

# The Voice of the Working Woman





## **The Voice of the Working Woman**

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In the background of our struggles against the government's anti worker and anti farmer policies it has been decided to observe Vimal Ranadive Memorial Day this year focussing on the issue of 'Recognition of Women's Work as Workers and Farmers'.

CITU has consistently taken up campaigns and struggles focusing on the issue of increasing shift of women's work from paid to unpaid work, increasing their burden and at the same time decreasing women's work participation in our country. We have to not only campaign, but also create a situation to develop struggles on the issues of unpaid work, unequal wages, precarity of women's jobs, women's unemployment and the impact of labour codes on women's working conditions.

Vimal Ranadive, who was a national secretary of CITU and the founder convenor of AICCWW (CITU) made pioneering efforts to increase the role of working women in the trade union movement including their presence in decision making bodies. Her 106th birthday on 10th April this year should be utilised to focus on these issues.

Plan for the observance of this day through lectures, seminars, meetings, discussions, debates, elocution contests, cultural programmes and any other activities, focussing on the above mentioned issues. CITU state committees/ industrial federations must plan the observance of the day involving the concerned women's subcommittees and ensure the maximum possible participation of both men and women.



# **EDITORIAL**

## **Workers & Peasants March United**

The month of March has been a month of resistance and struggle by the workers, farmers and other sections of the toiling masses. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), spearheading the farmers' protests against the three Farm Acts gave the call to observe 6th March, the 100th day of protests at Delhi borders. Lakhs of farmers participated in the demonstrations across the country; thousands blocked the KMP highway at all Delhi borders.

Thousands of working women participated in the demonstrations and rallies on International Women's Day on 8th March, responding to the call of CITU demanding recognition of their work as workers and peasants, jobs and equal wages etc. SKM too gave the call to observe 8th March. Thousands of women farmers reached Delhi borders; they handled the stages and made speeches about the huge role of women in agriculture and the issues of women farmers.

Just a week later, the bank employees and officers went on a total two days' strike on 15-16 March against privatisation of two banks and the retrograde reforms in the banking sector. The call for the strike was given by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU). The call received huge support and solidarity from all other sections of employees, workers and common people. The employees and officers of the Regional Rural Banks also joined the strike. BSNL employees, Nabard employees, RBI employees and workers from many other sectors participated in the demonstrations across the country.

As the strike of bank employees ended, the employees of the public sector general insurance companies struck work on 17th March at the call of their Joint Front of Unions against privatisation and hike in FDI in the insurance sector.

Next day, 18th March was the turn of the LIC employees who were on a strike against the Initial Public Offer (IPO). The National Federation of Insurance Field Workers of India organised a two hour walk out strike in support of the strike by LIC employees.

The SKM decided to observe 23rd March, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. The 'Shaheed Yagdar Kisan Mazdoor Padayatras' from Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh will converge at the Delhi borders on 23rd March after marching for hundreds of kilometres for 4-5 days. Farmers, workers and other sections of people are marching around 400 kms in a padayatra in Karnataka. The SKM gave the call for Bharat Bandh on 26th March, which marks four months of the protests at Delhi borders that started on 26th November, the day when the working class went on a country wide general strike. Holi will be observed across the country by burning the three Farm Acts and the four Labour Codes.

What is highly significant is the increasing support and solidarity of the workers and farmers to each others' struggles. The working class has extended full support to all the protest calls of the farmers. Thousands of workers have been physically participating in all the programmes called by the SKM. The joint trade union platform has extended its full support to the call of Bharat Bandh on 26th March. Similarly the SKM has extended support to the strike of the bank and insurance employees. Farmers have participated in the demonstrations on the occasion of bank and insurance strike.

This shows the growing awareness that the policies of so called 'reforms' of the BJP government are meant to attack the basic rights and livelihoods of the workers, farmers and all sections of toiling people for the benefit of the big corporates, domestic and foreign; that these have to be fought unitedly

Such united struggles have been further intensified and strengthened at all levels. The pro corporate policies have to be defeated and changed to bring any improvement in the lives of our toiling masses.

# Self Reliance – By Auctioning PSUs to Foreign Companies?!

Self reliance was the aspiration of our Independence struggle. The public sector was established and expanded to meet this aspiration of our people. The Modi led BJP government has changed the meaning of 'self reliance'. It's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' is meant to make our country totally dependent on foreign companies and foreign countries.

The government has decided to completely liberalise the entry of foreign companies for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as well as Foreign Institutional Investment (FII). Indian companies will be allowed to freely list themselves in foreign jurisdiction thus permitting unhindered intervention of foreign capital including speculative capital in almost all sectors of our economy. This is bound to promote aggressive foreign take over and control of crucial sectors of our economy as well as flight of domestic capital seeking speculative profits.

This is accompanied by wholesale privatisation embracing almost the entire public sector industrial and services network, eroding whatever self reliance has been attained during the over seven decades after independence. The BJP government made it clear that 'the government has no business to do business' and in the budget 2021-22 announced total privatisation drive; only one or maximum four PSUs will be allowed in each strategic sector in the future, to be notified by the government. No public sector undertaking will be spared from such come what may and at any cost. This will be done through global tenders, thus, further liberalising entry of foreign monopolies.

We cite here certain crucial sectors to show the reality of BJP's brand of 'self reliance'.



**DEFENCE PRODUCTION** is being privatised through corporatisation, PPP is being forced on the Ordnance Factory network; 74% FDI is allowed through automatic route. This will only lead to more dependence on

foreign defence equipment companies, not self reliance; and threaten our security preparedness. As seen in the Rafale aircraft deal, technology transfer provision is done away with. Similar deals with big foreign companies are in the pipeline for naval frigates, submarines, missiles etc. The ultimate objective is to make our profit making defence sector PSUs, shipyards etc redundant or convert them into junior partners of the foreign companies and make our country dependent on imperialist powers. 41 Ordnance factories network along with Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) will finally be pushed towards privatisation or more probably to redundancy increasing our import-dependence to the advantage of multinational armament giant companies.



The BJP government is attempting multiple routes to privatise the **COAL & OTHER MINERALS SECTOR**. Commercial mining of coal, by private companies including foreign companies, is allowed through legislative

changes and ordinances. The binding condition of captive mining for use by private companies has been done away with. Despite importing huge amounts of coal, restrictions on export of coal is going to be waived as a natural consequence. Coal is an essential input for industry, including electricity generation, steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers etc. Complete deregulation of exploration and trading of coal will starve domestic industries particularly crucial sectors like electricity, of this essential input. This will adversely impact domestic industrial production and economic self reliance.



Systematic attempts are being made to destroy almost all public sector undertakings in the most crucial **PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR**, which have played a commendable role in producing affordable medicines for the common people in our country.



**ELECTRICITY**, most vital for industrial production as well as public consumption is being pushed for privatisation by the BJP government led by Modi. The Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 makes it compulsory for state governments to follow this disastrous route. Regulatory power is being centralised; subsidies for domestic consumers and agriculture will be phased out increasing the burden of electricity charges. In spite of the promise to the Kisan leaders that they will withhold the bill, the government has listed the Electricity Amendment Bill 2021 in this parliament session once again proving their deceit.



It is the **PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS & INSURANCE COMPANIES** that have considerably, though not fully, protected our country from the shocks of the global financial meltdown of 2008. These are now being sabotaged by the Modi government. The BJP government has legalised deliberate loan defaults, mostly by major corporates, through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code Act. The public sector banks are forced, de facto, to forego 60%-70% of the total loan amount. This, in turn, has adversely impacted the much needed industrial credit particularly to the MSMEs and in turn the economic health of the country. Dubiously, the government is putting forward this as an excuse to privatise the public sector banks. The most successful Life Insurance Corporation of India is being forced to disinvest.



**INDIAN RAILWAYS**, the pride of India, serving the common people is being privatised through corporatisation of production units, handing over railway stations to corporates, allowing private passenger and freight trains etc. To facilitate this destructive process, the railway production units are being forced not to produce to their capacity while essential equipment including coaches and engines are being imported. Even the railway operation in certain routes is being planned to be handed over to foreign operators.



In the **AVIATION SECTOR**, not only Air India, but profit making airports are also being privatised. Already several of them have been handed over to the government's favourite cronies. On the other hand the domestic airspace will be more liberally allowed for foreign flying companies virtually without any restriction.



**SPACE RESEARCH & ATOMIC ENERGY** sectors will be privatised through PPP route. National assets and intellectual property developed through public investments and hard work of our scientists are being handed over to private corporates for money-making purposes.



The Government is endangering the energy security of our country, and not even sparing the public sector **OIL COMPANIES**, which are profitable and contributing to the exchequer. The government's decision to privatise Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) will further endanger the energy security of our country.

This betrayal and disservice to the people and the nation is, in the dictionary of the BJP, 'self reliance'! The time chosen by the government for fast tracking such fraud is the lockdown period, when the people and the workers are immobilised in the name of containing Covid-19!

This conspiracy on the nation cannot be tolerated by the masses, which build the nation and protect it. These nefarious games have to be defeated and they will be defeated by the united struggles of the working class. It is possible to defeat this destructive game-plan by all out united intervention by the working class with the active support of all toiling people.

*The 15 March "Anti Privatisation, Anti Corporatisation Day" called by the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions, independent federations and associations received massive response from the working class and peasantry as well as common people. We are prepared to defy and resist if the government remains obstinate.*

# **Country-Wide Bank Strike on March 15-16**

**CP Krishnan**

Till the year 1969, all the banks except State Bank of India and its subsidiaries were in the private hands. During this period more than 500 private banks collapsed due to bankruptcy with the result the people lost their considerable portion of their money deposited in these banks!

The remaining banks were in the hands of a few corporates who used the banks' funds for the improvement to their own business. These banks did nothing either to improve the economy of the nation or to improve the standard of living of the common people. That is why 14 major private banks were nationalised. The banking system was converted to 'mass banking' instead of 'class banking'. Public Sector Banks (PSBs) started serving national priorities like agriculture, MSMEs, employment generation, financial inclusion etc.

Even after 1969, in the last 51 years, 38 private banks became bankrupt. Public Sector Banks only saved the majority of these banks and their depositors' money by taking them over. But for that, the depositors of these banks would have suffered heavily. In early 1990s, with the advent of neo-liberal policies, 10 new generation private banks were opened with all pompous. But within a short period four private banks including Global Trust Bank and Times Bank became bankrupt.

## **PRIVATISATION OF PSBS**

When this is the scenario, the finance minister has made an announcement in the central budget presented this year that two Public Sector Banks besides IDBI bank would be privatised. Earlier in May 2020, as a part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat plan, the finance minister clearly spelt out that this government wants to dispense with all the Public Sector Undertakings in toto except a few in strategic sectors. As finance is declared as one of the strategic sectors, they want to leave one or two banks or at the maximum four banks in the public sector. The remaining eight PSBs will be either merged or handed

over to private sector. This time, unlike in the past, the chosen two banks and IDBI would be strategically sold to corporates with government shareholding reduced to zero as reported in the media quoting the PMO.

## **LICENCE TO CORPORATE INDUSTRIAL HOUSES TO OPEN BANKS**

Earlier, as a prelude to this move of privatisation of the PSBs, a policy announcement was made by RBI's Internal Working Group (IWG) on November, 20, 2020 to allow corporate industrial houses to open banks. The five-member committee of IWG consulted 10 experts out of which four experts are the former deputy governors of RBI and the remaining six experts are the heads of the private banks and other private firms. Nine out of 10 experts clearly opined otherwise and despite that, the IWG has come out with the recommendation that corporate industrial houses can be allowed to open banks.

Even in USA which is often cited as example by the ruling class of our country, the industry and commerce are not mixed and corporate industrial houses are not permitted to open banks. But, this government, unmindful of the disastrous consequences to our economy due to this policy change, is bent upon giving licence to the corporate industrial houses to open banks and then hand over the PSBs to them.

The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the banking industry is allowed upto 74 per cent as of now. The share of the foreign institutions in many of the new generation private banks is more than 51 per cent.

## **TOP LEVEL CORRUPTION**

There is rampant top-level corruption in the private banks and the Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFC) for quite some years. Take the case of private players like Yes Bank, ICICI Bank, Lakshmi Vilas Bank or that of private NBFCs like Dewan Housing Finance Limited (DHFL), Infrastructure Leasing and Financial

Services (IL&FS). The ex-head of ICICI Bank, Chanda Kochar is charged with misusing her position in the bank while sanctioning loans to Videocon group for a quid-pro-quo corruption deal through her husband Deepak Kochar. The co-founder of Yes bank, Rana Kapoor is charged taking bribes through shell companies promoted by his wife and daughters for the loans sanctioned in Yes bank which eventually became NPAs. Wadhwan brothers of DHFL are charged with 2,60,000 fictitious housing loans sanctioned between the years 2007 and 2019 amassing approximately Rs.17,400 crores through a non-existent Bandra branch and diverting them to their accounts. These are few of the examples and many more such frauds are yet to see the limelight. The government is planning to hand over PSBs to such corrupt people who indulge in fraudulent activities.



#### **UNPARALLELED SERVICE OF THE PSBs**

The PSBs and Regional Rural Banks (RRB) have opened 40.63 crore out of total 41.88 crore Prime Minister Jan Dhan Yojana Accounts for the poor people and the private banks hardly opened only 1.25 crore accounts. The government banks are outstanding institutions for rendering exemplary services to the ordinary people through agriculture loans, small, medium and micro-finance loans, education loans, women self-help group loans etc., without any guarantee or security. This plays a vital role in improving the standard of living among these vast sections of people. The private banks can in no way match the performance of the PSBs in this regard. While the Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) arising out of large borrowers constitute around 90 per cent of the total NPAs, it is less than two per cent in the case of these above categorised priority sector loans. Even today with so much expansion of PSBs and with so many co-operative and RRB branches in rural areas, around 40 per cent of the rural population depends on usurious money-lenders and landlords for their credit needs.

#### **THE LOOTERS WANT TO TAKE OVER PSBs**

In May 2016 the BJP government enacted IBC (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code) with a tall claim of recovering NPAs on account of large borrowers expeditiously and efficiently. In May 2020, the finance minister herself gave a graphic picture about the performance of this Act for four years. According to the statistics given by the government, in all 221 cases have been resolved amounting to Rs 4.13 lakh crores NPAs out of which Rs1.84 lakh crores (44 per cent) are only recoverable and the remaining Rs 2.29 lakh crores (56 per cent) have been written off. This amount of 1.84 lakh crores is only recoverable and not fully recovered. This is the efficacy of this law and it clearly manifests the lack of political

will on the part of the government to stringently recover these corporate NPAs. The infuriating and paradoxical part is that the inefficient corporates who benefit from these bank write-offs (including those from PSBs as well) are on the forefront to take over the PSBs due to the reckless policies of the present BJP government.

#### **TWO DAYS' COUNTRY-WIDE STRIKE AND APPEAL FOR SUPPORT**

This is precisely why UFBU (United Forum of Bank Unions) consisting five unions and four officers associations representing 10 lakh bank employees and officers has given a clarion call for country-wide strike on March 15-16, 2021 demanding strengthening of the public sector banks, opposing their privatization and the anti-people banking sector reforms. In the year 2000, during the Vajpayee govt., a bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha to reduce the government holding in the PSBs to 33 per cent with intent to privatise PSBs. That sinister move was defeated through incessant struggles of the bank employees actively joined by the democratic forces and widely supported by the general public. This time as well the bank employees' movement is resolved to confidently fight this privatisation move, that they believe can very well be pushed back with the support of the common people.



# Why is India Selling its PSUs? - LIC Case Study

## Why is India selling its public sector undertakings (PSUs)?

Is it because they are inherently inefficient?

Is it because they are no longer required?

# No!

PSUs are being sold to:

- Paper over economic incompetence
- Recover mismanaged public money
- Keep the government's cronies happy
- Reduce the power of organised labour

## How are PSUs being sabotaged by the government?

### The case of LIC:

LIC, or the Life Insurance Corporation of India, is a unique PSU because it is not technically majorly owned by the government.

LIC gives a 5% dividend to the government and all the rest of the profit to policyholders.

The government guarantees the security of all LIC policies.

## How has LIC been used by successive governments?

Some examples of LIC being used to bail out failing companies:

### 2010

The government sold some of its shares in NMDC (previously known as the National Mineral Development Corporation) and NTPC (previously known as the National Thermal Power Corporation Limited). LIC was made to buy about 64% of NMDC shares up for sale and almost 50% of NTPC shares up for sale. Thus this sale of government shares, called divestment, did not bring that much money from the private sector into government coffers.

### 2012

The government wanted to raise Rs. 13,000 crore by selling some of its shares in Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC). It was able to raise only Rs. 2,000 crore from private investors. LIC was made to fill the gap again.

The story was repeated from **2013–2018** with divestment in SAIL, BHEL, Coal India and HAL.

### 2019

LIC was made to buy a 51% stake in IDBI Bank without getting an adequate say in management. IDBI had 28% bad loans. LIC was saddled with a bad asset to overcome the mismanagement in IDBI and the financial sector in general.

## LIC is an example of a well-performing PSU which is used to rescue other inefficient PSUs.

LIC is often made to buy stake in failing PSUs. This saddles LIC with bad debt and restricts its ability to compete with private insurers. With this maneuver LIC loses efficiency because it is made to buy these stakes.

The other PSUs have lost efficiency because of corruption and disinterest, not because of their public ownership.

## What is lacking is political will!

It is upon the people of India to pressure the government into running PSUs in the people's interests and to not sell them at low prices to their friends.

Demand that PSUs should be run in the public interest!

Demand that PSUs should not be sabotaged in order to sell them!

Resist lies about the fate of PSUs!



## ***Privatisation of Public Sector General Insurance Company is an Attack on the Economic Sovereignty of the Country***

Since Independence India decided to keep many industries public so that the people would own these industries and have a say in its functioning. While the private sector is driven only for profit, the public sector works for a variety of reasons serving numerous different needs of the people. It provides a diverse range of intermediate products required in industries from farming to machinery to even space.

When it comes to LIC, it was set up to provide security to people for the long term using small savings of individuals. In 1956 LIC was started with a meager 5 crore rupees provided by the State. From this 5 crore foundational capital, LIC has become an enterprise which holds the Life Funds of nearly 32 lakh crore Indians. Not only that, more than 55 lakh crore rupees have been invested by LIC over the years - public investment in crops, in roads, in sewage and so on. These are immeasurable contributions that need to be appreciated w.r.t. the role a public sector enterprise plays in the economy.

Lastly, there is a gross misconception that the private sector generates a lot of employment in the country. LIC is a firm which employs 11 lakh people across the country. LIC assures not just employment, but social security, permanent wages and other benefits to its workers. Clearly public sector enterprises fulfill diverse roles in the economy and are quite important to the well being of the country. Then what are the arguments in favour of privatisation and the LIC IPO?

First, the government states that the IPO will help them raise capital. However, LIC is already a capital making enterprise. It is public sector enterprises that the private sector relies on to create value in the economy. For example, 80% of Reliance's capital consists of loans from government banks. In other words, public enterprises like LIC make it possible for private firms like Reliance to exist in the first place. What can be a greater proof of capital-making than this? The argument that LIC needs to raise capital from the market absolutely falls flat.

Second, the State says that LIC requires corporate governance. Let us take a look at corporate governance.

What happened to Axis Bank? Or PMC? Or Enron? Or Lehman Brothers? There is a long list of eminent private enterprises that have failed. In comparison, not only is LIC a thriving undertaking, it makes its data and accounts available in the parliament on a yearly basis. The argument for corporate governance also falls flat.

Third, is the argument around people's participation. India's stock market has around 3 crore investors. Do these 3 crore investors constitute the nation? In comparison, LIC distributes its profits to 42 crore of its investors in this country. How will an IPO then increase people's participation? It will in fact decrease it by encouraging the firm to value shareholders over its investors. Further, on the subject of dividends, 5% of LIC's profit also given to the Indian government. Over its period of existence LIC has turned over 26 thousand crore rupees to the government in return for the 5 crore rupees foundational capital it received in 1956.

All three arguments given by the finance minister fail upon scrutiny. What is the real motive behind this push to privatise LIC?

20 years ago, the insurance sector was opened up to private firms. At that point the media heralded the end of LIC, likening it to a 'white elephant', which would not survive against private competition. However even today 75% of the market share belongs to LIC, which is a big source of annoyance to the private players. The government is helping them remove this thorn on their side, by simply handing over LIC to them.

The move to privatise LIC and public sector banks has little to do with problems within the public sector. The public sector is important for our economy and for the people — it is in fact, a success due to the efforts of the people. Specifically when it comes to LIC, privatisation will neither improve its efficiency, nor the participation of people, nor change its capital earning capabilities. The push for privatisation is then revealed to simply be a blatant attempt to hand over our economy to capitalists. We appeal the working class to support the struggle trade unions and LIC employees, which is very important for the economic sovereignty, and interests of the weaker sections of Indian society.

# ***The Kisan Movement: A Mass Movement Building the Unity of the Working Class & Peasantry against the Common Enemy***

***Vikram Singh***

*"Modi and his party have taken billions of rupees as funds from Big Corporates & are committed to work for them, which is compelling the government to not resolve the issue raised by the struggling farmers."*

These were the words of Jia Lal an ex-army person, presently a farmer who was responding to a question on why the Modi government is not taking back the three laws despite growing opposition and visible political damages to the BJP. This is the impact of the ongoing historical peasant movement in exposing the nexus of the ruling party and corporates. Through their own struggles people have understood the underlying mechanisms through which the ruling class of India led by 'Big Corporates' (in collaboration with transnational corporates) are controlling policy decisions and taking forward the neoliberal agenda in all sectors. The ruling class has a hold on both leading political parties of India but at the present juncture of economic crises, the communal BJP is more suitable to work in a dictatorial manner against all democratic and constitutional practices.

Presently we are witnessing the typical style of functioning of a fascistic party, against the will and needs of common people. But the people of the country under the leadership of farmers and workers are in historical struggle against the policies of neoliberalism, against the ruling BJP and its communal politics and the corporates.

The present upsurge is not only result of the farmers anger against farm laws but is a cumulative effect of the persistence agrarian distress prevailing in India which has forced lakhs of farmers to commit suicide and dispossessed millions of their

land. Agriculture is not a profitable affair in India - farmers are finding it difficult to recover the costs of production, let alone make profits. It should be acknowledged that in the time of the economic slowdown during the pandemic and the unplanned lockdown, it is the agrarian sector which saved Indian economy to some extent. In this situation strong support from the Government is required to revive the agrarian economy in India. But the present laws don't offer anything that Indian agriculture actually needs. Therefore, the farmers who were already under distress have sensed the impending insecurity and uncertainty that awaits them in the future, and have been forced to take to the streets. These farm laws are the immediate reason which ignited the prevailing anger.

Their unprecedented unity is the result of a long process of issue based struggles. This has two parts; unity of more than 500 farmers organisations and unity of peasant and workers organisations. The seeds of this present unity of farmers organisations were sown in the year 2014, when the Central Government promulgated The Land Acquisition Ordinance on December 31st. Understanding the gravity of this dangerous move the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) took an initiative of consulting with other Left and Democratic peasant, agriculture workers and social organisations and succeeded in developing wider unity and building resistance against the NDA Government. A united platform in the name of **Bhoomi Adhikaar Andolan** (Movement for Land Rights) was formed in the process in which more than 300 organisations are members. This was an important achievement and through these efforts they developed a broad based unity at a national level.



**SIKAR UPRISING, 2017**



**KISAN LONG MARCH, 2018**



**SAMYUKTA KISAN MORCHA, 2020**

Based on this experience a platform was formed in 2017 after the **Mandsaur firing** in Madhya Pradesh where five farmers were killed. AIKS is an important part of this platform which is joined by more than 250 farmers' organisations with a common agenda and demand to implement the Swaminathan Commission recommendations, seeking MSP prices at  $C2+50\%$ . A series of struggles were organised in the last two years, but 2 significant struggles really set the agenda and brought the farmers' issue on to the mainstream. These were the **Sikar Uprising** and the **Farmers' Long March** from Nasik to Mumbai in the year 2017 and 2018 respectively; both led by AIKS. These struggles shared similar characteristics with the present movement i.e. a mass-led, peaceful protests that were successful in gathering huge public support.

After the introduction of the three farm ordinances in June 2020 protests erupted all over India, and on October 27, 2020 a joint meeting was convened which was attended by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and farmers' organisations of Punjab. The Delhi Chalo call of November 26th and 27th 2020 was given and was joined by other organisations and a much broader national platform i.e. the 'Samyukt Kisan Morcha' (SKM) was formed to lead this historical struggle.

The ongoing struggle against the three Farm Laws and Electricity Amendment Bill has become a historical mass movement. Apart from the other sections of the society, the working class is playing a very important role in this struggle. Earlier as well there were joint struggles where workers and farmers came together on common issues but the call on November 26th and 27th has initiated another chapter in this history. On 26th November workers of the country were on a General Strike, while farmers observed rural strikes throughout India and the farmers in Northern India marched on to Delhi. On 27th November, workers also marched with them. Agricultural workers in rural India are part of this struggle from the very beginning as the impact of the laws affects them adversely as well. This is the first layer of worker peasant unity.



***This is not merely a united struggle but a process which is raising the consciousness of the working class of the country: helping them understand that their present conditions, miseries and uncertainties are a direct result of the neoliberal economic policies blindly peddled by the Central Government, which is on a crusade of privatisation and corporatisation of the nation's wealth.***

Workers unions of India have also forged a united platform against the onslaught on labour rights and are in continuous struggle for the last few years. India has seen historical united strikes of workers. This unprecedented unity and mass mobilization against the policies of the Central Government has even forced the workers' union of the ruling party to speak and join the struggle at times, going against their political compulsions. One need not explain their old habit of betrayal due to their inherent commitment to the interests of the ruling class.

Workers are not considering this unity merely as a support to the farmers, but as a part of their own struggles against the policies of the government. All the mobilizations in the past 3-4 months have seen this unity growing. While farmers are fighting against the farm laws which will hold them at the mercy of the brutal market laws of precarity and uncertainty; workers are also fighting against the codification and dilution of labour laws which puts them in the same situation. This unity is becoming much stronger because both sections are united against a single issue - the pro-corporate policies of the Central Government. This unity is not just 'on paper' but can also be visibly seen and felt on the ground. Various workers' groups are sitting shoulder to shoulder with farmers at the protest sites.

This unity is also the result of the deliberate efforts of the workers' unions, agricultural workers' and farmers' organisations, with a leading role played by the CITU, AIKS and AIAWU. Remember the active support of the peasants and agricultural workers to All India Strikes of Trade Unions when organised workers were striking in towns, factories and workplaces; and farmers and agricultural workers were protesting on their issues in rural areas, so that the impact of the united actions could be felt

throughout the country. On the other hand, workers' unions have also included issues of the agricultural workers and farmers including NREGA, food and income security, privatization of education and health services etc in their demand charter. One of the milestones of this process was the All India Worker-Peasant Rally in Delhi organised by CITU, AIKS and AIAWU which was attended by more than 15 lakh farmers, agricultural workers and workers.

All Central Trade Unions and Federations have extended their support to the ongoing Kisan struggle and the working class has participated in all the key stages of this struggle in different parts of the country. A broad picture of a worker-peasant unity is emerging, which will further strengthen the democratic resistance in the future. Both platforms representing farmers and workers i.e. the Samyukt Kisan Morcha and the Central Trade unions and Federations; are having joint meetings to evolve strategy to intensify the movement.

The next and higher level of actions is planned on March 26 as an All India Strike. On this day a united participation will be witnessed in the country when farmers and workers will be raising slogans against the three farm laws, the labour codes and the electricity bill. This is not merely a united struggle but a process which is raising the consciousness of the working class of the country: helping them understand that their present conditions, miseries and uncertainties are a direct result of the neoliberal economic policies blindly peddled by the Central Government, which is on a crusade of privatisation and corporatisation of the nation's wealth. This is also helping them identify their common enemies and building their resolve to bring about a qualitative change in the country through larger united struggles.



**KERALA**

## ***For Recognition and Remuneration: AICCWW (CITU) Observes International Women's Day***

Hundreds of women workers held demonstrations, rallies, meetings, hall meetings, seminars, webinars etc demanding 'recognition and remuneration for women's work as workers and farmers' at the call of All India Coordination Committee of Working Women, AICCWW( CITU) on International Women's Day, 8 March this year.

The call was given in continuation of the historic Jaibharo on the occasion of International Women's Day last year and also in the context of the ongoing struggles of the working class and peasantry in our country and the role of women in it. The major demand was related to the contribution of women's labour in the country's economy. The recent trend of decreasing work participation of women shows the shifting of women's work from paid to unpaid in different ways. It has been the continuous struggle

by the government service sector employees who are highly exploited and underpaid and categorised as "scheme workers' and like the anganwadi, ASHA, Mid-day Meal workers, Para teachers etc, which has brought this issue much into the mainstream discourse and has lead to the recommendation of the Indian Labour Conference for the recognition of them as workers with minimum wages and pension. The struggle by the scheme workers have also highlighted the demands of institutionalisation of the basic services of nutrition, health, education, childcare and elderly care which will reduce the unpaid work of women in our country.

At a time when the unpaid care work done by Indian women and girls reached an alarming level of 19 trillion rupees a year (Oxfam Time to Care Report 2020), the women' work participation rate is around 20%, the government is hell bent on privatising PSEs and public utilities and services. The fight against the pandemic and the lockdown and resultant disasters of poverty and hunger depended much on the selfless work of the frontline workers, especially the women scheme workers and health workers. But the government is not ready to recognise their work and pay them, on the contrary is closing down these services itself.



**In this situation of increasing unemployment, low and unequal wages, poverty, increasing violence and distress, AICCWW (CITU) organised district/ local level rallies, demonstrations/protests etc on the following demands**

1. Recognise women's work as workers and farmers; include women's unpaid and underpaid work in the GDP. Take specific measures to reduce women's unpaid work such as provisions for adequate water to each household, subsidized cooking gas, arrangement for childcare (crèches) and elderly care etc.
2. Regularise scheme workers as workers/ employees; Pay Minimum wages and social security as per the recommendations of 45th ILC, immediately.
3. Ensure equal wages for equal work for women in all sectors.
4. Legal measures to promulgate amendments in all laws for joint pattas including under Forest Rights Act to ensure women's land rights. Special priority to single women headed households including widows, abandoned and deserted women. Women farmers must be included in all government schemes for farmers.
5. Strict implementation of POSH Act in all work places.
6. Take effective measures to prevent violence against women; implement Justice Verma Committee recommendations.
7. Enact Act to provide 33% reservation for women in all legislative bodies at the earliest.
8. Withdraw the Labour Codes, Farm Acts and Electricity Amendment Bill.
9. Stop Privatisation of PSEs and Services.
10. Ensure public health services to all.
11. Arrest Price Rise. Withdraw the increase in the prices of Cooking gas and other petroleum products. Ensure free ration including all essential items to all and income support of Rs.7500 per month to all non taxpaying families
12. Create more job opportunities for women. Special schemes for income support to all those who lost jobs
13. Ensure 200 days work in MNREGA @Rs. 600 per day. Extend it to urban areas as well.







The struggles of the working class and the farmers have been witnessing massive participation of women these days. There was a tremendous response to the call by CITU unions and committees at various levels. This year the call was observed by more organised sector unions than last year. In many states, it was observed jointly with the women's organisations including AIDWA and fraternal trade unions.

In AP, the program was observed in many districts, hall meetings, seminars etc were organised. The State CCWW has decided to organise month long programmes on women workers and their issues. In Assam, the programme was organised in 9 districts in 21 places. In Bihar the anganwadi workers and helpers union organised district level protests in which hundreds participated. In Aurangabad they held a rally blocking the road.

In Kerala, the CCWW (CITU) observed the women's day along with AIDWA. In all the 140 assembly constituencies of the poll bound state, meetings were organised. In some constituencies programmes were organised at local level. Cultural activities, rallies, hall meetings, seminars etc were held throughout the state. In addition to these, programmes were organised by many unions.

In Haryana, the day was observed jointly with the Samyukt Kisan Morcha. Massive mobilisations of women at borders as well as toll plazas in Haryana were organised. On that Day the stage was managed by women in all the Kisan Struggle spots. At Singhu border, CITU National Secretary, Usharani addressed the women farmers and workers. A R Sindhu, Convenor AICCW(CITU) participated in the programme organised in Noida, Delhi NCR. In Maharashtra, the programme was held in 57 places.







In Punjab the programmes were held in 53 places in 14 districts. In Tripura a massive joint rally was organised along with AIDWA at Agartala. In Tamil Nadu mass mobilisations were held at different places. The women leaders addressed various meetings. In Gujarat, in 6 districts, programmes were held in 16 places. In West Bengal also massive mobilisations were held in various

places. In Madhya Pradesh scheme workers' unions organised women's day programmes throughout the state. In UP programmes were held in 8 places. A programme was held in Andaman & Nicobar as well. In all the states memorandum on the issues of working women addressed to the Prime Minister was submitted through the officials and also sent to the PMO.





## ***Himachal Pradesh Anganwadi Workers & Helpers Protest***

Thousands of Anganwadi workers and Helpers under the banner of Himachal Pradesh Anganwadi Workers and Helpers union affiliated to CITU staged a protest dharna on 9th March 2021 in front of assembly in Shimla. Their main demand was that anganwadi workers should be appointed for pre-primary. During this protest dharna, the workers shouted loud slogans about their demands.

There was such a huge crowd in the protest that for about two hours, heavy traffic jammed and the queues of vehicles were seen on the road in Shimla city. During the demonstration, a twelve-member delegation led by AIFAWH President Usha Rani met the Chief Minister, Shri Jairam Thakur and submitted a nine-point memorandum. The Chief Minister assured to fulfill the demands of Anganwadi workers. The demonstration was addressed by AIFAWH president Usha Rani, Union's state president Neelam Jaiswal, General Secretary Veena Devi, Khimi Bhandari, Sudesh Thakur and other union leaders. CITU national secretary Kashmir Singh Thakur, CITU state president Vijendra Mehra, General Secretary Prem Gautam also joined in the address. The Union demanded that only Anganwadi workers must be assigned the work as teachers in pre-primary classes because anganwadi workers have been doing the work of education of children below the age of six years for the last forty five years.

Leaders demanded that the State Government should announce this in this Budget session itself. Leaders demanded the withdrawal of the New Education Policy (NEP) as it is not only anti-student but also anti-ICDS. The NEP actually has a hidden agenda of privatization of the ICDS, the leaders said. Due to this, Anganwadi workers will lose their jobs in the future.

Leaders termed the 30 percent reduction made by the Central Government in the ICDS budget of 2021 as a major attack on the employment of Anganwadi workers. Leaders said that the increase in the salary of Anganwadi workers and Helpers by Rs. 500 and Rs. 300 by the HP state government just a day before the union protest was a cruel joke.

The Union demanded that Anganwadi workers should be given wages and other facilities similar to those provided by Haryana. The union has demanded a pension of Rs. 3000/- per month for workers and helpers, gratuity of Rs 2 lakh, medical and holiday facilities. The Union has also demanded an increase in the retirement age of Anganwadi employees to 65 years, equal pay to mini workers and for the withdrawal of the NEP 2020 and.

A delegation met the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister later, who assured that the preschool component will remain with the Anganwadi workers.





## ***Madhya Pradesh Anganwadi Workers and Helpers on Struggle***

On the call of Anganwadi Sevika Sahayika Ekta Union in Madhya Pradesh, in 24 districts across the state, militant demonstrations were held and memorandums were submitted to the Chief Minister. Around 5000 Anganwadi workers and helpers participated in these protest actions held on 22 February 2021.

In 2018, the Central Govt. had increased the remuneration by Rs. 1500 for Anganwadi workers, Rs. 750 for helpers and Rs. 1250 for mini workers. This amount was deducted by the Shivraj Singh Chouhan's Government of Madhya Pradesh arguing that it is paying much to the Anganwadi workers and helpers from state exchequer.

The Anganwadi Union filed a case in the High Court, praying to the Hon'ble High Court, seeking direction to the State Government to provide the deducted honorarium of Anganwadi workers and helpers with arrears.



The High Court issued notices to the Chief Minister and Secretary of the department. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan had given a statement that his government will pay back the deducted honorarium, but that promise has not been fulfilled yet. The participation in the protest called on a short notice shows the anger of the Anganwadi workers and helpers. In this action programme, Leaders of the state union participated in various districts. The union decided to intensify the struggle in case the government does not fulfill its promise.

## WOMEN ON THE MOVE



### Odisha ASHA Workers in Struggle

In spite of the important role played by the ASHA workers in fighting the pandemic, the Government is not ready to even provide ASHA workers in Odisha with the necessary safety measures or risk allowance.

Odisha ASHA Karmee Association (CITU) held one day sit in program before assembly on 2nd March 2021. The union submitted a 23-point charter of demands to the government. The dharna was addressed by various leaders of CITU and the union.

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## ***Tamil Nadu Anganwadi Employees' Phased Actions***

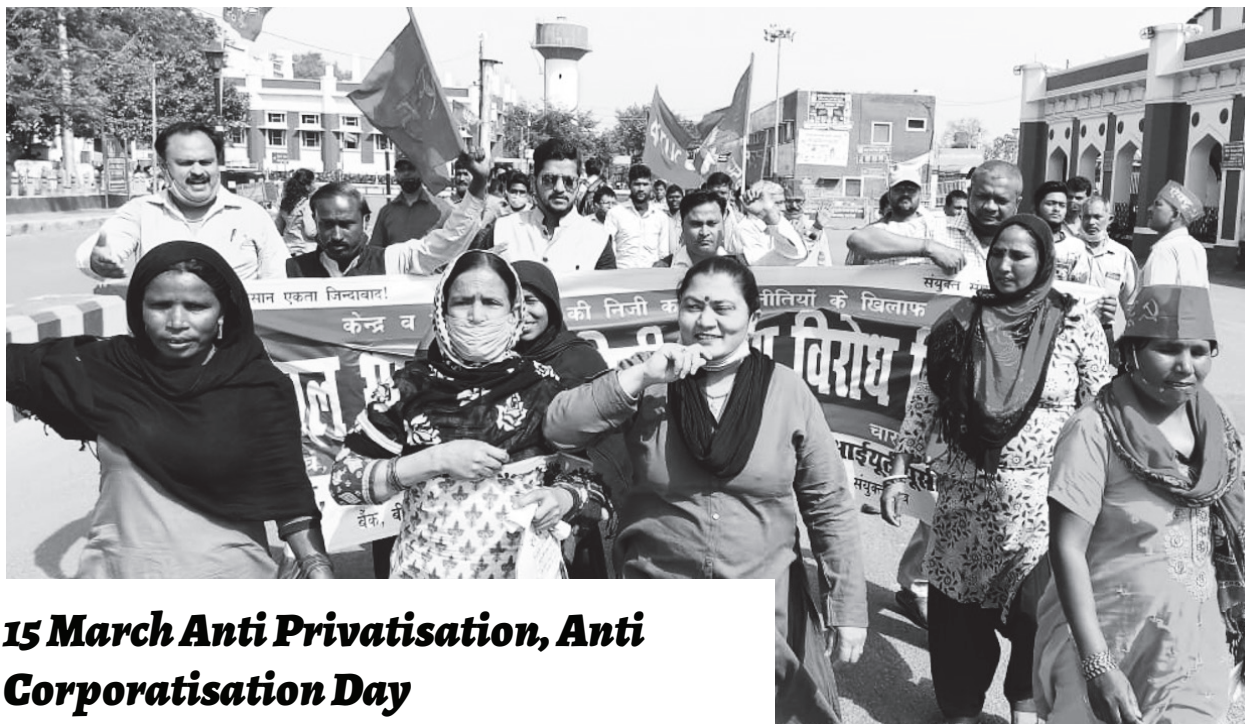
Tamilnadu Anganwadi Workers & Helpers Union (CITU) organized phased actions to pursue their demands. The first phase of the struggle began on 22 January by staging demonstrations before CDPOs offices, which was participated by around 35,800 Anganwadi employees at more than 329 blocks in 30 districts. This was followed by around 22,000 employees staging demonstrations before the Project offices on 29 January in 30 districts.

In the third phase, more than 30,000 employees from 30 districts staged a demonstration on 5 February 2021 before the State Director's office in Chennai. The huge gathering was addressed by CITU state General Secretary G. Sukumaran, State Treasurer Malathy Chittibabu and others

including T. Daisy General Secretary and Rathnamala President of the Union. Talks were held between the union leaders and the officials of the department who ensured they would send the demands to the CM, assuring favourable decisions.

In spite of this there was no action by the department on the demands of increase in wages and pension. The union organized day and night dharna in front of the District project office as well as the State directorate from 22 February 2021. The dharna continued for three days. Almost all the anganwadi workers and helpers joined the struggle. The workers and helpers continued to sit all three nights in spite of threats and various pressure by the government. On the fourth day, after the assurance by the Department for an increase in wages and pension, the struggle is withdrawn.





## **15 March Anti Privatisation, Anti Corporatisation Day**

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) in their first joint meeting held on 1st March decided to coordinate time to time joint action programmes in the coming days to strengthen the evolving unity between workers and farmers. Although the ongoing struggle has seen the emerging unity of the workers and farmers through unprecedented solidarity actions by trade unions, this was for the first time a formal joint meeting was held.

There was appreciation of the fact that the farmers had extended their solidarity to the call of trade unions on 26th November and the consistent support by the Joint Platform of CTUs to all the agitation programmes called upon by the SKM from 26th November onwards.

They were in agreement that there is need for intensification of their struggle to save the land of the farmers, to stop contract farming and amend the Essential Commodities Act as well as the Electricity Amendment Bill in the national interest. They firmly believed in the legalizing and ensuring Minimum Support Price to the farmers produce.

The trade unions apprised SKM representatives about the dangers of govt. decisions of privatisation of Public Sector Enterprises to India's sovereignty over the National assets and natural resources and the grievous impact of the four labour codes on the workers of the country. The four Codes take away the right of forming unions and protection of the working people from exploitation and excluding workers from existing social security schemes and workplace safety norms.

Both the sides reported that the hated enactments affecting them were passed without following democratic process of consultations and even transparent parliamentary process. They affirmed that the corporate loot of farmers and working masses through usurping land and other national resources is a big challenge as the Government is taking position in favour of corporate loot.

It was decided to unitedly observe 15th March as Anti Privatisation Day, by holding demonstrations near/before railway stations. The SKM has also extended support to the strike actions of the banks



on 15-16 March and GIC unions on 17th March, and Life Insurance Unions on 18th March. It was decided that the trade unions would extend their support to blockade of Kundli–Manesar–Palwal (KMP) Expressway for five hours announced by Samyukta Kisan Morcha along with flying black flags atop houses on 6th March 2021, which marked the 100th day of the struggle and all the other programmes decided by the SKM.

The meeting also decided to work together against the anti people policies in the future to consolidate the worker farmer unity. As per the decision, the blockade of KMP Expressway has seen massive participation. From 11am to 4pm the highway was blocked. Throughout the country in many places there were mass mobilizations. Thousands of farmers joined the workers in the demonstrations held all over the country, mainly at the railway stations, to observe 'Anti Privatisation, Anti Corporatisation Day' 15th March 2021 as per

the joint call of the joint platform of central trade unions and independent industrial federations and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha.

Around 10 lakh bank employees and officers participated in the strike called by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), paralysing the entire banking sector. Tens of thousands of workers participated in the demonstrations across the country, in support of the strike. Demonstrations were held at over one lakh places including thousands of railway stations, in front of public sector units, banks etc. People including in rural areas spontaneously supported the call. In New Delhi, national leaders of trade unions and SKM joined the protests at New Delhi railway station and Central Electronics Limited.

The united actions will be intensified in the future to build a strong people's movement against the anti people policies.



## ***On Acquittal of POCSO Accused by Nagpur Bench of Mumbai HC***

We denounce the judgment of the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court which has acquitted an accused of the charge of sexual assault of a 12 year old girl under Section 7 of POCSO by saying that since there was no skin to skin contact with sexual intent no case was made out. The high court overruled the sentence of 3 years given by the trial court.

The young child was lured by the 39 year old accused to his house on the pretext that he would give her a guava. She was then taken by the accused to a room on the first floor of his house and the accused started fondling her breasts and tried to remove her salwar obviously with the intention of raping her. When the girl started shouting, the accused covered her mouth with his hand and then left the room after locking the door from the outside. A neighbor heard the girl's shouts and informed the girl's mother who found her weeping in this locked room. Though an offence of attempt to rape was made out, the accused was not charged with this.

The accused was only charged with kidnapping, wrongful confinement and molestation under Section 354 IPC, and non-penetrative sexual assault under Section 8 of POSCO Act. Section 7 of POCSO describes non-penetrative sexual assault and says that whoever, with sexual intent, touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of a child or makes the child perform the same acts with the person involved or

does any other act which involves physical contact with sexual intent without penetration commits sexual assault. Section 8 of POSCO prescribes a punishment of 3 to 5 years and with fine. It is obvious even to lay person that the crime committed by the accused falls squarely within the definition of sexual assault as defined in Section 7. Nowhere does the section specify that the touching with sexual intent has to be a skin to skin contact. In any case the definition is wide enough to cover all other acts of touching with sexual intent.

The judge's reasoning is thus deeply flawed. The judge also fails to understand the serious nature of the act from the perspective of the victim of sexual assault. She seems to have seen it just as a minor crime for which a punishment of 3 years was very harsh and disproportionate. However the vulnerable child who was subjected to this act of abuse and violence was clearly traumatized by this experience.

The women's movement and others have struggled and campaigned for several years for a law which recognises the effect and seriousness of sexual assault for those who are subjected to it. However though the law has been amended in many important aspects the patriarchal mindset of those applying the law also needs to change. Sexual assault is a grave act of violence and violates the bodily integrity of a woman. Government of Maharashtra must file an appeal against this atrocious judgement.



## **Odisha Engineer Girl Turns Labourer to Pay Fees**

*"No work is small or insignificant", said 22-year-old Roji Behera, an engineering diploma holder from Odisha, who had enrolled her name as a labourer under the MGNREGA scheme to fund her college fees.*

Roji of Goradipidha village in the of coastal district of Puri has been shovelling away and carrying mounds of soil on her head as a labourer hoping that she can earn enough money to pay her dues to the private engineering college. Along with her two other sisters, one of whom is pursuing her B Tech, Behera has been hard at work making a road in her village.

*"Though I completed my diploma in civil engineering from a private engineering college in Khurda district in 2019, I had pending dues of ₹44,000. My father could raise around ₹20,000 but I could not manage the rest. After sitting idle for over a year and a half, I decided to work as a MNREGA labourer for at least 3 months so that I can earn something," said Behera.*

Roji was first noticed by a local news channel when she was carrying a basket of mud on her head at the road construction site. Her story soon became the talk of the town, prompting district officials to reach out to her with help.

Shortly after, the college authorities rushed to her residence with the certificate. *"I never felt ashamed of the work that I was doing. Some may look down upon me, but I don't see a reason why I should feel ashamed. I worked for the community*



*road development project and earned ₹ 207 a day," said Roji Behera. "My father is a landless, poor farmer. The house in which we are staying is on the land of another person. For me getting admission to a B Tech course is the priority. I am willing to slog as a labourer to finance my B.Tech. education."*

The 22-year-old girl also had two of her five sisters, one of them pursuing a B.Tech degree, working by her side at the construction site.

*"We were sitting idle at home during the lockdown, when sarpanch Pradymnya Parida asked villagers to work for the road development project. I found it to be a good opportunity to earn something to pay my college fees. Authorities at my college had refused to give me my certificate for not being able to pay hostel fees of ₹ 44,500. My father is a farmer and also works as a mason, and we are five sisters.... I could deposit only ₹ 20,000", she said.*

*"Several appeals to college authorities fell on deaf ears, but a news clip on a local TV channel worked wonders", said Rojii.*

# ***Understanding the Complicated Politics & Geopolitics of the Coup in Myanmar***

***Vijay Prashad***

On February 1, 2021, Myanmar's military—known as the Tatmadaw—invoked Article 417 of the 2008 constitution, dismissed State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, and arrested her and other members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Condemnation of the coup was swift, although there would be reason for hesitancy in the reaction: Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been the face of the democracy movement until her release from house arrest in 2010, ruined her reputation when she came to the International Court of Justice in 2019 to defend her country's genocide against the Rohingya people. No longer is Aung San Suu Kyi the unalloyed symbol of democracy and human rights.

Within Myanmar, protests against the coup continue. Tens of thousands of people, many wearing red (the color of the NLD), have taken to the streets across Myanmar, not only in the more congested cities but also in the countryside, to protest the coup. The momentum against the coup picked up when associations of civil servants refused to work for the military. While this wave began with medics, it escalated to involve workers in the railways and education, and workers in the social welfare and construction ministries. Staff in the Department of Social Welfare released a statement that read, "We will get back to work only after power is handed back to the democratically elected government."

By the second week of February, protests entered Myanmar's typically quiet capital city of Naypyitaw, with motorcycle parades and demonstrations at the main marketplaces. Myanmar's military built this city as the capital and shifted all administrative offices from Yangon to this interior town in 2005. Naypyitaw was built with the intention that it would remain a military stronghold, safe for the rulers of the country who would not be disturbed by the messiness of

democracy. However, in the elections of 2015 and 2020, the military's election vehicle, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), did not prevail even in Naypyitaw, where the NLD won handily. It demonstrates the appetite among Myanmar's public for a democratic process.

## ***COUP NATION***

Myanmar's military seized power of the country's institutions in 1962. It has not yet turned over control to civilians. The 2008 constitution, written substantially by the military, provides a legal fiction to hang over military domination. One in four seats in the parliament—the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw—is held by a person nominated by the military. The military continues to hold the Cabinet portfolios for defense and home affairs, both held till the coup by lieutenant generals in the Tatmadaw.

The constitution's Article 417 allows the military to declare a "state of emergency" and dismiss the civilian fig leaf. This is exactly what the military did on February 1. What happened that day was both a coup and not a coup; it was a coup because the military dismissed the civilian government and took power, but it was not a coup because the military did not hand over power after the 2010 elections (the military's USDP ran unopposed and took over the government, exchanging fatigues for suits). General Min Aung Hlaing had hoped to become the head of government after his term as commander in chief of Myanmar's army ended. As it is, General Min Aung Hlaing controls a substantial part of the economy through the Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), an army conglomerate, and through the businesses of his children Aung Pyae Sone and Khin Thiri Thet Mon. Sources in Yangon told me that in 2015 General Min Aung Hlaing's close associate U Than Htay was put in charge of the USDP, ensuring that it became an instrument of General Min Aung



*Following the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, vast sectors of society, including garment factory workers (L) and healthcare workers (R), have taken to the streets to protest and demand a return to civilian rule*



Hlaing. The general took the defeat of the USDP in the November 2020 election personally; it was this animus that led to the tens of thousands of cases of election fraud alleged by the USDP against the NLD.

Before the November 2020 election, General Min Aung Hlaing warned the candidates not to be swayed by foreign influence. This was seen in Myanmar as a threat to the NLD. Accusations of fraud in that election did not carry weight even with the election commission. On January 26, military spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun said that the military would act if the accusations were not taken seriously. This is precisely what they did a few days later.

### **CAUGHT BETWEEN THE US AND CHINA**

China and Myanmar share a 1,300-mile border, with China being Myanmar's largest investor and one of its key economic partners. A decade ago, the United States government attempted to wean Myanmar away from its links to China and to reorient its economy toward the United States. This became part of US President Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia." In 2007, Derek Mitchell, who would later become Obama's special representative for Myanmar, co-authored an article that pointed out that sanctions had been ineffective and that a new "road map" was needed to reform the military. Myanmar's military had its own road map: it created a new constitution in 2008, held elections in 2010 that brought the USDP to power, released Aung San Suu Kyi from prison that year, and allowed her to

run for elections in 2015. Obama went to Myanmar in 2012, and then the US removed sanctions in October 2016, hoping that these moves would signal a shift from Myanmar's links to Beijing toward Washington.

But this did not happen. Neither the military nor Aung San Suu Kyi could logically break trading ties with its neighbor. In May 2017, Aung San Suu Kyi went to Beijing to sign an agreement to bring Myanmar into China's Belt and Road Initiative. In mid-January 2021, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Naypyitaw to discuss the Belt and Road projects as well as China's assistance to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. On the agenda was the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, including the China-Myanmar Border Economic Cooperation Zone, New Yangon City, and the Kyaukpyu Deep Sea Port. Wang Yi met with both Aung San Suu Kyi and the military leadership, both of whom spoke warmly about Myanmar's relations with China.

Washington's attempt to push out China from Myanmar had no bearing on the February 1 coup; both the military and NLD are committed to the strategic link with China. But it does not help that this "new cold war" has deepened the instability that marks Myanmar's history since 1962. The people are on the streets now in the midst of what they are calling a "drum revolution." With each passing day, more and more people are joining the call for a return to civilian rule, even if this means going back to the status quo with the military pulling the strings in the background.



## **Comrade Vimal Ranadive**

Born on 10th April, 1915 in a middle class family in Maharashtra, Vimal Sardesai was attracted to the freedom movement through her cousins. She joined the anti-colonial nationalist movement at the tender age of 12-13 years as a Seva Dal volunteer. At the age of 15, she was arrested for picketing a foreign cloth shop. The British judge asked her to admit the mistake and apologise. She boldly refused and said "We know what we have done and for that, we won't apologise" and went to jail gladly.

In 1930, more than eighty years ago, it was the choice made by a fifteen year old Vimal. It was a choice to fight injustice, to fight all kinds of exploitation and therefore to fight imperialist aggression, come what may. She stood by this choice all through her life.

Vimaldi developed solidarity with the cause of the poor, the working class and became a communist. She worked to earn a living for her siblings, married a communist, B T Ranadive, who had to go underground on the day of their marriage. When her son was just two years old she was jailed for two years. She spent many years underground including at the time of the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. For a short span she acted in films for her earnings.

She was actively involved in organising workers in Mumbai and was part of the upsurge of the Mumbai working class and the naval uprising in 1946. She worked among various sectors of unorganized sector workers as well. She was the first General Secretary of the All India Plantation Workers' Federation, the founder President of the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers & Helpers and was the leader of the beedi workers union as well.

She fought for more representation of women in the leadership at CITU and addressed various issues of women at the workplace. She was the founder Convenor of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (CITU), the first ever women's committee of any trade union. She continued in that position till her death. She was the Secretary, CITU - Centre of Indian Trade Unions and was a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

She was the founder editor of 'The Voice of the Working Woman' and 'Kamkaji Mahila'. She has written many books including "the Women Workers of India". She died on 24th July 1999. Let us pledge to continue her legacy of uncompromising struggle against all kinds of exploitation, injustice and inequalities. Let us intensify our struggles and overthrow this authoritarian regime. Let us also make a choice of commitment to the cause of the toiling people of the world.





### Around The World

