



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

8-9 January 2019

Countrywide General Strike

From Mountain to Sea



Procession on Ice (Himachal Pradesh)



Rally on Hills



Striking Workers outside Vizag Shipyard on Bay of Bengal (Andhra Pradesh)



Road Blockades – East & South



Patna



Bangalore

Countrywide General Strike

Deserted



Howrah Bridge



Sealdah Station



Domlur Flyover, Bangalore



Flyover Bridge, Imphal



Dharavi Bus Depot, Mumbai



Agartala, Tripura

WORKING CLASS

FEBRUARY 2019
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Editorial

Two Steps Backward

Under Modi regime, RSS-BJP has recently taken two retrograde steps to change the main features of the Constitution of India.

First, on 8 January, 2019 Modi government got the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 passed in the Lok Sabha, on the same day the workers of the country were on countrywide unprecedented general strike. The Bill proposes to confer citizenship to migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan based on religion mainly for Hindus and discriminating and debarring the Muslims.

In his public speech, the BJP chief minister of Assam took the name of 'Jinnah' to explain the background of the Bill. This is to accept the British Rule's 'two nations' theory on the basis of religion for the partition of India. India never accepted this and 'Secularism' became the cornerstone of the Constitution of India. For this Gandhiji laid down his life at the hand of Nathuram Godse. This Bill is based on Godse's theory of 'Hindu Rastra' over Gandhi's theory of 'Secularism' as enshrined in the Constitution of India prepared by Ambedkar.

The other is RSS-BJP led violent agitation in Kerala against the implementation of Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench's judgement striking down the practice of discriminating and debarring women of 10-50 age group from entering Sabarimala temple (*see write up of A. R. Sindhu in this issue*). This medieval practice of discrimination against women is against the equal rights as enshrined in the Constitution of modern India. It insults the womanhood as being 'impure'. It is also part of 'Manuvadi' system of social division, discrimination and deprivation of Dalits and OBCs, who are in the lower rungs

of 'Varnas'; Adivasis who are 'Avarnas'; and the women.

These calls for urgent campaign of uniting the working class movement with the socially discriminated and deprived sections like Muslim minorities, women, Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs.

Countrywide General Strike

World' Largest Workers Strike

Estimated 200 million workers participated in the two-day All-India General Strike Jan. 8-9. The strike was probably the largest general strike in world labor history.

Although generally ignored by the Western capitalist news media, this was a world-shaking event. Workers throughout India participated from largest cities to 67 percent of the country that remains rural.

Workers in government, banking, transit, manufacturing, transportation, education, agriculture and the informal economy were among those walking out. Every sector of the economy experienced slowdowns and in some cases total shutdowns.

As of 2017, India's population was 1.34 billion people. One in six people in the world live in India. Of those 1.34 billion, at a bare minimum more than 1 in 9 took part in the strike. Or about one striker for every 50 people in the entire world!

(Extracts from The Morning Star, 14 January, 2019)



World Federation of Trade Unions

Solidarity Message

In a statement on 3 January, 2019, on behalf of its more than 95 million members in 130 countries of the 5 continents, WFTU expressed its internationalist solidarity and support to the workers All India General Strike on 8-9 January 2019 in which WFTU affiliates in India took leading role in the strike called jointly by 10 central trade unions and independent federations. It would be the third and biggest countrywide strike against the neo-liberal policy of Modi's governance which is aligned with the World Trade Organization norms and is variously affecting the working class of India worsening its living and working conditions, the statement said.

"During the last years, the Indian working class has been resisting, undertaking struggles at local, sectoral and national level. The two- day general strike is the continuing and escalation of the previous struggles against the policy which creates a country of unemployment and stagnancy of wages in combination with rising prices, relentless attacks against the worker's rights and unparalleled privatization policy of public sector."

"The World Federation of Trade Unions joints its voice with the call of the class-oriented trade unions for militant and massive participation of all the workers of the country regardless their sector or region. The WFTU supports the fair demands of the declared strike, given that the class-oriented struggle for a dignified life and work is the only way out from the capitalist barbarity."

Two Days Countrywide General Strike

Working Class of India Rises in a Tide Against Modi Government's Policies

K Hemalata

The magnificent country wide general strike on 8-9 January 2019 reflected the tide of people's anger against the anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national neoliberal policies pursued by the BJP led government at the centre. It surpassed, in its sweep and depth, even the earlier two massive general strikes, on 2 September 2015 and 2016 during this Modi government regime.

The participation of workers in the general strike across sectors and the massive support and solidarity it received from all cross sections of people across the country indicate the growing resentment of people against the government. The national organisations of the peasants and agricultural workers, dalits, adivasis etc extended active support and called for a '*grameen bandh*' bringing rural India to a standstill. The retired employees' organisations also have actively campaigned for and supported the strike. Below is the information received at CITU centre up to the afternoon of 9 January, 2019.

STATES

Assam: The strike in Assam was unprecedented. All the tea gardens were closed. Refineries were closed. Workers, both permanent and contract workers picketed and demonstrated outside several refineries. Workers along with fraternal mass organisations of peasants, agricultural workers, students, women etc held rail roko all over the state. Police arrested hundreds of activists including Tapan Sharma, general secretary of the state committee of CITU.

Bihar: The strike received massive response from the working class in Bihar. Road transport was totally paralysed. Scheme workers, construction workers, beedi workers participated in the strike and held huge rallies in Samastipur, Khagaria, Darbhanga, Jamui, Begusarai and other districts. Roads were blocked in Samastipur, Katihar etc. The state bandh called by the Left parties in support of the strike, on the issues of peasants and agricultural workers and against the deteriorating law and order situation in the state, on 9 January was total.

Delhi-NCR: The industrial workers and employees in NCR Delhi joined the strike in a big way. Only 5 workers joined duty in the public sector CEL. The industrial areas of Okhla 3 phases, Naraina, Mayapuri, Mongolpuri 2 phases, Udyognagar, Nangloi, Wazirpur, GT Karnal Road, Badli, Rajasthanpuri, Bhorgarh etc, were totally closed. Workers struck work and marched in processions which culminated in rallies in different industrial areas. Around 2000 to 3000 workers participated in each rally. Teachers and students of Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University joined the strike en masse. Universities were closed.

Gujarat: Home state of the Prime Minister Modi, witnessed such a joint strike of workers for the first time in many decades. The trade unions took up extensive joint campaign. Engineering workers in Baroda, Surat, Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Junagarh, Ahmedabad, most of them not organised

under any trade union joined the strike in large numbers. Despite the threats of victimisation from the BJP government in the state, anganwadi employees and ASHAs joined the strike and held massive demonstrations in most of the districts in the state. For the first time midday meal workers joined the strike. BMS campaigned extensively against the strike calling it a 'political strike'. Despite this, anganwadi employees affiliated to the BMS union in 3 ICDS projects in the state joined the strike and also the demonstrations held on the occasion. Big rallies were held in 8 cities – Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot, Junagarh, Baroda, Anand and Palanpur. Around 3000 to 8000 workers participated in each.

Haryana: The modern industrial area of Gurgaon in Haryana witnessed good response of the workers to the strike. Hero Honda declared 3 days' holiday. Except Maruti, most of the big industries including Honda remained closed. Workers in all the smaller industries in the area struck work and joined rallies. A huge joint rally of industrial workers was held on 8th January. Workers in govt sector, roadways and unorganised sector like brick-kiln, forest, village chowkidar, construction etc joined the strike in a big way.

Rajasthan: Strike in different industries, both in organised and unorganised sector has been quite noticeable despite severe police repression on the striking workers in the MNC dominated industrial area in Neemrana. There have been numerous demonstrations and procession by the striking workers along with others throughout the state.

Himachal Pradesh: The scheme workers, MGNREGA workers, hydel project workers as well as industrial workers in Himachal Pradesh participated in the strike. Huge rallies with mostly women workers were held in several district headquarters.

Jammu & Kashmir: Despite the difficult political situation in the state, unorganised sector workers and scheme workers participated in the strike in thousands. Interstate bus services were off the road. A procession with the participation of scheme workers, railway contract workers, construction workers, coal mine workers, hydro project workers, vendors, middle class employees etc was held in Jammu. Protest demonstrations were held in almost all the districts in the Kashmir valley.

Jharkhand: The industrial areas of Bokaro, Ranchi, Adityapur, Gamharia in Jarkhand were almost closed due to the strike. Pharmaceutical industry was closed. Beedi workers and stone quarry workers in Pakur, Sahebganj and Chatra and Bauxite workers in Lohardaga were in total strike as were the workers in the copper mines and industry.

Karnataka: Over 30 lakh workers, including industrial workers, public sector, government, bank, insurance, BSNL etc employees, scheme workers and unorganised sector workers, participated in the strike. There was total strike in public road transport; autos were off the road in Bengaluru. All the permanent workers in multinational corporations Toyota Kirloskar, Volvo buses and trucks, Coca Cola etc and also in private sector major industries participated in the strike. Strike was total in the industrial areas of Bengaluru, Mysuru etc.

Kerala: Despite the large scale disturbances sought to be created by the BJP against entry of women of all ages to the temple in Sabarimala, joint campaign was extensively conducted all over Kerala with an effort to reach every nook and corner of the state. Strike was total. Workers and members of other mass organisations picketed trains at 32 points. Train traffic was disrupted and several trains had to be cancelled. Trivandrum, Cochin and Kozhikode airport ground handling staff were on strike causing disruption of flights. Because of the campaign, people extended support to the strike. There were very few passengers in the buses and trains. Thousands of workers have gathered at the 483 strike centres which have been opened across the state. These centres were active for entire 48 hours duration of strike throughout day and night.

Madhya Pradesh: In addition to the total participation of anganwadi employees, ASHAs and midday meal workers in the strike, thousands of workers in private industries. Strike was total in all the cement units where CITU had affiliated unions. In addition it was near total in Hitech and 75% in Heavy Engineering Workers. Workers in the industrial clusters in Indore, Neemuch etc and the contract workers in NFIL joined the strike. Though most of the road transport workers are not organised under any trade union, the extensive campaign by the CITU state committee resulted in massive participation of road transport workers with transport being seriously affected in 22 districts in the state, where no passenger buses could run. In Bhopal, 70% of the buses could not operate and 80% of city buses were stopped in depots. Even under government pressure, only 15% - 20% buses were operated. Strike in the coal mines in the state was also massive.

Chhattisgarh: Balco witnessed 95% strike, Hirry and Nandini Mines 90% and coal mines, more than 85% workers joined the strike. Anganwadi workers and mid-day-meal workers' strike was to the tune of 60%, Participation of beedi workers, rice-mill workers, loading-unloading workers in the Mandis was above 60%. In the central govt offices, banks and insurances, strike was above 90%. In Bhilai steel Plant, strike was partial.

Maharashtra: With the total participation of the transport workers in BEST (Bombay Electricity Supply and Transport) in the strike, bus services were off the road in Mumbai. There was total strike by workers in multinational companies like BOSCH, CEAT, Crompton, Samsonite etc. Thousands of permanent and contract workers of Reliance Industries also joined the strike. The industrial areas in Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Kolhapur, Ichalkaranji were seriously affected due to the strike. Highways were blocked in many places. A massive rally planned jointly in Solapur could not be held as police denied permission because of Prime Minister's visit to the city on that day.

Manipur: Manipur bore a deserted look due to the massive strike. Vehicular traffic was totally stopped; educational institutions shut down and examinations were postponed. All the major markets were closed. Road blocks and demonstrations were held in many places.

Odisha: There was a bandh like situation in Odisha. Road transport was totally off. Strike was 80% in cement and engineering industries. The strike in the public sector units like NALCO, Port and Dock and Indian Oil was over 80%. In the mining sector, strike is almost total. Scheme workers totally participated in the strike. Unorganised sector workers held rasta roko and rail roko in several places. All political parties including the ruling BJD, except BJP supported the strike.

Punjab: Strike was total among the PUNBUS employees and electricity employees in Punjab and Chandigarh. Workers in the industrial areas of Ludhiana including Hero cycles, the cement factories in Bathinda, industries in Amritsar went on strike. Contract employees in private hospitals were on strike throughout the state. Scheme workers joined the strike en masse and participated in thousands in the demonstrations, rallies and rasta roko across the state.

Tamilnadu: Strike in Tamil Nadu was immense. Pondicherry witnessed a total bandh like situation with all sectors being paralysed. Over 85% of the public sector Salem steel plant employees, 70% of the BHEL employees were on strike. Workers in Neyveli Lignite, Tuticorin port and Salem Chemplast also joined the strike. The textile industry including the cooperative spinning mills, power looms, NTC mills were affected. 50% of the workers in the engineering industry were on strike. Workers in Madras Export Processing Zone also went on strike. Manufacturing units in north and south Chennai were closed. Loading and unloading were stopped. Workers in

several railway goods sheds were on strike. Majority of the total markets in the state witnessed total strike. 80% electricity employees were on strike. Bill collection was closed in 90% centres. There was total strike in Thiruvallur thermal plant. 85% autos were off the road. Tea, rubber and coffee plantation workers including those in big estates went on strike. Street vendors also joined. Many other industries including the famous knitwear industry in Tiruppur, chemical industry, Salt Corporation, Ashok Leyland, tanneries, Tasmac, sugar, etc witnessed massive strike. Scheme workers joined. Beedi factories in 67 villages and towns were closed. Crackers and construction workers were on strike. 80% of autos were off the road.

Telangana: Over 21 lakh workers and employees in Telangana participated in the strike. Strike was total in the automobile manufacturing units and breweries and distilleries and 80% in the engineering units in the industrial areas in Hyderabad and surrounding districts. 90% of the contract workers in NTPC joined the strike. Over 65% scheme workers joined the strike despite the threats and intimidation by the TRS government and its administration.

Tripura: In Agartala, despite the use of force, BJP government could manage to get only 30% of the shops opened and around 30% of buses to operate. Almost same has been the situation in many other districts of the state. Teachers attended schools but there were no students.

Uttarakhand: The main participants in the strike in Uttarakhand were the anganwadi employees and midday meal workers in addition to the government employees. In some places hotel workers, contract and outsourcing workers, work charged employees also participated. However, rallies were held in all the districts.

West Bengal: East India Pharmaceuticals, Britannia and other big industries in Kolkata were closed due to the strike. There was total strike in the jute mills with all except one being closed as well as in the engineering industry despite the terror by the Trinamool goons. There was no loading in trucks. Passenger and goods transport by in the state were practically out off roads. There was total strike in the industrial areas in 24 Paraganas, Hooghly, and Howrah. In tea garden workers in Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Dinajpur were on strike and participated in Rasta roko demonstrations. There was good strike in coal and steel in the state. 60% of the permanent workers in Calcutta port were on strike. 70% of street vendors in Kolkata joined the strike. Universities and colleges remained closed with the lecturers and students joining the strike. Despite attack unleashed by Police and Trinamool Congress goons on the striking workers in the state, it was resisted by the workers along with democratic people from all walks of lives throughout the state heroically. Police arrested hundreds of activists and leaders including Anadi Sahu, general secretary of the CITU state committee.

INDUSTRIES / SECTORS

Participation of workers in the major industries in this strike all over the country was quite high compared to the earlier strikes.

Coal: The overall participation of strike in the coal industry was around 70%- 75%. Production and dispatch almost collapsed. Both permanent and contract workers joined the strike in almost all the big projects including the outsourced projects.

Electricity: 30 lakh electricity workers, employees and engineers in the power sector joined the strike across the country at the call of the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers.

Petroleum: The strike in the oil sector was unprecedented, particularly in Assam. Employees in various refineries in Assam joined the strike and picketed offices. Oil workers of 3 out of the 4 unions in Kochi refinery joined the strike despite the management getting a court order

banning the strike. Contract workers participated along with the permanent employees. Overall, strike in the petroleum sector has been substantive in the eastern, north-eastern and southern India while it was partial in western and northern part.

Steel: There was good strike in the steel industry with near total strike in Vizag steel, Salem steel and Bhadravati. In Rourkela steel permanent workers joined the strike and picketed the plant and strike was around 50% on the whole. Contract workers joined the strike en masse. The strike in other steel plants viz., Bokaro, Bhilai and Durgapur was partial.

Port & Dock: Strike was partial in the ports as some of the major unions did not join the strike in some of the major ports. But cargo handling was affected in Paradip, Tuticorin, Kolkata, Haldia, Visakhapatnam and Cochin ports.

Road Transport: Road transport was highly affected creating a bandh like situation in many states in the country. An estimated 3.5 crore transport workers and small owners participated in the strike. The strike in the road transport sector was total with the participation of workers in public and private passenger and goods transport including autos in Kerala, Bihar, Odisha, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Strike was over 80% in West Bengal. Strike had serious impact in Punjab, several districts of Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand.

Construction: Construction workers participated in the strike in a big way as well as in the demonstrations in the entire country. Plantation workers, tea, coffee, rubber, joined the strike en masse in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala and in large numbers in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Service Sector: In addition to the industrial workers, the strike saw massive participation of employees in the service sectors also.

Women Scheme Workers: Women scheme workers in all states, including where the trade union movement was weak, participated not only in the strike but in the demonstrations all over the country. They lent visibility to the strike even in places where no other trade union existed.

Financial Sector: Strike among insurance employees was near total all over the country. Lakhs of bank employees including the officers in the Regional Rural Banks, Cooperative Banks, Reserve Bank and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) participated in the strike at the call of All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) and Bank Employees' Federation of India (BEFI).

Central Government: Around 13 lakh central government employees joined the strike across the country as per the call given by the Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers. The strike was total in the postal and income tax departments. In addition employees of Audit and Accounts, Civil Accounts, Atomic Energy, Geological Survey of India, Customs and Central Excise, Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Central Ground Water Board, Postal Accounts, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Printing and Stationery, Indian Bureau of Mines, AGMARK, Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), Medical Stores Depots, Film Division of India, Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Central Food Processing Laboratory, Census Department, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Defence Accounts, Rehabilitation Department, Central Public Works Department (CPWD), Institute of Physics, LNCPE, Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences, Canteen Employees, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), Passport Department, and various other autonomous and scientific research institutes participated in the two days' strike. The strike among central government employees was total in Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Odisha,

Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Haryana, Assam and other North Eastern states including Tripura. In all other states 60%-80% employees participated in the strike.

State Governments: State government employees in many states joined the strike in a big way. While the strike was 90% in Kerala, around 80% of state government employees in Haryana and several other states joined the strike. In Uttar Pradesh over 60% employees were on strike while it was 40% in Himachal Pradesh.

BSNL: Strike in BSNL was total in Kerala, West Bengal and the north eastern states and partial in other states.

Pensioners: In many states retired employees, including EPS 95 pensioners extended solidarity and support to the strike by joining the demonstrations and rallies.

Rallies, Demonstrations & Solidarity Actions

Huge demonstrations and rallies were held in all the states in the industrial centres and district headquarters with the participation of thousands of workers in each. Industrial workers, middle class employees, scheme workers and unorganised workers participated in these in large numbers. Thousands of workers were arrested across the country including in Assam, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal etc.

Particularly significant in the strike was the enormous solidarity and support extended by the various sections of people – the peasants, agricultural workers, women, youth and students etc. In addition, the organisations of tribals, dalits etc also supported the strike. Thousands of members of these organisations and their national and state leaders directly participated in the demonstrations, rallies, rasta roko and rail roko all over the country.

Strike Breaker Role of BMS

True to its commitment to the divisive ideology as a member of the *sangh parivar*, and ever loyal to its fraternal political wing the BJP, the BMS tried to confuse and divide the workers nursing illusions to weaken the strike. The BMS, which was involved in preparing the joint charter of demands of the central trade unions when it was part of the joint trade union movement, now finds the demands to be 'political'. It had no problem in participating in struggles including strikes when the Congress led UPA government was in power. But, with the BJP in power, even when the government is fast carrying forward the anti worker amendment to the labour laws to trample labour rights underfoot, totally ignoring the suggestions of the central trade unions, neglecting the tripartite bodies, BMS strangely finds the government to be 'positive' to workers' demands. It gathered a few breakaway groups of central trade unions and created a platform, opposed the strike and actively campaigned against the strike. But the working class of the country totally rejected its hypocritical manoeuvres. These attempts in fact boomeranged as the magnificent two days' strike clearly showed the participation of their own ranks in the strike in several states.

The Tasks Ahead

What is required now is to take the struggle against the neoliberal policies forward and heighten and intensify it by strengthening the unity of the entire working class and the unity of the working class with the all the other sections of toiling masses.

Countrywide General Strike

Andhra Pradesh



Telangana



Tamilnadu



Countrywide General Strike

Karnataka



Kerala



Maharashtra



Countrywide General Strike

Gujarat



Madhya Pradesh



Chhattisgarh



Countrywide General Strike

Rajasthan



Delhi – NCR



Haryana



Countrywide General Strike

Punjab



Jammu & Kashmir



Himachal Pradesh



Countrywide General Strike

Uttar Pradesh



Bihar



Jharkhand



Countrywide General Strike

Odisha



West Bengal



Tripura



Goa



Manipur



Countrywide General Strike

MPs in Solidarity Outside The Parliament



The Great Women Wall in Kerala

(Report Page 19)



The Great Women Wall in Kerala

For Equal Rights

A. R. Sindhu

History was made on 1 January 2019 in Kerala when 55 lakhs of women, one third of state's total women population, joined hands and formed a Women Wall all along 620 kilometres of highways from Kasargode to Thiruvananthapuram covering the entire length of Kerala. This was world's biggest women action for equal gender rights which entered in the Guinness Book of World Records.

After 12 year long litigation against the retrograde practice that restricted the entry of women of 10-50 age group in Sabarimala temple, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India in their verdict of 28 September, 2018 stated that it ***"is a clear violation of the right of Hindu women to practice their religious beliefs which, in consequence, makes their fundamental right of religion under Article 25(1) a dead letter"*** and ***"which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.."***

The Left Front government in Kerala announced that it was duty bound to implement the Court's order.

Rightwing offensive against implementation of the verdict

Though at national level BJP and Congress welcomed this verdict, both these parties have taken opposite position in Kerala opposing the verdict in the name of 'tradition'. Both NDA and UDF are also trying to mobilise conservative sections who resent the appointment of Dalits as priests in temples and the reservation for backward communities, Dalits and Adivasis in appointments to the Devaswom Boards.

BJP, RSS and their other outfits are using this verdict as a political weapon to polarize people. They have been adopting violent agitational methods in different parts of the state. RSS organised '*namajapa yatra*' creating an atmosphere of terror near the Sabarimala temple checking every woman who was coming for worship, asking for age proof and attacking those who opposed their intervention. A leaked audio of BJP leaders exposed their real intention, conspiring to create violence and to force police to fire as a ground for central government's intervention.

They are also trying to create confusion by propagating that it is the 'atheist Leftist government' who is attacking 'Hindu beliefs' and 'destroying temples'. As a tactics they are not criticizing the Supreme Court for the Sabarimala judgement, but the LDF government who is trying to implement it.

Congress party in Kerala has taken a hypocritical and opportunist stance. The opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala went on a day long fast *"to save the custom and traditions of the Sabarimala temple"*. Other Congress leader, its working president K Sudhakaran, made outrageous statements that the 'menstruating women are impure'.

In contrast, almost all the women rights groups extended support to the LDF government and declared they would not create any violent situation in Sabarimala.

Movement to protect Renaissance values

Kerala has rich tradition of struggle against all religious, caste and women discrimination and practices. Vaikom Satyagraha and Guruvayoor Satyagraha were great movements for the rights of Dalits' entry in temples and walking on roads near temples. There were numerous struggles for right to entry to school for Dalits and girls. Organisations of Nairs, Ezhavas, Pulyas, Dalit Christians were formed to fight the Brahmanical dominance and heinous practices in their own castes. Dalit women were not allowed to wear a blouse till 1928. Lower caste women were not allowed to wear gold ornaments but were forced to wear stone ornaments. There were struggles for wearing a blouse, wearing gold ornaments etc. Great leaders like Ayyankali, Sreenarayana Guru, Poykayil Yohannan were the leaders Kerala's renaissance movement which was integrated into the anti-colonial struggle and the struggle for land to the tillers. The Kerala women's movement has inherited the rich tradition of Nangeli who refused to pay the tax on breast, imposed by the British and the King, and instead cut off her breast and died.

The RSS could bring some women to say that they are 'impure' and are 'ready to wait' to see lord Ayyappa. Right wing campaign has been glorifying the practices that consider menstruating women as 'impure' and to bring back age old retrograde practices which are opposed by all progressive sections of the society.

The Great Women Wall

It is in this background, Kerala LDF government called a meeting of all the Hindu organizations, which had the tradition of renaissance in Kerala, to discuss the developments related to Sabarimala. On the suggestion of KPMS leader Punnala Sreekumar, the meeting decided to organise a huge Wall of Resistance only by women. It was decided to form an organizing committee involving all sections with the leadership of women to concretise the idea.

Widest possible campaign was taken up in the state to explain the purpose of the Wall and its importance in protecting the progressive values earned through the militant struggles and martyrdom of many. More than 1500 'Renaissance meetings' were held throughout the state. Cultural forms were used for the campaign. Many songs, plays, short films, videos etc were produced to counter the RSS propaganda and to campaign for the Women Wall.

For protection of progressive values and gender equality to support Women Wall from Kasargode to Thiruvananthapuram on 1 January, 2019; the trade unions held a state level joint meeting presided over by AITUC state secretary Vijayamma and the discussion was initiated by CITU national secretary P. Nandakumar. The meeting was also attended by Anathalavattom Anandhan, K. O. Habeeb and P.P. Prema of CITU; M. G. Rahul of AITUC; G. Suganan of HMS; Sonia George and Swetta Das of SEWA; Kavidiyar Dharman of KTUC; Kollamkode Raveendran of JTUC; J. S. Baburaj of INLC. This was followed by districtwise joint meetings and lower level campaigns by the trade unions. The Kerala Coordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) mobilized all the women members of CITU in the Wall. Leaflets were distributed and meetings were held at the sectoral level and local/district levels.

Estimated 55 lakhs women participated in the Women Wall. At many places it had 3-4 layers. At many places men created Supporting Wall. K K Shylaja, Minister for Health and WCD, Government of Kerala was the first woman at one end of the wall and Brinda Karat, member of the Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) was the last at the other end. Mercykutty Amma, Minister for Fisheries, Government of Kerala and Vice President CITU participated in Kollam and A R Sindhu, Secretary, CITU participated in Alappuzha. The pledge was taken throughout the state at exactly 4 PM and the movement made history.

INDUSTRIES & SECTORS

Port & Dock

Workers Jointly Opposing 'Major Ports Authorities Bill'

The national working committee meeting of Water Transport Workers Federation of India, held at Kochi on 24-25 November and inaugurated by CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, strongly opposed Modi government's move, in this winter session of the Parliament, to push through Major Port Authorities Bill 2016; and planned joint actions against it with other water transport workers federations.

The Bill's provisions envisage road to privatisation compromising with national security, sale of ports lands and elimination of all existing benefits of port & dock workers and pensioners.

The meeting also raised several issues related to the industry and the workers opposing the proposed amendments in the Indian Ports Act 1908; for rivers dredging to keep open the navigational channels to major ports; not to allow ports' surplus funds, employees PF and gratuity fund to deposit in private equities and bonds that would violate section 88 of the MPT Act 1963; to create centralised pension fund to ensure uninterrupted payment of pension; and implementation of new wage settlement ensuring arrears payment within 3 months, as per the settlement, without any delay and precondition. (*Inputs: T. Narendra Rao*)

Cement

Meeting of National Coordination Committee

The National Coordination Committee of Cement Workers Unions was held at BTR Bhavan in New Delhi on 24 December and attended by office bearers of CITU unions in the cement industry in 7 states - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka. Co-convener Kashmir Singh Thakur presided. CITU president Hemalata and general secretary Tapan Sen addressed the meeting.

Convener Nishith Choudhury presented report on the ongoing national bipartite wage negotiation in cement industry, other organisational issues and stressed to make workers general strike on 8-9 January successful in the cement industry.

The meeting decided to pursue early wage settlement and taking up contract workers issues failing which to mobilise for united action. CITU national secretariat member R. Karumalaiyan was co-opted as a member of the coordination committee.

Joint Meeting in Madhya Pradesh

A joint meeting of the three CITU unions in the cement industry at Rewa, Sidhi and Bela in Madhya Pradesh was held at Rewa on 22 December and was attended by the members of the working committees of the unions. It was addressed by Nishith Chowdhury and Kashmir Singh Thakur.

The meeting had elaborate discussion on general strike and on cement workers issues with participation of unions leaders particularly the general secretaries. The general strike is expected to be successful in all the three units for which elaborate campaign, including serving strike notice, is being carried on. The meeting took more concrete campaign and organisational decisions on strike.

The meeting also stressed on early wage settlement and on taking up contract workers' issues; and decided to expand CITU base among cement workers in the state. The meeting was concluded with summing up speech by CITU state president Ram Vilas Goswami.

Next day, on 23 December, 1500 strong mass meeting of the cement workers of three units was held near the Narmada Gate at Rewa which was addressed by Ram Vilas Goswami, Pramod Pradhan and Kashmir Singh Thakur. (*Inputs: Nishith Choudhury*)

STATES

Maharashtra

9th State Conference of Anganwadi Union

9th Maharashtra state conference of Anganwadi Karmachari Sanghatana (AKS) began with 500 plus Anganwadi employees' rally from iconic Shivaji Maharaj statue to the conference venue, named as Comrade Ahilyatai Ranganekar Nagar, at Pune on 24-25 November and attended by 159 delegates coming from 16 districts.

CITU national secretary and AIFAWH general secretary A. R. Sindhu inaugurating the conference at Comrade Sumantai Sanzgiri Manch, in its open session, said about the anti-workers and anti-people policies of Modi government adversely affecting all toiling sections in general and ICDS and its employees in particular and stressed on increasingly bigger mobilisation of Anganwadi employees in the joint struggles against these policies. CITU national vice president and its state president D. L. Karad in his address narrated the anti-worker policies of Modi government at the centre and Fadnavis governments in the state and called upon Anganwadi employees to give a befitting reply by making 8-9 January workers general strike totally successful in the state. CITU state general secretary M H Shaikh called upon the Anganwadi workers to take more initiative to organize other scheme workers and bring them in the democratic movement.

In the delegate session, Shubha Shamim placed General Secretary's report; 25 delegates participated in the discussion and the conference adopted it. 6 resolutions – on implementation of sexual harassment of women at workplace Act; against rising atrocities on women; for price rise control by controlling petrol, diesel prices and strengthening of PDS; relief in agrarian crisis and to make 2 days nationwide general strike on 8-9 January totally successful in the state etc. – were adopted. CITU national secretary and AIFAWH president Usharani and A. R. Sindhu guided the conference through their time to time intervention.

The conference unanimously elected a working committee and office bearers of the union with Ramesh Chandra Dahiwade as the president, Anna Sawant as working president, Shubha Shamim as general secretary and Armaity Irani as Treasurer.

Kerala

Working Women's Convention



Kerala state committee of CITU organised a state level convention of working women at Thiruvanthapuram on 28 October for reorganizing Kerala CCWW (coordination committee of working women)(CITU) as per the guidelines of the 15th conference of CITU. The Kerala CCWW has been functioning since its formation in 1979.

Over 150 women activists from more than 40 sectors and unions participated. They include workers and employees in IT & ITES, shops & establishments, cooperatives, RUBCO, financial enterprises, national savings, new generation bank, electricity board, municipal bodies, tourism, state road transport, beverages, export processing zone, private hospitals, shipyard, social welfare, water authority, Anganwadi, MDM and ASHA schemes, beedi, plantation, coir, khadi, handloom, fisheries, security and housekeeping, nurses, beautician, LIC agents, artisans, street vendors, allied workers, Kerala agricultural technical staff etc.

Kerala CITU vice president K. P. Mary presided. Inaugurating the convention CITU national secretary and All India CCWW(CITU) convener A. R. Sindhu explained the importance of building trade union movement on women workers issues and linking it with class issues which will also thwart rightwing offensive. CITU state president Anathalavattom Ananadan and its secretary K. N. Gopinath also addressed the convention.

K. P. Mary made a brief presentation on the functioning of state CCWW and the purpose of the convention for reorganisation. 17 delegates spoke in the convention. They put forward suggestions to improve the functioning of the state CCWW.

The convention constituted a 45 member state CCWW(CITU) with Sunitha Kurien as its convener and P. P. Prema, Beemabeevi, K. K. Presennakumari, A. K. Narayani and Deepa K. Rajan as co-conveners.

Punjab

ASHA Workers Agitation for Implementation of Increased Wages



Under the banner of Punjab Asha Workers and Facilitators Union (CITU), about 400 ASHA workers staged dharna and demonstration in front of the office of state health commissioner at Mohali on 3 November demanding immediate implementation of enhanced wages announced by the Centre and their coverage under Minimum Wages Act. Dharna and meeting was addressed by the general

secretary Ranjeet Kaur and other leaders of the union, CITU state secretary Tarsem Jodhan, Agnawadi union leader Nirlep Kaur and others.

Tamilnadu

50th Anniversary of Venmani Martyrs

1170 leaders and workers of CITU along with the leaders and activists of CPI(M), AIKS, AIAWU, AIDWA, DYFI, SFI, AIIEA, TNGEA and others observed 50th anniversary of Venmani massacre on 25 December, 2018 by raising red flags, offering floral tributes at the martyrs memorial at Venmani where 44 persons of agricultural workers families, including children, were massacred, burning them alive, by the landlords 50 years back for raising just demands; and holding mass meeting. In response to the call of CITU state committee, its Virudhunagar, Cudallore, Salem, Coimbatore, Vellore, Ramnad, Kanchipuram, Dindigul, Trichy, Tuticorin and Kanyakumari district committees widely campaigned on the demands of the farmers and the agricultural workers along with the 12 point charter of demands of workers nationwide general strike by holding mass meetings and distributing 55,000 handbills and 1100 posters.

Relief Work for Gaja Cyclone Victims

Recent Gaja Cyclone has devastated entire delta districts like Nagapattinam, Tiruvarur, Tanjore and Pudukottai. Lakhs of people have lost their homes. Till date, in hundreds of villages, electricity and transport connectivity and people's normal life have not been restored. Relief measures by the state government are very slow.

CITU state committee has given a call to all the district committees and the federations to help the people of the affected areas. CITU district committees in Coimbatore, Karur, Erode, Tiruppur, Salem, Dharmapuri, Namakkal, Chennai North, Kanyakumari, Tuticorin, Trichy, Virudhunagar, Vellore collected and sent relief materials to the affected districts. In addition, Tamilnadu Anganwadi Workers & Helpers Association and DREU in railways collected relief materials from their members and public and distributed the same in Tanjore Tiruvarur, Pudukootai and Nagapattinam.

Himachal Pradesh

Anganwadi Union's State Conference



12th HP state conference of Anganwadi workers and helpers union, held on 11-12 November in Shimla and attended by 155 delegates from 10 districts, was inaugurated by CITU national secretary and AIFAWH general secretary A. R. Sindhu narrating the government policies, which is leading to dismantling of ICDS, and calling upon the Anganwadi employees in the state for maximum participation in the general strike on 8-9 January, 2019 which will

mark the era of assertion of the workers and peasants bringing theirs and people's issues in the political agenda of the country. CITU national secretary Kashmir Singh Thakur and its state's general secretary Prem Gautam also addressed the conference.

Union's general secretary Rajkumari placed the report which was discussed in groups; participated by 14 delegates in plenary session and was adopted unanimously. The conference adopted resolution in support of the all India workers general strike on 8-9 January and against state government's attempt to open pre-school in schools. The conference elected a 41 member state committee with Neelam as president and Rajkumari as general secretary.

Strike Report of Andhra Pradesh

Nearly 10 lakhs workers and employees have participated in the strike including 90% of the postal employees, 95% in insurance, banks and BSNL excepting part of SBI. Total public sector in Visakhapatnam was paralyze

On 8 January statewide joint processions were brought out in cities, towns and mandal centres holding rallies and public meetings, joined by about 2 lakh workers. On 9 January, human chains were organised in front of government offices joined by thousands of workers. AIKS, AIAWU and other Left led organizations in solidarity resorted to road rokos in mandal and village areas.

Workers' safety code excludes more workers than it includes

K.R. Shyam Sundar

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has been trying to introduce major reforms at the national level by attempting a huge exercise of codifying 40-odd labour laws into four codes on industrial relations, wages, social security and occupational safety and health and working conditions (OSH and WC). However, owing to strident protests including the recent one on 5 September from trade unions and others including from the RSS-affiliated BMS and opportunistic political opposition, none of them have seen the light of the day. The principal reason is the absence of meaningful dialogue with the trade unions though India is duty bound to invoke tripartite discussions over labour policy issues among others since it has ratified the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976.

The draft code on OSH seeks to consolidate and amend 13 central labour laws concerning different sectors like factories, mines, docks, plantations, etc. The first impression is that the code is an uneasy amalgam of variety of variables and aspects (like safety, welfare, contract labour system, etc). Secondly, the "omissions relating to the coverage" of the code are striking. The OSH code and the centre's Model Shops and Establishments Act (2016) (shops and establishments are covered by the state governments and the government of Maharashtra has endorsed this and soon others would follow its suit) apply to establishments and others employing 10 or more workers/employees and thereby exclude at least 95% in any sector that the code covers which employs fewer than 10 workers, according to the Sixth Economic Census, 2013-14, although the share will be much less if we exclude own-account establishments, but the exclusion will still be significant. No wonder that India has ratified only three of the 17-odd ILO Conventions.

Thirdly, on the one hand, we have generic definitions in the beginning and on the other hand, as we move through the huge code, we are confronted with differing thresholds for each aspect like canteen, labour welfare officer or safety committee. Further, the government has either maintained the same or tinkered with the existing thresholds in the code (e.g. contract labour system, canteen, safety committee). Of grave implication is the narrowing of the coverage of the safety committee from the existing 250 to 500 in the case of factories. Factories employing 500 or more in 2012 accounted for 2.8% of the total factories submitting returns and they accounted for 44.19% of total reported workers. OSH is a universal right and regulatory systems should be in every establishment and these observations apply to construction or mines as well.

If the law makers believe in strengthening bipartisanship, they should promote in every sense the role of recognized unions and the legally registered trade unions. For example, ideally the recognized or registered unions should get the primacy of place in the consultation process like the stipulated Safety Committee or the Advisory Boards and failing their absence, the workers' representatives could come into play. In these times of union avoidance and busting, failures of such stipulation cause extreme concern for decent work. In these times of liberalized, randomised (machine-dictated) and non-discretionary inspection system and when an inspector on an average has to inspect potentially more than 300 factories in a year and in the context of the constricted applicability of bipartite regulation of OSH and disempowering trade unions, any reform concerning OSH is empty and meaningless.

Dismantling several laws which sit uneasily with others, treating some aspects patchily, leaving out laws like Employees' Compensation Act, 1923, tinkering with provisions in the name of consolidation which anyhow create diversity, and creating a huge labour bureaucracy under this and other codes like social security code defeat the very purpose of reforms and at what social costs! It is better to retain 40-odd laws and tinker in each to achieve the same objectives.

(First published in Livemint; 27 November, 2018; K.R. Shyam Sundar is a professor at XLRI, Jamshedpur)

**CONSUMER PRICE INDEX NUMBERS (GENERAL) FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS
(BASE 2001=100)**

State	Centre	Oct 2018	Nov 2018	State	Centre	Oct 2018	Nov 2018
AP	GUNTUR	283	283	MHR	MUMBAI	298	298
	VIJAYWADA	286	286		NAGPUR	361	361
	VISHAKHAPATHNAM	291	288		NASIK	340	338
ASM	DOOM DOOMA TINSUKIA	272	275		PUNE	320	319
	GUWAHATI	263	260		SHOLAPUR	313	313
	LABAC SILCHAR	266	268	ORI	ANGUL TALCHER	320	319
	MARIANI JORHAT	257	254		ROURKELA	312	313
	RANGAPARA TEZPUR	252	252	PUD	PUDUCHERRY	306	309
BIH	MUNGER JAMALPUR	331	334	PUN	AMRITSAR	322	317
CHD	CHANDIGARH	304	303		JALANDHAR	303	312
CHS	BHILAI	324	324		LUDHIANA	289	286
DLI	DELHI	287	284	RJN	AJMER	280	279
GOA	GOA	323	321		BHILWARA	281	281
GUJ	AHMEDABAD	279	280		JAIPUR	291	287
	BHAVNAGAR	292	293	TN	CHENNAI	269	275
	RAJKOT	290	289		COIMBATORE	280	281
	SURAT	270	269		COONOR	314	316
	VADODARA	273	272		MADURAI	281	287
HRY	FARIDABAD	271	271		SALEM	283	283
	YAMUNANAGAR	290	290		TIRUCHIRAPALLY	295	293
HP	HIMACHAL PRADESH	267	266	TEL	GODAVARIKHANI	311	310
J&K	SRINAGAR	273	272		HYDERABAD	254	255
JRK	BOKARO	296	294		WARRANGAL	310	309
	GIRIDIH	330	331	TRP	TRIPURA	266	265
	JAMSHEDPUR	349	350	UP	AGRA	349	347
	JHARIA	346	349		GHAZIABAD	324	321
	KODARMA	365	371		KANPUR	328	328
	RANCHI HATIA	368	369		LUCKNOW	321	320
KNT	BELGAUM	299	298		VARANASI	315	316
	BENGLURU	291	292	WB	ASANSOL	326	325
	HUBLI DHARWAR	318	318		DARJEELING	276	277
	MERCARA	305	306		DURGAPUR	323	323
	MYSORE	306	306		HALDIA	333	331
KRL	ERNAKULAM	307	306		HOWRAH	287	282
	MUNDAKKAYAM	304	304		JALPAIGURI	277	274
	QUILON	345	347		KOLKATA	285	284
MP	BHOPAL	314	314		RANIGANJ	280	282
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Bihar



West Bengal

CPI(M) Leader Sujan Chakraborty

Police Repression at Daikin in Neemrana



& The Meeting



Countrywide General Strike

Rail Roko, Rasta Roko



Guwahati, Assam



Bhubaneswar, Odisha



West Bengal



Kerala



Varanasi, U.P.



Arrests in West Bengal