar supported a system of state socialism. He diligently strived to fulfill his duties and responsibilities towards the working class throughout his political life within the framework of bourgeoisie democracy.

Dr. BR Ambedkar's struggles and vision played a historic role in shaping a modern India and in guaranteeing rights for the oppressed. As the chairperson of the Drafting Committee of India's constitution he played a pivotal role in giving India a modern democratic constitution. Today, when India is being ruled by a regime that has unleashed a comprehensive and brutal attack on the secular and democratic fundamentals of the Indian Constitution and on the hard earned rights of Indian workers in order to serve the interests of crony capitalism, Ambedkar's vision provides us the strength to fight back. Today, when the anti-worker Labour Codes adopted by the Modi led BJP government weakens workers' right to unionise, strike, minimum wages and social security, Ambedkar's historical role and vision for strengthening workers' rights provides us the inspiration needed to intensify workers' struggle against such an injustice and unjust laws. ■

NO JOBS / POOR JOBS:

The ILO Report on Education & Employment ^[1]

A Worrying Picture

★ AKASH BHATTACHARYA

The India Employment Report 2024 released by the Institute for Human Development and International Labour Organization on March 26, presented a gloomy picture of the Indian economy. The report has flagged concerns about poor employment conditions: the slow transition to non-farm employment has reversed; women largely account for the increase in self-employment and unpaid family work; youth employment is of poorer quality than employment for adults; wages and earnings are stagnant or declining.

The report uses the ‘employment condition index’ to understand the economy. The index is based on seven labour market outcome indicators: (i) percentage of workers employed in regular formal work; (ii) percentage of casual labourers; (iii) percentage of self-employed workers below the poverty line; (iv) work participation rate; (v) average monthly earnings of casual labourers; (vi) unemployment rate of secondary and above-educated youth; (vii) youth not in employment and education or training.

The report has focused on almost two decades : 2000 to 2022. The report brutally exposes the current government’s claim of having ensured all-round development and generated millions of jobs.

Employment Quality

Informal employment has risen — around half the jobs in the formal sector are of an informal nature.

Self-employment and unpaid family work has also increased, especially for women. Almost 82% of the workforce is engaged in the informal sector, and nearly 90% is informally employed, the report said. Self-employment remains the primary source of employment — 55.8% in 2022. Casual and regular employment accounted for 22.7% and 21.5% respectively.

The share of self-employment remained almost stable around 52% between 2000 and 2019, while regular employment increased by almost 10 percentage points, to 23.8% from 14.2%. This is reversed by 2022, with self-employment increasing to 55.8%, while the share of regular employment declined to 21.5%. Casual employment consistently declined to 22.7% in 2022 from 33.3% in 2000.

Participation of Women

The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) in India remains among the world’s lowest. Female LFPR declined by 14.4 percentage points (compared to 8.1 percentage points for males) between 2000 and 2019. The trend reversed thereafter with female LFPR rising by 8.3 percentage points (compared to 1.7 percentage points for male LFPR) between 2019 and 2022.

There is a considerable gender gap — women’s LFPR (32.8%) in 2022 was 2.3 times lower than men’s (77.2%). India’s low LFPR is largely attributed to the low female LFPR, which was much

[1] This article draws upon both the ILO/IHD [report](#) as well as a [through analysis](#) of the report by journalist Aanchal in the Indian Express dated 28 March 2024.

lower than the world average of 47.3% in 2022, but higher than the South Asian average of 24.8%, as per ILO data.

As on 2022, 48.4% women are not in employment, education, or training. This is nearly five times that of men (9.8%).

Structural Transformation

There has been a reversal of the slow transition towards non-farm employment after 2018-19. The share of agriculture in total employment fell to around 42% in 2019 from 60% in 2000.

This shift was largely absorbed by construction and services, the share of which in total employment increased to 32% in 2019 from 23% in 2000. The share of manufacturing in employment has remained almost stagnant at 12-14%.

However, since 2018-19, this slow transition has stagnated or reversed with the rise in the share of agricultural employment.

Youth Employment

Youth employment and underemployment increased between 2000 and 2019 but declined during the pandemic years. However, unemployment among youths, especially those with secondary-level or higher education, has intensified over time.

In 2022, the share of unemployed youths in the total unemployed population was 82.9%. The share of educated youths among all unemployed people also increased to 65.7% in 2022 from 54.2% in 2000.

The unemployment rate among youths was

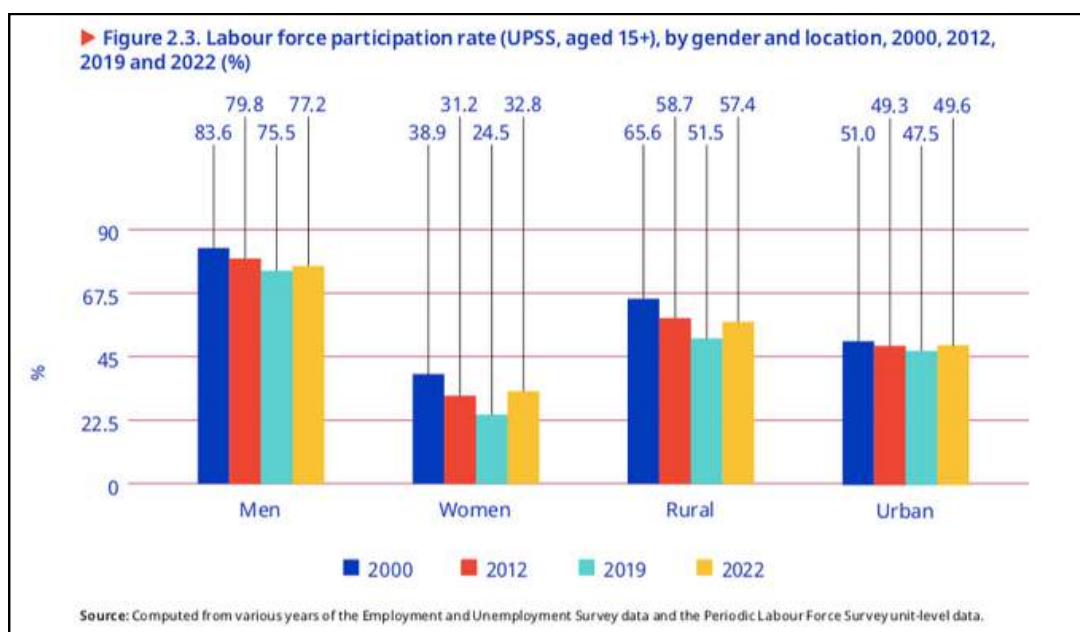
six times greater for those who had completed secondary education or higher (18.4%) and nine times higher for graduates (29.1%) than for persons who could not read or write (3.4%) in 2022. This was higher among educated young women (21.4%) than men (17.5%), especially among female graduates (34.5%), compared to men (26.4%).

The unemployment rate among educated youths grew to 30.8% in 2019 from 23.9% in 2000, but fell to 18.4% in 2022. Even though there has been a rise in youth employment recently, the quality of work remains a concern, especially for qualified young workers.

Forty percent of technically qualified youth engaged in vocations which do not correspond to their qualifications. Highly skilled youth are taking up blue collar jobs. At an aggregate level only 4% of youth have access to formal vocational training. In 2005, only 11.61% of youth had access to vocational training. That increased to a mere 15.62% in 2022. Among them only 3.6% were OBCs, 3.66% were SCs, and 1.79% STs. The education-employment gap gives a lie to the government's claim of having bridged this gap through the National Education Policy (NEP 2020).

The Lies of the Present Government

Employment grew at only 1.6% annually between



2000 and 2012. After 2012, it declined to 0.01%. It increased after 2019, but mainly in agriculture. The share of manufacturing in employment was stagnant throughout the Modi years, at around 12% to 14% per year. This indicates the failure of Make in India and other flagship employment generation schemes. During these years, employment in manufacturing increased by only 1.7% annually (2000 to 2019) and then by 3.5% between 2019 and 2022. This is a far cry from the government's claim of generating lakhs of manufacturing jobs every year.

Two-thirds of incremental employment after 2019 comprised self-employed workers, among whom unpaid women family workers predominate. Nearly 82% of the workforce engages in the informal sector, and nearly 90% is informally employed. A large number of youths are employed in the gig and platform economy where jobs are insecure, poorly paid and the labor regime is very oppressive and controlled by algorithmic functions.

As much as 62% of the unskilled agriculture workers and 70% of such workers in the construction sector at the all-India level did not receive the prescribed minimum wage in 2022. A large proportion of regular workers (40.8%) and casual workers (51.9%) did not receive the average daily minimum wage prescribed for unskilled workers.

All this is proof of low-quality employment, characterized by poor wages, job insecurity, lack of social security and workplace rights. The way the report draws attention not only to unemployment but also to the poor quality of employment makes it highly significant. While unemployment is a potent issue in Indian politics, the quality of employment still remains somewhat as a hidden problem.

The report is praiseworthy, but it could have reflected more on the possible impact of labour codes on employment. The 'employment condition index' could have been conceptualized better. Workers' rights as well as their access to basic civic amenities need to be accepted as a key indicator of the quality of employment. The report stops short of doing that. Reports such as these will also benefit from consulting workers' unions as key stakeholders in the economy. ■

WORKERS' CONVENTION Resolves to Vote Out the BJP!

★ ATANU CHAKRAVARTY

Under the clarion call of AICCTU, the West Bengal State Committee organised a workers' convention on March 16, 2024, at Moulali Youth Centre, Kolkata. Workers from different sectors - jute industry, construction, scheme, public and private transport, brick kiln, textile, railways, ordnance factories, and contract workers from various industries, were present.

The convention paid homage to Comrade Raghupati Ganguly, a veteran comrade of Bally, Howrah, who breathed his last on the day, Comrade Amitabh Roy, AICCTU organiser who worked among scheme workers, and other departed comrades.

The convention started with an inaugural song by Nitish Roy. Basudev Bose, the state General Secretary of AICCTU, stressed upon the necessity to hold the convention as a part of AICCTU's all India campaign and presented the political resolution. The resolution stated that never in the post-independent India did the Constitution of India and the institutions of democracy faced such an unprecedented attacks as in Modi's fascist dispensation. The BJP, the official political party of the RSS - the rabid communal Hindutva force, has set the stage to build a Hindu Rashtra by 2025, the centenary year of the RSS.

The long cherished unity in diversity, the hallmark of India, is under peril with the minority population being persecuted and excluded. The CAA rules are notified with the aim to break the unity of the working class.

The economy is in severe crisis. In this context, it is the task of the working class to save the country from this catastrophe.

The Labour Codes were adopted when the entire country was reeling under COVID -19 pandemic and even when the normal functioning of the parliament was disrupted. The hard won trade union rights, after century long struggles, have been snatched away. The Modi government has converted the 200 year old Ordnance Factory into a corporation in its unabating bid for privatisation. When the workers of the factory decided to go on an indefinite strike against the decision to dismantle the public sector unit, the Modi government promulgated Essential Defence Service Act (EDSA) and prohibited the strike. All forms of trade union agitations, even peaceful sit-in demonstrations, were declared illegal under the purview of the EDSA.

While India has become more unequal in terms of wealth concentration than in British colonial India, the real wage continue to be stagnated for the last ten years. In 2014-15 and 2021-22, the real wage of the working population declined to one percent, and for construction workers, the real wage entered into a negative territory at -0.2 per cent. 91 per cent of workers employed in unorganised sector are totally deprived of social security benefits. India is the only country among G-20 to have the highest number of informal workers.

Lakhs and lakhs of scheme workers, predominantly women, are not even recognised as workers and are without any minimum wages or social security. 9.5 crores of women are engaged in unpaid informal work. The ILO has mentioned that any employment without wages can not be considered as 'employment'. However, Modi government has officially recorded all these unpaid work as employment and as empowerment of women in labour market.

Indiscriminate privatisation, disinvestment of public sector, selling state property to corporates for a pittance, writing off 15 lakh crore rupees of corporate loans in the name of NPA are the ugliest examples of selling and surrendering national interest before the corporates.

CPIML State Secretary Com. Abhijit Mazumdar exposed the anti-people anti-worker policies of the Modi government and called upon the workers to defeat the BJP in the forthcoming parliament elections.

Nabendu Dasgupta, President, Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Forum, Jayashree Das, leader of All India Scheme Workers Federation, Jaydev Dey, leader of Kashipur Gun & Shell factory also addressed the convention.

While concluding the convention, Atanu Chakravarty, president, state AICCTU, appealed to workers to rise above economic interests to fulfil their duty of defeating the BJP, the party that destroyed the constitution, the parliamentary democracy, the democratic rights and that pushed teeming millions to the brink of disaster.

The working class must rise to the occasion and emerge as vanguards of the society to lead the war of second independence from the clutches of Hindutva forces and their political representative, the BJP. ■

LABOUR SNIPPETS

APRIL 2024

ALMOND WORKERS PROTEST IN KARAWAL NAGAR, DELHI

More than 5,000 workers in Karawal Nagar (New Delhi) had a 10-day protest seeking an increase in their wages since March 1st. Almonds imported from California reach Khari Baoli region of Delhi, where thousands of workers shell, hull, clean, sort and pack almonds for consumption in India. However, the workers face no dignity of labour in the area with their rights being violated and no due respect being given to them. Reports have stated that men, who are mostly employed to operate machines are paid Rs. 5 per kg to process almonds, whereas women who are involved in manual work are paid Rs. 2 per kg. While the minimum wages stipulated is Rs. 673 per day, the workers struggle to earn even Rs. 300 a day, with the average at Rs. 200 a day. The workers do not have weekly holidays, and work for about 14 to 15 hours every day, without any overtime being paid to them. The workers also face occupational health hazards due to the chemicals used, the dust created, etc., with no health benefits extended to them.

GENDER KEYPOINTS AT UNCSW

In the recently concluded 68th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in March 2024, gender equality and workspace democracy were keypoints that were highlighted. Payment of statutory minimum wages to women workers, implementation of 'equal pay for equal work', universal social

protection policies, etc., were discussed. Participating trade unions spoke about the importance of workplace democracy which would help achieve gender equality through right to collectivization and collective bargaining. They stated that this would help eradicate women's economic disadvantages and empower them to voice out their concerns better. It was also highlighted that the problem of unpaid care work must be addressed. The International Trade Union Confederation, a participant at UNCSW, stated "The ITUC, as the global voice for workers, is committed to advocating for these issues, aiming for a more inclusive, fair, democratic and equal workplace for women worldwide."

FACTORY WORKERS IN BANGLADESH NOT PAID WAGES

Over 90% of the workers in Narayanganj of Bangladesh (which houses several factories and several thousand workers) have not been paid wages for several months, despite the closing of Ramzan month. Reports have stated that there is a risk of labour unrest due to the demand of payment of salaries and bonuses during Eid. The delayed payments have been spotted in 416 industrial establishments, including 71 from Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and 171 member establishments.

FRENCH UNIONS ISSUE STRIKE NOTICE

Amid Olympics and Paralympics being scheduled to take place in France this

Labour Snippets Continued from Page 14...

year, leaders of the most powerful workers unions have filed strike notices, to allow them to call for industrial action among public sector workers, including in essential services sector, during the Olympic games. They are seeking permanent recruitment, compensation for professional constraints generated by the games, holiday rights, right to choose work from home and to switch off from work. The unions in France have been issuing strike notices since January this year, due to the overwork situation that has been generated and the growing inflation rates, which has caused unrest among the workers, who were already protesting against the violation of their labour rights.

Power Plant Accident in Italy

An explosion at a hydro-power plant in northern Italy has left three workers dead and several injured. The explosion at the Enel Green Power Plant occurred as the company was testing the efficiency improvements that were made to the facility recently, which generates power from the water of a nearby dam basin. The explosion occurred underwater, and divers have been deputed to rescue workers, who are working in conditions of “zero visibility” in the rubble and debris of the explosion. They are manually removing debris and rubble, which is delaying the rescue operations. This incident has resulted in the unions calling for a general strike demanding safe working conditions and compensation in cases of death at workplaces. ■



Advisory for Employers to Promote Women Workforce Participation: THE NAMESAKE EQUALITY

★ SHILPA PRASAD

Advertising Bald Initiatives

The BJP Union Government's Ministry of Labour and Employment in January 2024 issued an Advisory, ostensible for the promotion of workforce equality, called the "Advisory for Employers to Promote Women Workforce Participation (Gender Equality & Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment)" ("Advisory"). While titled with the stated goal of women's equality, its contents display the true intentions of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, to advertise bald initiatives and promote the new labour codes as being progressive and central to women's empowerment.

In the introduction to the Advisory, the union government credits itself with the marginal increase in women's workforce participation to 35.9% in 2022-23, without noting the increasing informalisation of female labour. While more women are participating in the workforce, more so than ever since independence, their work is insecure and informal. The Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23 (PLFS), which the ministry relies on, to boast of a 35.9% female workforce participation, also notes in statement 6, that 27.8% of women are working on their own account, 37.5% are helpers in domestic enterprises, and 65.5% are the self-employed. A mere 15.9% of women are regular wage or salaried workers, and even then, 18.8% among them are casual labour. The data is even more stark for rural women, of whom only 8% are regular /

salaried workers.[1]

The intersectionality of the discrimination faced by women in the workforce is also evident by the social stratification of women's workforce participation - only 28.9% of Scheduled Caste (SC) community women, 43.5% of Scheduled Tribes (ST) community women and a mere 28.5% of Other Backward Classes (OBC) women participate in the workforce (statement 17 PLFS).

The PLFS also notes that 64.3% of women are working in the agricultural sector, which is an increase from the 62.9% in 2021-22 and 62.2% in 2020-21. The same is true for percentage of women in informal sector enterprises as well, with 60.8% women in informal sectors in 2022-23, as compared to 58.4% in 2021-22 and 56.7% in 2020-21.

The "Economic Survey of Karnataka 2020-21" issued by the Planning, Programme Monitoring and Statistics Department - the Government of Karnataka in March 2021, notes that out of 25.5 million labour force in Karnataka, informal workers are 22.2 million, constituting 86.9% of the total workforce in Karnataka, with the highest number of persons being self-employed, constituting 45.6% of the workforce. The Worker Participation Ratio (WPR) for women in rural Karnataka is also a mere 24.2%.[2] In 2022-23, the female worker population ratio was 37.2%. In fact, in the Standing Committee on Labour's 25th Report on "The Impact of

[1] This article draws upon both the ILO/IHD report as well as a through analysis of the report by journalist Aanchal in the Indian Express dated 28 March 2024.

COVID-19 on Rising Unemployment”, it is noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of persons below the proposed national minimum wage increased by 230 million.

Misleading Statistics and Welfare-ist Claims

Thus, at the very outset, the BJP Government has cherry-picked data to appear to have helped the empowerment of the female workforce in India. However, in reality, more women are working only in informal sectors, self-employment, agriculture, or domestic employment. The percentage of women in formal sectors or with formal wages is shockingly abysmal, which is evident from the fact that although more women are in the workforce, the quality of their work and working conditions has depleted. This increasing informalisation of employment also deprives women of social security benefits and restricts their mobility.

Even this labour force participation is low when compared against the global average. There are several factors playing into this, such as lack of employment opportunities.[3]

Then, the Advisory goes on to list various welfare provisions for women in the existing labour laws, including the Factories Act, 1948, the Building and other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and the Inter State Migrant Worker Central Rules, 1980. The irony of the same should not be lost on the public, with the memory of the Union Government’s attempts to exempt the applicability of several labour laws during the pandemic.

The Advisory’s appreciation of the extant welfare provisions of the existing labour laws for women

ignored key facts. First, it ignores the continued attempts of the same union government to dilute labour laws in the country. During the pandemic, the government attempted to halt the implementation of the Factories Act, 1948 on the ground of the pandemic, attempted to increase the hard won 8-hour workday to 12 hours in various states, increased the threshold for prior permission for retrenchment / closure from 100 to 300 (in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947) in various states. The government also introduced the concept of fixed term employment through executive fiat. All in all, the government ensured that labour laws were diluted. Enabling a “business-friendly environment”, which is another name for strengthening corporate rule.[4]

Introducing the Labour Codes by Stealth

Second, the Advisory enumerates new provisions under various labour codes, while deceptively referring to these as provisions under the existing labour laws. The labour codes not only seriously dilute existing labour law protections, but weaken the implementation machinery and also undo decades of hard-won rights. The Advisory looks to promote the new provisions even before they came into force.

The Advisory fails to note that although the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 exists, most women work in informal sectors where internal complaints committees are not constituted. There is no publicly available information regarding the constitution of the committees, and women face loss of employment and threats if they do approach an existing committee for help. Domestic workers, for example, often face sexual harassment at their workplace, but they do not have an easy and accessible grievance redressal mechanism due to

[2] [This article draws upon both the ILO/IHD report as well as a through analysis of the report by journalist Aanchal in the Indian Express dated 28 March 2024.](#)

[3] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro_new_delhi/documents/genericdocument/wcms_342357.pdf.

[4] https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/labour_law_reforms-06-03-2020.pdf.

the highly informal nature of their work. According to a study of the International Labour Organisation, more than 1 in 5 persons in employment have faced at least one or other form of violence and harassment at work.[5]

The Advisory then talks about the new labour codes. It lists certain provisions of the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (e.g. mandatory health check-ups for women, and provision of transportation to female workers), the Code on Wages, 2019 (e.g. equal remuneration), Code on Social Security, 2020 (e.g. applicability of social security to gig workers), and the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 (e.g. such as representation of women in the Grievance Redressal Committee). The Advisory paints a rosy picture of the advancement of women's work and employment through the labour codes, whereas the reality is the quite opposite.

In reality, both trade unions and experts have noted that women will face the brunt of the new labour codes.[6] Under Section 6 and Rule 3 of the Code on Wages, 2019, the minimum wage will be fixed on the basis of the standard working-class family, which includes a spouse and 2 children apart from the earning worker, equivalent to 3 consumption units = 1+0.8+0.6+0.6. Essentially, women have been assigned a lower consumption unit, which is blatantly gender discriminatory.

Regarding Wages and Benefits

The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, envisaged that all remuneration payable in cash or kind to men or women, for same or similar work, shall be equal. However, the new Code redefines the provision of equal pay for equal work, and excludes certain components of wages, such as bonus payable, house-accommodation values, PF contributions,

THIS WILL DEPRIVE JUSTICE TO SEVERAL WOMEN ON THE GROUND DUE TO THEIR VARIOUS POSITIONS OF DISADVANTAGE DUE TO SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION.

commission payable to employee, retrenchment compensation or any ex-gratia payment and gratuity, from the wage calculation of equal wages. Thus, it is legally permissible for unequal pay for equal work under the above-mentioned heads. These exclusions would be applicable unless the pay exceeds 50% of the income of workers. The Code also introduces a new criterion of "experience" for assessing equal pay for "same work or work of similar nature", in addition to the criteria of skill, effort, and responsibility. This will deprive justice to several women on the ground due to their various positions of disadvantage due to societal discrimination.[7] The Code in fact ignores decades-long demand to revise the criteria from "work of similar nature" to "work of equal value" which would permit the remuneration for disparate jobs to be assessed fairly. Additionally, women's representations on the Advisory Boards, which was hitherto 50%, has been reduced to 33%.

Section 60 of the Social Security Code, 2020, envisages payment of maternity benefit at the rate of average daily wage. However, wages as defined in Section 2(88) does not include bonus, house-accommodation, PF contribution, rent allowance, overtime allowance, etc. The new Occupational Safety Code also permits women to be employed in night shifts based on consent. However, it is apparent that due to unequal wage relations, that consent cannot be free and will be coerced through

[5] https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_863095.pdf.

[6] [1] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/women-to-bear-brunt-of-new-labour-laws-experts/articleshow/75794353.cms?from=mdr>.

[7] <https://www.aicctu.org/workers-resistance/v1/workers-resistance-october-2021/new-labour-code-acts-assault-rights-women-workers>.

the threat of termination or disciplinary action. Hence, women would effectively be forced to consent to night shift work, which was until now prohibited by the existing laws. Maternity Benefits will be applicable, as per the First Schedule of the Code, to every factory, mine, oilfield etc. and to every shop or establishment in which at least 10 or more employees are employed. Thus, large parts of the informal sector, with a heavy presence of women workers, will find themselves excluded from maternity benefits.

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, also increases the threshold of workers to seek prior government permission for lay-off, retrenchment, etc from 100 to 300, meaning several medium and small establishments, often employing large numbers of women, will be excluded from protection against arbitrary lay-offs and retrenchment.

In essence, the Advisory contains a false plain

pretense of gender equality. It is a rhetorical advertisement for the new codes, without any actual concern for gender equality at the workplace. In the final portion of the Advisory, employers are advised to increase women's participation in the workforce in various ways. The Advisory calls upon employers to "ensure the welfare of women workers", provide first-aid, creche, latrines, maternity benefit etc. Finally, the Advisory lists the schemes of the Union Government and their achievements in providing benefits to women. The Advisory itself is bereft of any real analysis as to why women's participation in the workforce is insecure, informal, and unprotected.

The Advisory is, in part, a restatement of existing laws, and in part a promotion of the new labour codes. It is a desperate attempt by the Union Government to make it appear to care for women's rights and equality in the workforce. ■





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