

The Voice of the Working Woman



From
Suicide to Struggle
To
Win our Rights!

KISAN LONG MARCH
in Maharashtra



“Pol Khol, Halla Bol” (Expose and Protest) on 23 May 2018

“Change the Polices or People will Change the Government”

**Agitation throughout the country on the occasion of the
4th Anniversary of NDA Government**

Taking further the recent struggles of the peasantry and the workers and various other sections of the people, the Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar Andolan (JEJAA), has decided to launch a struggle on the occasion of the 4th Anniversary of the NDA Government.

On 23rd May 2018, JEJAA will organise massive mobilizations at all state capitals and in the national capital to observe Protest Day with a slogan “Modi Sarkar ki char saal, Pol Khol, Halla Bol’ (Four years of Modi Government, Expose and Protest)

This will be preceded by a one week massive campaign through distribution of leaflets, cycle/motor cycle/vehicle rallies/jathas, public meetings etc. Various sections will be submitting their charge sheets against the government, jointly and independently through programmes and mass mobilizations at various levels. JEJAA will also be putting forward the alternate polices of various sections.

This protest day will launch a series of struggles with the aim of making the Government accountable for the devastating impact of its policies and for betraying the people, especially the women and youth, through its false promises. The campaign will put forward the slogan “Either the government change its policies or we will change the government”

The decision to launch the struggles was taken in an extended meeting of the working committee of JEJAA. JEJAA was formed in a national convention held on 18 September 2017 at New Delhi, and consists of **more than 100 organisations including CITU** representing trade unions, organisations of peasants, agricultural workers, state and central government, bank and insurance employees, school, college and university teachers, women, youth and students, social movements of dalits, adivasis, environmentalists etc **having a membership of around 20 crores.**

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A Bankrupt Ideology

Addressing the BJP Parliamentary Party meeting, Prime Minister Modi declared that the victory of BJP in Tripura was 'an ideological victory'. While BJP's electoral gain in Tripura is significant, to claim that it was an ideological victory only exposes the bankruptcy of that 'ideology'.

In Tripura, BJP had an opportunistic alliance with the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, which has been demanding a separate tribal state of Twipraland. While the IPFT claimed that the alliance was based on the assurance to divide Tripura and form a new state of Twipraland, the BJP said that Tripura was a small state and need not be divided. It is well known that IPFT had links with the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a banned separatist and terrorist organisation which seeks to secede from India and establish an independent Tripuri state. But the BJP, which never tires of talking about 'nationalism', had no qualms of having an unholy alliance with the IPFT.

On the one hand the BJP government at the centre used its power to stifle the state by not releasing the funds, including for MGNREGA in the implementation of which the left front government of Tripura had the best record in the country; and on the other the Prime Minister himself resorted to an utterly false and malicious campaign against the left front government without showing any facts to support his lies. Unprecedented amounts of money were used along with lavish promises to influence the young voters who had no taste of the BJP's ways. The entire Congress was lured into converting itself into BJP.

The results of the elections in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh indicate the present mood of the people who have known the BJP and its ways. Making promises with no intention whatsoever to implement them, the BJP president himself declaring that they were mere 'election jumlas', having scant respect for truth or facts, at all levels of the BJP and government hierarchy – these have now become the hall mark of the BJP.

The defeat in the two Lok Sabha constituencies vacated by none other than the chief minister and deputy chief minister show the anger of people against the BJP and the governments at the centre as well as in UP. The 'no confidence motion' in the Parliament by the Telugu Desam Party, which has been a part of the NDA during the last four years and its decision to withdraw from the NDA, and the growing number of parties supporting it are reflections of the growing discontent against the Modi government. There may not be any threat to the survival of the BJP led NDA government due to this 'no confidence motion'. But these developments show which way the wind is blowing.

The neoliberal agenda that BJP led government chose to pursue much more aggressively along with its divisive and RSS sponsored 'Hindutva', has had a disastrous impact on the lives and livelihoods of the common people.

The anger against these policies is being increasingly expressed through big struggles and mobilisations of all sections of the toiling people, the farmers, workers, employees, students, youth etc. The joint trade union courting of arrests, the joint demonstrations of the workers, the huge demonstrations of peasants in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and other states indicate this.

It is in this background that the General Council of CITU will meet in Kozhikode to chalk out the future programmes of campaigns and struggles. Intensifying struggles, projecting concrete pro worker pro people policies and mobilising all sections of toiling people in support of these struggles alone will lead to the defeat of not only the BJP government, but the neoliberal policies and the disruptive and divisive 'Hindutva' agenda of the RSS. That is the urgent task before the working class today.

I Walked With Farmers Through Mumbai. What I Found

Rana Ayyub

Before I started for the rally, I had applied a generous amount of sunscreen on my face, my mother had given me a bottle of ORS to sip through the walk so the scorching summer sun did not induce a migraine. I had my head and face covered with a scarf and my Nike running shoes in place.

My urban, sheltered and privileged life was an embarrassment when I walked with Ujjwala, who had left her month-old baby at home to march with her fellow villagers. I notice a drop of sweat escaping from her hairline and offer her my ORS. She laughs and tells me in Marathi *"Nako tai, aamhala savay aahe, tumhi ghya"* (Thanks, sister, but we are used to it. You need it)". Ujjwala has a bag full of documents, mostly applications to the local bank. Some are letters in Marathi from her local *panchayat*, some from the village registrar. Ujjwala delivered a baby last month, she was admitted to the local hospital right after for acute anaemia, the baby was born underweight. She could not breastfeed her child because nutritious food is a luxury, three meals are a struggle and some days, her family survives on a single meal of rice and jaggery.

Last year, her small farm was destroyed by pests leaving them with almost no produce. The loan that her family took from a cooperative in the district has been unpaid. She asks me if I know anybody in the government to whom she can hand over the applications. I try to offer her some money. *"Nako re tai"*, she refuses. *"Your money won't even last us a month, only the government can help, get them to listen to us if you can."*

Walking right behind her are a bunch of young boys in red caps and flags raising slogans of *"Lal salaam"*. They are singing a Dilip Kumar song from *"Mazdoor"*. They laugh when one of them misses a line and switch to a Marathi song.

I ask them if they are members of the Left. They smile and ask me if I work for a TV channel. Another says *"Didi, hum log shetkari log hai (we are farmers)"*.

It is late evening and some of the marchers have decided to stop by a tea stall on the road. The eldest of the group is presumably in his late 70s, a volunteer offers him tea in a disposable cup. Somebody passes on a packet of Parle-G biscuits. I ask him if it was important for him to walk all the way to Mumbai from Nasik. He says he is not alone, most of his friends are walking along. *"Last night my legs froze."* He tells me about his diabetes which made it difficult for him, every two hours he had to look around for a toilet. *"The people of your city are good people, they gave us food and water. We are here to ask your leaders sitting in Mantralaya (the government headquarters) to be good to us. They have forced us to walk all the way from our villages to your city. Even if I fall sick, I will know that I did something for my son and his children. Sitting at home is not going to pay our loans."*

He is hopeful, he shows me his Aadhaar card and that of his grandson. *"I have all the documents, everything they need. I have got all papers, I have got my voting card too."*

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray's son Aditya Thackeray, who is President of the youth wing of the party, is already addressing the rally. *"They look at your red flags, I look at the red colour of your blood,"* he tells them, taking potshots at the BJP whose leaders have called the rally a Leftist attempt to destabilize the government - of which his party is a member.

MNS leader Raj Thackeray who is almost slipping into political oblivion also makes an appearance. I ask those around me if they would want the Shiv Sena or Congress to support their rally and

they tell me the colour of the flag does not matter. *“Manmohan Singh was the son a farmer, Modi claims to be one of us, he rose from being a chai-wala. How does it matter what party they belong if they have no concern for us? Anyone who can bail us out of this distress will be our saviour.”* WhatsApp groups and Twitter handles have been activated. Messages float around that the protests have been planned by Maoists to destabilize the BJP led government in the state and at the centre. Poonam Mahajan, BJP MP from Mumbai, tells reporters outside parliament that the farmers protests have been propelled by “urban Maoists”. If not for the ongoing parliament session, Poonam could have been in Mumbai and seen the blistered feet of the farmers who passed by her constituency.



In June last year, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had announced a complete loan waiver for farmers following which state peasant leaders had called off their protests. The farm waiver was to benefit 89 lakh farmers, but the organisers of the march told the media that only 31 lakh farmers have benefited from what they described as an arbitrary loan waiver procedure.

Since January this year, senior leaders from the NCP, Congress and the Shiv Sena have been talking of a statewide agitation. The All India Kisan Sabha of the CPI(M) started mobilizing farmers across the state systematically with cadres visiting villages and taking details of loans from villagers.

As I write this the farmers, have called off their protest. Chief Minister Fadnavis has agreed to meet all their demands in a move that was much anticipated. The state along with the country will face elections next year. The voices of the farmers are now in our living rooms, not just those of Mumbaiers but through the country - everyone has been watching the agonizing march of distress.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said his government was “sensitive and positive” towards the demands of the farmers

The WhatsApp forwards on development that used to pour in were replaced by images of tired faces and scarred feet. This movement has the potential to galvanise and give voice to an agrarian distress that has overtaken the country. For now, Modi and Fadnavis have managed to change the direction of the wind. But the peasants from Maharashtra have given a direction to the rest of the country, made it clear that they will no longer be taken for granted.

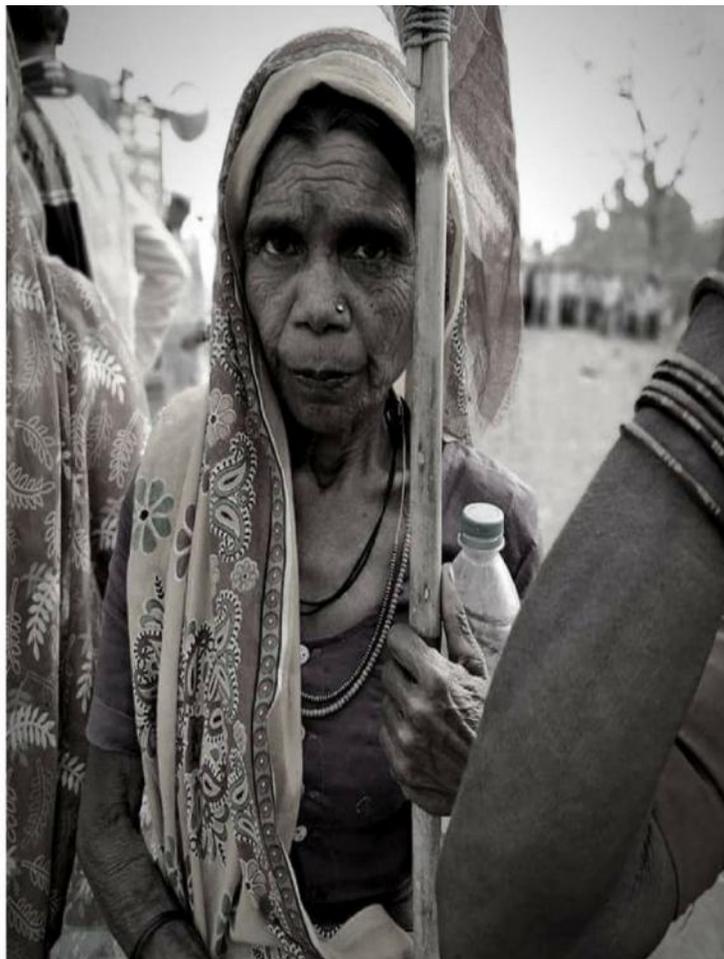
Promises have been made in the past and it is very likely that now, like then they will not be fulfilled. It is also likely that compromises could be made by leaders, that the farmers could return to our indifferent city the next year to serve us another reminder of their pain. But the stories of suffering, of farmer suicides which were restricted to an insignificant corner of a newspaper, have now become a talking point. It brings with it a much needed reassurance that the country has not lost its soul.

(Rana Ayyub is an award-winning investigative journalist and political writer.)

KISAN LONG MARCH

Every single meal you have comes from the sweat and toil of the peasants. Over 4 lakh took their lives in the face of complete apathy of the ruling classes. Their hands are soaked in the blood of the peasantry. The peasants are marching for their rights. Let us stand resolutely in solidarity with them.

ALL INDIA KISAN SABHA



CITU Congratulates the Maharashtra Peasants

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) congratulates the farmers of Maharashtra for the historic 'Kisan Long March' from Nasik to Mumbai. Around 50000 farmers have marched on foot, under the leadership of the Maharashtra state committee of All India Kisan Sabha, for around 200 kms, braving the scorching sun, to press for their demands before the BJP government of Maharashtra. The state government was compelled to concede in writing their demands including loan waivers, right to forest lands for the tribals tilling the land for decades, MSP as per Swaminathan Committee recommendation etc.

The CITU congratulates the AIKS for leading farmers' struggles in different states and taking the initiative for joint movements of farmers. These campaigns and struggles, as the earlier struggle in Rajasthan, indicate the determination of the farmers to take to the struggle path leaving behind the desperation and suicides. CITU is confident that these struggles will spread to other states as well in the coming days and contribute to the intensification of the struggle of all toiling sections of society against the neoliberal policies of the BJP led government at the centre.

The successful struggle of the farmers of Maharashtra has inspired the entire country, particularly the workers across the country. The working class has stood in solidarity with the struggling farmers in Rajasthan and in Maharashtra. CITU assures that the working class will continue to support the genuine demands of the farmers all over the country and stand firmly in solidarity with them.

The Nirav Modi Scandal

Prabhat Patnaik

NIRAV Modi, and his uncle Mehul Choksi, are the latest additions to the list of the so-called “entrepreneurs of new India” who have looted public money and decamped with the loot. The Punjab National Bank, the second largest bank in the country, kept giving them loans without any collateral (which is basically what happened through the complicated procedure of the so-called “Letters of Undertaking”); and one fine day Nirav Modi simply left the country with his immediate family, to be followed by his uncle a few days later.

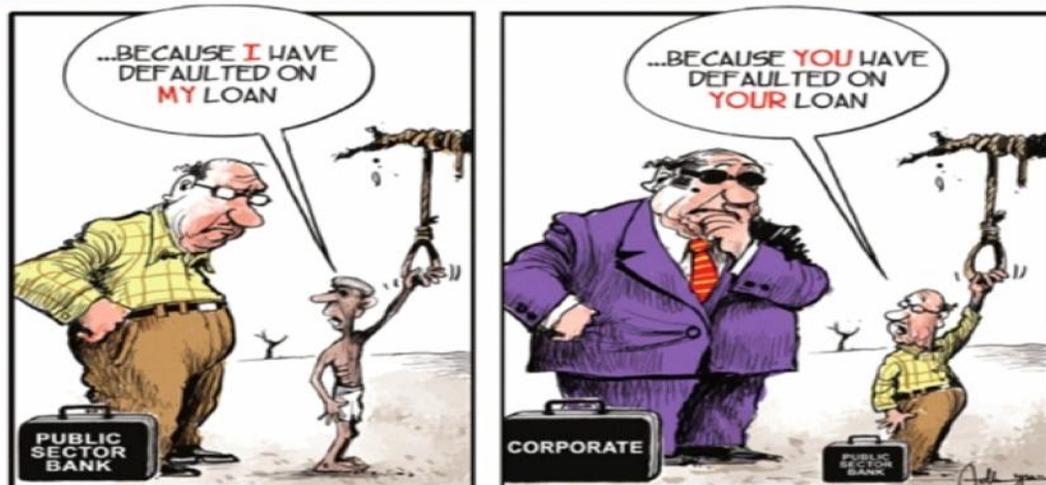
Several characteristics are shared by all these decamping “entrepreneurs” whose list includes Lalit Modi and Vijay Mallya. First, all of them are high-profile “celebrities”. Lalit Modi for years appeared everyday on television screens in lakhs of homes across the country during IPL matches, alongside political and Bollywood heavyweights, and was hailed as the “brain” behind this event. Vijay Mallya was a member of parliament elected with much fanfare, and also a regular TV presence during IPL matches involving the team that he owned, the Royal Challengers Bangalore. And Nirav Modi, whose diamonds adorned Hollywood and Bollywood stars, was in addition related through marriage to the country’s top “entrepreneur” family, the Ambanis.

Secondly, all of them were close to the ruling party. Lalit Modi’s proximity to Sushma Swaraj and to Vasundhara Raje continued openly even after he had fled the country. Vijay Mallya had been elected to the Rajya Sabha with the surplus votes of the BJP. And not only was Mehul Choksi “Mehul bhai” to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but Nirav Modi actually appeared in a photograph, after having fled the country, as part of Modi’s team of Indian “entrepreneurs” at the Davos summit. The government’s subsequent claims that he merely slunk into the photograph are absurd: nobody can just slink into a prime minister’s photograph.

Indeed the closeness of all these persons to the ruling Party is evident from the fact that their escapes can be shown to have been “assisted escapes” by the government (as a report in *The Wire* establishes). In the case of Vijay Mallya, who misappropriated Rs 9000 crores, a “lookout” notice issued on October 16, 2015, was conveniently and unaccountably “downgraded” on November 25, allowing him to escape from the country on March 1, 2016. And in the case of Nirav Modi, who defrauded PNB of Rs 11,400 crores, the government took no action whatsoever despite being informed about his misdemeanour in July 2016.

Line of No Control

Sandeep Adhwaryu



(Courtesy: The Times of India)

Thirdly, each one of them continues to be absolutely brazen about his criminal deed without an iota of remorse. Lalit Modi struts around the world pretending that he is the victim. Vijay Mallya has the temerity to march into a function at the Indian High Commission in London. And Nirav Modi has even written a letter suggesting that it is PNB's impetuosity, leading to a media blitz on his borrowing that is responsible for his default, ignoring conveniently that he fled the country on January 1, long before any news of his default had reached the media.

It is ironic that a government which screams its opposition to economic malfeasance, which put millions to acute hardship through an act of demonetisation supposedly for fighting black money, and whose insistence on Aadhaar for plugging "loopholes" in public distribution has already starved several destitute persons to death, has presided over a plunder of banks by some of the country's richest people, and even "assisted" their escape! And there is a deafening silence till now from both the prime minister and the finance minister on this latest case of plunder by Nirav Modi.

It is also ironic that Assocham should use the instance of this plunder to demand that public sector banks should be privatised! This is tantamount to a demand for handing over the banks to the very same tribe whose members are responsible for looting them: a Nirav Modi loots the PNB and sits cozily in New York, while this very loot then becomes the reason for the PNB to be handed over, say, to his relatives, the Ambanis! Or, even more ironically, the same Nirav Modi can use a front to buy the same PNB with the same money that he has looted from it!

But while Assocham can always be expected to make such outlandish demands, even the chief economic advisor to the government, Arvind Subramaniam, has asked for an increase in private equity in public sector banks on the grounds that this would bring greater share-holder vigilance to check such malpractices. One wonders if his views are those of the government; and if not, then one wonders how he can freely air them while holding a responsible official post. But there are two obvious flaws in his position.

First, vigilance alone by those holding an interest in the bank cannot stop such malpractices, as the Barings Bank case shows, where the funds of Britain's oldest merchant bank were used for rampant speculation by one of its employees, Nick Leeson, which brought down the bank. In the PNB case where LOUs anyway have a very short life-span, either there was a bunching of LOUs just before the scam burst, or fresh LOUs were issued to cover expiring LOUs, so that audit could not catch the misdemeanor. The share-holders therefore could scarcely have been able to prevent it.

The more important issue here relates to the fact that lending practices were bent with impunity by a bunch of employees to favour Nirav Modi; and preventing this requires a change in *practices* rather than greater share-holders' vigilance. The Modi government's culpability in this case lies in not taking action *despite being warned*, which again calls for a change in practices. Such a change for instance, should involve greater parliamentary vigilance over PSB affairs rather than greater share-holder vigilance through privatisation.

Secondly, suppose for a moment that PNB was a private bank. Then with a scam of this order, there would have been a run on the bank from depositors, leading either to its collapse with disastrous consequences, or to a government bail-out at heavy cost. But because PNB happens to be a government-owned bank, there is still enough confidence among depositors, despite Jaitley's and Modi's deafening silences, not to panic into withdrawing their deposits.

Privatisation, whether involving private control or only greater private equity, will not *per se* prevent such occurrences, but banks will still require government funds to keep afloat in the event of such occurrences. And if government funds are to be used in such eventualities, then there is no reason why the government should not own the banks or should dilute its equity. For preventing such occurrences what is required therefore is the devising of appropriate institutional mechanisms of supervision even while retaining government ownership.

There is however a deeper problem here. Capitalism exhorts private economic agents, such as businesses, corporations and banks to pursue economic gain, indeed that is supposed to be its *modus operandi*; yet it wants employees of these agents to obey commands and not to pursue their own private gain even clandestinely. It promotes hedonistic behaviour, of maximising gain, in the realm of the economy; but it wants the State, and its employees, not to be contaminated by such individual hedonism. It wants profit maximisation by private agents, but it can work only if they do so within legal bounds; yet there is nothing to prevent them from pursuing profit-maximizing behaviour *at the expense of the law* (through offering bribes to law-enforcers for instance).

There is in other words a basic contradiction at the heart of capitalism, namely that it is tenable only if the behaviour it exhorts is kept bounded within limits; but there is nothing in the system to keep it so bounded.

This problem has not in the past assumed the seriousness that it potentially can, because for a long time, the personnel in institutions outside of the economy, such as the State, had ideas of what is “done” and what is “not done” that were either derived from an earlier mode of production (eg, “a sense of honour”, “the badge of a public school” etc), or, under social democracy, based on a certain commitment to the community-values of workers (“can’t let my folks down”). In countries like ours, the legacy of the freedom struggle had introduced ethical considerations to the personnel of the State and the public sector that shunned the private aggrandisement associated with capitalism. The contradiction at the heart of capitalism in short had not assumed the intensity that would have made the system dysfunctional.

With neo-liberalism however this restraint goes. The quest for private gain gets generalised, which manifests itself in the kind of institutional break-down that we find of late. Nirav Modi’s therefore is not a case of “crony capitalism” supplanting “genuine capitalism”; it is rather a case of “genuine capitalism” coming into its own and displaying its fundamental unworkability.

To be sure, having institutional restraints, as suggested above, can stem the rot for a while; but soon even these restraints themselves will get subverted, and the fundamental unworkability of a system based on the pursuit of private gain will again manifest itself.

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(See Rule 8)**

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Gitanjali Gems Workers Lose their Jobs

While the owners have happily fled the country after cheating the Punjab National Bank and the people of around Rs 1400 crores, it is the workers employed in their establishment, Gitanjali Gems, who are left in the lurch. The workers of Gitanjali Gems factory in SEZ Rangareddy district in Telangana were thrown out of the factory after Enforcement Directorate's decision to seize the factory belonging to Nirav Modi, after the scam came out in the open.

The Gitanjali Gems factory was established to manufacture diamond jewellery in the year 2005 in Rajeev Gems Park, a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) established by the Central Government in Rangareddy district of Telangana. The factory commenced production on 9th November 2006. The Telangana state government allotted 176 acres of land for only Rs 4 crore for the factory. Apart from the land the government provided electricity, infrastructure facilities and other subsidies. The company got a loan of Rs 120 crore from LIC by pledging 176 acres of land received from the state government.

Nearly 700 workers, from poor and downtrodden families, mainly widows and physically handicapped persons, picked from different parts of the state have been working in the factory. Nearly 300 (100 women) out of 700 were given training from DRDA.

All these workers started their career with a wage of Rs.750 per month and were now earning Rs.12000 to 15000 per month. All these workers have settled near the factory. Most of the physically challenged persons purchased tricycles obtaining loans as they thought their life was settled due to the support from the government. The state and central governments have given several awards to the management for providing employment to the maximum number of physically challenged persons. When everything was moving peacefully a sudden threat has emerged in the form of Nirav Modi's loan default. The workers are on the agitation path. They demand that this issue be viewed from a social angle also apart from employment.

The workers who have no idea about Nirav Modi who fled the country, are sufferers of the Rs 14000 crore scam. Nobody seems to be concerned about the workers who lost their jobs due to Modi's default. In Davos the Telangana state IT Minister and PM Narendra Modi shared the dais along with Nirav Modi. PM and IT Ministers discuss on industry, investment and employment on international and national conclaves but they do not have the time to see the plight of the workers of Gitanjali Gems. IT Minister does not find time to address the problem of industries closing down.

The Telangana CITU state committee has demanded that the state government should take over the Gitanjali Gems factory and run the same for the overall development of the area. There is a trained workforce, plant and machinery, infrastructure and established market for the finished products. The time has come to prove the government's commitment to the people.

CITU extended its full support to the agitating workers. M Saibabu, general secretary of Telangana state committee of CITU addressed a gate meeting of Gitanjali Gems workers and criticised the policies of the state and central government which are aggravating the problems of workers by erasing the rights achieved so far and demanded immediate intervention by the state to redress the issue.

The state committee organised a round table discussion on the issue with Prof K Nageswar as the chief guest. Leaders from AITUC, INTUC and AIKS also participated.

Grand Victory of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers in Haryana

After a total strike by the anganwadi workers and helpers from 19 February to 10 March, the BJP led Haryana Government had to agree to most of the demands including an increase in wages. The most significant achievement of this struggle is that after Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, the workers are included in the state government outsource employees according to their seniority. A worker who joins the service will be treated in par with semi skilled worker and those who with 10 years of service will be treated as skilled worker.

In Haryana the workers were getting Rs.7500 per month and although the promise was to increase it by Rs.1000 per month per year it was pending since 2014. The Khattar government had declared an increase last year but did not implement it. Only in April 2017 the government increased the remuneration to Rs.8140 for the workers. Helpers were getting Rs.3750 and it was increased to Rs.3820 in April 2017 (only Rs.70). There was much discontent among the workers and helpers against the state government. The all India Strike of scheme workers on 17 January 2017 and the continuous campaign for it had created an atmosphere of struggle in the state. The 16 days strike by the ASHA workers under the leadership of CITU and its notable achievements have again ignited the fighting spirit among the anganwadi workers and helpers. The Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union, Haryana (CITU) gave notice and started an indefinite strike from 19 February 2018. Out of the other three unions existing in the state, BMS and AIUTUC unions were only small a pocket and they did not join the strike. The other union which was formed by those who were expelled from our union on charges of financial irregularities had also given a strike call. The strike was total. Government tried various measures to break the strike. Day by day, the participation in the strike pandal of our union in the districts was increasing. After a round of discussions led by the officials , the government called a meeting with the Chief Minister where he put forward the proposal for a grade pay for the workers but no such pay for helpers. Union demanded the wage for skilled and highly skilled workers and at least 70 percent wages of workers to be paid to the helpers which is 50 per cent now. But the government was adamant not to agree and also on other demands like pension and ex gratia. The discussions failed. But the government declared the decision unilaterally and got it signed by those unions who have not even issued the strike notice. But the CITU and the union rejected the proposal and continued the strike. The government issued termination orders to workers and helpers who were on strike. Under the leadership of the union they had a 'holika dahan' of the termination order and set it on fire.

The union had a big padav in Karnal the city of the CM on 5th March. More than 12 thousand workers and helpers participated in the padav and stayed there overnight. In the meantime the CM announced in the assembly that ' he will not allow hooliganism by the red flag people". The administration tried to arrest them at midnight but the union threatened of dire consequences in case of any repression on the peaceful struggle. In between the government again declared increase in remuneration of mini anganwadi workers on par with the workers which is also a significant victory. On 8th March workers took out a torch light procession against the state government.

The Chief Minister had to call the unions for discussion on 10th March. There he agreed to consider the demand of increase in the remuneration of helpers, increase in their wages according to seniority, ex gratia and summer and winter holidays and an increase in rent of the centres.

If the promises are implemented anganwadi workers in Haryana will get a salary of Rs.10286 and Rs.11429 for those who have completed 10 years of service. This will be increased every 6 months as per DA. The workers will be covered under ESI and PF. Helpers will get Rs.5715 as of now while the government will work out policies for further increase and also according to seniority. Government agreed for 50 percent reservation for the post of workers and the removal of condition for promotion of helpers.

The union temporarily withdrew the struggle for one month and declared a general body on 10th April in which the future course of struggle will be declared in case the promises are not met. He also apologised for terming the CITU as hooligans.

Maharashtra ASHA Workers Dharna in Mumbai

On the 7th of March, around 8000 ASHA workers and Block Facilitators of the Maharashtra ASHA Worker and Ghatparvartak Federation held a dharna demonstration at Azad Maidan, Mumbai. They had come from fifteen districts including Kolhapur, Solapur, Sangli, Satara, Sindhurg, Akola, Amravati, Buldhana, Vardha and Nagpur. They were raising their long pending demands with the state government, on the issues of fixed monthly payment, increase in incentives, regularization as health workers and for minimum wages.

A delegation comprising of Anandi Awaghade, President of the Federation, Saleem Patel, General Secretary of the Federation, Netradeepa Patil, Meena Koli, and Priti Meshram, under the leadership of CITU state Vice president Narsayya Adam, met the Finance Minister and held discussions with him.

The Minister assured the delegation that the issue of providing fixed payment will be considered favourably. He said that he will discuss the same and the other demands with the federation after consulting the Health Minister and its secretariat. He will convene the meeting regarding this after 20th March.

(Report from Saleem Patel)

AP ASHA Workers Rally in Vijaywada

In preparation for the International Women's Day programme on 8th March general body meetings were held in all the districts of Andhra Pradesh and 35,000 leaflets were distributed. In February on ASHA day dharnas were held at PHCs in which 18,000 workers participated. Memorandums were submitted at 600 PHCs.

On International Women's Day, despite 1500 ASHA workers being arrested in various districts, around 3,500 ASHA workers managed to reach Vijayawada. They marched from Vijayawada railway station to Alankar Dharna Chowk and then blocked the road for 6 hours. The Additional Director Family Welfare, the Director of Health, and ASHA state programme officer were forced to come to the spot. They assured the ASHA workers that they will arrange a joint meeting of the union with the Principal Secretary, Health before 10th April and that the issue of wages and other issues will be settled. They further assured that the incentives pending for 2 to 3 months will be released immediately. The union, while accepting the assurances, declared that if the assurances are not fulfilled on time, they will *gherao* the Health Commissionerate.

(Report from K Dhanalakshmi)

Struggles and Celebrations

Scheme Workers



Haryana Anganwadi Employees



Madhya Pradesh Anganwadi Employees

Struggles and Celebrations

Scheme Workers



Andhra Pradesh Asha Workers



Maharashtra Asha Workers

Struggles and Celebrations on 8th March 2018



Haryana Mid Day Meal Employees



Punjab anganwadi employees

Struggles and Celebrations on 8th March 2018



Delhi 8th March



Gujarat anganwadi employees

The Pangs of Hunger

A fight over sharing of two rotis in an impoverished Dalit family of Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri district, which had no food at home for the past four days, prompted a 12-year-old girl, Jyoti, to hang herself on February, 23 2018. The girl's mother, a labourer, had found no work in the past week and had not been able to feed her children.

On 23rd evening, when the mother, Jagrana, 36, was out to find some work, a desperate Jyoti went to her neighbours begging for some food. When she got two rotis, she rushed back home in Nayi Basti area, to share them with her three siblings — Laxmi, 19, Mohini, 9 and 11-year-old Mohit. However, a fight ensued over sharing the two rotis and the elder sister, Laxmi, left home in a fit of rage. The sight was too gloomy for Jyoti to bear, and she locked herself in a room and took the extreme step.

The fate of the once well-off farming family changed for the worse about eight years ago after the Sharda river, which flows nearby, changed its course and washed away their land. The parents had to become labourers.

Four years ago, the father, Chhote Lal, died of illness. Jagrana had been working as a daily wager since then. On the 23rd, she collapsed after reaching home and seeing her daughter hanging from the ceiling in their makeshift hut. Jyoti was rushed to a hospital but was declared brought dead by doctors. (Courtesy – The Times of India)

Dalit Students in Himachal School told to Sit in Stable to Watch PM Modi's Speech

Dalit students of a government high school in Kullu were made to sit separately outside, in a "place used for horses", during the telecast of Prime Minister [Narendra Modi's 'Pariksha Par Charcha'](#). On February 16, the school in Kullu's Chestha gram panchayat had made arrangements for students to watch Modi's televised programme at the residence of the head of the school management committee. Some of the students alleged that a teacher told them to sit outside the room where the television had been set up. Dalit students were made to sit in a place used for keeping horses. The students were told not to leave the place midway as this would make them lose marks from their 'assignment'.

In their complaint, the students alleged that they are subjected to "*caste discrimination during midday meals. Students belonging to Scheduled Caste category are made to sit separately. Even the headmaster does nothing... he also practises untouchability*".

(Courtesy – The Indian Express)

Swachh Bharat ?

A picture of the Rajasthan Health Minister Kalicharan Saraf, urinating on a wall of the Pink City, Jaipur, has gone viral. He however shrugged it off, saying it was "*not a big issue*". According to rules, those urinating on roads are asked to cough up fine of Rs 200.

The picture comes as the Jaipur Municipal Corporation is working hard to bring the city to the top of charts under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

In three years already Rs 530 crore has been spent on publicity for the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, The campaign attracts the highest Central government advertising expenditure. The expenditure on advertising and promoting the campaign is **equivalent to the entire annual budgets of some schemes** such as the North East development fund of the Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises.

Wooing Dalits...Hindutva Style

Savera

Weird things happen in Indian politics, but one of the most bizarre sights is the Sangh Parivar – BJP, Bajrang Dal, VHP, ABVP, BMS, etc. and their mother organization, the RSS – trying to woo dalits. After spending most of its history practicing upper caste politics, denigrating dalit icons like Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, preventing dalits from entering temples and defending India's brutal caste system, the BJP is going all out to 'win over' dalits.

UP CM Yogi Adityanath has asked all UP government offices to put up Dr. Ambedkar's photos. RSS ideologues are repeatedly saying that Dr. Ambedkar was a staunch Hindu. The BJP's youth wing has launched a country-wide campaign for organizing meals in all localities where dalits and OBCs will sit together with upper caste people to have food. Earlier, Prime Minister Modi had compared Dr. Ambedkar to the famous black rights leader from the US, Martin Luther King. The RSS weekly Organiser had brought out a special edition on Dr. Ambedkar with 27 articles praising him. And so on

Why this energetic all-out effort to prove that the RSS and BJP are well-wishers of dalits? BJP-RSS wants to somehow get rid of the growing distance with dalits. This distance has always been there, ever since the RSS was founded by a group of Brahmins in 1927, partly in response to the growing awakening among dalits led by Jotiba and Savitribai Phule. The RSS upheld a fundamentalist and extreme Hindu vision that supported the caste system, took Manu-Smriti as the basis of organizing society in India, declared that non-Hindus should either leave the country or live as second rate citizens and believed in a socio-economic system that was based on militaristic organization, repression of all dissent and freedom for owners of property to exploit labourers to make profit. In this Hindu Rashtra, dalits were to be preserved in the same lowest rung as was prescribed by the Manu-Smriti, written about 1800 years ago.

The distance – even hostility – to dalits was repeatedly expressed over the years. In the RSS view the Constitution drafted by Dr. Ambedkar was bogus because *“there is no mention of the unique constitutional developments in ancient Bharat. Manu's laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparta or Solon of Persia. To this day laws as enunciated in the Manusmriti excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits (read Ambedkar) that means nothing.”* [Organiser, Nov, 30, 1949, page 3]. The most revered leader of RSS, Guru Golwalkar writes in his book *Bunch of Thoughts*, that the Constitution is *“just a cumbersome and heterogenous piecing together of various articles from various Constitutions of the Western countries. It has nothing which can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles as to what our National Mission is, what our keynote in life is?”*

For those who don't know, the Manu-Smriti includes such barbaric edicts about dalits: they cannot possess property, as they themselves are the property of the three higher varnas; if a Shudra abuses a Brahmin his tongue should be cut; if a Shudra beats a Brahmin his arms should be cut; if he listens to the Veda, molten lead should be poured in his ears; if he recites the Veda his tongue should be cut; if a Shudra happens to be a witness in a dispute or case, his testimony can be believed only when he drinks poison and does not die, or is put in the fire and does not burn.

In the same book, Guruji writes *“Society was conceived of as the four-fold manifestation of the Almighty to be worshipped by all.”* By 'four-fold', he means the hated four varna system. Further, in the same chapter he writes, *“Castes were there in those ancient times too, continuing for thousands of years of our glorious national life They serve as a great bond of social cohesion.”*

This problem is all the more heightened because the hostility to dalits is not just a matter of history. Even in the short span of four years of rule at the Centre, the Modi government has presided over a slew of acts that continue to display the same anti-dalit stance in their hearts. In Una, Gujarat, four dalit youths were stripped, mercilessly beaten and videographed, pleading for their lives, by upper caste hoodlums sparking protests all over the country. They were ‘*accused*’ of going about their traditional vocation of flaying fallen cattle, a task reserved for outcastes in Hindu society. Since then there have been at least 30 attacks on those transporting cattle or involved in the lifting of cattle carcasses, in the name of the sacred cow. Dalits were viciously attacked in Koregaon Bhima, Maharashtra, by Hindu fanatics. Dalit students have committed suicide due to brutal discrimination coupled with deprivation – Rohith Vemula to K.Sai Deepthi. Atrocities registered with police have increased to over 40,000 cases in 2016, NCRB data shows. The Conviction rate is only 25%.

Repeatedly, RSS leaders display their anti-dalit heart by talking about reconsidering reservations. They keep on parroting their old line that unity of the Hindus is what is needed, not being able to reconcile themselves to the caste oppression that is dividing the Hindus. Recently, addressing a rally of *swavamsewaks* (members) of RSS at Meerut in Western UP on 25 February 2018, Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS supreme leader declared, “*The roadblock to being united is that we are fighting on the lines of caste. We have to say that all Hindus are brothers irrespective of their community.*” Bhagwat was speaking only a hundred odd kilometers away from Saharapur where in May 2017 a mob of upper caste Hindus had destroyed a Sant Ravidas temple (revered by the Dalit community), reportedly urinated on his idol and burned down dozens of Dalit homes in Shabbirpur village. Violence continued for nearly a month. Bhagwat had no words of sympathy for Shabbirpur dalits or any words of condemnation for the attackers.

There are many, many more examples of the open hostility that the RSS and its political fronts like the Jana Sangh and then the BJP have displayed over the years. It is part of their DNA. But this has created a problem for both the BJP and RSS. Without dalits neither can the RSS fulfill its dream of the Hindu Rashtra nor can the Modi-Shah duo achieve its goal of winning more and more elections, including the Lok Sabha elections coming up in 2019.

And so, the strange acrobatics of the BJP-RSS continues. A BJP leader in Tamil Nadu gets inspired by the Tripura incident of BJP supporters pulling down Lenin’s statue and appeals that the same thing should be done with Periyar’s statues in Tamil Nadu. Periyar was a rationalist leader who organized the non-Brahmins and struggled for their rights. There was such an outrage in Tamil Nadu at this statement that the whole BJP leadership from Modi and Shah down to state leaders went into defensive mode. They were afraid that their votes would be lost! This is what happens every time the RSS ideology peeps out of the ‘sabka saath, sabka vikas’ that Modi and Shah go about wearing.

There are some who think that dalits can be aroused and organized only on the basis of their ‘dalit’ identity and that this will help defeat the RSS-BJP. There can be nothing further from reality. As the people of this country know very well, many dalit leaders have come and gone, many have sided with the BJP too – but the lives of dalits have not changed. This is because the dalit leaders have no real agenda of emancipation, no programme for change. The only real way forward for dalits is to align with, and become an integral part of the larger workers and peasants unity that is fighting for a top to bottom change in the system and our society. It is only the working class movement that has the strength and ability to destroy caste oppression because it has the ability and potential to destroy the rest of the exploitative system that has India in its parasitical embrace at present.

WFTU Presidential Council meets in Tehran

A meeting of the Presidential Council of World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was held in Tehran, Iran on 26-27 February 2018. The Presidential Council has 48 members representing their trade unions in 42 countries in all the 5 continents. Over 50 members and invitees participated in the meeting. CITU was represented by Hemalata, president of CITU and member, WFTU Presidential Council and Swadesh Dev Roye, deputy general secretary of WFTU and national secretary of CITU.

Alireza Mahjoob, Member Parliament and secretary general of Iran Workers' House, which hosted the meeting welcomed the participants and said that the presence of the members of Presidential Council in Tehran strengthened their anti imperialist movement. The presidium in the inaugural session of the meeting comprised of representatives from Asia including Hemalata from CITU and Amarjeet Kaur from AITUC.

George Mavrikos, general secretary of WFTU extended solidarity and support to all the anti imperialist struggles across the globe, particularly Iran, Cuba, North Korea, and Venezuela etc. He condemned US attacks on Syria, Yemen and extended support to the people of Palestine, fighting heroically for their motherland. He said WFTU supported the right of people to decide freely and democratically, their future without imperialist pressures and interventions.

Formally placing the report of activities during the last year and proposals for action in 2018 Mavrikos said that 2017 was a year of numerous actions for WFTU, which saw its influence expand. 40 delegations from 180 countries visited the WFTU headquarters in the year. WFTU affiliates in India mobilised around 20 crore workers from different sectors in different campaigns and struggles all over the country. He also said that though there were many solidarity actions, internationalism and solidarity still remain inadequate, in the face of the onslaught of international finance dictated neoliberal policies on workers across the world. WFTU affiliates need to be in the frontline in extending solidarity. He also emphasised the need to strengthen WFTU financially to meet the present requirements. Mavrikos called for reaching a membership of 100 million by the 75th anniversary of WFTU in 2020. He also proposed that the year 2018 be observed as '*The Year of Trade Union Education and Training*' by the WFTU and the Action Day on 3rd October, the Foundation Day of WFTU, be observed, focussing on the demand of 'Social Security for All'. 37 speakers participated in the discussion on the report placed by the general secretary and endorsed the formulations and proposals for future action. Hemalata and Swadesh Dev Roye spoke on behalf of CITU.

The meeting adopted several resolutions unanimously – against the denial of visa to visit the US for a meeting of workers to the WFTU general secretary George Mavrikos, against imperialist threats and interventions and in solidarity with North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Syria



and Lebanon. The meeting also adopted resolutions in solidarity with Cuba and demanding a homeland for Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. It was decided that the next meeting of the extended Presidential Council will be held at WFTU headquarters Athens.

The meeting concluded on a confident note that WFTU will grow stronger with increased ideological consciousness of its cadre in the coming days.

Never Again – Guns and the Culture of Violence

R Arun Kumar

The rampant gun culture and shooting of innocents claimed the lives of 17 young school students and their teacher in Parkland, Florida, US on February 14. This is one of the deadliest high school massacres in the history of the US. Since 2012, there have been more than 1,600 mass shootings, killing more than 1,800 people and wounding more than 6,400. In fact, four of the five deadliest gun rampages were in the past year and a half, after Donald Trump assumed presidency. The shooting at the Parkland High School follows a series of mass shootings in late 2017, one at a church in Texas and the other at an outdoor country music concert in Las Vegas. According to CNN, “*The US makes up less than 5 per cent of the world’s population, but holds 31 per cent of global mass shooters*”. The US has nearly six times the gun homicide rate of Canada, more than seven times that of Sweden, and nearly 16 times that of Germany, according to United Nations data compiled by *The Guardian*.

These incidents have once again placed the debate of gun control forcefully before the public agenda, this time with the survivors of the school shooting leading the charge for the proponents. A major aspect missing from the entire debate is the link between the imperial policies pursued by the US and its impact on the prevalent ‘gun culture’.



The National Rifle Association (NRA) is the most vocal opponent of any government control over the right of individuals to own a gun. It identifies such a control as an infringement on the rights of the individuals guaranteed by the First Amendment of the US constitution. NRA is a very powerful organisation, funded in large part by small arms manufacturers. It has connections across the political divide in the US, but chiefly, its supporters are in the Republican Party. According to analysts, Trump received over \$30 million from the NRA during his presidential campaign. The NRA and other gun-rights organisations spent nearly \$55 million in the 2016 election – nearly 19 times the amount spent by groups promoting gun restrictions. The NRA has 5.5 times the budget revenues of the four top national gun control groups combined.

With such huge monetary resources and the accruing political access, NRA succeeded in blocking any restriction on curtailing gun ownership. Even Obama, who vowed to impose restrictions, could do nothing but shed tears after the tragic school shooting in 2012 (Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, in which a gunman killed 20 children and six adults). Now with Trump as the president – the first president since Ronald Reagan – who attended the NRA national convention, they are pretty confident about their ‘rights’ being protected, in spite of massacres that happen around the country.

The survivors of the Parkland shooting have taken upon themselves to challenge the NRA, established politicians and their views on gun ownership. *These student survivors are leading*

protests organised by thousands of people. Most were high school and college students locked arm-in-arm with the Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ activists who also have been victims of gun violence. The students behind the march have also formed a group, #NeverAgain. There are several reasons why the protests organised for gun control are getting noticed now.

One of the important factors is the age of the students. They are in their late teens, who responded immediately after evacuating the building by going before the media and expressing their ire before the entire world to show exactly what they were feeling. These students are also benefiting from a broader national environment in the US that is ripe for activism. They are joining the protests like the 'Me Too' movement that has led to the downfall of several Hollywood big wigs, prominent personalities, including politicians; protests against Trump's attempts to ban travelers from majority-Muslim countries and the protests against racial attacks – Black Lives Matter. These have given them the confidence to believe that they can affect a change. Being young, they have refused to buy the arguments of status quo made by some 'adults' who argue about the difficulties in getting a legislation passed. They are looking at things differently – with a belief in affecting a change and making the world a better place. This is visible in all their protests, conduct, speeches and whenever they are confronting the law makers in person.



As a result of their efforts, Trump was forced to order a Justice Department crackdown on bump stocks and propose tougher background checks on gun buyers. They've made the Education Secretary Betsy DeVos call for congressional hearings and sparked marches, protests and school walkouts around the country. Still, they have a long way to go. For the average American, the 'gun issue is one on which they have opinions, but it's not a top tier issue', as the connect between their bread and butter issues and gun control are not exposed.

It is because of this limitation that Trump, backed by the NRA money bags, is desperately trying to derail the issue by offering to "tackle the difficult issue of mental health." Beyond that, he said, he will consider a proposal to arm school teachers in an attempt to prevent mass shootings. These diversionary tactics are exposed by Michael Stone, a psychiatrist at Columbia University who maintains a database of mass shooters. According to his analysis, only 52 out of the 235 killers in the database, or about 22 per cent, had mental illnesses.

Interestingly, Trump had mentioned an important thing in his discussion with the public attorney of Florida: "The fact is that you are having movies come out, that are so violent, with the killing and everything else, that maybe that's another thing we need to discuss". Further, Kentucky governor Matt Bevin said "We have a cultural problem in America... You look at the 'culture of death' that is being celebrated....It's garbage. It's the same as pornography. They have desensitised people to the value of human life, to the dignity of women, to the dignity of human decency". While these observations are true to the point, there is an important lacuna in their arguments. Both of them, in spite of what they had stated above, also emphatically argue that "guns are not the problem".

It is pertinent to look into the role of State in perpetuating the ‘culture of death’ in American society. Researchers have accessed nearly 4,000 pages of documents from the Pentagon and the CIA through the Freedom of Information Act. According to these **official documents**, the US military intelligence agencies (including the NSA) have influenced over 1,800 movies and TV shows produced by the Hollywood.

These included blockbuster franchises of Marvel, DC, which includes movies such as *Transformers*, *Iron Man*, and *The Terminator*. On television, *Flight 93*, *Ice Road Truckers*, *Army Wives*, *24*, *Homeland*, *NCIS*, reality shows like *America Got Talent*, talk shows of *Oprah* and *Jay Leno*, documentaries by *PBS*, the *History Channel* and the *BBC* were all influenced by the US government’s department of defence.

It is now established unequivocally for the first time that the ‘security State’ has supported thousands of hours of entertainment. And then there are the growing number of video games, a number of which are engineered by or created for the military, which have accustomed players to interactive war play through military simulations and first-person shooter scenarios.

The reason for government’s involvement as Professor Henry Giroux points out: “Popular culture not only trades in violence as entertainment, but also it delivers violence to a society addicted to a pleasure principle steeped in graphic and extreme images of human suffering, mayhem and torture”. This combination of military with entertainment is labeled as ‘militainment’, whose purpose is to glorify war, military and earn support to America’s increasing military interventions and expanding military empire. It is also intended to silence people from questioning the increasing defence expenditures of the successive governments, even in the background of severe economic crisis and increasing income and wealth inequalities.

The US today, spends more money on war than the combined military budgets of China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Japan, France, Saudi Arabia, India, Germany, Italy and Brazil. It has over 800 military bases and troops stationed in 160 countries. It is intended to blind the people from realising the fact that the United States is the number one consumer, exporter and perpetrator of violence and violent weapons in the world.

The over-the-counter availability of lethal weapons act as catalysts in the background of military invasions, government sponsored glorification of violence and widening inequalities. To ensure that the incidents of mass shootings are not repeated, though necessary, it is not sufficient to enact more gun control measures, or increase the presence of armed police and surveillance.

They had unambiguously declared that ‘there cannot be two sides to doing everything in our power to ensure the lives and futures of children who are at risk of dying when they should be learning, playing, and growing’. And, the movement for change, ‘starts now, inspired by and led by the kids who are our hope for the future. Their young voices will be heard’.

In order to realise the ‘change’, they have announced their future course of action. Along with the Women’s marches, a national school walkout for 17 minutes (one minute for every person killed in Parkland) has been planned on March 14 and on March 24, a ‘March For Our Lives’, is planned in Washington. The students have already joined with the women’s, Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ groups. This alliance should be further broadened to include the trade unions and other organisations of the working people, to become a formidable force.

These voices need to be heard. They will surely be heard.

CITU Condemns Government Bid to Open Coal Sector for Commercial Mining by Private and Foreign Corporates

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions vehemently condemns the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) of the Narendra Modi government to open the coal mining sector for commercial mining by private and foreign corporates, that too without any restriction on pricing and end-use. So long the private sector was allowed to mine coal only for captive use in power, cement and steel industry and debarred from selling the coal in market.

As such the above retrograde decision by the Modi government is nothing but a total reversal of the four decade long policy of nationalized coal mining which contributed immensely to industrial development as well as expansion of the power generation capacity of the country's economy. Such opening up of the coal mining sector for unhindered exploitation by private and foreign corporates without any restriction on pricing and end-use will definitely pave the way for weakening and privatization of the public sector coal industry, both Coal India and Singareni Collieries Ltd, thereby affecting the coal production for both public and industrial consumption as a whole. Proliferation of private coal mining will also severely compromise the rights and safety of the workers deployed in private mining; further withdrawal of all restriction in pricing of coal and their end-use will increase the burden on the people many times. Such unrestricted private mining of the coal will also severely impair energy security of the country in a big way. This follow up move of the Modi government in amending the Coal Mine Nationalisation Act 1973 in 2016 through Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Bill 5 was vehemently opposed by the coal trade unions through industry wide strike action and also by Left MPs in Parliament.

The CITU denounces such a disastrous move by the Modi government which militates against the interest of the national economy and mass of the people. CITU calls upon the trade union movement and the coal unions in particular to build up strong opposition to such a gross anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national move throughout the country. CITU welcomes the immediate response of the All India Coal Workers' Federation(CITU) through organizing protest demonstrations within next few days in the coal mines throughout the country in both Coal India and Singareni Collieries Ltd.

“MAKE IN INDIA” or “DESTROY INDIA” !

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions denounces the Central Government's decision to close down 9 printing presses under Indian Railways and 12 printing presses under Central government. In a formal communication by the Executive Director Railway Stores (G) of the Ministry of Railways dated 07-02-2018, it has been notified that 3 ticket printing presses and 6 general printing presses under Indian Railways will be closed down within next six months. These presses are located at Kolkata, Kurseong, Kharagpur, Garden Reach, Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Ajmer, Mahalaxmi/WR and Tiruchirapally. These presses are supplying different divisions of Railways with railway tickets and other stationery of daily use for railway services. That means the requirement of these essential printed items for railways will continue to be there but the railway presses producing these items will be closed down to facilitate the business of chosen private players.

The same closure spree of the government at the centre is going on in respect of the functional printing presses directly under the central government. The concerned Minister of Urban Development has already announced closure of 12 central government printing presses and the closure process is being actively pursued thereby destroying the productive activities in all these presses.

It is clear, under the loudly touted slogan of “Make in India” by the government, what is being actively pursued is gradual destruction of indigenous manufacturing capabilities in different areas of the economy and quality and decent employment in several thousands is going to be eliminated just to ensure business and profit for big businesses at the cost of national exchequer.

CITU condemns such destructive and employment killing policy of the Government of India and calls upon the trade union movement and that in Railways and Central Government sector in particular to oppose and resist such nefarious and destructive designs.

CITU Condemns Repression on Farmers in Rajasthan

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) strongly condemns the repression unleashed by the BJP government in Rajasthan on the farmers demanding implementation of the promises made by it. The Vasundhara Raje government arrested hundreds of farmers and their leaders including Amra Ram, national vice president, and other veteran leaders of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) including Hetram Beniwal, Shyopat Meghwal and many others on 21st February and sent them to jail. CITU demands that all the arrested farmers and their leaders be released immediately and their genuine demands be fulfilled immediately, including the assurances given by the state government earlier. After the historic struggle of the farmers in the state under the leadership of AIKS last year, the BJP government in Rajasthan was compelled to agree to their demands including loan waiver, remunerative prices and public procurement, pension etc. However the government failed to implement these till today. Farmers from all over the state led by AIKS were marching to the state capital Jaipur to sit in an indefinite 'mahapadav' from 22nd February when the government resorted to the arrest in order to pre-empt the struggle.

CITU congratulates the thousands of farmers who reached Jaipur with exemplary determination to participate in the 'mahapadav' and extends its full solidarity to their struggle. CITU warns the Rajasthan state government that it cannot suppress the struggles of the toiling people through such repressive measures.

CITU calls upon the working class in the state as well as in the entire country to extend their support and solidarity to the struggle of the farmers in Rajasthan.

AIDWA Demands Immediate Suspension of JNU Professor

The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) has sent the following memorandum to the Vice Chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University demanding immediate suspension of Prof Atul Johri and instituting a free and fair inquiry on the complaint of sexual harassment against him. The memorandum is self-explanatory.

Subject: Immediate Suspension of Prof Atul Johri and Free and Fair Inquiry on the Complaint of Sexual Harassment of Girl Students in the School of Life Sciences

Dear Professor Kumar,

The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) expresses deep anguish at reports of sexual harassment by Professor Atul Johri, a senior professor at the School of Life Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University. The harassment of girl students in JNU is highly condemnable and shameful. We understand that seven girl students from his laboratory have registered a police complaint against Prof Johri. We note with concern that since Professor Johri still occupies some important administrative positions (like wardenship of Chandra bhaga hostel) within the university, he will try to suppress the case and discredit the students who have had the courage to complain. He is also likely to use his administrative clout to influence any probe into these charges. Pressure is already being exerted on the girls to withdraw the complaint.

The very fact that no action has yet been taken against him on the basis of the police complaint, shows that the University has not taken this issue seriously. This gives an impression of the administration trying to defend a criminal act.

Given the serious nature of the allegations, the JNU administration must act immediately to suspend Prof Johri and bar him from supervising any students till the investigation is completed. We also urge you to ensure that protection is accorded to the students who have complained, and all other students and teachers who may be questioned in this case.

A Tribute to Stephen Hawking

"I believe the simplest explanation is, there is no God. No one created the universe and no one directs our fate. This leads me to a profound realization that there probably is no heaven and no afterlife either. We have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe and for that, I am extremely grateful." - Stephen Hawking.

Scientist Stephen Hawking, known for his groundbreaking work with black holes and relativity, and the author of several popular science books including 'A Brief History of Time', died on March 14 at the age of 76. His demise is a great loss to us, especially at a time when scientific temperament, reasoning and proof as the basis of acceptance of knowledge, are under threat. A time when we are asked to believe that Ganesh's elephant-head means existence of plastic-surgery in India in pre-historic times!

Stephen Hawking was born on January 8, 1942, exactly three hundred years after Galileo's death. He was a British scientist, professor and author who performed ground breaking work in physics and cosmology, and whose books helped to make science accessible to everyone.

In 1988 Hawking catapulted to international prominence with the publication of *A Brief History of Time*. The short, informative book became an account of cosmology for the masses and offered an overview of space and time, the existence of God and the future. The work was an instant success, sold millions of copies worldwide and has been translated into more than 40 languages.

In September 2010, Hawking spoke against the idea that God could have created the universe in his book *The Grand Design*. Hawking had previously argued that belief in a creator could be compatible with modern scientific theories. In this work, however, he concluded that the Big Bang was the inevitable consequence of the laws of physics and nothing more. *"Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing,"* Hawking said. *"Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist."* Within his new work, Hawking set out to challenge Sir Isaac Newton's belief that the universe had to have been designed by God, simply because it could not have been born from chaos. *"It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going,"* Hawking said.

At the age of 21, while studying cosmology at the University of Cambridge, Stephen Hawking was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease). In a very simple sense, the nerves that controlled his muscles were shutting down. At the time, doctors gave him two and a half years to live.

Hawking first noticed problems with his physical health while at Oxford but he did not look into the problem until 1963, during his first year at Cambridge. For the most part, Hawking had kept these symptoms to himself. Finally, when Hawking saw the doctors he was diagnosed with the early stages of ALS.

It was devastating news for him and his family, but a few events prevented him from becoming completely despondent. While Hawking was still in the hospital he shared a room with a boy suffering from leukemia. Relative to what his roommate was going through, Hawking later reflected, his situation seemed more tolerable.

In a way, Hawking's disease helped turn him into the noted scientist he became. Before the diagnosis, Hawking hadn't always focussed on his studies. *"Before my condition was diagnosed, I had been very bored with life,"* he said. *"There had not seemed to be anything worth doing."* With the sudden realization that he might not even live long enough to earn his PhD, Hawking poured himself into his work and research.

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