WORKERS RESISTANCE

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DECLARATION

ONWARDS TO THE 12TH FEBRUARY 2026
ALL INDIA GENERAL STRIKE

We, the Joint Platform of Ten Central Trade Unions, independent Sectoral Federations and Associations are meeting today in Delhi to deliberate on the everworsening situation in the country on all fronts. This convention is taking place in a very critical situation, when the union government, in order to contain and weaken the trade unions and place the Indian Working Class Movement disarmed in face of the onslaught of capital, have come out with the four labour codes. Indian Workers observed 5 massive general strike during the period since the labour codes were brought and passed in the Parliament with brute force.

This has come in a background of a worrisome situation of deteriorating economy, growing unemployment, increased attack on the democratic rights of people, venomous campaigns of polarisation and hatred against the minorities, attack on all democratic institutions and filling them with blind supporters of the ruling party with dubious agenda of obliterating the rights of freedom of association, expression and dissent.

The government continues its agenda of privatisation and sale of all strategic Public Sector Undertakings and Public services such as railway, port and docks, coal mines, oil, steel, defence, roadways, airports, banks, insurance, telecom, postal, Atomic energy, electricity generation and supply etc. to the big corporates of Indian and foreign origin thus endangering indigenous industrial growth and self-reliant economy. Our demands of filling sixty five lakhs vacant posts, stopping of regular workers to private companies, lifting ban on creation of new posts etc. were totally ignored. The government is continuously pursuing the policies against farmers under different guise since after the agitating farmers forced the government to withdraw three agricultural laws which were brought to corporatise the agriculture and grab land to the advantage of the chosen few corporate houses. Still now the agrarian sector continues to be in crises resulting in distress migration to cities in search of livelihood.

Extreme corruption is coming to fore at the cost of basic services to the common people. The basic services are collapsing and people are dying with contaminated drinking water.

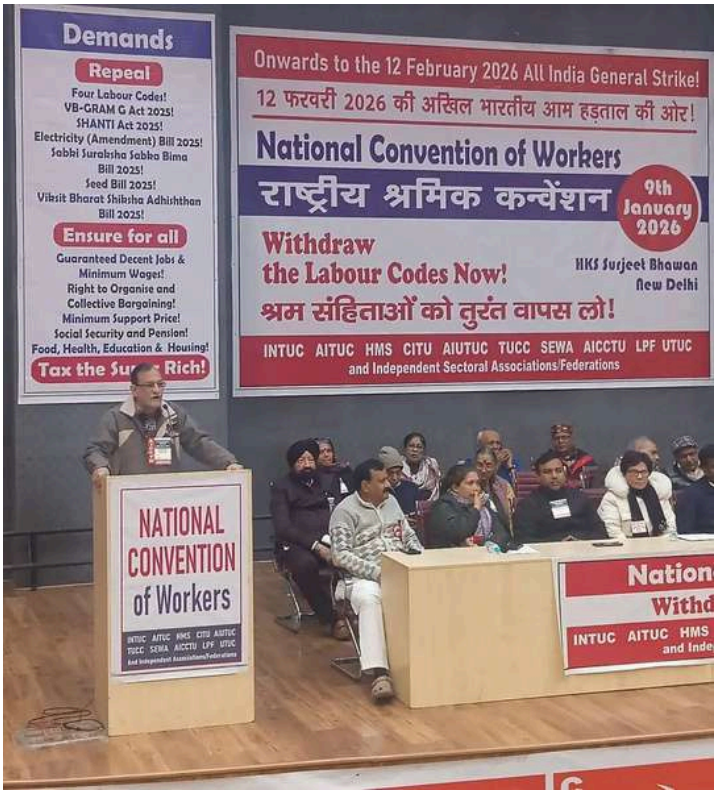
The commercialisation of education and health are severe jolt to the people as they can not afford the cost. The prices of essential commodities are rising unabated.

With inequalities growing, a very large number of people are getting pushed to a life below poverty line.

The trade unions have been continuously on path of agitation against the anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-national policies of the Ruling regime in Centre. But the Union government in order to contain and weaken the unions, came out with four labour codes without any legitimate exercise of consultations with stake holders or holding Indian labour conference. The unions organised 5 major strikes during the period since the labour codes were brought to the Parliament ignoring International Labour Standards to which India as a Nation state is signatory.

The last general strike by the CTUs and Federations/Associations was organised on 9th July 2025 with participation of around 25 crore people. This was a grand General Strike with solidarity support from Samyukt Kisan Morcha in mass mobilisation in rural India also. The students, youth, women, people from other social movements and also journalists supported and participated in mobilisation. The issues of that strike included those of the workers, farmers and in general of common people. 26th November 2025 was also observed as a day of mobilisation by the workers and farmers on their demands.

The Central Government instead of responding to legitimate demands of the people, has increased its assault on all sections in the advantage of its cronies in the Corporate World. Rather the government is



AICCTU General Secretary Comrade Rajiv Dimri addressing the gathering at National Convention of Workers held on January 9th, 2026

busy giving concessions and leverage to the foreign companies to the disadvantage of small businesses and trade, MSMEs which provide major chunk of employment. After Trump's increased Tariff announcements, the government has been surrendering India's Interest in the foreign trade.

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Sectoral Federations / Associations had met on 22nd December 2025. The meeting expressed deep anguish over the blatant attacks of the Central Government inside and outside Parliament during this intervening period post our General Strike of 9th July 2025.

The Government came out with Draft Labour Policy-Shram Shakti Niti-2025 on October 8th and placed it in the public domain for comments. Once again without talking to Stakeholders, the policy brought to push for implementation of the four labour codes and with clear direction of decimating the role of trade unions, the work/labour termed as dharma and not a right, changing/abdicating role of

the Govt. from regulator and compliance/enforcement of laws to a vague, deceptive and undefined role of so called employment facilitator and besides undermining rather negating collective bargaining, abandoning of tripartism in the world of labour with proposed national body for review, usurping the role of state governments for concentration of power in the centre and riddance of inspections and compliances etc. In defiance of fundamental Constitutional values of liberty, equality, fraternity, fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy, the draft policy claims to have drawn inspiration from the archaic Manusmriti, Yagnavalkya smriti, Narada smriti, Arthashastra, Sukraniti, ShulkyaNayaya and so on.The unions under the joint platform of CTUs and Independent Sectoral Federations and Associations outrightly rejected it. The Labour Codes have been notified on 21st November, and the Government is trying to utilise all of its institutional machinery, media, and public sector managements to build a positive consensus around these Codes. Now the government has notified Rules for these codes, put these in public domain for comments/ suggestions. But the workers are determined to fight against the unilateral imposition by the Government and get the Codes repealed. We once again demand immediate convening of Indian Labour Conference (ILC) to discuss Draft Labour Policy, repeal of four labour codes and fresh discussions of labour reforms. The notified labour codes and the draft Rules are to crush the collective bargaining to take away the right to strike, almost 70 percent factories will be out of labour law coverage, regulation and employers' obligations to leave workers at the mercy of employers, throw out vast majority of workers from the protection of occupational safety and also from social security, would virtually demolish the existing rights and wage protections through conciliation/adjudication procedures;wage definition itself is proposed for change, trade union act is proposed to be changed to make unionisation cumbersome/impossible towards arbitrary deregistration and de- recognition, vindictive punitive actions against collective trade union activities and license to employers to violate their statutory obligations at their whims. In totality the Labour Codes are articulately designed by the Govt. to impose conditions of slavery on the workers and their trade unions, to facilitate their corporate masters to continue their loot on the workers, people and the country. In contrary to the demands of CTUs to include construction workers, beedi workers, home-based workers, domestic workers etc. into ESIC and other social security coverage, the codes are throwing out the workers from their achieved rights due to threshold raise and no legal guarantee.

The Parliamentary process has been turned into mockery; the government get the bills passed with their brute majority without necessary without necessary discussions from the opposition benches. The democracy is being stifled. Election Act,2023 is a blatant example of "legally" doing away with free and fair elections in India.

In the last parliamentary session the Bills passed include the following.

- The "Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act", which will allow private and foreign players to enter highly risky and hazardous nuclear power production with a motive of profit; it has withdrawn the liability of foreign and national suppliers of instruments in case of accidents/disasters – certainly, it is an attack on the nuclear security and sovereignty of our country.
- The Mahatma Gandhi NREG Act has been replaced by the Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025. This new Act replaces the rights-based rural employment guarantee, when the people are reeling under extreme joblessness, by discretion of the central authority and shifts the fiscal burden onto the States. It bans the operation of the Act during harvesting season.
- 100% FDI has been allowed in the Insurance Sector, practically giving foreign players the

right to take over domestic insurance companies.

- The Central Government has placed the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, in both Houses of Parliament, though it could not be passed in this session.
- The Government has floated the Draft Seed Bill and the Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025. These Bills, if placed and passed, will create a disastrous impact on agriculture, domestic and MSME electricity consumers, and the public electricity sector of our country.
- The Pension Validation Act 2025, is brought and the OPS denied. EPS 95 pensioners being kept at below poverty line level.
- The Central Trade Unions took serious note of the current environmental crisis in the northern part of India, unbearable pollution in Delhi-NCR, and the dangerous Supreme Court order allowing the destruction of almost 90% of the Aravalli Hills, which have remained the protector of northern India from the expansion of the Thar Desert. The Supreme Court in the face of stiff opposition from all sections of society took suo motto the matter, taking back the earlier order and set up a committee for examination of the matter afresh.

The meeting of Central Trade Union had decided to give a strong message to the

Ruling regime in the Central Government by observing a "One Day Strike" on 12th February 2026 which we are formally ratifying today in the National Convention of Workers.

If the Government still tries to pursue the Rules under the Codes and does not repeal the Codes, the Central Trade Unions will be compelled to go for further strong actions, including a multiple-day General Strike, besides sectoral resistance actions.

The CTUs acknowledge and salute Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) for their unconditional support to the General Strike.

The National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOEEE) has also announced to hold its Sectoral National Strike on the same day with full strength and conviction.

Joint meetings and conventions with electricity employees and consumers will be held in the months of January and February 2026.

The SKM has decided to observe the Resistance Day on 16th January 2026 at villages and block levels against the Seed Bill 2025, Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2025, VB-GRAMG Act, 2025, and in support of other demands. The CTUs will take part in this action with full strength.

CTUs call upon the entire working class and other sections of the toiling masses to gear up for the ensuing General Strike, start campaigning widely, and prepare their organisations for a heightened struggle.

While welcoming the protest action organised by the INDIA BLOC Parties in the premises of Parliament opposing the Labour Codes, we call upon them and various other sections of the people, especially the youth and students, to come forward in support and solidarity with this Strike to save the basic rights of the working people and protect the democratic – secular fabric of the country. ■

ONWARD TO NATIONAL GENERAL STRIKE ON 12TH FEBRUARY 2026.

OBSERVE RESISTANCE DAY ON 16TH JANUARY AT VILLAGE AND BLOCK LEVEL AGAINST THE SEED BILL 2025, ELECTRICITY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025, VB-GRAMG ACT, 2025, AND IN SUPPORT OF OTHER DEMANDS.

THE JOINT PLATFORM OF THE CENTRAL TRADE UNIONS AND SECTORAL FEDERATIONS/ ASSOCIATIONS

INTUC AITUC HMS CITU AIUTUC TUCC SEWA AICCTU LPF UTUC

AICCTU

AT THE CALL OF CENTRAL TRADE UNIONS

MAKE THE ALL INDIA GENERAL STRIKE ON FEBRUARY 12, 2026, A GREAT SUCCESS

Friends,

The Modi government is fully prepared to implement the four Labour Codes. After notification on November 21st, central rules are being formulated to implement them. Then, the four Labour Codes will be implemented from April 1st, 2026. The government is using widespread false propaganda to portray these codes as beneficial to workers.

The four Labour Codes, enacted by abolishing all labour laws that previously provided legal protection and certain rights to workers, will enslave workers to their employers. They will be pushed back to a situation that dates back 100-150 years. These codes will exclude a large segment of workers from the status and scope of "worker," endangering their very existence. These labour laws, which provide legal protection to workers, were achieved through the struggles and sacrifices of the Indian people against British (colonial) rule. Therefore, these codes, enacted by abolishing labour laws, are a major attack on the country's Constitution and precisely a part of the Modi government's conspiracy to subvert it. The country's labour movement has been opposing these codes from the very beginning, demanding their repeal. In fact, these codes were introduced at the behest of employers and with the support of the RSS-BJP-affiliated trade union, the BMS. These codes were introduced to push the "ease of doing business" to ensure exorbitant profits for corporates/employers by draining workers. Also, the government has come up with Shram Shakti Niti 2025 (National Labour and Employment Policy of India) which characterizes labour as “Dharma” (sacred and moral duty) and no rights.

NO TO THE LABOUR CODES! REPEAL THE VB-GRAMG ACT!
STOP INDISCRIMINATE PRIVATIZATION!
RISE UP IN THE STRUGGLE TO REPEAL THE LABOUR CODES!
THE LABOUR CODES ARE THE MODI GOVERNMENT'S WAR AGAINST WORKERS; GIVE IT A BEFITTING REPLY!

Starting with the issuance of the codes, the Modi government has launched a series of attacks within a month.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which provides employment to the poorest of the poor, has been abolished and replaced by the "Viksit Bharat- Employment and Livelihood Guarantee Mission (Rural) Act, 2025" (VB-GRAMG); and Mahatma Gandhi's name has also been removed. This new law, at a time when the country is grappling with high unemployment, eliminates the need and rights-based rural employment guarantee, introducing a system based on the whims of the central government, and shifts the financial burden to the states. It prohibits the law from operating during the harvest season, ensuring cheap labour for landowners. Not only this, it is mainly aimed at creating a vast army of cheap labour for industries. Without any work in rural areas, they will be forced to migrate to cities in search of employment and in turn become part of vast army of cheap labour.

While coal, railways, defense, education, health, etc., are undergoing rapid privatization/corporatization, a law has been enacted allowing 100% foreign direct investment in the insurance sector, which will give foreign companies the right to take over the domestic insurance system, making this social security system inaccessible to the general public. Additionally, the government has issued the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025, and the Seed Bill, to hand over power and agriculture to corporates like Adanis and

Ambanis. If passed, these bills will have a devastating impact on agriculture, domestic and MSME electricity consumers, and the country's public power sector. Furthermore, the highly sensitive and hazardous nuclear power production sector has been handed over to private and foreign companies, jeopardizing the country's nuclear security and sovereignty. To this end, the "Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (Shanti) Act" has been passed. The workers and the people of the country demand Repeal of all these Acts and Bills.

All these laws are being introduced in the name of “Viksit Bharat” (developed India), which will, in reality, belong to Adani and Ambani, not to the people of the country, not to "we the people of India." While the gap between rich and poor has reached its peak, the poor are being deprived of everything from their rights to basic amenities, turning them into an army of slaves for Modi's "Viksit Bharat." Labour codes, including 12-hour work, police rule and bulldozer rule, along with communal hatred and division, are being made the destiny of these working and deprived people. Furthermore, by resorting to "vote theft" and turning the Election Commission into its own pocket organization, the Modi government is depriving the poor on a large scale of their right to vote.

To respond to these all-out attacks on the working class by the Modi government, the country's central trade unions have declared an all-India strike on February 12, 2026. The time has come for workers to plunge in a decisive fight to protect their rights and existence. The situation demands of the working class to intensify militant united struggles to thwart these attacks. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has extended its full support to this strike. We call on the entire working class and all other sections of the toiling masses to launch a massive campaign and make this strike a resounding success, giving a befitting reply to the Modi government's attacks. Let us wage a long-term battle against the Labour Codes and the VB-GRAMG Act and other attacks, with the same tenacity, strength, and determination that enabled India's farmers to achieve historic success in repealing the draconian agricultural laws.

Let us make this strike a resounding success and brace ourselves for a larger and longer fight! ■

Nation-wide protest demanding minimum EPS pension of Rs 9,000 per month+DA. Visuals of the protest from Delhi. Com. Atul Dighe addresses the protestors on the occasion.

165 DAYS LONG CHENNAI SANITATION WORKERS' STRUGGLE ENDS ON A POSITIVE NOTE

After more than 160 days of relentless struggle, on January 12 the sanitation workers of Chennai, organised under UUI-LTUC–AICCTU, concluded their fight on a positive note with the DMK government agreeing to their core demands. The workers will continue to be paid directly by the Chennai Corporation, successfully defeating privatisation attempts. Minister P.K. Sekar Babu, along with Mayor R. Priya, visited the LTUC office to end the fast by offering juice to the fasting workers.

The Minister assured that the services of nearly 1,400 workers, who had been on a path of relentless struggle since 1 August 2025, braving arrests and cases and the police brutality would be restored by the end of January 2026. He also assured to protect wages and consider restoration earlier than the end of the month, preferably by 20th January, as requested by the UUI union president and the state president of AICCTU, Barathi, during a meeting with sanitation workers following the visit.

The struggle began after 1,400 temporary sanitary workers, protected under the Madras High Court's order until 31 July 2025, were illegally terminated on 1 August 2025, after the government reference to the court. The corporation demanded that they forgo 5 to 20 years of prior service and accept employment with private contractors, despite an industrial dispute pending since 29 July 2025, in violation of the Industrial Disputes Act 1947. These workers are predominantly SC (Arundhadhiyars, Adi Dravidars), poor people of all castes, and women, many of whom are single parents.

A historic struggle began at Rippon Building on 1 August 2025, with workers sitting day and night in scorching heat and rain. All political parties, including DMK allies CPI, CPIM, VCK, and Congress, supported the strike. A police crackdown on 13 August 2025 led to arrests, but the High Court protected the leaders from arrest on 14 August 2025.The issue of sanitation workers and their struggle snowballed into a major political issue in the state.

The workers' demands were restoration of employment under the same conditions as on 31 July 2025, with direct payment from the Corporation, along with compensation for lost wages and withdrawal of police cases.

Workers continued relentless weekly, and later daily, struggles, including standing hip-deep in the sea of Bay of Bengal, polluted waters of Koovam river or graveyards, to force the government to respond. They faced repeated arrests and remained without wages for over five months, while their families endured extreme hardship. The union UUI, LTUC–AICCTU, provided relief such as rice, oil, and dal twice.

From 17 November 2025, women workers undertook indefinite fasts in batches, lasting up to 57 days, with High Court permission. In support of the struggle, progressive intellectuals, activists, writers, professors, lawyers, and concerned citizens launched a signature campaign and addressed a press meet in solidarity with the sanitation workers.

CPIML Liberation congratulates the sanitation workers, especially the women workers, for sustaining their struggle and upholding their spirit in the face of all odds. We also extend our heartfelt congratulations to the union leaders at all levels, as well as to all citizens and progressive organisations who expressed solidarity with the workers' long and courageous fight.

We hope the state government and Chennai Corporation will fulfill their promise to restore the services of the workers at the earliest.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF STRUGGLE OF THE CHENNAI CORPORATION SANITARY WORKERS

- Nearly 1400 temporary sanitary workers enjoying the protection of the Madras High Court's Order upto 31.07.2025, were thrown out of service by the corporation on 01.08.2025.
- The corporation asked them to forego their prior services ranging from five to twenty years and take up employment with a private contractor from 01.08.2025. This was done even as an Industrial dispute was pending before the Industrial Tribunal from 29.07.2025 regarding outsourcing. Therefore, it was contrary to the Industrial Disputes Act 1947.
- These temporary sanitary workers are SC (Arundhadhiyars), SC (Adi Dravidars), poor of all castes and women. Most of these women are single parents.
- A historic struggle in front of the Rippon Building was waged from 01.08.2025. The workers sat in the platform day and night braving the scorching heat and pouring rain. All political parties in the state, including DMK alliance partners, notably CPI, CPIM, VCK and the Congress, supported the strike. There was a police crackdown on the night of 13.08.2025. The High Court came to the rescue of the leaders and granted them protection from arrest on 14.08.2025. The problems of sanitation workers inevitably turned into one of the major political issues in the state.
- Since then, the workers were relentlessly waging struggles almost every week and were practically waging a struggle every day in the last two-three weeks. They even stood hip deep in the Bay of Bengal, the most polluted river like Koovam river in Chennai, stayed in the graveyard, etc., and tried to force the government to see reason.
- The police arrested them every time and released them very late in places from where they did not have facility to return to their homes.
- These workers remained without wages for more than five months, 165 days as on 12 Jan 2026. The union managed to collect and give them 25 kgs of Rice, 1 litre of Oil, and 1 kg of Dal once and another occasion 10 Kgs of Rice. Other than that, most of them were finding it difficult to survive because of loss of livelihood employment. While participating in the struggle they were able to manage, at least, one time food when under the police custody. The children of the workers, the spouses, the parents were all suffering even without such a negligible relief. The most downtrodden people of Central North Madras are put to innumerable difficulties.
- The issue of permanency, the issue of the justification of outsourcing are all pending before the Industrial Tribunal Tamil Nadu.
- The workers were only demanding restoration of their employment on the same service conditions as on 31.07.2025, which was also a temporary employment but under direct payment system from the Corporation.
- There are enough vacancies in the adjoining zones and the outsourced zones of 5 and 6 of the corporation.
- The previous ADMK Government outsourced 10 zones. Only the 5th and the 6th zone of the corporation were outsourced since the DMK government came to power. DMK government faced a lot of hostility and criticism because of its attack on the poor, downtrodden sanitary workers. The union also demanded compensation for loss of wages for the past five months, withdrawal of police cases in addition to the status quo as on 31.07.2025.
- Starting from 17.11.2025 the women workers in batches of four were on an indefinite fast
- (for 57 days as on 12 Jan) to press the above demands in their union office after getting permission by an order of the Madras High Court. The first batch was on indefinite fast for 15 days, the second batch was on indefinite fast for 25 days, then, the third batch was on indefinite fast for 17 days.
- The prominent social activists, professors, writers, lawyers and intellectuals organised a signature campaign in support of struggling sanitation workers. They held a press meet on 5th January 2026 to appeal to the government to consider the workers' demands positively.

Comrade Barathi, the president of UUI and AICCTU, addressing a General Body meeting of sanitation workers on 12 Jan regarding the understanding reached between the union and the Chennai Corporation on their demands, along with the DMK minister PK Sekar Babu, Chennai Mayor Priya, AICCTU Advisor Kumarasami and other leaders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FASCIST ASSAULT ON THE WORKING CLASS

[THIS IS A GREETING MESSAGE OF AICCTU DELIVERED BY COMRADE CLIFTON D' ROZARIO, ALL INDIA VICE PRESIDENT, TO THE 18TH ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF CITU]

Dear comrades of the presidium, colleagues of the central trade unions, and delegates of the 18th All India Conference of CITU; on behalf of the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), I extend my revolutionary greetings to you all.

This Conference is taking place on the heels of the declaration of a veritable war on the working class by the Modi Government.

Private and foreign players have been permitted to operate in the nuclear power production, guaranteeing them profit and freedom from liability. 100% FDI has been allowed in the Insurance Sector, laying out a red carpet for foreign players to take over domestic insurance companies. In the pipeline are the Draft Seed Bill and the Draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025 which will wreak havoc on the agriculture sector, while adversely impacting domestic and MSME electricity consumers. MNREGA, acclaimed for the past two decades as the world's biggest public works and social welfare programme by economists all over the world, has been scrapped and replaced with a the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act 2025 (VB – Gram G Act), snatching away rights-based rural employment guarantee, especially when the people are reeling under extreme joblessness, shifting the fiscal burden onto the States, and banning the operation of the Act during harvesting season, ensuring cheap labour to the landlords and aimed at creating a vast army of cheap labour for industries as people will be forced to migrate to cities in search of employment.

Alongside all this are the four Labour Codes that spells death knell for workers' rights has been brought into force on 21st November 2025. In fact, this day must henceforth be commemorated as the "Black Day for Workers". The working class will face this challenge head on. The 12th February Strike against the draconian Labour Codes and the multi-pronged attack by the Union Government on the people's rights and entitlements, shall mark a decisive moment in the history of the working-class movement.

Comrades, this conference is set against a backdrop of gaping inequality in India. We know the numbers well by now: India is amongst the most unequal countries in the world. A mere 1% of the country accumulated some 40% of its wealth. The top 10% of earners, namely the class and caste elite, capture 65% of income, while participation of women in the labour force remains shamefully low. This is not an accident, but the result of a deliberate neoliberal policy choice that has consolidated corporate loot, while weakening worker rights. The new Labour Codes, the repeal of the MNREGA Act, opening up of all sectors to private players, represent the latest front of a calculated and sustained assault on the lives of working people.

The Labour Codes represents a fundamental restructuring of labour relations to weaken workers' bargaining power and strengthen employer control. By deliberately reorienting labour laws in favour of capital; the State has openly come out as the guarantor and enforcer of corporate interests against labour. However, two aspects need to be emphasised here. One, is that the Labour Codes constitute a blatant attack on federalism by centralising decision-making in the hands of the

Union government and effectively reduce states to mere implementing agencies. States are stripped of meaningful legislative authority to tailor labour protections to their industrial conditions, regional realities, and workers' needs. Labour is a concurrent subject and both, the Union and State governments, are empowered to legislate in this regard. However, what we are witnessing is forced centralisation weakening both workers' rights and the autonomy of states.

Secondly, the Labour Codes have excessive and dangerous reliance on delegated legislation. The Codes lay down only vague and skeletal principles, while handing sweeping powers to the Executive through blanket rule-making powers. Core legislative functions from Parliament to the executive—particularly the Union government. Critical matters such as fixation of the national floor wage, eligibility and access to social security, inspection regimes, among others are removed from democratic legislative scrutiny and placed in the hands of the bureaucracy.

Comrades, the very architecture and design of the Labour Codes is fundamentally exclusionary. Higher thresholds are mandated which reduces the scope of coverage of these laws – lakhs of workers who enjoyed some rights under the existing labour laws, are now completely outside the scope of labour law protections. Alongside this is the relaxed safety regulations and a diluted inspection system, which reduce job security and workplace accountability. Wages are tinkered with, and the right to equal wages for women has been compromised. Minimum wages, which were to be mandatorily revised every 5 years under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, can now "ordinarily" be done in 5 years. Although the Codes introduce a framework for gig and platform workers, they stop short of recognising them as employees, leaving millions without meaningful social security. These changes undermine constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and freedom of association, while pushing India towards a hire-and-fire regime already criticised for deepening inequality. The Labour Codes have nothing for the Scheme workers, domestic workers and other construction workers who have been on the streets demanding their rights.

Job security, under the new codes, is now an illusion. The Union government likes to use fancy words like "labour market flexibility", but we all know what this means – nothing but institutionalized insecurity and tyranny over working lives.

> *Firstly*, hire and fire will be the norm, as the protections against lay-off, retrenchment and closure, which earlier applied to establishments with 100 workers now apply only to units with 300 workers. Thus, more than 87% of Indian industry will be unregulated and workers will be at the mercy of the employers.
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> *Secondly*, the Labour Codes entrench permanent job insecurity by legalising fixed-term employment across all sectors, even for regular and perennial work.
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> *Thirdly*, the Labour Codes institutionalise and legalise contract labour – what we call the modern day slavery. The contract system has been a tool for expropriation of the fruits of labour of impoverished workers to add to heaped coffers of capitalist establishments. Trade Unions have always sought for abolition of the contract system and yet, contract labour is now legally permissible under the new Labour Codes, in perennial and essential services such as sanitation, watch and ward, gardening, housekeeping, and even in certain core activities.

As Trade Unions, one major concern is that the two main weapons of trade unions movement – the right to strike and collective bargaining -- are severely undermined by the Labour Codes. In his opposition to the Industrial Disputes Bill in 1938, B.R. Ambedkar said: "A strike is simply another name for the right to freedom; it is nothing else than the right

to the freedom of one's services on any terms that one wants to obtain. And once you concede the right to freedom, you necessarily concede the right to strike." However, under the new Labour Codes, strikes are virtually outlawed through a web of prohibitions. The right to form trade unions, protected by the freedom of association guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution, too stands undermined as the new Codes empowers the Registrar to withdraw or cancel the registration of a trade union "on the information received by him" regarding an alleged contravention of the code. The new system for recognising trade unions can potentially fragment and weaken trade union power and collective bargaining. The notion of the negotiating council mechanism, too, though sounding inclusive, enables employers to play unions against each other and reach agreements with more compliant unions while ignoring militant ones. This is a reiteration of the classic strategy of the colonial powers – to divide and rule.

The four Labour Codes are being presented as anti-colonial "labour reform". Nothing could be further from the truth. The struggles and sacrifices of countless workers have snatched workers' rights from the hands of the British and those very rights and laws are consigned to the history books. This argument at decolonisation is a ruse to cover the essential reorientation of the state's role in mediating class relations in the country. This is made clear in the draft "Shram Shakti Niti 2025", the National Labour and Employment Policy of India, which declares work as a rajdharma (sacred duty) by drawing inspiration from the Manusmriti and other texts. This is essentially the codification into law of Golwalkar's philosophy of labour rooted in moral responsibility and an insidious attempt to re-establish centuries-old caste-based hierarchies and occupational slavery.

This fascist assault on the working class comes at a time when the working class, world over, is confronted with old and new challenges. The intensifying crisis of capitalism is causing global economic turmoil, greater inequality, and harsher worker exploitation. This domestic unrest is directly linked to increasing international conflicts, imperialist wars, and foreign interventions. Ordinary people bear the brutal cost through poverty, joblessness, forced displacement, state repression, and the loss of hard-won rights.

THE FOUR LABOUR CODES ARE BEING PRESENTED AS ANTI-COLONIAL "LABOUR REFORM". NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH.

As we battle on, class struggle is our guiding light; class unity is our strength. This is possible by evolving a paradigm of class unity and class struggle that does not stop shy of challenging caste, gender, and communal discrimination. The objective is ultimately to unite all workers, transcending caste and other lines, to stand up against all forms of injustice, discrimination, and oppression.

Over the years, we have witnessed the growing physical attacks on migrant workers, in particular Bengali Muslim migrant workers, across the country. Whether it is the lynching of West Bengal migrant worker Jewel Rana Sheikh in Sambalpur, Odisha or that of Chhattisgarh migrant worker Ramnarayan Baghel in Kerala, at the hands of Hindutva forces, the very lives of workers are now under threat. The communal polarisation is now a life threat to workers, and not just a divisive feature. Fighting caste and communal divisions among workers becomes an essential aspect of trade union activism and working-class consciousness.

The neoliberal economic order has pauperised working people and created the material conditions for the rise of fascist and authoritarian regimes worldwide. In this overall global climate of rise in reactionary bourgeois regimes, in India, Hindutva returns in the unconditional defence of a crisis-ridden capitalism. For workers seeking a life of dignity, resistance is not a choice, but a necessity. The urgent task before us is to revive militant trade

union struggles and rebuild working-class consciousness to wage a collective fight for emancipation from exploitation by the ruling classes and the insecurities imposed by the labour market. Our immediate task is to make the 12th February Strike a great success and let us all build militant struggles of the working class against this concerted attack of the Modi government.

On behalf of AICCTU, once again greet the 18th All India Conference of CITU a grand success!

Jai Bheem! Lal Salaam!
And in the words of Hasrat Mohanai made eternal by Bhagat Singh –

INQUILAB ZINDABAD!

THE NEW LABOUR CODES
Ushering in the Era of the "Dictatorship of the Private Employer"

★ MAITREYI KRISHNAN

On 21st November, 2025 the Union Government issued notifications bringing into force four Labour Codes - the Code on Wages, 2019, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, (OSH Code) the Social Security Code, 2020; and the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 - that had been passed between 2019 and 2021. The four Labour Codes, presented as an anti-colonial "labour reform", essentially constitute a reorientation of the State's role in mediating class relations in the country. That corporate India has largely hailed the labour codes indicates whose interests the new Labour Codes serves. Trade unions have taken this as an attack on the working class and indications are that the coming months will see a concerted challenge on the streets.

The very passing of these Codes in Parliament was marked by an undemocratic approach by the Union government – three of the four bills were passed without any debate in 2020 on a day when the Parliament was in a furore over the passing of the farm laws. Trade unions have consistently resisted this codification process and have held 4 nationwide strikes. Yet, ignoring all objections, the Government has proceeded to issue notifications on 21st November 2025, bringing the Codes into force.

The Codes have a serious impact on the rights of workers, while the Union government claims that the Codes are worker-friendly. In this, they are ably supported by the unquestioning main stream media. Given these distortions, it is imperative to examine the actual substance of the Labour Codes to understand its true impact on the working class in particular, and the socio-economic structure of society at large. Simply put, it grants employers a greater freedom while curtailing even the most basic rights of workers, with the harshest consequences borne by the most marginalized workers.

Pushing Workers Out of the Ambit of the Law

One of the fundamental changes that the Labour Codes make in comparison with the previously existing law, is that it reduces the applicability of the law. Labour laws generally prescribe a worker threshold for their applicability, and the laws apply only to those establishments that employ workers meeting that threshold.

Take the Factories Act, 1948 for instance. Enacted to ensure basic health, safety, welfare facilities, working hours, and leave for workers in factories, it set a threshold of 10 workers for its applicability to

Protest against Labour Codes in Bengaluru (left) and Bhubaneswar (right)

establishments operating with power, and 20 workers for those without power. It has now been replaced by the OSH Code, 2020.

This raises the threshold to establishments with 20 workers with the aid of power and 40 workers without power. According to the Annual Survey of Industries 2022–23[1], 43.2% of factories employ fewer than 20 workers, and the workers in these industries are denied the benefits and protection of this law.

The relationship between workmen and management is inherently unequal. Leaving service conditions entirely to the employer's discretion opens the door to arbitrary and discriminatory employment practices, with workmen subject to unilateral terms. To address this, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 was enacted, which mandated that establishments employing 100 or more workers must frame standing orders i.e. rules governing conditions of service and these must be certified by the State authorities after hearing the workmen and ensuring that the terms are fair and reasonable. The Industrial Relations Code, which replaces this law, raises the threshold to 300 workers. This means that workers in establishments with less than 300 workers are pushed into a legal vacuum, leaving their service conditions entirely at the mercy of employer discretion.

The Industrial Relations Code makes another shift vis-à-vis the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947. Under the 1947 Act, establishments employing 100 or more workmen were required to obtain prior government permission before effecting any lay-off, retrenchment, or closure, ensuring public scrutiny over decisions that affect livelihood and job security of workers. The Code raises this threshold from 100 to 300 workmen. Employers in units employing fewer than 300 workmen can now lay off, retrench, or shut down operations without any prior approval, effectively granting them unchecked power to terminate employment and exposing workers to sudden and arbitrary loss of livelihood.

The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 was enacted to protect workers in the exploitative contract labour system by prescribing its abolition under certain conditions, and mandating basic safeguards – timely payment of wages, provision of essential amenities, liability of the principal employer, etc. This Act applied to all establishments employing 20 or more workers. The OSH Code that replaces it, raises this threshold to 50 workers, pushing the workers below this threshold outside the purview of the law.

The overall trend in the Labour Codes of raising the threshold for enjoyment of rights and entitlements under them strip workers of hard-won rights and narrow the scope of regulation, pushing lakhs of workplaces outside of legal regulation.

Blunting workers' freedom of association and right to strike

The working conditions and enforcement of labour laws in any establishment is contingent on the workers organisation and militancy, a product of the eternal conflict between capital and labour. This explains why, even today, workers who are organised enjoy comparatively greater security, while those in the unorganised (rather consciously disorganised) sector, where workers are actively prevented from organising, are subjected to extreme exploitation.

The right to form trade unions is protected by the freedom of association guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution. The Trade Unions Act, 1926, which gave statutory expression to this right, has now been replaced by the Industrial Relations Code.

The Industrial Relations Code empowers the Registrar to withdraw or cancel the registration of a trade union "on the information received by him" regarding an alleged contravention of the Code. While a power of cancellation existed under the Trade Unions Act, the scope of the Industrial Relations Code is far wider, as it now governs strikes and several other aspects of industrial relations. This significantly expands the Registrar's discretion and exposes trade unions to arbitrary interference. Under the Trade Unions Act, 1926, office-bearers and members of registered trade unions enjoy statutory immunity from civil proceedings and criminal prosecution under Section 120B(2) of the Indian Penal Code, for actions taken in furtherance of legitimate union objectives. This protection is retained in Section 17 of the Industrial Relations Code, but is rendered meaningless by the Code's expanded power of deregistration. Once a union's registration is cancelled, its members lose immunity. The threat of cancellation thus operates as a weapon to intimidate unions and create a climate of fear that undermines the freedom of association.

The Labour Codes also attacks the right to strike, an essential component of collective bargaining. For workers, whose only bargaining power lies in their labour, the withdrawal of that labour is often the sole means to be heard in the face of unequal power relations. In his opposition to the Industrial Disputes Bill in 1938, Dr Ambedkar said "*...A strike is simply another name for the right to freedom; it is nothing else than the right to the freedom of one's services on any terms that one wants to obtain. And once you concede the right to freedom, you necessarily concede the right to strike*".

The attack on the right to strike under the Industrial Relations Code is two-fold. Firstly, the Code effectively makes strikes illegal through procedural traps. Under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, prior notice of strike was required only in public utility services. The IR Code expands this by mandating a 14-day advance notice for a strike in every

Protest against Labour Codes in Kolkata (left) and Kanpur (right)

Protest against Labour Codes in Gunupur, Odisha (left) and Delhi (right)

establishment. The issuance of such notice triggers conciliation proceedings, and once conciliation is underway, strikes are prohibited. This new regime effectively acts as a prohibition on strikes, hollowing out the right to collective bargaining.

Secondly, in addition to prohibiting any strikes, the Codes escalates penalties. Under the Industrial Disputes Act, the penalty for an illegal strike was imprisonment up to one month or a fine of ₹50. The IR Code increases this to a minimum fine of ₹1,000 going up to ₹10,000, or with imprisonment or both.

The effect is an assault on collective action and the silencing of working-class actions.

Systematic Erosion of the Rights of Women Workers

Article 39(d) of Constitution mandates that the State shall direct its policy towards securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women. This constitutional provision was strengthened in the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, which prohibited discrimination in wages on the basis of sex. The Code of Wages has effectively dismantled this. While on the face of it, equal wages are mandated, the devil lies in the details. Wages, under the Code, is now redefined to exclude key components, including various allowances, allowing employers to structure wages in a way that appears compliant, but perpetuates gender-based discrimination. In a labour market where women already face discrimination, this redefinition risks legitimizing indirect wage discrimination, directly contravening the guarantee of equality.

The second major setback to women workers' rights is the reduction in maternity benefits payable to women. The Maternity Benefits Act, 1961 is now replaced by the Social Security Code that narrows the very definition of "wages" to exclude various allowances. In practice, employers split wages across multiple heads to avoid liabilities. By excluding these components, the Code legitimizes such avoidance and will result in women workers receiving lower maternity benefits.

The introduction of night shift for women, hitherto prohibited under the Factories Act is being heralded as freedom for women. In reality, it does precisely the opposite. It offers greater freedom to employers to extract labour from women under conditions that are inherently unsafe and unequal. Although the provision requires the "consent" of the woman worker, such consent is illusory in a workplace marked by stark power imbalances. Studies have shown that night-shift work exposes workers to serious risks, affects workers health and overall well-being, while adding to emotional and psychological stress. Rather than regulating night shifts to protect all workers, the Code now legitimizes the use of this oppressive practice against women.

Institutionalizing Caste and Class Inequality through Contract Labour

As far back as 1990, the Supreme Court described[2] the contract labour system as "an improved version of bonded labour." Yet, despite the enactment of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, contract labour has only expanded over the

years, particularly as part of the neo-liberal restructuring of the workforce. Contract labour is overwhelmingly concentrated in forms of work labelled as "unskilled" or "menial," categories that are deeply intertwined with caste. Occupations such as sanitation, housekeeping, gardening, and similar forms of labour have historically been caste-ordained and continue to be performed almost entirely by Dalits and other marginalised communities.

The contract labour system is marked by non-payment of minimum wages, delays in wage payments and the absence of social security. This precarity traps workers into poverty, and has intergenerational consequences, forcing children out of school and into the same caste-ordained occupations.

Rather than end this exploitative system, the Labour Codes legitimises the same. The OSH Code, which replaces the 1970 Act, prohibits employment of contract labour in core activities only in name; the very definition of "core activity" reeks of casteist classist tendencies excluding precisely those forms of work where contract labour is most pervasive and exploitative. Sanitation work, watch and ward services, canteen and catering services, loading and unloading operations, housekeeping and laundry services, gardening and maintenance of lawns, transport and ambulance services, construction and maintenance work, are specifically excluded from the definition of core work. By excluding these activities from the definition of core work, the OSH Code institutionalizes this exploitative new form of bonded labour. Instead of protecting these workers who have been continually marginalized, the Code gives legitimacy to a system that has historically been designed to exploit them, embedding inequality and discrimination into the very structure of the law.

Paving the way for the Dictatorship of the Employer

In States and Minorities, Dr. Ambedkar stressed on the necessity of State intervention to prevent economic exploitation, warning that the absence of regulation would not produce freedom, but lead,

Protest against Labour Codes in Guwahati (topmost) and Ranchi (top)

instead to the "dictatorship of the private employer." The Labour Codes, in that sense, represent the abdication by the State of any responsibility towards workers. Indeed, the very Manusmriti, that Dr. Ambedkar burnt, is invoked in the draft Shram Shakti Niti 2025, National Labour and Employment Policy of India, which characterises labour as a "sacred and moral duty". The Labour Codes, on the one hand enable what Dr. Ambedkar described as the "dictatorship of the private employer," and on the other deepen poverty and reinforce caste and gender inequalities. The Labour Codes must be understood within the broader effort to dismantle Constitutional rights, one that seeks to recast exploitation as a right of the employer and resistance by workers as criminal and a failure of duty. The way forward in this class war mounted on the working class is not only to demand status quo ante, but a labour law regime that guarantees the job, wage and social security – in the true sense, to all. ■

(With due acknowledgements to the first publisher, the Frontline, 24th December 2025)

FOOTNOTES:
[1] Annual Survey of Industries, 2022-2023, Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
[2] Sankar Mukherjee vs. Union of India 1990(Supp) SCC 668

METAMORPHOSIS OF MGNREGA INTO VB-GRAMG

Summary Execution of India's Best Known Social Welfare Legislation

★ DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA

For twenty years MGNREGA was being acclaimed as the world's biggest public works and social welfare programme. There have of course been concerns about irregularities and anomalies in the implementation of the Act and demands for more effective provisions to make the Act more purposeful. Of late, the vindictive and discriminatory approach of the Modi government made the Act rather dysfunctional in some states. Only the other day the Supreme Court upheld a High Court order to ask the Modi government to resume MGNREGS work in West Bengal. Now in yet another defiant move overruling the Supreme Court, the Modi government wants to scrap the very MGNREGA Act and replace it by a new legislation called Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill 2025!

True to its nature, the Modi government seeks to camouflage this dismantling of the employment guarantee framework as a 'benefit' for rural job seekers by presenting it as an increase in the scope of persondays from 100 to 125 per year. The reality is labourers have hardly been getting 50 days of work per year. Behind the veil of imaginary increase of workdays, the new bill actually erodes whatever right and guarantee job-seekers enjoyed under the previous arrangement. The operation of the Act will from now on remain suspended for a period of sixty days during the main agricultural season. States will have to bear a bigger burden of the wage bill, and panchayats will hardly have any say in the bureaucratically administered scheme of things.

There will be no increase in wages or guaranteed payment of minimum wages. A demand-driven rights-oriented legislation will thus be replaced by another centrally manipulated supply-limited cash transfer programme subjected to the vagaries of the digital delivery system.

The government would like us to believe that the new arrangement of pausing the operation of the Act during busy agriculture season is beneficial to both farmers and labourers. Actually farmers across India have been demanding a closer integration or linkage between rural employment guarantee and agriculture. The money the government distributes in the name of 'Kisan Samman' or honouring India's farmers does little to ease the burden of agrarian

crisis and ever escalating cost of agriculture. Closer linkage between the employment guarantee act and agriculture would amount to an effective subsidy from the farners' point of view while ensuring regular employment and minimum wages for agricultural labourers. The Modi government has chosen exactly the opposite route of divorcing the employment guarantee act from agriculture.

Renowned development activist and one of the key architects of NREGA in 2005 Jean Dreze has rightly described the VB-GRAMG Bill as not mere renaming of the old act and removal of the name of Mahatma Gandhi, but as outright assassination of the Act akin to the assassination of Gandhi himself. At a time when the country has been yearning for a stronger rural employment guarantee act with an equivalent extension in urban areas to address the issue of acute urban poverty and unemployment, the Modi government has come out with this combo package of Labour Codes and VB-GRAMG sounding the death knell for employment guarantee and labour rights.

For the Modi government this is a long awaited surgical strike on a UPA-era signature legislation. From NREGA (later renamed MGNREGA) and RTI to Forest Rights Act and the Land Acquisition Act 2013 (Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act), the UPA period had witnessed a set of legislations which were all products of protracted struggles and dedicated public interest research and activism. The Modi era began with the attempt to kill the Land Acquisition Act with an Ordinance, but the farmers' movement and the opposition succeeded in foiling the move. Wiser from the defeat of that bid, the Modi government chose the path of subverting the legislations by sinister amendments. Now emboldened by the successful hijack of the Bihar elections, the government has chosen the moment to kill the MGNREGA through a summary execution without any public consultation or parliamentary debate. It is now for India's agricultual and other rural labourers, workers and farmers to forge broad-based unity and wage a sustained movement against the disastrous combo package of Labour Codes and VB-GRAMG Act with the kind of tenacity, strength and determination that enabled India's farmers to win their historic victory over the now repealed farm laws.

(This article first appeared in Liberation, January, 2026)

BRING BACK RIGHT TO WORK!

MGNREGA has been repealed. With it goes one of the world's most powerful rights-based poverty alleviation programmes. Corporate sponsored Modi government repealed, scrapped and replaced MGNREGA by a centrally controlled, discretionary scheme under the VB–GRAM G Act, bulldozed through both Houses of Parliament in a single day.

MGNREGA was one of the strongest rights ever won by the rural poor in independent India. It was an international example of rights-based poverty alleviation programme. This arrogant government carried out the repeal without consultation with workers, Gram Sabhas, trade unions, civil society, or even serious parliamentary debate. A government that claims to speak for the people has chosen instead to silence them. This show the real intent of the corporate friendly style of working.

For nearly 20 years, MGNREGA stood as a wall between rural India and poverty driven hunger. It generated billions of workdays and became a lifeline during droughts, economic crises, and the COVID-19 lockdowns when markets collapsed and livelihoods dried up leaving working class absolutely in despair and hunger. During such tough times, MGNREGA guaranteed up to 100 days of work as a legal right, not as charity. If the State failed to provide work, it was legally bound to compensate the worker. For once, the burden of failure lay on the government and not on the poor.

Let us be clear: MGNREGA was not a gift from a benevolent State. It was forced into existence by decades of struggle against chronic unemployment, drought-driven poverty, and mass distress migration in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Workers, women, Dalits, Adivasis, & people's movements across the country demanded something radical yet basic: the right to work, guaranteed by law. In 2005, Parliament responded with rare political consensus. Cutting across ideologies, parties acknowledged employment in rural India cannot be left to market forces alone.

MGNREGA changed power relations. It turned the rural poor from petitioners into rights-bearing citizens. It imposed a legal duty on the State & gave workers the power to demand work, wages, & accountability. That is precisely why it had to be destroyed. The repeal of MGNREGA is not about efficiency or development, but to centralise power and breaking poor workers' bargaining power. It replaces rights with discretion, guarantees with budget caps, and democracy with command-and-control corporate styled governance. It hands back power to feudal forces, contractors, corporations, and a remote central authority while pushing the rural poor back into insecurity and hunger.

This is a direct attack on the Constitution, on Article 41, and on the idea that the State has any obligation to protect its most vulnerable citizens. By dismantling MGNREGA, the government has sent a brutal message: the poor have no rights in new Bharat of Modi and Shah.

HOW MGNREGA TRANSFORMED PEOPLE'S LIVES

The scheme was implemented when neoliberal programmes were reshaping India's economy at the expense of the working poor. At a time of jobless growth, the promise of 100 days of guaranteed employment per year to each rural household that asked for it did more than provide income: it strengthened the voice of workers in everyday economic and social life. Since its inception, 15.55 crore job cards have been issued and 26.6 crore workers have been registered under the scheme. Of these, 8.63 crore job cards and 12.17 crore workers are currently active, indicating the programme's continuing relevance for rural livelihoods.

✊ MGNREGA as a Wage Stabiliser

The average wage under MGNREGA stood at about ₹267 per day last year. By setting a floor to wages, the programme increased daily earnings for men and women in several states, reducing exploitation as private farm workers and bonded labourers. Access to work on demand and minimum wages helped the poorest families escape hunger. In FY 2024-2025, over 73 crore went directly into workers' hands as wages, reinforcing the scheme's role as an income support mechanism.

✊Largest Mass Participation Programme in Recent Decades

The programme witnessed participation of crores of workers, with strong involvement of women and Dalit–Adivasi communities. In FY 2024-2025 Scheduled Castes (19%) and Scheduled Tribes (17%) together generated more than a third of total workdays, while persons with disabilities have also found access to employment under the scheme. This makes MGNREGA one of the most inclusive labour programmes in India.

✊ One of the Most Decentralised Programmes

Gram Sabhas and Gram Panchayats played a central role in decision making process under MGNREGA. Workers in Gram Sabha had the right to identify work according to their local needs. Labour budget would be prepared and sent upward for implementation. People were the core planners with no interference from the beaurocracy, state or central government.

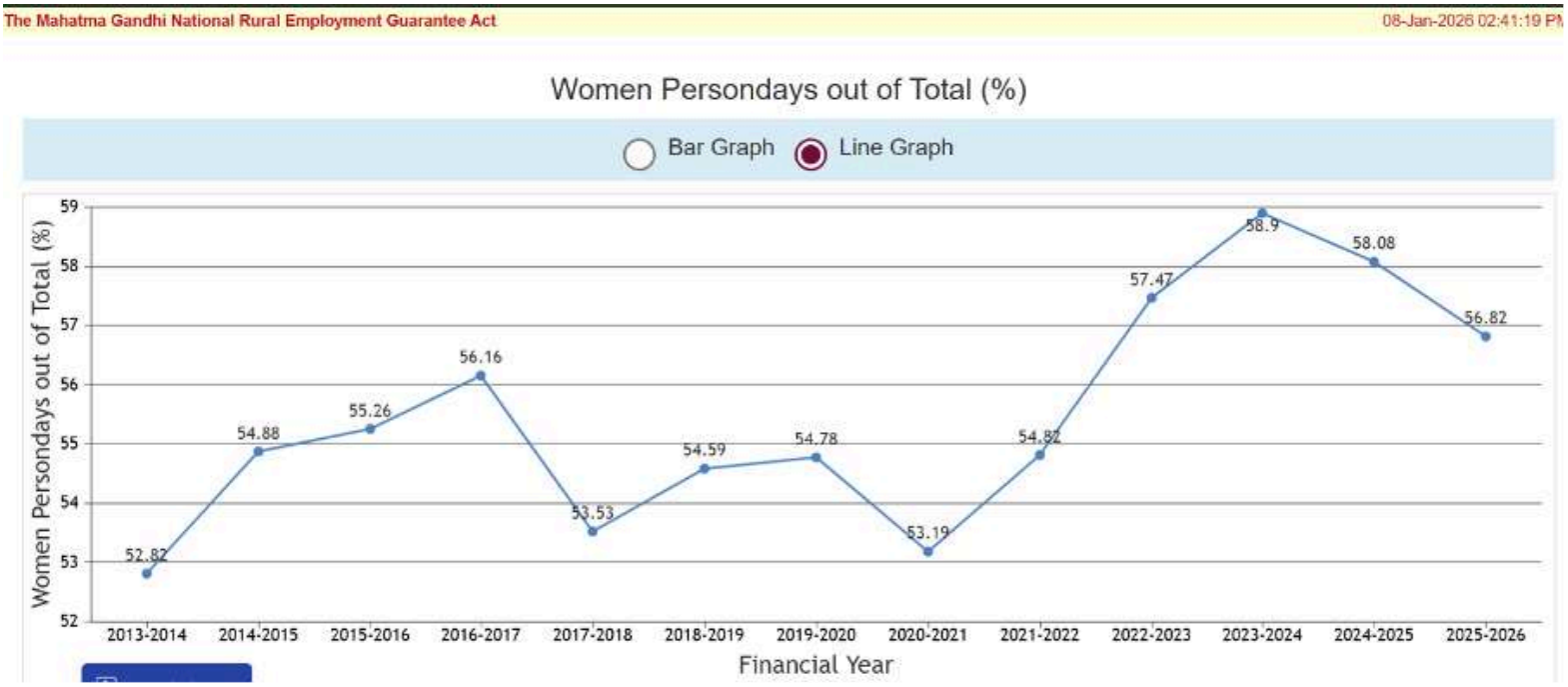
✊ Source of Dignified Work for Poor

MGNREGA was designed as a programme for the most marginalised. It is among the most inclusive labour programmes in India. In absence of dignified work in rural India MGNREGA came as blessing for many. In many villages, traditional labour arrangements such as the jajmani system, a caste based and hierarchical patron-client relationship involving year-round service obligations, began to weaken.

Beyond many loopholes in the scheme, in 2025–26, the programme provided employment to 4.87 crore rural households, with 6.49 crore individuals participating and generating over 106 crore person-days of work. Even under financial constraints, nearly 40.7 lakh households completed the full 100 days of work in FY 2024-2025, demonstrating the continued demand for guaranteed employment. This regular income brought stability to households and reduced debt and insecurity.

✊MGNREGA Transformed Women's Lives

For many rural women, MGNREGA provided the first independent source of income and greater say in family and community decisions. MGNREGA's regulations also explicitly reserve that at least one-third of participants should be women, but the actual share has been consistently above this minimum. It significantly increased post pandemic reaching to ever highest participation of around 59%! This reflects demand of manual work by women and the scheme's proximity to rural homes which reduces mobility barriers for female workers.



Official MGNREGA portal data for the 2024-25 fiscal year shows women accounted for about 58.08% of total person-days nationwide. This share was around, 59% in 2023-25, 57.5 % in 2022-23 and about 54.8 % in 2021-22. The trend indicates a steady rise in women's participation at the national level over the last decade.

HOW THE VB-GRAM-G BILL (2025) DESTROYS THE SPIRIT OF MGNREGA (2005)

1. FROM LEGAL RIGHT TO BUDGET-CONTROLLED SCHEME

MGNREGA (2005): Work was a *legal right*. Any rural household could demand work, and the State was bound to provide it.	**VB-GRAM-G (2025):** The "right to work" is weakened. Employment now depends on **central allocations**, not people's demand. The guarantee becomes supply-driven instead of demand-driven.

2. FORCED NO-WORK PERIOD DURING FARM SEASON

MGNREGA: Workers could demand work **any time of the year**, strengthening their bargaining power and protecting them from exploitation.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Introduces a **60-day compulsory no-work period** during peak agricultural seasons. This pushes workers back into **low wages and feudal labour relations**, especially harming SC/ST communities.

3. LABOUR BUDGET REPLACED BY FIXED CAP

MGNREGA: Funding followed demand. The Centre bore most costs, ensuring states were not burdened.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Fixed "normative allocations" with a **budget cap**. Employment days will now depend on how much money the Centre decides to release — hitting poorer states the hardest.

4. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DECIDES WHO GETS WORK

MGNREGA: Universal entitlement meant *any rural household, anywhere*.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Government will now decide what work will be done, when and where! Work will be provided **only in areas notified by the Centre**. If your village is not notified, **you have no right to work.**

5. WEAKENING GRAM SABHA & PANCHAYAT POWER

MGNREGA: Planning started from **Gram Sabhas**, based on local needs, as mandated by the **73rd Constitutional Amendment**.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Local planning is replaced by a **centralised "National Rural Infrastructure Stack"**, reducing Panchayats to implementers, not decision-makers.

6. DILUTION OF TRANSPARENCY & AUDIT

MGNREGA: Audits conducted in consultation with the **CAG**, along with social audits.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Audit rules controlled by the Centre. **CAG reduced to an advisory role**, weakening accountability.

7. EXCESSIVE DEPENDENCE ON TECHNOLOGY

MGNREGA: People-based monitoring with limited digital tools.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Mandatory **biometrics, GIS, geo-tagging and AI**, despite clear evidence of worker exclusion due to technology failures.

8. SHIFT AWAY FROM UNSKILLED WORKERS

MGNREGA: Focused on **unskilled manual work** for the poorest.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Pushes **skilled and semi-skilled infrastructure projects**, sidelining those who need work the most.

9. DANGEROUS "CONVERGENCE" MODEL

MGNREGA: MGNREGA funds could not replace departmental budgets.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Makes convergence a core objective — risking diversion of labour funds to build infrastructure meant for other schemes

10. CORE OBJECTIVE DILUTED

MGNREGA: Single clear goal — *livelihood security through employment*.	**VB-GRAM-G:** Focus shifts to infrastructure targets and labour management, not workers' survival.

VB GRAM G BILL'S 60-DAY BLACKOUT PERIOD
An Attempt to Divide Workers and Farmers

This Bill cheats both farmers and workers. It slyly and deliberately reduces a deep agrarian crisis to a single, misleading factor: so-called labour unavailability during peak agricultural seasons. This overs implication is on purpose and not at all accidental. It is crafted to deflect attention from policy failure and to turn farmers and workers against each other.

In reality, agriculture is in loss not because rural workers earn a minimum wage, but because farmers are denied the most basic guarantees. The crisis stems from the absence of a legally assured Minimum Support Price (MSP), lack of markets linkages, inadequate storage and cold-chain infrastructure, rising input costs, mounting debt, and the near-total failure of crop insurance. These are structural problems created by incompetence of the Modi government and not by MGNREGA. There has been no serious effort by this government to ensure a real rise in farm incomes. Instead of strengthening public procurement, price support, and market regulation, the government attempted to impose draconian farm laws in middle of a pandemic. We all knew immediately that these farm laws directly favoured large corporations and agribusiness interests, especially Adani. These laws would have dismantled farmers' bargaining power and handed control of agriculture to corporate players. It took a historic, year-long resistance by the farming community to force their withdrawal.

Beyond this rollback, the government's response to agrarian distress has been reduced to a meagre cash transfer of a few hundred rupees per month under the so-called "Kisan Samman" Yojana - a token amount that does nothing to address the real concern of the farmer community of the country.
This Bill cheats both farmers and workers. It cheats workers by dismantling MGNREGA, which established a wage floor and protected rural labour

from extreme exploitation. In traditional village systems, the old jajmani structure meant generational bondage for Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalised communities. Landowning elites controlled wages at will, forcing workers into dependence with no bargaining power. MGNREGA disrupted this system by giving workers an alternative and that is precisely why it is being attacked.

It also cheats farmers by offering them a false narrative. Instead of addressing the real structural reforms farmers have been demanding for long i.e Minimum Support prices, assured markets, storage, insurance etc. The government now uses this Bill as a shortcut, falsely projecting it as being "pro-farmer". In truth, it does nothing to strengthen agriculture and everything to weaken labour rights.
This is an intentional strategy to manufacture conflict between farmers and workers, two communities whose struggles are deeply linked. By blaming labour protections for agrarian distress, the government protects corporate interests while evading responsibility for its own policy failures. ■

We reject this false divide.

WFTU STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE NEW YEAR 2026

As we welcome the year 2026, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) addresses its militant and class-oriented greetings to workers, trade unionists, and progressive peoples across the globe. The new year finds the international working class confronted with old and new challenges, but also armed with experience, organization, and the unbreakable strength of solidarity.

The year that has passed once again confirmed the deepening structural crisis of the capitalist system. Economic instability, rising inequalities, and intensified exploitation go hand in hand with sharpening geopolitical antagonisms, imperialist wars, and interventions. The peoples continue to pay a heavy price through poverty, unemployment, displacement, repression, and the destruction of social and labor rights.

Imperialist aggression and militarization remain central features of today's world. Wars, occupations, blockades, and sanctions are used as tools to impose political and economic domination, secure profits for monopolies, and control strategic resources and markets. The crimes committed against peoples, most tragically illustrated by the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people, expose once again the brutal and inhuman nature of imperialism. With over 63,000 lives lost by the end of 2025 and numbers tragically increasing, the genocide in Gaza confirms that ceasefires and agreements imposed by imperialist powers, under their control and supervision, cannot ensure just or lasting peace, as they serve the interests of monopolies and geopolitical dominance rather than the right of the Palestinian people to freedom and dignity, and the end of the occupation and the establishment of their own independent state.

The WFTU reiterates its unwavering solidarity with all peoples resisting occupation, foreign intervention, and economic coercion. We stand firmly alongside the people of Palestine in their struggle for freedom, justice, and self-determination, and alongside the people of Cuba in their just demand for the immediate lifting of the criminal blockade and the end of all forms of imperialist pressure and blackmail. In the same spirit, the WFTU expresses its firm and unwavering solidarity with the working class and the people of Venezuela, who are facing intensified threats, military provocations, economic warfare, and attempts at foreign interference by U.S. imperialism and its allies. We denounce the escalation of aggression, including military deployments in the region under false pretexts, which endanger peace, violate Venezuela's sovereignty, and threaten the stability of Latin America as a whole. The peoples of Venezuela have the non-negotiable right to determine their own future freely and democratically, without coercion, sanctions, blockades, or intervention.

Militantly, the international class-oriented trade union movement will continue the struggle for peace, the struggle for the dissolution of NATO and all imperialist military coalitions, for the elimination of nuclear weapons, and for a world based on cooperation, and mutual respect between the peoples.

At the same time, workers everywhere face intensified attacks on wages, working conditions, social protections, and trade union freedoms. Governments and multinational monopolies are accelerating policies of privatization, labor deregulation, and repression, while seeking to criminalize struggle and weaken collective organization. The right to strike and the right to organize are under direct assault in many countries.

Workers refuse to accept these conditions. Guided by class-oriented trade unions, they continue to resist and struggle. The path of collective struggle remains the only dignified and effective path to defend workers' rights, to confront exploitation, and to secure living and working conditions that meet contemporary needs.

The demands of the international working class remain urgent and non-negotiable:

- Real wage increases and secure employment with full labor and social rights
- Reduction of working time with no loss of pay, with 35 hours of work per week and 7 hours of work per day
- Universal, public, and free access to healthcare, education, and social security
- Safe and healthy workplaces and respect for human dignity at work

The year 2025 the WFTU firmly and successfully commemorated the 80th anniversary of its founding, a milestone that reaffirmed the historical continuity, relevance, and fighting character of our Federation. The legacy of eight decades of struggle strengthens our responsibility to pass on to new generations of workers the values of class unity,

THE PATH OF COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE REMAINS THE ONLY DIGNIFIED AND EFFECTIVE PATH TO DEFEND WORKERS' RIGHTS, TO CONFRONT EXPLOITATION, AND TO SECURE LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS THAT MEET CONTEMPORARY NEEDS

internationalism, and uncompromising resistance to exploitation.

Drawing strength from this history, the WFTU will continue to intensify its action, strengthen its structures, and expand coordination among its affiliates and friends worldwide. Special emphasis will be placed on organizing young workers, women, migrants, and precarious workers, who are often the first victims of capitalist exploitation and anti-labor policies.

As we enter 2026, the World Federation of Trade Unions remains firmly committed to its founding principles. We stand in militant solidarity with all workers and peoples fighting exploitation, oppression, racism, discrimination, and imperialist domination. Internationalism remains our most powerful weapon, and unity our greatest strength.

Confident in the capacity of the international class-oriented trade union movement to confront the challenges ahead, we look forward to new struggles and new victories. For the defense of workers' interests, for social justice, for peace, and for a world free from imperialist wars and the man by man exploitation.

On the occasion of the New Year 2026, the World Federation of Trade Unions extends to workers all over the world, to its affiliates and friends, its warmest militant wishes for a year of strength, solidarity, struggles, and victories! ■

Jan Vishwas Bill is a Jan Abiswas Bill

★ MAHENDRA PARIDA

The so-called Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill—better described as a Jan Abiswas (public distrust) Bill—claims to promote "trust-based governance" by decriminalising minor offences across multiple laws. In reality, it represents a dangerous dilution of accountability, favouring corporate and commercial interests at the cost of workers' rights, environmental protection, and public welfare.

Originally introduced in 2022 and passed as an Act in 2023, the Jan Vishwas law amended 42 legislations by replacing criminal penalties such as imprisonment with civil fines for what it termed "technical" or "procedural" violations. In August 2025, the government introduced the second iteration of this reform—popularly referred to as Jan Vishwas Bill 2.0—proposing amendments to 17 additional laws and over 100 provisions spanning more than 30 ministries. These include municipal governance, motor vehicles, labour-related laws such as the Shops and Establishments Act and the Apprentices Act, and export-related regulations.

Objectives and Claims

The stated objective of the Bill is to reduce compliance burdens, improve the ease of doing business, and dismantle the so-called "Inspector Raj" inherited from colonial-era legislation. It seeks to reduce judicial backlog by shifting minor offences to administrative adjudication and claims to boost investment by decriminalising procedural lapses such as delayed filings or record-keeping failures, while retaining criminal liability for serious offences.

The government argues that this trust-based framework aligns with India's ambition of becoming a $10 trillion economy. However, this assumption rests on an overly optimistic belief in voluntary compliance. India's track record—particularly in areas such as environmental regulation, where conviction rates remain abysmally low—suggests that the absence of strong deterrents often leads to increased violations rather than improved compliance.

Key Provisions

The 2023 Act decriminalised 183 provisions across 42 laws, including the Aadhaar Act, Legal Metrology Act, and Food Safety laws, introducing fines, warnings for first offences, and adjudicating officers for enforcement. Penalties are set to increase periodically, while appeals are routed through administrative authorities.

The 2025 Bill expands this framework to additional sectors. In municipal governance, several offences are converted into civil penalties, though wilful tax evasion still attracts imprisonment. In motor vehicle laws and export regulations, imprisonment is removed for several non-compliances. Under the Apprentices Act, first-time violations attract warnings, with fines for repeated breaches.

Of particular concern are amendments to environmental laws. Under the Air Act, the government is empowered to exempt certain industries from pollution control consents, while penalties for emission violations are capped at levels that are insignificant for large corporations. Funds collected are channelled into an Environmental Protection Fund, raising questions about whether pollution is being monetised rather than prevented.

Claimed Benefits

Proponents argue that the Bill will reduce fear among entrepreneurs, ease judicial congestion, and modernise archaic laws—some over a century old. By

shifting enforcement to administrative mechanisms, it is expected to reduce prison overcrowding and free courts to focus on serious crimes. The government also presents the Bill as a scalable framework for future reforms through digital compliance and self-declaration.

Serious Concerns and Risks

Despite these claims, the Bill suffers from serious flaws. There is no clear definition of what constitutes a "minor" offence, allowing serious violations to be trivialised. Monetary penalties risk becoming a routine "cost of doing business" for large corporations, especially in sectors such as pollution, pharmaceuticals, and intellectual property.

The shift from judicial scrutiny to departmental adjudication increases the scope for political pressure, corruption, and regulatory capture. The delegation of penalty-setting powers to subordinate rules—often without upper limits—creates the possibility of arbitrariness and abuse. Furthermore, the incremental nature of the reform leaves the vast majority of problematic provisions untouched, while frequent policy changes create uncertainty.

In sectors affecting public health and safety, such as drugs, environment, and labour regulation, over decriminalisation risks endangering lives. Weakening enforcement mechanisms undermines public trust and contradicts the very premise of the Bill.

Broader Implications

The Jan Vishwas Bill signals a clear shift from punitive regulation to facilitative governance—but one that disproportionately benefits corporations. While it may improve India's business rankings, it risks diluting protections for workers, consumers, and the environment. Politically, it reflects the government's pro-corporate orientation and invites legitimate criticism from trade unions, environmental groups, and civil society.

Conclusion

The Jan Vishwas Bill is a reform with mixed intentions and deeply flawed execution. While it addresses outdated compliances and administrative inefficiencies, its ambiguous scope, weak deterrence, and susceptibility to misuse threaten public interest. Without robust safeguards, periodic reviews, and genuine stakeholder consultation, this so-called trust-based governance model becomes an exercise in institutionalised distrust of the people.

Far from being a Jan Vishwas Bill, it risks becoming a Jan Abiswas Bill—one that erodes accountability while privileging profit over public good. ■

LABOUR SNIPPETS

COMPILED BY LEKHA ADAVI

Gig Workers Log Off from Apps in Strike

On 25 and 31 December 2025, lakhs of gig workers across India collectively turned off their app IDs to protest against the arbitrary and exploitative policies of app-based companies. Workers associated with platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Blinkit, Zepto, Porter, Ola, and Uber have, over several years and across multiple cities, repeatedly raised concerns regarding declining wages, unsafe working conditions, and lack of basic protections.

Rather than addressing these grievances, senior executives of app-based companies have made dismissive and controversial remarks. In particular, comments by Deepinder Goyal, CEO of Eternal (the parent company of Blinkit), denying the existence of exploitation among gig workers and referring to protesting workers as "miscreants" have drawn widespread criticism. Such remarks are seen as trivialising the hardships faced by crores of workers dependent on these platforms for their livelihood.

Gig workers often work 12–14 hours a day without earning a minimum living wage. In cases of road accidents, compensation is largely absent, and insurance claims frequently fail. Over the past two years, despite earning revenues worth thousands of crores, companies such as Blinkit and Swiggy Instamart have intensified cost-cutting measures that directly affect delivery workers' incomes. Payment systems remain opaque and arbitrary, with platforms advertising high peak-hour rates to attract more workers, only to dilute individual earnings due to oversupply.

Recruitment is left deliberately unrestricted, enabling companies to maintain a large, replaceable workforce while avoiding responsibility. Algorithms are used to obscure decision-making processes, facilitating practices that amount to unfair labour treatment. On the ground, workers report intimidation, mistreatment, and even violence during peaceful protests, including instances where company management or hired bouncers intervened at dark stores to suppress dissent.

A major concern is the absence of effective grievance redressal mechanism. Workers' complaints routinely go unanswered, leaving them without institutional support. Companies continue to classify workers as "partners" to evade legal obligations, including those related to wages, social security, and workplace safety.

At the policy level, despite claims that the new Labour Codes introduced in November 2021 would improve conditions for gig workers, these laws provide neither concrete social security guarantees nor accountability mechanisms for platform companies. As a result, a massive workforce remains trapped in precarious employment without legal protection.

The ongoing protests reflect growing resistance among gig workers demanding recognition under labour laws, fair wages, and basic social security protections in the rapidly expanding app-based economy.

Electricity Workers Stage Protest

Protesting against the Haryana government's proposed online transfer policy on December 23, the Haryana State Electricity Board Workers' Union submitted a memorandum to their senior officers in Sirsa. The memorandum stated that the online transfer policy proposed by the power utility management and the Haryana government would cause serious harm to both the organisation and its employees, and that field staff could face life-threatening risks.

Office-bearers said that frequent transfers would make it difficult for employees to identify defaulting consumers due to the loss of local area knowledge, leading to significant revenue losses for the utility across the state. The union stated that it would continue its protest until the policy was withdrawn.

Contract Workers' Sit-in Protest

Several contract workers at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, have been sitting in protest since November 14, demanding payment of pending arrears, maternity leave, bonuses for 2023–24 and 2024–25, and the reinstatement of four security guards who were removed from their jobs for participating in an earlier protest.

A Joint Action Committee of contract workers stated that despite two notifications issued by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment directing the PGIMER administration to ensure that contract workers are paid on par with the lowest-paid regular employees performing similar work, and to provide equivalent facilities—particularly for those engaged in sanitation, security, and catering services—these provisions have been denied to workers for a long time. The JAC said that arrears amounting to ₹90 crore are pending following wage revisions by the Government of India in 2018 and 2025.

Govt Employees and Teachers to Strike on January 6

Seeking the revival of the old pension scheme and the scrapping of the new pension scheme, a fair pay scale, timely promotions, clearance of pending increments, regularisation of part-time and temporary employees, and the restoration of special pay provisions, the Joint Action Council of Tamil Nadu Teachers' Organisations and Government Employees' Organisations (JACTTO-GEO) has announced an indefinite strike from January 6, 2026.

Ahead of the strike, employees have decided to wear black badges from December 27 onwards to register their protest. It remains to be seen how the government responds to these demands and whether negotiations will commence.

Ambulance Workers Protest in Guwahati

The struggle of 108 Mrityunjay emergency workers in Guwahati has reached a critical stage, with nearly 3,000 employees engaged in a 22-day protest against deteriorating working conditions. These frontline workers are demanding job regularisation, job security until the age of 60, and fair wages that reflect the current cost of living.

Their demands also include a safety net for their families, including ₹40 lakh in compensation for

workers who lose their lives in the line of duty, and assistance in accessing housing loans. Despite the management reportedly dismissing 1,500 workers in an attempt to break the strike, the movement has only grown. A large section of the protesters are contract and temporary workers, reflecting strong solidarity across the workforce. The workers, along with their family members, have escalated the agitation, maintaining pressure on the management to resolve their demands.

Sanitation Workers in Ganjam, Odisha Stage Protest

Workers under the banner of the Kabisuryanagar NAC Sanitation Workers' Association dumped garbage in front of block offices, the revenue inspector's office, bus stands, and other crowded locations across Ganjam district in protest against unpaid wages. The workers have not received wages for the past ten months. Employed under a sham contract system, they have been working for nearly a year without receiving any payment.

Coal Mine Workers in Poland Protest

After finishing their work shift, coal mine workers in Poland spontaneously called for a protest demanding that the government extend the layoff compensation programme to their mine. In December 2025, the Polish Parliament approved a bill on the functioning of the hard coal industry, which envisages severance packages for miners laid off by state-owned mines.

The coal miners' trade union stated that the protesters would remain underground unless they received written assurances from the government that the layoff compensation would be extended to them.

Bangladesh: 48,000 FIRs Against Garment Workers Dropped

Two years ago, garment workers in Bangladesh took to the streets demanding an increase in minimum wages and better working conditions. The Sheikh Hasina-led government responded with a severe crackdown, during which four workers were killed, dozens injured, factories were damaged or shut down, and over 130 workers were arrested.

Police later filed mass criminal charges against workers after factory owners, including those supplying to over 40 international brands, lodged complaints without providing evidence. This constituted a large-scale repression aimed at punishing workers for collective action.

Following the fall of the Hasina government, local trade unions, along with the Clean Clothes Campaign, worked with the interim administration to secure the withdrawal of all cases. Trade unions are now in discussions with the interim government on broader legal reforms, including stronger protections for the right to organise, the right to strike, and a more transparent wage-setting process.

General Strike Against Labour Reform in Portugal

December 11, 2025, was marked by a nationwide general strike in Portugal against a new labour reform package proposed by the government. This was the first general strike in over a decade, with thousands of workers marching in protest. Flights were cancelled, schools closed, and transport services disrupted as workers across sectors participated.

The minority centre-right government claimed the reforms would boost productivity and economic growth. However, unions accused the government of shifting power towards employers at the expense of workers' rights, despite strong economic performance and low unemployment. The proposed reforms include easing just-cause dismissals in small and medium-sized enterprises, lifting limits on outsourcing, and capping flexible-work rights for breastfeeding mothers at two years.

The strike was called by the largest unions, CGTP and UGT, and was the first since June 2013, when Portugal was under austerity measures imposed as part of an international bailout. The bill, yet to be submitted to parliament, is expected to pass with the backing of the far-right Chega party.

Union-led Protests Over Fuel Subsidies in Bolivia

Major worker federations in Bolivia rallied against the removal of long-standing fuel subsidies, staging protests on December 23, 2025, to demand economic relief and stronger labour protections. The subsidies, removed by centrist President Rodrigo Paz, had been in place for over 20 years under the previous left-wing government, keeping fuel prices at $0.53 per litre. Following the removal, fuel prices rose to around $1 per litre, contributing to dollar shortages and economic turmoil. Imports of gasoline and diesel —costing the government up to $3 billion annually—had depleted foreign currency reserves and worsened Bolivia's worst economic crisis in four decades, following the decline in natural gas exports.

Despite these challenges, unions traditionally aligned with left-wing political forces, including miners' and coca growers' unions, went on strike demanding the reinstatement of fuel subsidies.

Global Solidarity: Starbucks Workers Ramp Up Strike Pressure

Starbucks baristas in the UK and eight other countries held coordinated protests in the first week of December 2025 in solidarity with striking US employees. Organised by Starbucks Workers United, the movement has expanded to include 3,000 workers across 100 US cities, with major demonstrations at the world's largest Starbucks in Chicago and walkouts in Glasgow.

The dispute centres on demands for improved pay, better staffing levels, and the resolution of hundreds of unfair labour practice cases. While the union aims to increase pressure following stalled negotiations, Starbucks management claims that compensation remains industry-leading and insists the strikes have had "no impact" on operations.

Although relations briefly improved last year, progress stalled after CEO Brian Niccol—criticised for unlabour practices during his tenure at Chipotle—assumed leadership. Despite mediation efforts, management continues to delay negotiations, refusing to ensure fair wages, safe staffing levels, or accountability for its history of unfair labour practices and union-busting. ■

Stop the US Military Aggression in the Caribbean!

HANDS-OFF VENEZUELA!

We, the undersigned organisations, are deeply concerned over the recent military escalation in the Caribbean and the aggression against Venezuela by the imperialist US.

We strongly condemn the US military deployment in the Caribbean and its military build-up and operations in the Caribbean Sea, blowing up boats and resulting in extrajudicial killings. The military build-up in the Caribbean under the pretext of combating drug trafficking and "narco-terrorists" since August 2025, is the latest attempt of the imperialist US to conduct a regime change operation in Venezuela. The intention of the imperialist US is clear, which is to remove the current Venezuelan government led by Nicolás Maduro, to reverse the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution, and to restore the pro-US oligarchical rule in the country, in order to serve the geopolitical interest of the imperialist US. Seizing Venezuela's oil deposits, one of the largest in the world, is a critical consideration, demonstrated by the recent US seizure of a Venezuelan oil tanker.

The Venezuelan people already suffer dire economic conditions due to the sweeping sanctions imposed by the US in 2019.

The people of Venezuela have every right to defend their sovereignty and to determine their own path of development, without any intervention from foreign imperialist powers.

Hence, we call for:

1. Stop US attacks on Venezuela!
2. Stop the US military operations in the Caribbean.
3. Stop all US interference and interventions in Latin American domestic politics.
4. Shut down all US military bases overseas.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela in defending their sovereignty, free from imperialist intervention.

- Issued on December 16 by
PSM, Malaysia, PLM, Philippines, CPIML Liberation and other organisations from South Asia & South East Asia.

For full list of endorsing organisations, visit: thinkleft.net

Modi Government's Assault on the Working Class

END OF YEAR UPDATES: 2025

★ SHILPA PRASAD

The Modi-led BJP Government's assault on the rights of workers reached a crescendo in 2025. Here are some of the labour law changes brought about in the name of "simplification" and "ease of doing business".

Notification of the 4 new Labour Codes

On 21st Nov. 2025, the Union Government announced the implementation of the four new labour codes – the Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020. These codes came into effect from 21st Nov. 2025. They replace 29 existing hard won labour legislations, including the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and other legislations.

The new labour codes codify the fascist assault on the working class in India, by diluting already diluted labour protections. For example, the Codes attack the fundamental right to association and collective action of workers by introducing a requirement for prior notice not only in public utility services (as was the existing law), but also mandating 14 days' prior notice for any strike. This effectively forces workers to wait 2 weeks before taking any action, which significantly reduces their bargaining power.

India's new labour policy – Shram Shakti Niti

The Union Government's Ministry of Labour and Employment released the Sham Shakti Niti 2025 – National Labour and Employment Policy of India. In this policy, the Union stated its guiding principles to be "Dignity and Equality of Labour, Universal Inclusion, Cooperative Federalism, Data-Driven Governance". This is often the double-speak of the laws as well as policies of the BJP Government, which couches radical attacks on the working class in soft and acceptable language.

In this, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, instead of enforcing and protecting the rights of workers, is reduced to an "Employment Facilitator" who will connect workers across Tier II and III cities, rural districts, and MSME clusters to employment opportunities. While the policy claims its legitimacy from the Constitution, in fact, it is deeply rooted in the Hindutva rhetoric that reduces workers to having no bargaining powers.

Labour itself is referred to as "srama". The policy claims, "In the Indic worldview, work is not merely a means of livelihood but a contribution to the broader order of dharma (righteous duty)... Ancient texts such as the Manusmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti, Naradasmriti, Sukraniti, and Arthashastra articulated this ethos through the concept of rajadharma, emphasising the sovereign's duty to ensure justice, fair wages, and the protection of workers from exploitation."

It then leaves us with this question: Is the Union Government's policy rooted in Sanatana Dharma, or our Constitution? It appears to be the former wrapped in the latter's packaging, with no real thought to protecting the rights of workers, instead declaring work to be their dharmic responsibility.

Watering Down of Environmental Clearances

The Union Government has bent environmental laws and clearances drastically and consistently over the years to ensure that industries have the least compliances, in the name of "ease of doing business". The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has reduced the mandatory requirement of a greenbelt or a green cover for new

industrial estates, parks and individual industries. These are requirements for environmental clearances. The Ministry's Office Memorandum dated Oct. 29th 2025 revised the greenbelt norms. Earlier, industries in the Environment Impact Assessment Notification 2006's schedule mandated a 33% minimum separate green belt for development projects including in industrial estates. Now, a minimum 10% of the area of industrial estates is to be designated a common green area with dense plantation. It is 15% for red category industries and 10% for orange belt industries.

The "**Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India** (**SHANTI**) **Act**", which will allow private and foreign players to enter highly risky and hazardous nuclear power production with a motive of profit; it has withdrawn the liability of foreign and national suppliers of instruments in case of accidents/disasters – certainly, it is an attack on the nuclear security and sovereignty of our country.

Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (**Gramin**) **Act 2025**

The Modi led Union Government has passed the VBGRAMG Act, 2025 to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The new law replaces a demand based right to work with a discretionary central scheme controlled by the Union Government. The Union Government claims that the work days have been increased from 100 days to 125 days. However, even under the MGNREGA, an average of only 50 or less days of work per household had been provided to a significantly less number of workers.

Moreover, while MGNREGA was Union government funded, the new law impose a fiscal burden on State governments to share a 60:40 cost sharing ratio for wages. Earlier, the Union had to fund the entire wage and 75% material cost. The new law also proposes a 60 day blackout period during peak agricultural season, which will severely affect workers. ■

AICCTU led Unprecedented Indefinite Strike by ASHA WORKERS OF UTTAR PRADESH

★ VIJAY VIDROHI

Under the leadership of the Uttar Pradesh ASHA Workers Union (affiliated to AICCTU), ASHA workers went on strike starting 15 December 2025. In an attempt to stop the strike, the Uttar Pradesh government imposed a ban on strikes across the state under ESMA for six months on the night of 12–13 December. Despite this, the leadership decided to go ahead with the strike, and on the morning of 15 December, ASHA workers across the state began their strike.

The National Health Mission announced the start of the polio programme from 14 December to sabotage the strike and justify their malicious action such as imposing the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA). But the resolve of the ASHA workers ensured that the strike was successful. Let us remember, it is the ASHA workers who have made significant contributions in making the country 'Polio Free', yet their rights as health workers is not recognised.

They made their presence visible through this strike. They reminded the government that it is not to the credit of Mr. Modi that the country has been declared 'Polio Free', rather it was due to the arduous labour of the ASHA workers that India has achieved this goal. Despite intimidation, threats, filing of cases, sending workers to jail, and various other coercive attempts, ASHA workers could not

be shaken from continuing the strike.

While holding sit-ins and demonstrations at Community Health Centres, strong protests were organized at district headquarters on 18 December. A call was given for a march to the Legislative Assembly on 23 December, 2025. Despite the arrest of state and district leaders of the Uttar Pradesh ASHA Workers Union across the state, deployment of heavy police forces at railway stations to stop ASHA workers from arriving, and blockades at toll plazas to prevent them from coming by road, thousands of ASHA workers still managed to reach the state capital, Lucknow. They were stopped by heavy police barricades at Charbagh Railway Station itself, still ASHA workers turned it into a successful public meeting.

In the meanwhile, the government proposed talks. A seven-member delegation held discussions with secretary-level officials at the Chief Minister's Office in Lok Bhavan. It was agreed to move the talks forward by forming two negotiation committees involving representatives of the government, the National Health Mission, the Finance Department, and the union. However, since then, the government has not fixed any date for further talks. On the other hand, the National Health Mission is making every effort to break the strike through repressive actions and unfair labour practices. The welfare and service committees (NGOs) that are entrenched for years in the name of ASHA organizations, are also playing the role of co-conspirators with the Yogi led state government in misleading ASHA workers and in trying to divide their organized struggle.

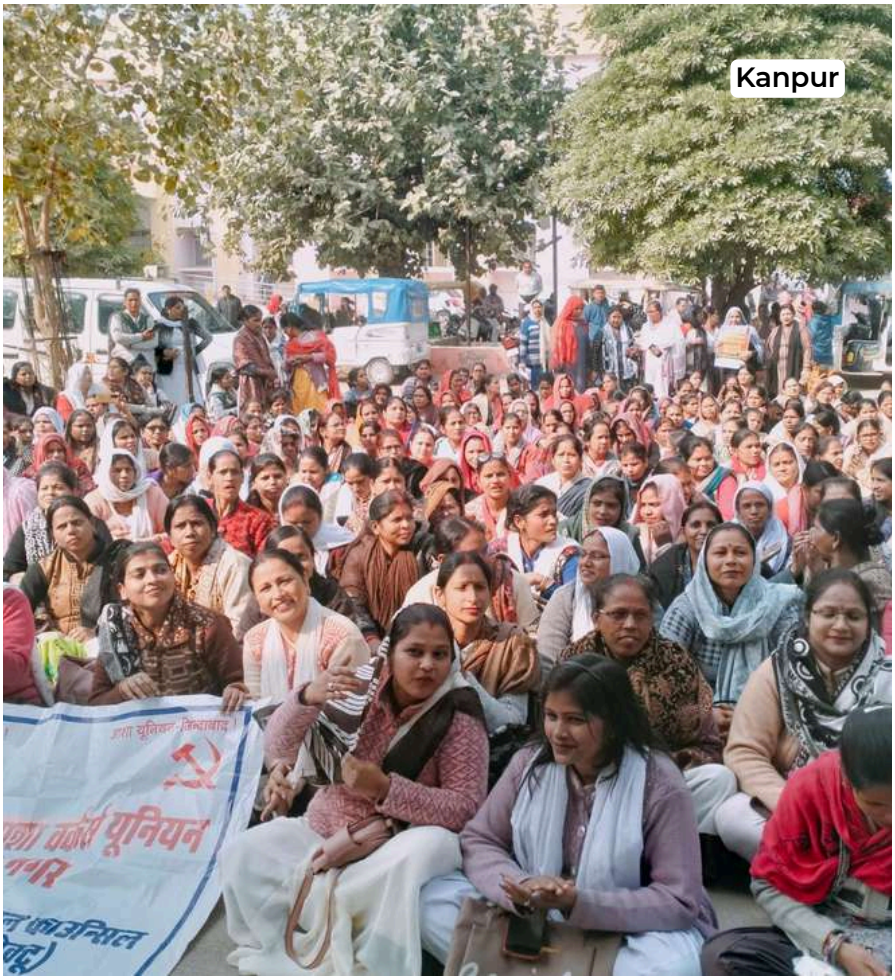
Even on 16th day of the strike, a massive outpouring of ASHA workers was seen on the streets. In Kannauj, more than 2,000 ASHA workers took out a procession stretching over three kilometers, marched through the city, raising slogans against the government's repressive behavior, and distributed leaflets with their demands. In various

districts, ASHA workers have been continuously sitting under the open sky since 15 December braving the shivering cold. Strong protests were witnessed in the streets of Ghatampur and Nagar in Kanpur, Auraiya, Farrukhabad, Mau, Kushinagar, Gorakhpur, Raebareli, and most other districts of the state. The union has decided to hold protests at all divisional commissioners' offices across the state on 9 January 2026 to thwart the intentions of and condemning the government.

The union state president Lakshmi said that the government is evading investigation, recovery, and payment related to the ₹1.5 lakh crore incentive amount scam. The government that came to power in the name of good governance is shying away from addressing this issue. Far from implementing the recommendations of the 45th/46th Indian Labour Conferences, the BJP governments are moving towards eliminating all rights of workers by enacting four anti-labour codes. However, the government cannot escape from addressing the real issues of minimum wages, social security, and dignity of workers.

ASHA workers in the state are determined to carry forward the strike until the demands are fulfilled. Their consistency, determination and resolve has generated solidarity from all other sections of the society as well.

On 9th January, a protest was held under the banner of AISMWF in different places in solidarity with UP ASHA workers protest. The struggle goes on. ■



STATEMENT OF CONDEMNATION ON ATTACKS AGAINST BENGALI-SPEAKING WORKERS IN ODISHA

★ MAHENDRA PARIDA

App-based and informal sector workers, particularly Bengali-speaking migrant workers, have recently come under brutal attack in Odisha following the coming to power of the RSS-BJP government in the state. Under the communal and xenophobic pretext of "identifying and driving out Bangladeshis," supporters and hoodlums aligned with the ruling ideology have unleashed violence and intimidation against poor workers from West Bengal who have migrated to Odisha in search of livelihood as street vendors, construction workers, and daily wage labourers.

Across several parts of the state, numerous incidents of harassment, assault and torture of Bengali-speaking workers are reported. This systematic targeting has created an atmosphere of fear, forcing many workers to flee Odisha and return to West Bengal to protect their lives. These attacks are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of communal violence directed against the most vulnerable sections of the working class.

The situation has taken a particularly horrific turn with the recent incident in Sambalpur, where a Bengali migrant worker was beaten to death and two others were brutally assaulted. Such barbaric acts represent a grave assault on human dignity and workers' rights and demand unequivocal condemnation.

Equally alarming is the continued silence and inaction of the Odisha police and state administration. Their failure to intervene or hold the perpetrators accountable has only emboldened criminal elements and encouraged further violence.

SUCH BARBARIC ACTS REPRESENT A GRAVE ASSAULT ON HUMAN DIGNITY AND WORKERS' RIGHTS AND DEMAND UNEQUIVOCAL CONDEMNATION.

The complicity of the administration, whether through negligence or deliberate inaction, has created an environment where communal mobs operate with impunity.

It is deeply hypocritical that the same political forces and individuals who either carry out or support attacks on Bengali-speaking workers in Odisha claim to protest against incidents of violence against minorities in Bangladesh. The communal hatred propagated within India over the past year and a half under the guise of "identification of Bangladeshis" has not only devastated lives here but has also contributed to communal tensions beyond the country's borders.

The ideological basis of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh and the targeting of poor Bengali Muslim workers in India is fundamentally the same.

Violence against working people on the basis of language, religion, or identity is a direct consequence of this poisonous ideology and must be stopped immediately.

AICCTU strongly condemns the attacks on Bengali-speaking workers in Odisha and demands immediate action against those responsible, protection for migrant workers, and an end to the communal targeting of the working class.

AICCTU
All India Central Council of Trade Unions

Workers Resistance

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