



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

3 February 2021

Countrywide Protest & Burning of Labour Codes



**Burning of labour codes by CITU all India leadership
at Rouse Avenue in front of CITU centre at BTR Bhawan in New Delhi**

CITU in Solidarity with Kisan Movement



Tapan Sen on the wheel (symbolically) at Delhi's Tikri border before Kisans Tractor Rally on 26 January, accompanied by CITU national President Hemalata and Secretary A. R. Sindhu, to express CITU solidarity.



CITU affiliated union's leaders of Rawat Bhata atomic power plant in Chhittorgarh district of Rajasthan in solidarity with Kisans at Shahjahanpur border of Delhi.



On 10 January, in support of Kisan movement, blockade of Kolkata – Delhi national highway at Kulti in West Bengal

History is in the making; Join it

WORKING CLASS

FEBRUARY 2021

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor

K. Hemalata

Working Editor

J.S. Majumdar

Members

Tapan Sen

R. Karumalaiyan

Amitava Guha

H. S. Rajput

Inside

Page

**Electricity Workers-Engineers
Strike**

4

**Workers Solidarity Action -
Opens Second Front
- Hemalata**

5

**National Convention on
Unemployment**

7

**7 - 8 January Workers
Countrywide Agitation**

9

**Farmers Mass Action
in Maharashtra
- Ashok Dhawale**

17

**CITU on Union Government
Budget**

20

**On Economic Survey 2020-21
- Brinda Karat**

22

**Plummeting Social Indicators
- Trinatha Dora**

25

The combination of the Trio – the International Finance Capital (IFC), transnational and domestic corporates, RSS-BJP led government and forces - has set in motion a definite agenda for a post-Covid 'New India' – for maximising profit by the capital; for takeover of all productive activities – agriculture, industries and services – by the corporates and establishing a one-India market; and for a RSS designed Hindutwa-led 'Akhand Bharat'.

Three farm laws; four labour codes; privatisation including railways and energy sector; NEP; dismembering Jammu & Kashmir; centralisation of power and dismantling federalism; GST; Ayodhya judgment and temple foundation stone laying by the PM and fund by the President; law against inter-faith marriage; dismantling of democratic institutions and shrinking of democratic space; suppression of people's movement and dissent; active communal and divisive forces and lumpenisation of the youths; total control on media and sending independent journalists to jail; contour of police state in fascistic way; exploitation of the masses and attacks on their lives and livelihood – all are in an integrated total package.

As against that all social productive forces – the workers, the peasants, youths, women and socially marginalised people and other toiling sections are in independent and joint actions never seen in such intensity in Independent India before.

The history is in the making. Let us be part of it.

3 February 2021

Electricity Workers - Engineers All India Strike Against Privatisation Policy of Modi Government

At the call of the National Co-ordination Committee of Electricity Employees & Engineers (NCCOE), the electricity employees in all segments – production, transmission and distribution – were on a day's all India strike on 3 February.

The strike was a solidarity action of electricity employees with the demands and struggle of the farmers who are in indefinite agitation at the borders of national capital Delhi and throughout country since November 26 demanding repeal of three Farm Acts and Electricity Amendment Bill 2020.

The strike was also against privatization policy of the Government of India towards curbing the right to electricity to the poor people of the country. Demands placed are as under:

The strike was in pursuance of 6 point demands -

1. Scrap Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020 and Standard Bidding Document towards total privatisation of distribution of electricity;
2. Withdraw process of privatisation of Electricity from public sector to private company in states and UTs; Cancel all existing private licenses and franchises in power sector;
3. Reintegrate all power utilities in States and UTs with function components of Generation, Transmission and Distribution like KSEB Ltd & HPSEB Ltd.
4. Reintroduce Old Pension Scheme & Scrap New Pension Scheme; Forced retirement is not acceptable in power sector;
5. Ensure equal wage for equal work, pending regularization of all contract and casual workers / employees; Fixed Term employment is not acceptable in power sector;
6. Fill up all existing vacancies with policy of regular jobs to be discharged by regular employees only.

Trade union members of all segments of electricity across the country participated in the strike. Their participation varied from 100% to 25%. The strike was 100% in Kerala and Chandigarh; in Tamil Nadu and Haryana the strike participation was 80%; in West Bengal - 70%, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Bihar and Assam the strike was 60%-50%. Power sector Engineers took part in Work Boycott and demonstration in huge number. In some states, day long protest demonstration continued.

While conveying warm greetings to the striking electricity employees, the Electricity Employees Federation of India (EEFI) called upon the electricity employees and consumers to form united broad based platform to carry forward the struggle.

Electricity Employees and Engineers through this token strike conveyed to the Government a message to drop their anti-people and pro-corporate policies throwing fiscal burden upon people and transfer profit to their cronies. Budget 2021-2022, placed by the Union Finance Minister on 1 February, has reaffirmed the same policy of allocation of fund for power sector, while the Government is going ahead with its policy of privatization.

In a statement on 3 February, CITU congratulated the Electricity Employees for the huge successful countrywide strike action this day of 3 February, 2021.

Workers Solidarity Actions with Farmers Struggle; Opens Second Front

Hemalata

It appears that the BJP government led by Modi has launched an undeclared war on the toiling people of our country. This feeling is reinforced by the manner in which the government has been trying to suppress the farmers' protests at the Delhi borders on the one hand and the continuing onslaught on the lives, livelihoods and conditions of the common people emphatically reiterated by it through its Budget 2021-22.

Unnerved by the tremendous support and solidarity that the farmers' movement against the draconian farm laws was gaining, the BJP government and its mentor, the RSS resorted to heinous machinations to discredit it. They utilised the services of some disruptive forces to work as their agent provocateurs to malign the farmers on the occasion of their tractor parade on 26 January.

The unprecedented Kisan parade on the Republic Day in fact turned out to be a people's parade. Crores of people, not just farmers, but also agricultural workers, workers and others from all walks of life proudly participated in it. Neither was it confined to the national capital. The Kisan parade was observed in hundreds of districts in more than 20 states across the country. Lakhs of farmers and thousands of tractors paraded peacefully in a disciplined manner in the designated route in the national capital.

It is to the credit of the united movement of the farmers led by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha that they have not only condemned the activities of these disruptive forces but also declared that the protests would continue.

Instead of taking action against those who were responsible for the failure of the police in effectively tackling the situation, the BJP government has now resorted to cruel repression on the farmers. It has not only cut down water and electricity and shut down internet at the protest sites; it has not only prevented access to toilets for the farmers and sanitation services; it has also erected five layers of barricades, inserted rows of nails on the roads, and put up barbed wire fences, as if it is facing the enemy at the borders. It has booked hundreds of farmers and their leaders. It is arresting journalists and booking them under false cases.

But, to its utter dismay, the BJP government till now has failed in all its attempts to get the protest fizzled out. Rather, the number of farmers at the Delhi borders has swelled after 26 January. Farmers in thousands are reaching the protest sites from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan etc. But the government, committed to its neoliberal agenda and servile to the interests of the big corporates, is arrogantly refusing to concede the genuine demands of the farmers. Since 26th January, the 'godli media' has immediately jumped in service of the government decrying the farmers as 'anti national'; the corporate mouthpieces heightened the pitch demanding that there should be no further yielding to farmers' pressure.

From the beginning when the joint farmers' platform has started protests against the three ordinances, the working class movement has consistently stood in solidarity with the farmers. It has been synchronising its struggle against the anti worker policies of the BJP government including the labour codes and privatisation with the struggle of the farmers against the anti farmer farm ordinances and laws.

The joint trade union movement has not only raised the demand of scrapping of the three farm laws, along with its own demands, in the charter of demands for the 26th November country wide general strike. It has also called upon the workers to actively support all the calls given by the joint kisan movement from time to time at all levels. Thousands of workers have been since participating in all the calls of the joint kisan platform at districts, state and national levels. Thousands of workers,

including women workers like anganwadi employees, ASHAs, MGNREGA workers etc, from Punjab, Haryana and other states have been physically participating in the protests at the Delhi during the last two months, helping them in logistics, in providing medical services etc. In addition, anganwadi employees have also been helping in mobilising people as well as rations, warm clothes etc for the protestors. Thousands of workers have also joined the parade in the district level parades all over the country. The working class has also supported the farmers financially. The working class has reportedly contributed over Rs 50 lakhs to the farmers' struggle, at the call of CITU itself.

What is to be particularly noted is that the farm laws, as are the labour codes and the privatisation drive, reiterated in the Budget speech of the finance minister despite all round opposition, are part of the neoliberal policies. Given the obduracy of the BJP government and their loyalty to the big domestic and foreign corporates, their commitment to protect corporate interests, any relief to the people can be achieved only by intensifying the struggle against neoliberal policies. All sections of the people must be mobilised into struggles on their own immediate demands linking them up with the neoliberal policies and also in solidarity with one another's struggles.

It is with this understanding that CITU decided to open a second front of workers' struggles. It has formulated a ten point charter of demands including scrapping of labour codes, withdraw Electricity Amendment Bill 2020, stop privatisation, universal health for all in addition to cash transfer, free ration to the needy etc. Repeal of the three farm laws has also been included as one of the major demands in the campaign. CITU has taken up a programme of work place demonstrations, district level mass mobilisation including courting of arrest and regional jathas within all states to reach maximum number of workers up to the village and block level and explain to them about the disastrous policies of the government. It has decided to develop grass root level struggles of workers and wherever possible of workers and peasants on their common issues.

What does opening of a second front mean? It is not just solidarity with the farmers' struggles alone. It means while already the farmers are fighting on one front against the farm laws and demanding withdrawal of Electricity Amendment Bill, the workers will also intensify the struggle on their own demands mobilising the mass of workers. This is intended to approach larger sections of workers to create awareness among them about the real cause of their immediate issues, linking them with the policies being pursued by the government and mobilise the mass of the workers into struggle against the anti worker policies.

In addition CITU along with the youth and students' organisations has taken up joint campaign against unemployment, job losses and the deteriorating quality of employment. The joint national convention held on 2nd February decided to conduct state and district level seminars, mobilisations at the block, district and state level culminating in a massive demonstration at the national capital.

The joint trade union movement has already demanded scrapping of the labour codes and to stop privatisation and called upon the working class to burn copies of the labour codes on 3rd February 2021. It has also decided to conduct continuous mass dharnas at district level in the third week of February 2021. The joint platform of electricity employees and engineers has observed a country wide strike on 3rd February against privatisation of electricity and also in support of the farmers' struggle. It is a welcome development that the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) has extended support to the strike and called upon farmers to join the demonstration. The working class will be supporting the week long campaign of the AIKSCC from 3-10 February 2021 against police repression and the 'chakka jam' on 6th February.

Such independent and joint struggles of the toiling people must be intensified and developed to the level of defiance, non cooperation and resistance. That is the only way before the people to protect not only their livelihoods and working conditions from the onslaught of the ruling classes, the national interests, but also to save the democratic and Constitutional rights of the people.

National Convention on Unemployment

CITU-DYFI-SFI Joint National Convention On Unemployment, Job Losses, Deteriorating Quality of Employment

A national convention was jointly organised by CITU, DYFI and SFI on unemployment, job losses and the deteriorating quality of employment at B. T. Ranadive Bhawan, all India centre of CITU in New Delhi, on 2 February, 2021. 297 delegates from 15 states – (CITU–105, DYFI–103 and SFI–89) participated.

A presidium consisting of Presidents of 3 organisations – K. Hemalata of CITU, Md. Riyaj of DYFI and V. P. Sanu of SFI – conducted the proceedings. The declaration of the convention was moved by CITU General Secretary Tapan Sen and was seconded by DYFI General Secretary Abhay Mukherjee and SFI General Secretary Mayukh Biswas.

Large number of delegates participated in the insightful discussion narrating the situation and experience on the three unemployment-related issues. All speakers emphasised on carrying forward the tasks unitedly and on consistent basis. On behalf of the presidium Hemalata summed up the discussion. The meeting unanimously adopted the declaration.

The declaration supported the farmers struggle against three farms Acts and Electricity Bill; united workers struggle demanding scrapping of four labour codes, against privatisation including railways and of electricity and food and income-support to the non-income-tax paying households; and the struggles against New Education Policy to privatise, centralise and communalise the education system and curb the right to universal education for the people as a whole.

The declaration underlined the devastating impact of the three unemployment-related issues on the livelihood and lives of the mass of our people - the workers, youth and students, those who are employed and those who seek employment.

The Situation: The declaration noted in brief sections the situation of Unemployment and deprivation of socially oppressed sections; Job Losses including effect of lockdown; Deteriorating Quality of Employment; Unemployed as Reserve Army of Labour; Right to Work as Fundamental Right; Crisis of Neoliberalism Aggravating Unemployment Situation.

Joint Initiatives: The declaration decided about Joint initiatives of CITU-DYFI-SFI to launch intensive campaign among all sections of society up to the grass-root level to pave the way for united action for reversal of the policy regime and adopted 14 point demands and 5 point programme of actions (1) Joint state and district level conventions within February 2021; (2) Extensive joint/independent campaigns on the charter of demands in all the states up to grass-root level; (3) To reach widest sections of the youth, students, workers, unemployed and people in general through (a) Conducting Survey; (b) distributing campaign materials; and (c) organising jathas/ processions/ meetings/ dharnas etc; (4) State level demonstrations; and (5) All India joint mobilisation, if possible (as will be jointly decided)

Convention Demands

1. Formulate policies that generate decent permanent employment;
2. Regularise all employees under contract, casual employment, and under the camouflage of voluntary work in government schemes in welfare, education including child-labour schools and other services;
3. Fill up all vacancies in different government departments and PSUs including all backlogs in reservations as per constitutional provisions for SC/ST etc
4. Strictly enforce all statutory provisions for reservation in employment. Extend and enforce these reservations to employment of all kinds in the private sector.
5. /ntroduce 35 hours working per week and four-shift workdays through appropriate statutory enforceable measures
6. Seriously address the issue of proliferation of child labour; strengthen the special child labour schools to prepare their enrolment into regular schools; rehabilitate the affected households with Govt assistance
7. Increase public expenditure/investment on infrastructure development, education, health etc and create decent permanent jobs
8. Withdraw premature compulsory retirement of government/PSU employees
9. Directly link incentives/concessions/rebates/exemptions provided from government exchequer to private corporate investment, in concrete verifiable terms, with decent and permanent job creation
10. Withdraw/scrap all measures/policies that facilitate precarious employment, insecure employment, including fragility of employment relations
11. Extend MGNREGA to every individual jobseeker instead of one per household; Increase workdays under MGNREGA to 200 a year with minimum wage of Rs 600/- per day; formulate urban employment guarantee scheme with appropriate statutory measures
12. Unemployment allowance of Rs 5000/- per month to be introduced and enforced through statutory measures
13. Free compulsory education with appropriate enforceable statutory measures for all up to university level along with expanding the education infrastructure from entry-level onwards through public investment; this should include vocational education and skill development institutions.
14. Right to Work to be made a fundamental right through appropriate amendment in the Constitution

7-8 January 2021

Workers Widespread Countrywide Agitation

Under Covid-19 cover, Modi government is giving all out drive to establish its neo-normal agenda for post-Covid 'New India'.

One major item in the agenda includes pro-corporate reforms in agriculture by corporatisation of land and farming and of farm-produce. The three farms Acts, adopted by the opposition-free Parliament and without voting, are at the centre of this drive.

Second major item in the neo-normal agenda is adoption of pro-corporate labour Codes along with the farm Acts. The labour Codes diluted all existing labour laws and rules; imposed labour's working conditions in favour of the corporates particularly 12 hours spread-over time of the working hours; two model standing orders including incorporation of 'fixed term employment' and 'work from home'; free 'hire and fire' in majority of the establishments; putting restriction on 'strike' and in the formation and functions of the unions; cut in social security etc.

Thus, the two producing forces are being attempted to put under total command of the corporates.

Third item in Modi's agenda is all out drive of privatisation, not only of public sector enterprises, but also of government's departments including the railways, the people's live-link in India.

Fourth is privatisation of energy sector including the 'Electricity', the other life-line of all sections of the people, and withdrawal of all types of subsidies including the system of cross subsidy and free electricity to farmers.

Fascism came as a measure to develop capitalism; and Second World War came as a war between the capitalists' imperialism to grab world markets.

Modi government's drive is for the corporates, cronies taking lead, to grab pan-India markets of agriculture and its produce, industrial products and services including health, education, water etc. Covid-19 came as an opportunity. In the process, Constitution is being subverted attacking on federalism including in relation to farm Acts; Parliament has been sent to limbo; judiciary has been playing second fiddle; police excesses in suppressing people's voice and voice of dissent; and communal forces driving the roost. All these are indicative of the rapid rise in fascistic trends. A corporate-communal combine is just the beginning of fascism in the neo-normal in 'New India.'

The farmers of the country opened the Morcha, the First Front, in their ongoing historical battle against this neo-normal model in agriculture by surrounding Modi government at Delhi borders and spreading and intensifying movement across the country. Workers and other toiling sections have been extending active support to the farmers through solidarity actions.

But, time has come for the working class to go beyond mere 'solidarity actions' with the farmers and have to directly confront Modi government's against the neo-normal policies.

The Second Front

With this understanding CITU gave call to the working class of the country to open Second Front to directly confront Modi government raising 10 point demands which mainly include above mention four areas of Modi government's neo-normal drive for New India - Scrap all four Labour Codes; Repeal three Farm Acts; Withdraw Electricity Bill 2020; and Stop Privatisation.

The scheduled action programmes includes 1% 30 December 2020 rallies & demonstrations at work places / block level 1% district level demonstrations including courting arrest on 7/8 January and 1% regional jathas within each State from 15 January 2021 onwards culminating in massive State level mobilisations.

There was widespread participation on 30 December 2020. Following are some reports on the massive district level programmes on 7/8 January 2021 in all States.

This was the background of countrywide Protest actions in districts including courting arrest. Following are some state-wise reports.

Kerala

The programme was organised across the State inaugurated by CITU state President Anathalavattom Anandan in Kollam, Secretary V. Sivankutty in Triandrum, its national secretary Chandrapillai at Ernakulam and by others in all district headquarters.

West Bengal

7-8 January programme was organised in West Bengal on 18 January successfully in Kolkata and in 16 district headquarters while remaining districts rescheduled the programme on later dates. With the workers, large number of students, youths and women also participated across the State. More than 25,000 workers and others courted arrest facing police repression.

In Kolkata, CITU and other central trade unions and of national federations, BSNLEU and State's 12 JULY Committee participated in a mass deputation to RLC (C) at Nizam Palace. CITU state President Subhas Mukherjee, its General Secretary Anadi Sahu, leaders of other central unions and federations addressed the assembled workers. A delegation, led by CITU Kolkata District Secretary Debanjan Chakraborti, submitted the memorandum.

Tripura

A rally shouting slogans marched through the streets of Agartala on 8 January culminating into rally and mass meeting in front of labour commissioner's office pursuing 15 point all India and state demands including the demand for reinstatement of 10,323 teachers of the State.

Hundreds of people - workers, peasants and other toiling sections - participated in the protest rally. Workers and others from Mohanpur, Jirania and Dukli subdivisions also joined. A memorandum was submitted. CITU state President Manik De was the main speaker. Others who addressed the rally include Jharna Das Baidya, M.P. from AIDWA, P. Kar from AIKS, J. Chowdhury from GMP and Jaya Barman of CITU.

Similar programme was organised in Belonia, Panisagar, Amarpur, Sonamura, Khowai, and Longtorai Valley. Rest of the subdivisions organised protest programme on 7 January through hall meetings, rally etc.

Karnataka

CITU, other central trade unions and different mass organizations including CITU unions in plantation, transport, construction, MDM, Anganwadi, Home-based, Beedi, Hamali and Industrial workers held demonstrations and rallies in 22 districts. 12,504 workers participated at 124 centres.

Tamilnadu

The programme was organised as road blockades on 6 January. Despite heavy rains in the costal districts and in Chennai, the road blockade and demonstrations were successfully organised in 36 districts, except in Nilgiris and Chennai South, at 72 places with more than 8,000 workers participation. 4890 workers and CITU functionaries were arrested across the State.

Around 65,000 leaflets were distributed and 1500 posters were pasted. Social media campaign was organised through Whatsapp groups.

Andhra Pradesh

Large scale courting arrest by the workers and other sections took place in front of collectors offices at Kurnool, Chittoor, Vizianagaram, Bhimavaram, Markapuram, Eluru and other districts.

Delhi-NCR

In response to all India call, dharnas, demonstrations and public meetings were held in front of DMs and SDMs and memoranda were submitted on 10 point demands including the SDM at Sector 8 in Dwarka of South West district; North-West DM at Nangloi; South Delhi DM at Amar Colony; SDM at Alipur of North Delhi; East Delhi DM; DM of North-East Delhi and DM of Shahdara at Nand Nagri.

In NCR, the programme was organised before the DM of Gautam Budhnagar in Uttar Pradesh. ADM came at meeting place to receive the memorandum.

Large number of factory workers from various industrial areas, water board employees, medical representatives, street vendors and DYFI and JMS members participated in these programmes.

Uttar Pradesh

Workers of CITU affiliated unions including Asha, Anganwadi workers unions participated in the programme throughout the State including Bulandshahr, Lucknow, Ballia, Ghazipur, Varanasi, Kanpur, Gonda districts.

Demonstration was staged before Lucknow Labour Office which was addressed by CITU State General Secretary Prem Nath Rai, UPMSRA General Secretary Hemant Singh, President Railway Contract Labour Union Arandi Kannaujia and other leaders of CITU. Memorandum was submitted to the ALC (C) at Lucknow.

Rajasthan

An impressive rally was brought out in Jaipur at district collector's office and demonstration was staged and public meeting was held addressed by CITU state President Ravindra Shukla, Vice President Sumitra Chopra, Secretary Bhanwar Singh Shekhawat; its district President Kishan Singh Rathore, State President of Teachers Association Shekhawat and Sunita Chaudhary of AIDWA.

Rallies and demonstrations were also organised at the headquarters of Hanumangarh, Sriganganagar, Sikar, Bharatpur, Jhunjhunu, Kota, Alwar, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara, Rawatbhata, Dungarpur districts.

Punjab

Workers of CITU Unions organised rallies and demonstrations at Ludhiana, Amritsar, Sangrur, Jalandhar, Fatehgarh Sahib, Tarn Tarn, Patiala, Barnala, Hoshiarpur, Nawan Sahar, Ropar, Pathankot, Bhatinkda, Mukatsar Sahib, Mohali and Chandigarh. Asha and Anganwadi workers massively participated in all the rallies and demonstrations throughout the state.

Police manhandled the agitators in Badaun at district collectorate office at the time of submitting memorandum.

Jharkhand

8 January Protest Day was organised by CITU at Sakchi and memorandum was submitted to the East Singhbhum DC at Jamshedpur. At Dhanbad district committee of CITU organised Satyagrah and picketing at Randhir Verma Chowk and memorandum was submitted to the DC.

Odisha

On 7th January Protest Day was organised at ADM office, Bhubaneswar by unorganised sector workers. In Rourkela, 500 workers participated and courted arrest. At Paradeep about 160 workers participated in a rally and demonstrated before ADM office. At Nayagarh 250 workers, mostly ASHA, Construction, MDM workers, joined the rally and protest. At Cuttack 150 workers were arrested before the collector office while staging protest.

On 8 January protest action took place at Nanai and demonstration was organised before Sub-Collector office. About 3,000 workers courted arrest. At Jagatsinghpur 400 workers were arrested at collectorate.

Rallies, protest programmes and demonstrations were organised at Bhadrak, Khurda, Angul, Berhampur and Kendrapara. CITU state President Janaradan Pati, General Secretary Bishnu Mohanty and other state leaders led the movement at different places on both the days.

Chhattisgarh

After holding rally and mass meetings, staging dharnas and demonstrations; 1181 workers courted arrests in 9 districts.

Uttarakhand

A procession was brought out at Dehradun from CITU office and memorandum was submitted to the city magistrate.

TUs Joint Call for Countrywide Joint Actions

The Second Front: In a significant development, the Joint Platform of all 10 Central Trade Unions (CTUs) - INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF and UTUC (except the RSS-affiliated BMS) – and independent national federation of employees met in New Delhi on 22 January and decided to launch workers countrywide united agitation opening a Second Front for long drawn struggle of defiance and resistance against Modi government, while continuing to extend support and solidarity actions with the fighting Farmers Front.

The Demands: To pursue four demands - (1) *Scrapping of Labour Codes and Electricity Bill 2020*, (2) *No privatisation*, (3) *Income Support and Food Support to all poor workers' households* and (4) *Against anti-people policies as reflected by union budget*.

The Action Programme: The united action include – (1) **National Protest Day on 3 February 2021** - Will be observed by staging massive demonstrations and mobilisation at work places, industrial centres and areas and symbolically burning the copies of Labour Codes; (2) **Hunger Strike by end February** (*date will be announced*): State, district or industrial centre level workers mass hunger strike will take place on that day.

7-8 January 2021 Countrywide Protest

(Report page 9)

Chhattisgarh



Delhi-NCR



Himachal Pradesh



Uttarakhand



Tamilnadu



7-8 January 2021 Countrywide Protest

(Report page 9)

Andhra Pradesh



Gujarat



Jharkhand



Karnataka



Kerala



7-8 January 2021 Countrywide Protest

(Report page 9)

Odisha



Punjab



Rajasthan



Uttar Pradesh



Massive Farmers Rally in Mumbai

(Report page 17)



At Azad Maidan, Mumbai



In front of Raj Bhavan, Mumbai

Massive Mass Actions in Maharashtra Strengthen Nationwide Farmers Struggle

Ashok Dhawale

President, AIKS

From January 23 to 26, massive mass actions took place in Maharashtra to further strengthen the nationwide farmers struggle for the repeal of the three hated Farm Laws and for a law to guarantee MSP and procurement. These politically significant actions were extensively covered by most of the mainstream media and, of course, by the social media.

Building up the Struggle

Led by AIKS Maharashtra unit, over 1,000 peasants, coming from several districts, had a five-day Vehicle March, on December 21-25, from Nashik to Delhi border at Shahjahanpur of Rajasthan and stayed there for a week.

With the intensification of the nationwide struggle, there was a need to greatly broaden and strengthen the struggle in Maharashtra so as to involve all political and social forces opposed to the BJP government at the centre and its policies. The AIKS Maharashtra State Council drew up this strategy in its first post-Covid physical meeting at Belapur in New Mumbai on January 10.

At AIKS initiative, a broad meeting of more than 100 mass organisations was convened in Mumbai on January 12. Representatives of most of the state level organisations in the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC), Trade Unions Joint Action Committee (TUJAC), Struggle Committee of Mass Movements (JASS), Nation for Farmers and Hum Bharat ke Log participated. The united Front formed to spearhead the movement was named as Samyukta Shetkari Kamgar Morcha - (SSKM Maharashtra) – (*United Peasant Worker Front*).

Programme of Action

SSKM held press conferences in Mumbai on January 15 and again on January 21 and announced its action programmes which included - January 14-15, public burning of Farm Laws and Labour Codes; - January 18, Women Farmers Day; - January 23, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Birth Anniversary: Farmers from districts in vehicles to come on that day to Mumbai for a massive Mahapadav; - January 24-26, to hold Mahapadav at Azad Maidan, Mumbai; - January 25, Mass Rally before Raj Bhawan; and - January 26, the Republic Day: hoisting of the national flag at Azad Maidan.

On January 14-15, thousands of working people in Maharashtra made bonfires of the Farm Acts and Labour Codes. On January 18, the Mahila Kisan Day was observed widely all over the state, with thousands of women and men taking part in innumerable actions. The AIDWA played an important role in mobilising women across the state.

Main Demands

The main demands of this struggle are Repeal the three Farm Acts and four Labour Codes; Enact a central law to guarantee a remunerative MSP and procurement; Withdraw the Electricity Amendment Bill; Give regular pension from the Centre to farmers and agricultural workers; and Withdraw the anti-people New Education Policy.

Some demands are also related to the state government- Implement Mahatma Phule Loan Waiver Scheme; Implement the Forest Rights Act and vest forest lands in the name of the tillers; Vest temple lands, pasture lands etc in the name of the tillers; Repeal the 2018 Land Acquisition Act enacted by the previous BJP state government and restore the earlier 2014 Act.

On January 14, the SSKM committee met former Union Agriculture Minister, former Chief Minister and NCP chief Sharad Pawar; Chief Minister and Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray; state Revenue Minister and Congress state chief Balasaheb Thorat and requested them to support this struggle on behalf of the Maha Vikas Aghadi. All of them assured full support to the struggle. Sharad Pawar and Balasaheb Thorat agreed to address the state convention at Azad Maidan. Uddhav Thackeray agreed to send a Shiv Sena representative to the convention.

The SSKM delegation requested the above leaders to convene a special session of the State Assembly to deal with the agrarian crisis and related issues; to adopt a State Assembly resolution asking the Centre to repeal the three Farm Acts and the four Labour Codes; and to enact an Act for ensuring MSP and other demands.

AIKS Vehicle March to Mumbai

On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on January 23, All India Kisan Sabha's (AIKS) Maharashtra unit began a state level Vehicle March of 15,000 farmers, coming from 21 districts, from Nashik to Mumbai. Before the March began, a large public meeting was held which was addressed by the leaders of all mass organisations. The March began from the Golf Club Maidan of Nashik in hundreds of tempos, pick-ups and other vehicles. The marchers halted for the night at Ghatandevi near Igatpuri. Next morning on 24 January the farmers, having large number of women and youth farmers, had 3 hours, 9 am – 12 noon, long March on Foot on the 8 Km long Kasara Ghat, joining Nashik and Thane districts; and then the onward March by vehicles to Mumbai.

The Kasara Ghat March on Foot and the Vehicle Jatha was led by AIKS national President Dr Ashok Dhawale; its state President Kisan Gujar and General Secretary Dr Ajit Nawale; other state office bearers including Sunil Malusare, Barkya Mangat, Ratan Budhar, Radka Kalangda, Savliram Pawar, Subhash Choudhary, Dada Raipure, Arjun Adey, Shankar Sidam, Uddhav Poul, Umesh Deshmukh, Uday Narkar and Manik Avaghade; CITU state Secretary and CPI(M) MLA Vinod Nikole; AIDWA national General Secretary Mariam Dhawale and its state General Secretary Prachi Hatiwlekar; AIAWU state President Maroti Khandare; DYFI state General Secretary Preethy Sekhar; SFI state President Balaji Kaletwad and General Secretary Rohidas Jadhav; and many other AIKS state council leaders.

On way, hundreds of CITU unions' factory workers from Igatpuri and Shahapur tehsils warmly welcomed their peasant compatriots by showering them with flowers. At Kalyan-Bhiwandi crossroad, activists, led by CPI(M), CITU and DYFI leaders including P K Lali, Sunil Chavan, Parveen Khan and Jyoti Tayde; and also the Amrut Vela Gurdwara; welcomed the Marchers and provided them with thousands of food packets. The Jatha crossed Mumbai border Mulund Check Naka in the afternoon and was warmly welcomed at the Kannamwar Nagar at Vikhroli by hundreds of activists of the CPI(M), CITU, DYFI and AIDWA of Mumbai, led by CPI(M) central committee member Mahendra Singh and Hemkant Samant. It then proceeded to the Azad Maidan, where it was resoundingly welcomed at the joint sit-in struggle at Azad Maidan organised by the SSKM from morning.

Massive Joint Mass Convention in Mumbai

On January 25, on the eve of Republic Day, a massive joint state level convention of around 40,000 peasants, workers and all other working sections was organised by the SSKM at the famous Azad Maidan in the heart of the city of Mumbai. It included thousands of women and youths. This was on the second day of the Mahapadav that began on January 24.

The political significance of this convention was that it was the first time after many years in Maharashtra that all political and social forces opposed to the BJP came together on one platform.

The main speakers were former Union minister and NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Congress state chief and state Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat, AIKS General Secretary Hannan Mollah and President Dr Ashok Dhawale, PWP General Secretary Jayant Patil MLC, renowned journalist P Sainath, anti-communal fighter Teesta Setalvad, Shiv Sena leader Rahul Londhe, CPI(M) state Secretary Narasayya Adam, Samajwadi Party leader Abu Asim Azmi MLA, CPI state Secretary Tukaram Bhasme, AAP Secretary Dhananjay Shinde, RPI (Kawade) leader Ganesh Unhavne, AIDWA national General Secretary Mariam Dhawale, AIKS state General Secretary Dr Ajit Nawale, CITU state Vice President Dr Vivek Monteiro, NAPM leader Medha Patkar, former Mumbai High Court Justice B G Kolse Patil, Hum Bharat ke Log leader Feroze Mithiborwala, MFUCTO President Tapati Mukhopadhyay, NCP leader Vidya Chavan ex-MLA, Congress Mumbai chief Bhai Jagtap MLA, Sarvahara Jan Andolan leader Ulka Mahajan, Kashtakari Sanghatana leader Brian Lobo, Satyashodhak Shetkari Sabha leader Kishor Dhamale and several others. The presidium comprised of Raju Korde, S K Rege, Milind Ranade and Shailendra Kamble.

Sharad Pawar was outspoken in his criticism of the BJP regime and of the three Farm Laws, insisted on an MSP guarantee law and warned that if the Central government tried to destroy farmers, they would destroy it instead. Balasaheb Thorat also attacked the Modi government on the Farm Laws and said that the State Government was seriously thinking of bringing in legislation to annul their effects and protect farmers.

Hannan Mollah gave the experience of the two-month long historic farmers struggle around Delhi and exposed the sheer bankruptcy and insensitivity of the Modi regime while dealing with it. P Sainath stressed on the fact that these Farm Laws attacked not only farmers, but all sections of the people and gave several examples to prove this point. Ashok Dhawale attacked the pro-corporate and neo-liberal character of the Farm Laws and the Labour Codes and accused the Modi regime of trying to sell off the country. Now it was targeting our agriculture and our land.

All the speakers flayed Modi government for its pro-corporate Farm Laws and Labour Codes and came down heavily on the BJP govt's crony capitalist connection with Ambanis and Adanis. Many leaders called for intensifying the boycott of their products and services. They also demanded a law guaranteeing a remunerative MSP and procurement.

Governor Absent, Farmers Tear Memorandum

After the convention, a huge rally proceeded to Raj Bhawan. On reaching Raj Bhawan, protesters got angry on learning that, despite giving prior appointment to SSKM delegation, Governor Koshiyari ran away to Goa. After an immediate SSKM meeting, Dr Ashok Dhawale announced unanimous decision of cancelling the schedule of meeting the Governor and publicly tore up the memorandum prepared for him. The public meeting then dispersed with the resolve to broaden and intensify the struggle manifold against the Farm Laws and the Labour Codes and for an MSP law.

On the morning of January 26, the national flag was hoisted at the Azad Maidan by Yamunabai Jadhav, a 73 year old Adivasi woman from Nashik district, who had herself walked the entire 200 Km stretch of the AIKS-led Kisan Long March from Nashik to Mumbai two years ago. The Speaker of the Maharashtra Assembly, Nana Patole specially remained present for the flag hoisting ceremony along with SSKM leaders.

The January 23-26 actions in Maharashtra had wide impact in the State and also across the country.

CITU on Union Government Budget

On 1 February CITU issued the following statement on Central Government's budget 2021-2022 placed by the Modi Government's Finance Minister in the Parliament.

Union Budget 2021-22

Destructive as well as cruelly insensitive to peoples' sufferings

The Union Budget 2021-22 demonstrated the continuity of same cruel indifference to the continuing distress and sufferings thrust upon the mass of the working people. Although the Finance Minister talked lavishly on the need to enhance expenditure substantially focused on augmentation of consumption demand of the people and enhance measures for their well-being, to combat the economic slowdown, the total proposed budgetary expenditure for 2021-22, remained almost at the same level as that in 2020-21 (revised estimate) meaning thereby a fall in real terms.

The lavish statement of the Minister on her Govt's commitment to peoples' well being and livelihood does not, as usual, match with the actual allocations particularly in the social sector and welfare related expenditures like MNREGA, ICDS, Mid day meal, jobs & skill development etc. In MNREGA, Budget drastically cut down allocation by 41% of what the Govt actually spent last year in 2020-21 although the rural unemployment and joblessness have increased phenomenally. In Mid-day meal, allocation has been cut down by Rs 1400 crore from what has been spent actually last year. In ICDS, the allocation has been reduced by 30% compared to allocation in last year's budget. In jobs & skill development, allocation has been cut down by 35% compared to allocation in the last budget. Mocking at tall talks by the Minister on improving employment generation and employability. There are many other examples. The Finance Minister also indicated the Govt move to "bring down the number of Centrally Sponsored Schemes" in line with the recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission.

Entire emphasis of the Budgetary exercise remained on promoting "ease of doing business" for the corporates and big business, both foreign and domestic, by way of easing the burden of compliance of their statutory obligations under Companies Act, and also in the matter of direct tax assessment and recovery of unpaid taxes, besides numerous exemptions on various heads.

While lamenting on financial crunch and low revenue generation during the pandemic period, Finance Minister did not utter a single word about the need to recover huge accumulation of unpaid direct taxes (Corporate and Income Tax) of Rs 10,57 lakh crore in the process of their last five year rule; of this Rs 2.29 lakh crore tax dues are not under any dispute and yet remained unrecovered. During same five year period the corporate tax rate have been drastically slashed down statedly for promoting better compliance. Promoting tax evasion by corporates with impunity has become the hallmark of the "ease of doing business policy" of the Modi Govt, which tantamount to sponsored loot of national exchequer.

In essence entire budgetary exercise and the reforms of tax administration and governance described therein is a commentary of measures promoting noncompliance of statutory obligations under Companies Act, Labour Laws etc by the corporate/big-business—all in the name of "ease of doing Business". Concessions announced for MSMEs are just non-consequential.

Budget has arrogantly reiterated its programme of wholesale privatization programme of mostly profit making PSUs, while declaring closure of all loss making PSUs, even those in core and strategic sector like pharmaceuticals, heavy manufacturing etc. The entire focus is on selling the assets including land at the disposal of these PSUs, Railways, Ports etc under their programme of monetization combined with privatisation. The Govt appears to be in a haste in its selling spree of national assets. Rs 1.75 lakh crore is targeted to be garnered through privatization in the current fiscal.

Even in Railways, Urban Transport, gas-pipe lines and also electricity discom sector, reforms proposed by the Govt are virtually privatization through PPP route. Increasing FDI to 74% in Insurance

Sector along with pushing through IPO in LIC and privatization of public sector banks after recapitalization from national exchequer are disastrous as well as destructive proposition aimed at handing over the control of financial sector to private hands under their touted programme of “Minimum Government”. Even after the grim experience of the pandemic period, public health infrastructure has not been spared. Budget talked lavishly about expanding the public health infrastructure up to block level but its execution is slated to be in PPP route through private health business operators.

Reduction in customs duty on steel semis and scrap is going to affect severely the domestic steel industry, particularly the integrated steel plants, both in public and private sector. All talks of promoting manufacturing sector as per their so called Atmanirbhar project are nothing but hollow announcement and basically aimed at incentivizing the corporate class, both foreign and domestic, out of national exchequer without any performance accountability. Huge concessions have already flown to these corporate since last six years under the same government, but nothing has been delivered by them either in terms of productive investment or employment generation. Same deceptive game has also been played by this Budget as well. In totality, the policy of the Govt continues to be destructive for the national economy as a whole. In this background the projection of 11% growth in 2021-22 appears to be kind of sound bites without much substance.

The statement of the finance minister, citing Labour Codes that they will ensure universal social security and statutory minimum wage for all, is totally devoid of truth. These Labour Codes are going to abolish all labour rights including that to even ask for social security and minimum wage and that is why the entire trade union movement has rejected forthright these Labour Codes and demanded their scrapping.

On Agriculture, despite all tall claims by Finance Minister on MSP, fact remains that MSP regime covers only 6% of the crop and MSP being paid does not cover mostly even the production cost, it being far below the formula of C2+50% rate recommended by Swaminathan Commission. And after execution of the draconian Farm Laws, which are at present put on hold because of farmers’ ongoing struggle, even MSP system will no more exist as a right of our farmers. That is why farmers are on united struggle demanding repeal of Farm Laws and statutory provision of MSP and procurement covering all crops and based on C2+50% formula. The Budget remained non-responsive on this vital aspect.

On the whole Budget does not provide anything for the people, did nothing for addressing the severe unemployment situation, no direct relief to people under severe distress through income and food support. It carries forward the same anti-people destructive policies through this Budget as well which deserves outright condemnation by the working people.

CITU Journal The Working Class

Be Subscriber
(Each copy – Rs. 10)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Subscriber • Agency • Payment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual subscription – Rs.100/- for 1 copy; - Minimum 5 copies; 25% discount as commission; - <u>By cheque</u> - Drawn in favour of “The Working Class” payable at Canara Bank, DDU Marg Branch, New Delhi – 110 002 |
|---|---|

By bank money transfer -
SB A/C No. 0158101019569;
IFSC Code: CNRB 0000158;
With email / letter intimation

On Economic Survey 2020-2021

Brinda Karat

The Economic Survey, which reads like a political defence of the Modi Government, has little hope to offer the crores of workers and marginal farmers reeling under the impact of the pandemic.

It actually describes as “humane” the government’s handling of the pandemic. The life-threatening experiences of crores of migrant workers, hundreds of whom did lose their lives, stranded without any help because of the arbitrary manner of the imposition of the lockdown within barely a day of its announcement, is airbrushed out of the Survey. This illustrates why the credibility gap between what the government claims and what the reality is will not be reduced by the survey.

Look at the hype of the projected V-shaped recovery. A (-)7.7% contraction in FY 2021, followed by an estimated 11% growth over this in FY 2022, “the highest since independence.” Assuming the estimates turn out to be accurate, it actually translates into an overall growth of just 2.45% in these two years taken together.

Growth of Inequalities

Moreover, ‘Growth’ is seen as the panacea for all the ills of the economy without any regard for a scrutiny of the *path of that growth*. It states: “Economic growth has a far greater impact on poverty alleviation than inequality... redistribution is only feasible in a developing country if the size of the economic pie grows.” It is precisely this self-serving argument that the largest mass mobilizations of workers and farmers have described as ‘*pro- corporate*.’

Inequalities in India are obscene. According to Oxfam’s recently-released report, “*In January, the richest 1% hold more than four-times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70% of the country’s population, while the total wealth of all Indian billionaires is more than the full-year budget.*”

There is nothing *natural* about this huge accretion of wealth by the few, including through a set of policies like the generosity in waiving off corporate loans, giving huge subsidies to corporates, and bringing down the effective tax rates through a slew of exemptions, especially for some sectors such as petroleum products and power sectors in which the effective tax rate is calculated to be just 20%-21%.

To propagate that busting inequalities will not help poverty alleviation is a justification for not taxing the super-rich, who, even in this period of pandemic, have shown in several sectors an increase in profits. Instead, the Survey makes it clear enough that the government is going to continue policies which, in the name of “growing the economic pie”, actually promote corporate interests on the basis of the failed and discredited ‘*trickle down*’ theories that if the rich get richer through government policy largesse, some of it will trickle down to the poor.

High Unemployment Rate

The high unemployment rates belie the rhetoric of the demographic dividend once again repeated in the Survey. As is known, though not admitted in the Survey, India was already in recession when the pandemic struck. In this period, the huge loss of jobs and livelihood were well-documented by CMIE. Its latest report reveals that the number of unemployed went up by one crore persons (to 38.7 million people) as a result of loss of jobs between November and December 2020. This is higher than before the lockdown. The CMIE states ‘*the deterioration in labour market conditions was across urban and rural regions*’ which ‘*raises concerns about the recovery process.*’ According to the CMIE, 427 million

people were looking for jobs in December 2020. Will the growth process predicted by the Economic Survey automatically lead to an increase in jobs?

The figures available for the manufacturing sector show that labour-intensive industries are not doing well. But employment creation in the manufacturing sector has received no attention in the recommendations of the Survey. The emphasis is on tech firms, digital India and mainly capital-intensive industries which may add to growth, but it will at best be job-less growth, if not job-loss growth.

Can there be poverty alleviation without the guarantee of jobs? In the absence of jobs, will the government guarantee any unemployment allowance as part of social security frameworks adopted by many countries across the world? The prescriptions offered by the Survey do not address this central issue of unemployment.

Defending Farm Laws

There is an outright defence of the three farm laws. Even though this was expected, what the Survey does is add to the substantive concerns being raised regarding food security by the farmers' movements. The emphasis in the Survey is on how to cut down on food subsidies. It underlines the various reports of the government on farm reforms to make the point that the current policies of guaranteed MSP, open-ended procurement leading to surplus stocks, supplying the PDS foodgrains at low, fixed prices is untenable.

The proposal in the Economic Survey is to raise the Central Issue Prices of foodgrains under the Food Security Act. As it is, prices of essential commodities have been going up.

Price Hike, Proposed Cutting Down Procurement and Doing Away MSP

Government revenues through increased cess on petrol and diesel is as much as 3.3 lakh crores rupees, an increase of 94% percent over 2014-2015. Continuous hikes in petrol and diesel have had a cascading impact on the rising prices of essential commodities, ignored by the Survey. At present, there are over 5 crore tonnes of foodgrains in government godowns, well above the buffer stock norms.

In a country ranked among the lowest in the Global Hunger Food Index, it makes moral as well as economic sense to universalise the system and increase the current allocations to a minimum of 35 kg per family. The present controlled prices of foodgrains of Rs.3 for a kilo of rice and Rs.2 for wheat provide critical relief to crores of families in rural India who spend more than half their income on food items.

Any plan to increase prices will seriously impact the lives of the poor and food-insecure households in a country that has the dubious distinction of having the largest number of undernourished people in the world.

The emphasis on cutting down on food subsidies also has a direct impact on the issue of procurement and MSP. In fact, all the "reform" reports quoted in the Survey have recommended cutting down the procurement and doing away with MSP. In so far as the policy prescriptions of the Survey reflect the thinking of the government, it only confirms the apprehensions of farmers.

Privatisation Drive

The Survey makes the argument for privatization of the public sector except for "strategic industries." It boasts of the reform measures towards increasing "ease of business." It is ironic that this is the only area where India has improved its global ranking, while its rank in indices related to hunger, gender inequality, democracy, press freedom are quite dismal.

Which are these "strategic industries?" From defence to space exploration to telecom, power and mining, banks and insurance, everything has been opened up for the private sector. So what is strategic?

It is interesting that on the very day the Economic Survey was released, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Undertakings, headed by BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi, raised this question of "strategic industries" and, according to press reports, asked for pharmaceutical industries to be included as "strategic" and raised questions about the privatization of "the national airline."

The Survey declares that the project of privatization of the Railways has moved forward with an expected investment from the private sector of 30,000 crore rupees. Private trains are likely to be introduced in 2023-24. Soon, there will be 150 pairs of private trains running in India and the private entities “shall have the freedom to decide on the fare to be charged from its passengers.”

So, an essential lifeline for crores of Indians is to be handed over to private entities who will have full freedom to decide fares. It is these policies which cause inequalities and make poverty alleviation a mirage.

The Survey does an amazing display of acrobatics in wriggling out of its own constructed iron framework of fiscal fundamentalism. Finding that there was no way of meeting their self-imposed fiscal deficit norms, given their estimates of revenue generation, the Survey does a U-turn and states that “the Survey endeavours to provide the intellectual anchor for the Government to be more relaxed about debt and fiscal spending during a growth slowdown and economic crisis.”

Stimulus Package

Here is an indirect admission of the crisis. But it is useful to remember that when people most needed the assistance, the government provided a meagre stimulus package, which was less than 2% of the GDP, and refused to provide cash assistance to people. Even, now the central government is punishing states by cutting their fiscal allocations in various ways if they “overspend.”

The world over, even governments committed to the same set of neoliberal policies as ours, have spent money through cash assistance and employment-generating programmes to strengthen domestic demand and revive their economies. Increasing the purchasing power of the people is critical for economic recovery. But even while shifting from its earlier position, the Survey makes it clear that this is only to “help crowd in private investment” and not to help increase the purchasing power of the people in any direct way.

The prescriptions of the Economic Survey to deal with the economic crisis will not help the people of India. Every chapter in the two-volume survey starts with some famous saying. It should end with a saying attributed to Abraham Lincoln ‘*You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.*’

(31.01.2021) (Brndia Karat, Polit Bureau Member of CPI(M) and former MP)

United Workers Solidarity with Farmers Struggle

The meeting of the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha on 22 January congratulated the farmers and their organisations for their determined struggles on their just demands and paid homage to the farmers who lost their lives during the protests.

The meeting appreciated the firm unity and resolve of the farmers’ organisations in the midst of the government’s vilification campaign branding the farmers as Khalistanis, terrorists, etc and using corporate controlled ‘godli’ media and its troll army; use of NIA, ED, Income tax department and imposing criminal cases to threaten and intimidate the leadership of the agitation and innocent farmers.

The meeting also appreciated the active support and solidarity expressed by all sections of people, particularly the workers and the trade unions, who have been in the front line in solidarity actions across the country.

The meeting emphasised that the growing unity of working class and the farmers in the fight against the three farm acts, four labour codes, privatisation and sale of national assets and loot by the corporate, and in defence of democratic rights is historic and in the interest of the entire nation. It was decided to further strengthen the unity of the workers and farmers and intensify their struggles. It was also decided to explore the possibilities of joint struggles against the anti people policies of the NDA government in the future.

Plummeting Social Indicators

Trinath Dora

From NFHS-5 data it is clear that economic slowdown and stagnation in wages over the last few years have dented the people's ability to access quality nutrition.

NFHS-5 data pertains to the situation just before COVID-19 crisis. One year later chances are that it has further deteriorated. This was also reflected in the leaked results of the Consumption Expenditure Survey of the NSO (2017-18). Global Hunger Index report placed India in 94th position in a list of 107 countries - below our neighbours Pakistan (88th) and Bangladesh (75th). In the 30th annual Human Development Report India ranked 131 out of 189 countries.

Lacking Nutrition, Rising Hunger

National Family Health Survey – 5 (NFHS-5) data pertains to the situation just before Covid-19. One year later chances are that child nutrition has deteriorated. Mid-day meals in schools and Anganwadis were discontinued from the lockdown onwards. Children have also suffered from the massive disruption of routine health services including immunization which is evident from the official health management information system. Indeed, numerous household surveys point to severe food insecurity across India in 2020. In the latest survey by Hunger Watch, two-thirds of the respondents said that they were eating less nutritious food today than before the lockdown.

The Prime Minister launched the flagship programme of *Poshan Abhiyaan* or National Nutrition Mission in 2018 with the ambitious goal of achieving a '*Kuposhan Mukh Bharat*'. Although a proper evaluation would require more data, it is clear that the Poshan Abhiyaan has only managed to scratch the surface in addressing nutrition while most of the structural issues remain neglected. For example, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), which is the main platform through which nutrition interventions are delivered, has not seen any expansion. Also, over 30% of supervisory positions in ICDS remain vacant. Budgetary allocations for ICDS and other nutrition schemes remain inadequate.

The Global Hunger Index report released in October 2020 gives India a GHI of 27.2, placing it in 94th position in a list of 107 countries. This year India's rank takes it below Pakistan (88th) and Bangladesh (75th). Perhaps, more worryingly, the GHI calculation did not account for the effect of Covid-19 on hunger and malnutrition. If India's situation is already "serious", as the authors of the report wrote, without this consideration, the actual situation on the ground may be grim. The unprepared lockdown had disastrous effect. The country's GDP shrank by a stunning 23.9% in the April-June quarter and 7.5% in July-September quarter with multiple downstream effects including a considerably weakened MSME sector and aggravated food insecurity with potential long-term effects.

Deteriorating Employment Opportunities, Rising Jobloss

The biggest and most crucial of measures for any economic diagnosis is jobs. All indicators point to a dismal unemployment situation. In December 2018, according to CMIE, the number of employed persons was about 39.7 crore. In November 2020 it dropped to 39.4 crore.

It is estimated that about 12 crore people enter the working age population every year. The average work participation rate used to be about 42% before the lockdown. That means about 5 crore

people join the army of job seekers every year. Yet, in two years the employed persons remain the same as the work participation rate dipped from 42.5% in December 2018 to about 40% in November 2020.

As per NSSO report 2019, in the age group of 15-59 years, only 67% rural men, 21% rural women, 71% urban men and 19% urban women participated in remunerative work.

During last 5 years, the employment rate has fallen from 42.7% in 2016-17 to 39.4% in 2019-20. According to ILO-modeled rates, world average employment rate is 57% and in India it is 47% while in Pakistan it is 50%, Bangladesh 57% and Sri Lanka 51% - all are well above India.

The youth unemployment has tripled from 6% to 18% between 2012 and 2018 and graduate unemployment has almost doubled from 19% to 36%. The current government's response to the demand for jobs has been two-fold. First, it denied the existence of the problem. It actively rubbished all available evidence including its own data that there was a job crisis. Secondly, Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues shifted the narrative by saying that we should create job providers and not job seekers.

According to data attributed to ILO, India is the worst performing country in terms of share of Public Sector workers as a percentage of total workforce. Only 3.8% of India's total workforce is employed in public sector while in USA it is 15.8%, UK 21.5%; Germany 12.9%, France 24.9% and Singapore 32%. China has 50% public sector workforce.

Plummeting Human Development Indicators, Rising Social Inequality

According to the 30th annual Human Development Report of the UNDP, India ranked as 131st out of 189 countries in Human Development Index (HDI) with an HDI value of 0.645, a drop from earlier position of 129th in 2019.

The Report says that the richest 1% in India holds 21.3% of Income Share and the richest 10% holds 31.7%. The poorest 40% in India has an Income Share of only 18.8%. The life expectancy at birth is 68.5 years for male and 71 years for female. The Gender Development Index (GDI) shows that in India the mean year of schooling was 5.4 years for female and 8.4 years for male. The report says the rate of vulnerable employment in India in 2019 was 74.3%. Vulnerable employment refers to the percentage of employed people engaged as unpaid family workers and own-account workers.

Oxfam report flagged that in India inequality is shockingly entrenched and vast. India's richest 1% hold more than four times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70% of the population. The combined total wealth of 63 Indian billionaires is higher than the total union budget of India for the fiscal year 2018-19 which was at Rs. 24,42,200 crore. As per the report, it would take a female domestic worker 22,277 years to earn what a top CEO of a technology company makes in one year. With earnings pegged at Rs.106 per second, a tech CEO would make more in 10 minutes than what a domestic worker would make in one year.

The foregoing analysis makes it amply clear that the precipitous decline in the social indicators cannot be arrested without a complete reversal of the neoliberal economic policy regime. Moreover, a massive government expenditure programme with an intention to infuse purchasing power among the working people and revive demand in the economy seems the only way out. Even though wealth inequality is increasing rapidly there is neither any wealth tax nor any inheritance tax worth the name in India. Even a 2% wealth tax and one-third inheritance tax, levied only on the top 1% of the population, would fetch Rs 14.67 lakh crore or roughly 7% of the current GDP. It will be enough to finance the institutions of a welfare state like India and arrest the plummeting social indicators.

(Edited; Trinath Dora is General Secretary, East Central Zone Insurance Employees' Association)

Electricity Workers – Engineers All India

(Report page 4)



Telangana



Tamilnadu



Kerala



West Bengal



Uttar Pradesh



Odisha



Haryana



Punjab

National Convention on Unemployment

(Report page 7)

