

The Voice of the Working Woman

Worker-Peasant Action Day

5 September 2020



Maharashtra



Uttar Pradesh



Gujarat



Andhra Pradesh



Jharkhand

Dear Readers,
Due to some unavoidable circumstances we could not publish the October issue of the Voice of the Working Woman on time. We regret the inconvenience caused.

However, you must have noticed the new layout of the journal. Please mail your feedback on the layout and content of journal as well as your suggestions to aiccww@yahoo.com.

- Editor



The Voice of the Working Woman

Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)

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Towards Countrywide General Strike on 26th November 2020

The national convention of workers called by the joint trade union platform and for the first time held online due to the lockdown conditions, on 2nd October 2020 called a country wide general strike on 26th November 2020. The convention strongly condemned the onslaught being perpetrated by the ruling classes and the BJP government representing their interests, on the workers and other toiling people of the country.

The BJP government has not only fast tracked privatisation and labour law codification to serve its corporate cronies; it has also launched an unveiled onslaught on the basic democratic and constitutional rights of the workers, farmers and the common people. State agencies like the CBI, ED, NIA, the police etc are being used to coerce and threaten those who oppose its policies.

Even when millions of workers have lost their jobs and incomes, the BJP government has refused to provide any relief with cash transfer and free food grains as demanded by the trade unions and strongly recommended by eminent economists. The DA of government employees is frozen. Premature retirement is sought to be forced upon them. For the BJP government, BSNL employees who have worked hard to extend its services are 'deshdrohis'. On the other hand the government continues with concessions and so called 'incentives' to the corporates. While the lockdown meant destitution for millions of workers, the BJP government's corporate cronies have been increasing their wealth by the hour during the same pandemic.

The national convention of workers strongly reiterated its earlier observation that this BJP government is 'anti worker, anti peasant and anti national'. The convention concluded that the present situation calls for higher forms of united struggles in the form of defiance, resistance and non cooperation by the entire working class.

The country wide general strike on 26th November 2020 will be the 20th since the onset of neoliberalism in our country. It is the second countrywide general strike by the joint trade union movement within a year. It may be recalled that the year 2020 started with a general strike on 8th January. Despite the lockdown restrictions, in which national or state level leaders could not physically meet the workers, no big public meetings or even general body meetings could be held lakhs of workers went on strike in between. The historic coal workers three days' strike is just one example. This indicates the mounting anger of the working class against the attacks on their livelihood and living conditions. It is not only the workers but the peasants are also on the struggle path across the country, against the Farm Acts. The convention firmly declared that the workers stand with the peasants and directed the working class to support in all forms peasants' struggles on their genuine demands not only at the national level but wherever they take place.

The situation today calls for united actions – of the workers, of the workers and peasants and of the workers, peasants and all sections of toiling people who create the wealth of our country. The year 2020 already witnessed a massive strike in the beginning. The strike in the end of the year surely will be a bigger one. But let the ruling classes be warned. This is the beginning for much more militant and united struggles of all toiling people, who will not rest till the anti worker, anti peasant and anti national policies are defeated and replaced with policies that place people first, not profits.

That should be the determination with which preparations for the 26th November General Strike should start, NOW.

Worker-Peasant Action Day

5 September 2020

The 2nd anniversary of the historic Mazdoor-Kisan Sangharsh Rally in New Delhi on 5 Sep' 2018 was observed as Workers-Peasants Action Day on 5 Sep' 2020 across the country mainly against the Anti-farmer Bills before the Parliament and other burning issues.



Centre members of CITU-AIKS-AIAWU at a demonstration in New Delhi. CITU

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions on large gatherings, restriction and limitations in physical movements, the Action Day was observed at local levels – at thousands of places; by organising rallies, dharnas, padayatras and demonstrations; with lakhs of people's participation and raising demands with the government through local administration.

More than 5 lakhs of workers-peasants-agricultural workers and some others joined the Action Day programmes at 13,019 places in 283 districts of 16 States and Union Territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands; Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala in the south; Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal in the east; Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra in the west; and Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan in the north.

CONTINUATION OF JOINT MOVEMENT

CITU-AIKS-AIAWU had jointly called upon the workers-peasants-agricultural workers of the country to observe the Workers-Peasants

Action Day as continuation of earlier joint movements including the Satyagrah / Jail Bhara movement of 9 August preceded by 23 July movement both of which had wide response of the people reflecting their growing anger against Modi government's destructive policies in economic, political and social fronts; centralising power under an authoritarian regime; with communal disunity agenda; and its distracting manipulation.

DEMANDS

The movement's demands are :

- Free universal healthcare for all - especially free tests and treatment for Covid-19
- Free Ration - 10kg free food grains per person per month to all for six months
- Rs 7,500 per month for all non-tax paying families for next six months
- 200 days' work in MGNREGA at daily wage of Rs 600 or unemployment allowance
- Rescinding ordinances/executive orders on essential commodities, farm trade, and electricity supply and labour laws
- No privatisation of PSEs and services

Some State Wise Reports from 5 Sep'2020 Worker-Peasant Action Day

“More than 5 lakhs of workers-peasants-agricultural workers and some others joined the Action Day programmes at 13,019 places in 283 districts of 16 States and Union Territories.”

KERALA

The Programme, held under Covid protocol, took place at 6,014 centres with 48,539 workers participating. At Trivandrum, the programme was inaugurated at AG office gate by national Vice President of AIKS, S. Ramachandra Pillai. National leader of CITU E. Kareem and of AIAWU State President M. V. Govindan Master addressed the meeting.

KARNATAKA

More than 1.5 lakh people participated at 256 places in 25 districts in the state.

TAMILNADU

On 5 September the programme was held in 35 districts at 434 centres in 22 districts with 10,225 people's participation. Due to heavy surge of Covid -19 in Tamilnadu the participation of the workers and peasants were very low. A state level joint meeting of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU was held followed by district-wise such joint meetings. 78,500 leaflets were distributed and 4,000 posters were pasted during the preparatory campaign.

TELENGANA

Worker - Peasant Unity Day was observed at 1,189 centres, in 288 mandals of 34 districts joined by 14,040 persons. Meeting of the leaders of CITU- AIKS-AIAWU at the state centre was held in Hyderabad on 23 August followed by joint online meetings and online public meetings in 10 districts. National centre's joint circular was translated in Telugu and was circulated through thousands of Whatsapp groups at grass root level.

ANDHRA PRADESH

The programme was held at 965 places with 21,565 people's participation across the State. Preparatory meetings were held by the three organisations together at state and district centres. An online public meeting was held from the state centre. 25 round tables were

held, 248 press statements were issued and 6,400 pamphlets were printed and distributed and circulated through 44,300 SMS. 3410 placards were physically displayed and sent to 33,463 persons online.

WEST BENGAL

5 September joint programme of CITU, AIKS, AIAWU, on the basis of 16-point demands, was held by organising processions, rallies, sit-ins, road blockades, two wheelers processions at about 950 places in gram panchayats, blocks, city and district centres in all districts in the State with about 1 lakh persons participation. Local demands were added with central demands and demonstrations were held in terror-hit areas with a message to face it by resistance and disobedience.

The Protest Day had spontaneous response in all parts of the State including the terror-ridden Jungle Mahal of Medinipur and Purulia districts; from Mathabhanga, Tufanganj of Cooch Behar to Kakdwip, Namkhana of South 24 Parganas; in industrial areas of Asansol, Durgapur, Barrackpore and Howrah districts; at Kolkata and Haldia port areas; agricultural areas of Memari in Burdwan, Balagarh, Pandua in Hooghly, Murshidabad, Nadia and Birbhum districts; and tea gardens in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Alipore districts. Preparatory joint meetings of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU were held in all districts.

JHARKAND

5 September Workers-Peasants Action Day was joined by 4,318 persons including 3306 peasants and 1012 workers in 33 blocks in 18 districts of the State. In Kolhan region, the programme was held at Golmuri by the trade unions; at Kakidih village in Borham block jointly by Kisan Sabha and trade unions; and holding padayatras at Sakchi by the trade unions. In Dhanbad it was organised in front of the union office at Jagjivan Nagar.

Some State Wise Reports from 5 Sep'2020 Worker-Peasant Action Day

BIHAR

5 September Workers-Peasants Action Day was jointly organised by CITU-AIKS-AIAWU by holding rallies and demonstrations with flags and banners concluding in impressive public meetings, with wider participation and appreciation of the people, at 365 places in towns and rural areas in 35 districts across the State. At 17 places the PM's effigy was burnt.

Under CITU banner about 73,000 workers participated while in almost equal number agrarian masses participated under Kisan Sabha and Khet Mazdoor Union banners. Bank, insurance and state government employees' participation in this programme was appreciable at most of the places.

MADHYA PRADESH

The Action Day was organised by CITU at one place in the capital city of Bhopal with 25 participants; 80 members brought out a rally in Guna and submitted a report to the collector; in coal areas 250 workers in Meera mine and 400 workers in Baratrai mines staged demonstrations. Kisan Sabha staged demonstrations in Rewa, Bhind and Anupgarh with about 100 kisans participation.

MAHARASHTRA

In the Workers-Peasants Action Day, 24,227 workers-peasants-agricultural workers participated at 719 centres in 67 tehsils of 21 districts across the State with AIDWA, SFI, DYFI and AARM members joining in several districts. In terms of mobilisation, the first 6 districts were Solapur with 12,212; Thane-Palghar - 5,641; Nagpur - 1204; Nasik - 1,100; Mumbai - 687 and Amravati - 647 participants.

UTTAR PRADESH

Workers-Peasants Action Day on 5 September was organised in the State in which CITU members participation was 94 in Kanpur; Allahabad - 54; Jaunpur - 95; Moradabad - 15; Ballia - 75; Bareilly - 15; Gonda - 55

and Lucknow - 65. Programme was also successfully organised in Varanasi, Bulandshahr, Firozabad and Sonbhadra districts. Kisan Sabha and Khet Mazdoor Union members also joined in large numbers in almost all places.

UTTARAKHAND

A rally was brought out from CITU office in Dehradun and staged demonstration in support of workers and peasants demands.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

On the Action Day, workers and peasants' joint demonstrations were staged at 29 places in 7 districts of Shimla, Hamirpur, Mandi, Kullu, Kinnaur, Kangra and Chamba with 1,356 persons participating.

RAJASTHAN

The Workers-Peasants Action Day was organised at 28 places in 7 districts of Sriganganagar, Hanumangarh, Sikar, Jaipur, Kota, Jhunjhunu and Bhilwara and by Roadways union with 2,699 total participants. In this, the noteworthy participation was 1,496 persons at 9 places covering 62 villages in Hanumangarh district.

PUNJAB

Despite strict prohibitory orders and lockdown, there was a good response to the joint call of Workers-Peasants Action Day in all 22 districts of the State. Over 2,000 villages were covered during jatha march and also in all industrial centres. The villages were covered by the state level MNREGA Mazdoor Union, Lal Jhanda Punjab Batha Mazdoor Union, Lal Jahanda Pendu Chowkidars Union, Anganwari Muljam Union, Bharat Nirman Mistri Mazdoor Union etc with 15,000 workers participation.

In Mansa district police resorted to lathi-charge injuring CITU state vice president Kulwinder Singh Udat and several local leaders and also arresting them under false charges.

Agri Acts 2020 : Unlimited Freedom for Agri-Business, Slavery for Peasantry

The Narendra Modi led BJP Government has got three draconian acts related to agriculture trade, price and food security passed in the Parliament on 20 September 2020 without even allowing the MPs to vote against it. Earlier on 5th June 2020 they had promulgated these as three ordinances and now these became laws. The acts are Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020, Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act 2020 and Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act 2020. These are part of the so called "Atmanirbhar Bharat" package announced by the Prime Minister. The BJP government claimed that these would bring "freedom" to the farmers who can now 'sell their produce to anybody at any price'. But in reality, these ordinances give total freedom to the corporate/agri-business to purchase any produce from any farmer at any price.

These acts are meant to ensure a complete paradigm shift in land management, procurement and trade in agriculture in favour of big-landlords and corporates including foreign agencies. This will ultimately end the government's responsibility and obligation to ensure remunerative price to peasants, of procurement of agri-produce at remunerative prices and food security for the nation.

The Essential Commodities Act (ECA) aimed at ensuring food security, helped in preventing hoarding and black marketing of essential commodities, especially in times of crises. The Amendment made to the ECA removes essential commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from regulations. According to the amendment, the processors, aggregators and big traders can procure any quantity of crops, stockpile, sell and export at the rates as dictated by the neo-liberal market even at the time of a war, natural calamity or famine! This is nothing but legalising black marketing and hoarding.

The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020 is an onslaught on the federal nature of the Constitution of India and allows agricultural produce to be purchased without auctions and regulatory supervision by the concerned authority. Agriculture is listed in the 7th Schedule of the Constitution and the Union

government has no unquestionable authority to enact laws on the subject without taking the State governments into confidence.

The clauses in this Act permit corporate forces to engage in interstate and intrastate trade of farm produce without any kind of regulation with the aid of E-trade platforms. The corporate dominance on E-trade and digitalization of farming processes will ultimately lead to monopoly control on production and productivity. There is no obligation for corporate forces to heed market regulation, auction system, pay market fee, cess or levy on trade activities. It would actually mean that sale of the agri-produce will be through unequal bilateral negotiations between large landlord-corporate traders on the one side and poor peasants on the other. In such an unequal relationship, it is anybody's guess how far the stipulation in the ordinance that the trader should prepare and implement fair trade practices including timely payment, would be implemented.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 deals with the crucial question of land management, procurement, processing and price. The provisions of this Act enable corporate capital to enter into contract farming thus pooling vast tracts of peasants' land under corporate management. This paves way to centralization and monopoly control over land resources and land use thus leading to reverse land reforms to cater the corporate interests. Though the title of this Act mentions 'agreement on price assurance' there are no provisions in this Act ensuring assured procurement of farm produce at remunerative MSP as per the Swaminathan Commission recommendation of C2+50% (at least 50% more than the cost of production) as promised by BJP in its election manifesto. It does not even guarantee the price paid at APMC. It is to be noted that lack of remunerative price is the cause of farmers' distress, not restrictions in marketing.

This is the kind of travesty experienced by the peasantry under the regime led by PM Modi. The Acts facilitate trade and services between unequal partners ultimately forcing the large mass of the small and middle peasantry to abide with the unequal and unjustifiable agreements on price and procurement being dictated by mighty corporate houses. These Acts are aimed at the “one nation, one market” plan of the BJP government, which in reality means total centralisation of political, economic and social power dismantling the federal structure of the country.

These Acts bring agriculture and agricultural trade into a centralised system without any restriction of state boundaries or taxation. They overrule the state Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act, although agriculture is a state subject. They also put in place a monitoring and conciliation mechanism bypassing the states and even the judiciary!! They stipulate that “no civil court shall have jurisdiction to entertain any suit or proceedings”. This in effect means that a farmer cannot approach a court of law in case of any dispute between him and a big trader. Under our Constitution, a law may regulate but cannot negate the Judiciary. Thus, the act is illegal and unconstitutional.

The Model Contract Farming Act sent by the Modi government and being implemented by many states has deregulated food items from coverage. Through this, the big landlord corporate nexus can directly drive farmers anywhere in the country to produce as per the requirements of agri-business companies. This is adversely affecting land use, food security and environment. Its main purpose is land consolidation and promotion of contract farming as well as lease of farm land by corporate companies. This dispossesses the peasantry and ensures corporatisation of peasant agriculture. This is nothing but a nefarious game plan to destroy peasant agriculture and replace it with corporate and contract farming. Peasant organisations and the central trade unions have demanded the scrapping of these disastrous anti national Acts.

RSS, which used to talk much about a ‘Swadeshi’ development model, is totally silent on these. Neither has any political party, except the Left parties, raised its voice seriously against these dangerous and disastrous attacks on our agriculture and the farmers. It is only the Left, which is strongly opposing these anti farmer and anti people ordinances.

Working class cannot remain a bystander to such attacks on our peasants and on the food security of our people. Class conscious trade union movement must unitedly oppose these measures of the authoritarian BJP government, committed to neoliberalism. Remember, peasants and workers together were able to defeat the notorious Land Acquisition ordinance during Modi’s previous tenure. We can do it again, now.

The Modi led BJP government is mistaken if it thinks that it can utilise the lockdown period, when workers and farmers are in distress and immobilised to push such anti worker anti farmer measures. This is nothing but an illusion spread by a government committed to the crisis ridden capitalist system, to maximise profits and multiply the wealth of the corporates, domestic and foreign. We must prove it wrong.

CITU and the Central Trade Unions have put the demand of repealing of the anti farmer Acts as one of the major demands along with the demand for repealing of the anti labour codes. The central trade unions have given a call for a nationwide general strike on 26 November 2020. The joint platform of the farmers organisations- AIKSCC has given a call for Delhi March on 26-27 November 2020. Both platforms have decided to support the calls of each other. **Nothing in the world is a match for the united strength of workers, peasants and agricultural workers, the producers of wealth in any society. We are committed to strengthen such unity and take the united struggles to a higher level of defiance and resistance, till these policies are changed.**

Spiralling Increase of Suicides by Daily Wage Workers

‘No to Suicide; Fight Back’

By K Hemlata

Recently published National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report brought into notice the issue of suicide by daily wage workers. The NCRB has started categorising daily wage workers in the ‘Accidental Deaths and Suicides’ data since 2014. Though the number of suicides by daily wage workers has been continuously increasing since then, this was widely covered only this year. Probably the silent revolt of the migrant workers, a large number of them daily wage earners, who lost their jobs, incomes and homes and walked home hundreds of kilometres a few months back, made people pay attention to their plight.

SPIRALLING INCREASE OF DAILY WAGE WORKER SUICIDES

According to the NCRB, out of the total 1,39,123 suicides committed all over the country in 2019, 32563 or 23.4%, a little short of one quarter, were by daily wage workers. In 2014, their share was 12% of the total suicides. This has been rising since then – to 17.8% in 2015, - 19.2% in 2016, - 22.1% and – 22.4% in 2017 and 2018 respectively – to 23.4% in 2019. **In absolute numbers too, the number of daily wage workers, who committed suicide, has more than doubled between 2014 and 2019.**

SUICIDES AMONG UNEMPLOYED

NCRB data also show that the proportion of unemployed in people committing suicide reached double digits for the first time since collecting this data began in 1995. **Those who have completed matriculation or secondary school comprise the highest percentage at 23.6%.**

Suicides by daily wage workers more than farmers suicides, govt. shows no concern.

Another significant and worrisome fact is the continuous increase in the ratio of suicides by daily wage workers to farmers. Since 2014, NCRB started publishing suicide data for daily wage workers in non-agricultural sector. Even

in 2014, more daily wage workers committed suicide than farmers; the ratio in that year was 1.7. This has risen to 2.91 in 2018. That is, for every farmer suicide there were almost three daily wage workers taking their lives. Suicide by over 3 lakh farmers in 15 years was not a matter of serious concern for the ruling classes and the government. Neither did the corporate media pay much attention to farmers’ distress. Daily wage workers’ suicides are being treated by the ruling classes with much more indifference and apathy.

Low income groups more vulnerable

An important feature was reportedly unveiled by collating data in the NCRB. As per reports, it is shown that, though the immediate trigger for suicide may differ, people with lower incomes are more vulnerable to suicide. The annual income of around two thirds of those who committed suicide was less than Rs.1 lakh.

The proportion of those, whose annual income was Rs.5 lakh or more, was less than 5%. This was visible even among the working population. The share of daily wage workers (excluding agricultural workers) out of the total workers including professionals who committed suicide was over 39% in 2014.

This increased to nearly 49% in 2018. That is, out of the total workers who committed suicide, around half were daily wage workers. If agricultural workers are also added, this goes up to 44% and 53% respectively.



Rulers & Society ignoring Suicides by Actual Producers of National Wealth

As already pointed out, the immediate cause for a person to end his or her life may vary. But the fact that people decide to end their lives for whatever the immediate provocation indicates helplessness and lack of faith in society in addition to frustration. What should be of even more concern is that lakhs of toiling people, workers, agricultural workers and farmers, who produce the wealth of the country, are driven into situations of desperation and helplessness where they think ending their lives is the only option. It is a loss not only to their families and friends but to the entire society. It reflects the way a society treats the people who produce its wealth.

But in the present capitalist society, the fact that it is the labour of the workers, farmers and all the other toiling people, which produces wealth, is totally ignored. For PM Modi and his BJP government, it is the corporates, the capitalists, who sustain themselves by exploiting the workers, whose motive of profit maximisation is the cause for the crisis and the misery of the workers, are 'wealth creators'. According to them workers are idlers; they must be taught a lesson by cutting down their wages, benefits and rights! That is capitalist society; and that is what BJP believes in.

It is further distressing to see the media, the ruling parties and their leaders grab incidents of suicide by some prominent individuals as opportunity to divert attention from causes that drive thousands into ending their lives. Unemployment, job losses, lack of income, poverty, inability to feed their families, inability to repay loans etc, which are questions of life and death to workers and all common people are brushed aside as a small price to advance the so called 'reforms' to protect corporate profits and the capitalist system. Above all neoliberalism promotes helplessness and a sense of isolation by denigrating trade unions and all collective actions.



Not Suicides, Murders by Country's Economic Managers & Rulers

The NCRB data as well as the visuals of the migrant workers marching on the highways and railway tracks, hundreds of them succumbing midway due to exhaustion and accidents show that the distress of the daily wage workers was not only due to the lockdown. They were distressed, pushed to the margins, into precarious conditions even before the lockdown. The sliding economy due to the global economic crisis hit them hardest. The lockdown and the total apathy of the BJP government further worsened their situation.

As per the latest GDP figures, our country's economy has registered a sharp fall of around 24%, the worst among the major countries in the world. But our finance minister and some of her guides and advisors see 'green shoots' sprouting up. Common people, however, are not able to see any 'green shoots' in their lives even in their dreams. Future appears even more bleak to them. Labour laws amended to remove the little protection and welfare benefits available to the workers; cuts in permanent jobs; retrenchments, declining jobs in both urban and rural areas, unemployment, wage cuts, receding access to health and education, indebtedness – this is what stares the workers in their face.

The BJP government stubbornly refuses to provide any succour to the workers and the poor in general. The trade unions, the Left parties and many others have been demanding cash transfer to put some money in their pockets for providing succour to the poor as well as to improve the economy. They have demanded free food grains to all needy.

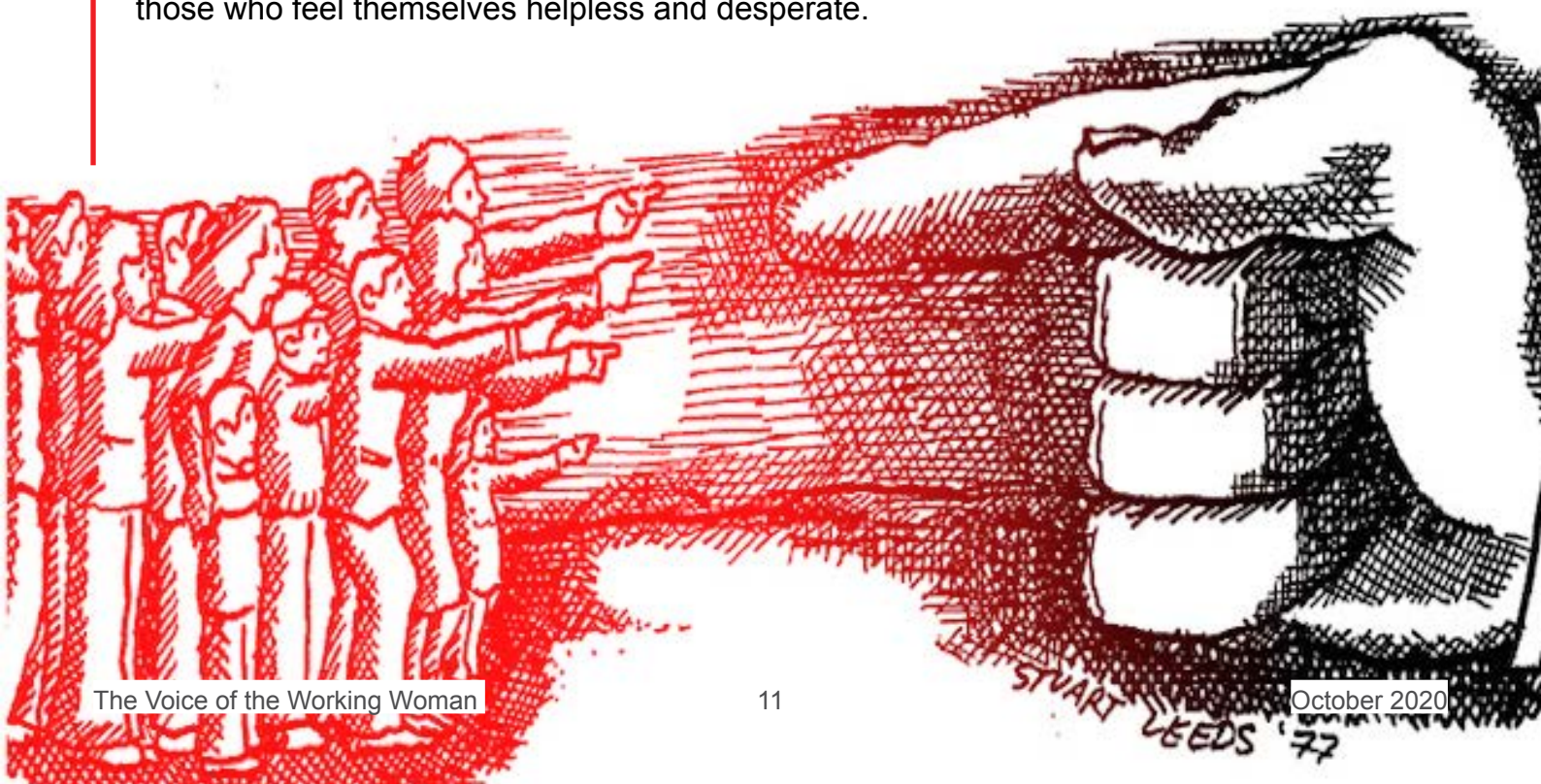
The Modi led BJP government, committed as it is to neoliberalism and obedient to the dictates of international finance capital, has totally ignored this. Instead, it is brazenly utilising the lockdown, not for strengthening health infrastructure and improving public health care facilities, but to facilitate exploitation of the people and hand over the country's wealth and resources to the corporates, domestic and foreign; to suppress democratic and constitutional rights to thwart resistance and opposition. It is resorting to witch hunting. Progressive, rational individuals and forces, voices of resistance are being targeted in a bid to throttle all dissent. In addition, along with its mentor RSS and its other outfits, the BJP is fomenting communal polarisation to divert attention from the real issues of the people, divide them on communal and caste lines, disrupt unity and weaken united struggles. It is using its power at the centre to influence all institutions to carry out its communal divisive agenda of 'Hindutva'.

No to Suicide, Fight Back

Despite the lockdown restrictions and difficulties, and the attempts of the BJP government led by Modi to suppress dissent through arrests, false cases and threats, hundreds of thousands have come on to the streets to fight for their demands. Workers and employees in different sectors including contract workers and daily wage workers have been fighting against retrenchments, wage cuts, anti worker labour law amendments and attacks on their basic rights, including by going on strike. Farmers have come together to fight the anti peasant ordinances. Workers, peasants and agricultural workers have come together to fight on common demands.

Strengthening such unity and intensifying struggles and taking them to a level of defiance and resistance is the only way to create confidence among the workers, all sections of toiling people and the common people in general that neoliberalism can be defeated; that pro-people and pro-worker policies can be brought in.

Support and solidarity among all sections of toiling people will drive away desperation, inspire people and create determination to come together to fight. That is the way forward in this situation of multi pronged attacks by the ruling classes. Don't despair! Don't take your lives! Let us come together to fight to change our lives! That should be our call to all those who feel themselves helpless and desperate.



Attempts to Enslave Workers Shall Not Pass

Working Class Warns Modi Led BJP Govt.

23 September 2020

The joint platform of central trade unions and independent industrial federations called for country wide National Protest Day on 23rd September 2020. This was on the immediate lockdown related demands of workers and toiling people, opposing the Labour Codes that curtail the existing rights and benefits of the workers and also the privatisation drive of the BJP led government.

Workers across the country responded in a big way to this call. Their participation in the demonstrations was even larger than that on the all India Protest Day on 9th August 2020, which was observed with the slogan 'Save India'. On 23rd September, tens of lakhs of workers and employees, belonging to all the constituents of the joint platform of trade unions, participated in the protests in more than one lakhs places all over the country. Through their powerful demonstrations, they asserted that it is they, the workers and the toiling people, who will together 'Save the country' from the disastrous neoliberal policies of the Modi led BJP government. They strongly condemned the increasing contempt for Parliamentary democracy, norms and the Indian Constitution, displayed by this BJP led government. They unambiguously declared that they will not allow this to pass.

The mobilisation of workers, the expanse of the sectors and places covered, and the demonstrations themselves reflected the anger of the working class against the manner in which the BJP government got the Farm Bills and the Labour Code Bills passed in Parliament. Not only in Delhi, where the central leadership of the joint trade union movement addressed the demonstrators, but in almost all the places, solidarity and support were expressed to the peasants fighting the anti farmer Bills passed hurriedly suppressing dissenting voices in Parliament. The working class was called to directly participate and extend all types of help and support to the call of the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) to observe militant protests including bandh, rail roko, rasta roko etc on 25th September.



National Protest Day March by joint trade union platform on 23rd September 2020 in Andhra Pradesh. CITU

These Codes, now passed, are meant to promote a 'hire and fire' regime and wipe out trade unions from workplaces. They provide open ended empowerment to the government to unilaterally alter and change provisions related to many substantive rights and working conditions of the workers, through executive orders. It is obvious that this is done at the dictates of their corporate masters.

Private and public sector industrial workers, telecom, railwaymen, road transport workers, coal, steel, copper, mines, ports, etc workers, bank and insurance employees, IT and ITES employees, medical and sales representatives, pharmaceutical employees, construction, stone cutting, beedi, plantation and other traditional sector workers, scheme workers, municipal and panchayat workers, and workers from many, many other sectors participated in the protests in large numbers.

CITU committees took up the campaign well before 23rd September, as soon as the decision was taken by the central trade unions. In several states, despite the lock down created difficulties, CITU state and district leaders and cadres physically visited workplaces and conducted meetings of activists, maintaining physical distancing and following all Covid protocols. Though thousands of photos of the protests were received by CITU centre from across the country, concrete reports are yet to be received from most of the state committees. As per the reports at the CITU centre –

In many places the police did not allow the workers to gather and protest on the pretext of Covid restrictions, Section 144 being in place etc. In Ahmedabad, Gujarat, they not only arrested the protestors but also manhandled the press reporters and photographers to prevent them from reporting. In Lucknow, UP, the police blocked the joint trade union procession from reaching its destination.

These demonstrations were held on the very next day when the BJP government got the three labour Bills – the Code on Industrial Relations, the Code on Social Security and the Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions – in Lok Sabha. As was expected these Bills were passed in the Rajya Sabha, even as the demonstrations were going on, without the presence of opposition members. Earlier the opposition boycotted

Parliament protesting against the illegal suspension of 8 MPs for exercising their right to demand division on the Farm Bills, which were declared passed amidst chaos. It is a shame that an elected government in Parliamentary democracy shows such contempt for constitutional and democratic rights of not only common people but of the elected MPs within Parliament as well. CITU's national secretary Elamaram Kareem, was one of the eight MPs who were suspended. This BJP government has turned Parliamentary democracy into a sham.

These Codes, now passed, are meant to promote 'hire and fire' regime and wipe out trade unions from workplaces. They provide open ended empowerment to the government to unilaterally alter and change provisions related to many substantive rights and working conditions of the workers, through executive orders. It is obvious that this is done at the dictates of their corporate masters.

The claims of the BJP government, of conducting wide consultations with all including trade unions, was exposed by none other than its co member in the RSS parivar, the BMS. In a press statement on 23rd September, BMS said "none of the objections raised by BMS and other trade unions as well as the recommendations of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in favour of workers are considered in the revised draft". And further 'Some important changes like that on standing orders are not even discussed in the consultation process; which will be violation of ILO Convention 144 ratified by Indian Parliament'. However, it tries to shift the blame entirely from the government and the BJP leading it, from the Prime Minister and the PMO who control all policy matters, to the bureaucrats. Does it mean that the chappan inch, powerful and 'visionary' Prime Minister is a mere captive in the hands of the bureaucracy, some secretaries and joint secretaries in the different departments?

Some Images from 23 September National Protest Day From Different States (images continued on last page as well)



Kerala



Assam



Madhya Pradesh



Andaman & Nicobar

While congratulating the working class for their massive response to the call of the central trade unions, CITU strongly condemned the BJP government's brazen assault on the Indian Parliament. It said the Labour Bills and the Farm Bills are nothing but brazen acts to push the working class into 19th century slavery like conditions, drive our small and medium farmers into the deadly grip of the corporate agribusinesses and convert our small farmer based agriculture into corporate agriculture. Along with the whole sale privatisation of the public sector, these sound the death knell to our self reliant economy and our people. All these are only meant to serve the corporate cronies of the BJP government.

The only way before the working class movement today is, as the 16th conference of CITU called in January this year, to defy and resist at the ground level, the implementation of these Bills that seek to push them into 19th century working conditions. Working class did not accept that then. They fought and achieved legal rights and protection. Working class will not accept this today. They will fight tooth and nail to protect whatever they have achieved. This is what the working class declared through their massive mobilisations despite the surging Covid. They made it clear that they are ready to defy, resist and stop these anti people and anti national measures on the ground, come what may.

But that is not the end. Working class needs to go further. They cannot allow the ruling classes to continue their machinations to attack their hard won rights. The fight has to be carried further on to end neoliberalism and then all exploitation; to change society for the better.

Historic Response to Pratirodh Diwas Call by AIKSCC Against Anti-Farmer Bills

25 September 2020

Total bandh in Punjab and Haryana, widespread in Rajasthan and Karnataka. Highways and rail lines blocked, effigies of Modi burnt in any states. Workers and different sections unite in support of farmers.

Response to the Pratirodh Diwas call of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) against the Anti-Farmer Bills brought by the Narendra Modi led BJP Government has been unprecedented. It has been a historic resistance with masses coming out in lakhs across India. Farmers were supported actively by the Central Trade Unions, organisations of Workers, Students, Women, Youth, Dalits and Adivasis across the country. Despite corona pandemic, restrictions, repression and rain in many States the participation in the protest action was overwhelming.

The Bandh called in Haryana and Punjab was total, and widespread in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka. Many leaders were arrested in these States. Many Districts of Rajasthan also witnessed massive protests and Bandh like situation. In Bengal the National Highway was blocked at 92 places and State Highways were blocked at 89 places. Over 6 lakh farmers and toiling masses participated in the State alone. In Kerala Dharna and protests were held in front of 250 Central Government offices and many places across the State. S.Ramachandran Pillai, vice President, AIKS inaugurated the protest in Trivandrum. In Tripura massive protests braving police repression and attacks have been reported. In most States the National and State Highways were blocked and even trains were stopped. Maharashtra witnessed massive protests across the State. At Dahanu the Mumbai Delhi Highway was blocked by thousands of farmers at Dahanu and Palghar. AIKS President Ashok Dhawale participated in the protest. Tamilnadu saw united protests in hundreds of centres across the State and police action against the protesting farmers. In Bihar and Jharkhand farmers and workers came out on the streets in big numbers, roads were blocked across all districts and Rail Roko was also done. Odisha, Assam, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh witnessed spontaneous response from farmers and workers. Effigies of Narendra Modi and the Bills were burnt in numerous places. The widespread nature of protests and massive response has exposed the concerted campaign of Narendra Modi, the BJP Government and corporate media that the protests were restricted only to a few pockets in Punjab and Haryana only.

In Delhi the solidarity action was addressed by Hannan Mollah, General Secretary, AIKS, Tapan Sen, General Secretary, CITU, Purushottam Sharma, Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA, Binoy Vishwam, MP, Rajya Sabha, Mayukh Biswas, General Secretary, SFI and Vijoo Krishnan, Joint Secretary, AIKS. Leaders of the Left Parties and representatives of different civil society groups, student organisations etc were present. K.K.Raghesh, CPI-M MP, Rajya Sabha who was suspended for speaking up against the Bills in Parliament and Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, CPI-M MP, Rajya Sabha were also present in solidarity with the farmers. The lies of the corporate media apart, on social media the first four top trends on twitter today were all against the Anti-Farmer Bills.

Some Images from 25 September Pratirodh Diwas From Different States



Tripura



Chattisgarh



Tamil Nadu



Gujarat



Haryana



Jharkhand



Karnataka



Maharashtra

The massive response to the Pratirodh Diwas is a clear warning to the arrogant Narendra Modi led BJP Government and the message is loud and clear. Peasants and workers will build the broadest possible unity to resist with all its might the efforts of the BJP to facilitate corporate loot and profiteering at the expense of farmers. AIKS congratulates all sections that came out in such huge numbers in solidarity with the peasantry.

Farmers' Voice in the Parliament

MPs Suspended Opposing Anti-Farmer Bills



The eight suspended Rajya Sabha MPs at the sit-in outside Parliament building, against undemocratically passed Agri-reform bills. PTI

“Dark day for Indian Democracy; Sabotaging of Parliamentary procedures; We MPs were denied with our right to vote on a Bill; Govt feared defeat as opposition united for the farmers; We were manhandled and our voices were not heard; Shame on this Government;”

This was tweeted by CITU national Secretary and Kerala state General Secretary Elamaram Kareem after he along with seven other MPs were suspended from Rajya Sabha till the end of the current session by its chairman Venkai Naidu. Naidu also rejected the no confidence resolution against dy. chairman Harivansh.

CITU's Kareem and AIKS national Joint Secretary K. K. Ragesh, both CPI(M) members of Rajya Sabha, along with six other opposition MPs of TMC, Congress and APP were suspended on Monday, the 21 September, by its chairman over a situation in the House earlier on Sunday for strongly opposing the passing of the anti-farmers bills and not leaving the House despite asking by the newly elected deputy chairman Harivansh.

The two anti-farmer legislations are - the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020. The opposition's suggestion to send the bills to a select committee for review, extension of the discussion, and physical voting – all were turned down by the dy. chairman, and the bills were passed by voice vote. The manner in which bills were passed on Sunday was “murder of democracy”, said the opposition.

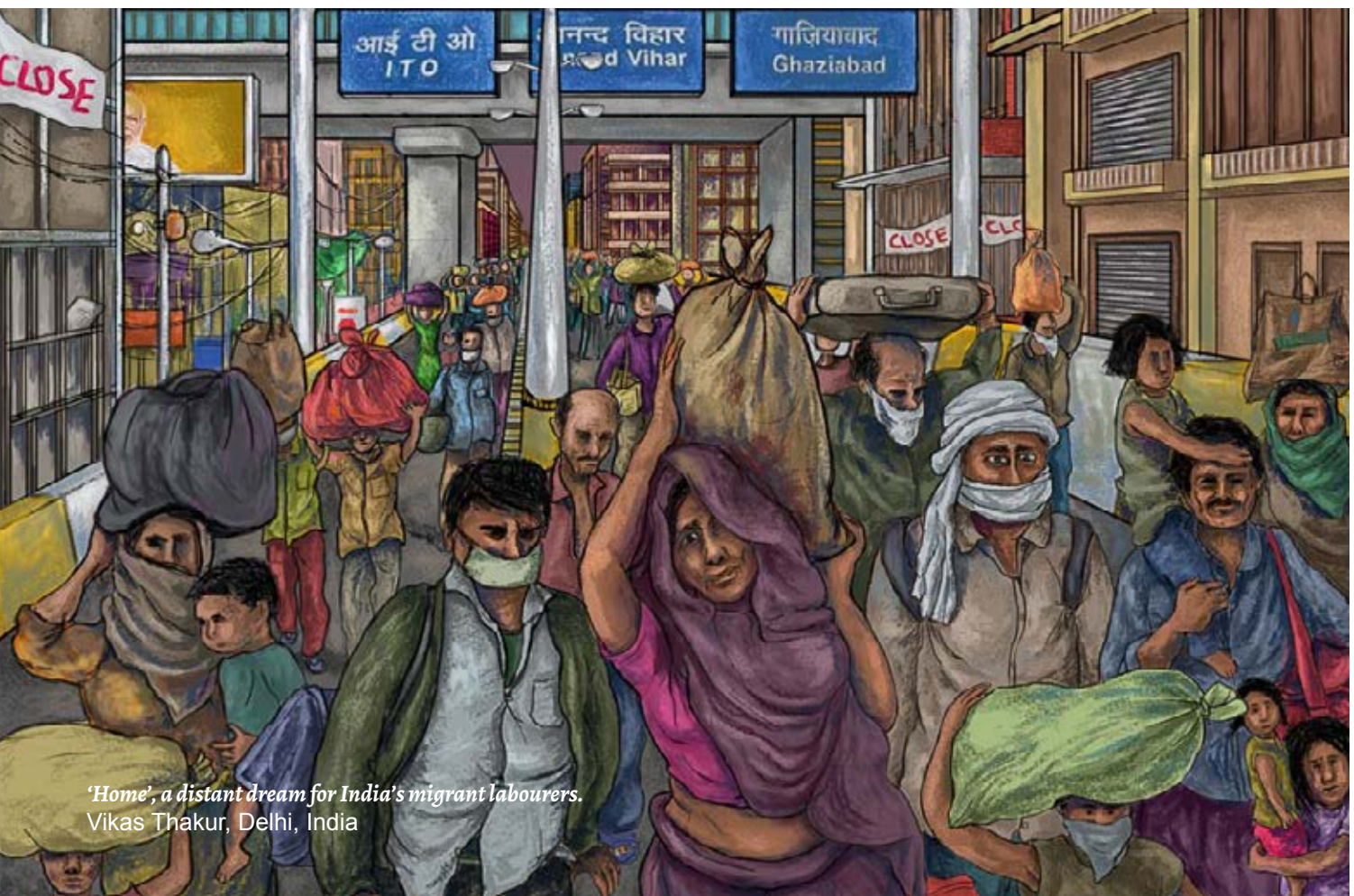
Day-Night Sit-in by Suspended MPs

Later on Monday itself, all the suspended MPs, including Kareem and Ragesh, staged a day-night sit-in near the Gandhi statue in the Parliament premises. Several opposition MPs expressed solidarity by attending the venue of the dharna. “We will fight for farmers” and “Parliament assassinated” – they raised slogans. The MPs spent the night on the lawns of the parliament building before joining other opposition leaders to walk to President Ram Nath Kovind's official residence to bring his attention to the issue.

“Suspension won't silence us. We will stand with farmers in their fight. Dy. Chairman throttled Parliamentary procedures yesterday. Suspension of MPs exposed the coward face of BJP. People will see through the attempt to divert attention from their undemocratic actions.” said another tweet by Comrade Kareem.

Why the Pandemic Crisis Marks a Dead-end for Capitalism

Prabhat Patnaik



'Home', a distant dream for India's migrant labourers.
Vikas Thakur, Delhi, India

Even after the pandemic shock is over, the world will still be stuck with the protracted crisis of over-production, which had engulfed it well before. There is a commonly-held view that the current crisis in capitalism, which has resulted in a massive output contraction and increase in unemployment, is because of the pandemic; and that once the pandemic gets over, things will go back to “normal”.

This view is entirely erroneous for two reasons. The first, which has been often discussed in this column, has to do with the fact that even before the pandemic the world economy was slowing down. In fact, since the financial crisis of 2008 following the collapse of the housing bubble, the real economy of the world had never fully recovered.

Small recoveries were followed quickly by collapses; and the low unemployment rates in the United States that had prompted Donald Trump's triumphalism, were to a very large extent explicable by the reduced work participation rate after 2008. In fact, if we assume the same work participation rate in 2020 (just before the pandemic), as had prevailed on the eve of the financial crisis, then the unemployment rate in the US was as high as 8% as compared to the less than 4% mentioned in official figures.

To get out of this crisis, it is necessary to use State expenditure, provided that it is financed by either taxes on capitalists or by a fiscal deficit. State expenditure financed by taxes on workers will not help, since workers consume the bulk of their incomes anyway, so that State demand only substitutes workers' demand without adding to the aggregate demand.

This slowing down in turn has been a result of the operation of neoliberal capitalism, which has massively increased the share of economic surplus in output, both within countries and also at the world level, by keeping the vector of real wage-rates unchanged, even as the vector of labour productivities has increased. This increase in the share of surplus, or this shift from wages to surplus, has lowered the level of aggregate demand for consumption goods and, hence, of overall aggregate demand, as workers spend more on consumption out of a unit of income than the surplus earners.

The pandemic has occurred in this context, so that even after it gets over, the world will still be stuck with the crisis of over-production which had already engulfed it well before the pandemic.

To get out of this crisis, it is necessary to use State expenditure, provided that it is financed by either taxes on capitalists or by a fiscal deficit. State expenditure financed by taxes on workers will not help, since workers consume the bulk of their incomes anyway, so that State demand only substitutes workers' demand without adding to the aggregate demand.

But neither fiscal deficits nor taxes on capitalists are liked by finance capital, so State expenditure as an anti-crisis measure is ruled out. This means that even after the pandemic is over, not only will the crisis continue, but it will do so without any counteracting measures, at least as long as neoliberal capitalism lasts. This crisis, therefore, marks a dead-end for neoliberal capitalism.

There is, however, a second reason why even after the pandemic gets over, capitalism will still remain engulfed in a crisis. This has to do with the fact that even if the demand for consumer goods recovers to the level where it had been

before the crisis, investment goods production will still remain below what it had been. And this very fact will also ensure that even consumer good output does not get back to the level where it had been before the pandemic. This is what happens when an economy receives a major shock, of the kind that the pandemic represents for the world economy.

An example will make the point clear. Suppose before the pandemic the economy was growing at 2% per annum. Then capitalists, anticipating a 2% rate of growth, would have been adding to their capital stock also at 2%. If the capital stock was 500, output was 100, then investment would have been 10, and consumption would have been 90. Let the share of post-tax profits and post-tax wage-bill in total private post-tax incomes be 50:50; and let all wages and 75% of profits be consumed. If government consumption (assuming a balanced budget for simplicity) happens to be 20, then this 90 of consumption would have been divided as 20 by government, 30 by capitalists and 40 by workers.

Now, suppose, for argument's sake, that after the pandemic, consumption recovers to 90. All of it can be produced by the existing capital stock, requiring no additional investment. Moreover, there is no reason why the capitalists should expect output to grow at 2% next year; so they would not add 10 to capital stock, as they had done before the pandemic. Let us assume that they add only 5 to capital stock, and wait to see what happens before deciding to add any further to capital stock.

Two things will happen in such a case. First, in the capital goods sector, output will be only half of what it had been before the pandemic. Likewise, capacity utilisation in the capital goods sector will be only half of what it had been before the pandemic.

“Any severe external shock to the capitalist system has this effect, namely, that investment recovers only after a long time, And precisely for that reason, even the recovery of consumption, though less delayed than the recovery of investment, also takes a long time. In other words even if there had been no crisis of over-production engulfing world capitalism before the pandemic, the sheer external shock represented by the pandemic would have kept the system mired in crisis for quite a long time. The existence of an over-production crisis predating the pandemic only makes matters worse.”

Second, even the consumption demand of 90 cannot be sustained. Assuming the same ratios as above, an investment of 5, which must equal private savings, will generate a total consumption demand of only 55 (given by 20 of government+15 of capitalists out of total post-tax profits of 20 + 20 of workers). Total output will be only 60, equalling consumption of 55 and investment of 5.

The 90 of consumption, therefore, which we assumed the world economy to reach, for argument's sake, will not even materialise. The consumption goods sector's capacity utilisation will be 61% of what it had been before the pandemic (55 divided by 90). This will be higher than the ratio of capacity utilisation in the investment goods sector compared with what it had been before the pandemic (in fact, it will now be only 50% of what it had been earlier).

Any severe external shock to the capitalist system has this effect, namely, that investment recovers only after a long time, And precisely for that reason, even the recovery of consumption, though less delayed than the recovery of investment, also takes a long time.

In other words, even if there had been no crisis of over-production engulfing world capitalism before the pandemic, the sheer external shock represented by the pandemic would have kept the system mired in crisis for quite a long time. The existence of an over-production crisis predating the pandemic only makes matters worse.

This is exactly what had happened in the US in the recovery from the Great Depression of the 1930s. The consumption goods sector had

recovered relatively faster than the investment goods sector, as a result of Roosevelt's New Deal, which had enlarged government spending. The recovery of the investment goods sector occurred only when there was an increase in armament expenditure in preparation for the war, which is why it is said that recovery from the Great Depression was made possible by the war.

But the New Deal had meant larger government spending, which is why at least the consumption goods sector had recovered somewhat, even before the war. Globalised finance capital today does not even allow larger government spending within any economy, either by taxing capitalists or by enlarging the fiscal deficit, the only two ways that such spending can increase aggregate demand. Therefore, even the depression in the consumption goods sector will last much longer than in the 1930s, so that, altogether, world capitalism will remain sunk in a protracted crisis for a very long time.

In an economy like India, where the government obeys the dictates of finance capital quite slavishly, the prospects of recovery are bleaker. None of the measures adopted by the government to revive the economy address the issue of demand, because the government does not understand that the crisis is because of insufficient aggregate demand.

In fact, the government measures are such that they will only aggravate the deficiency of aggregate demand, thereby worsening the crisis rather than alleviating it. As the crisis gets aggravated, however, the government will resort even more strongly to repression against the working people, and even further intensify its communal agenda.

Thousands of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Observed National Action Day on 1 October 2020

AIFAWH will send 5 lakh protest letters to Minister WCD against her statement in Parliament

On the occasion of the 45th Foundation Day of ICDS (on 2nd October 2020), thousands of anganwadi workers and helpers throughout the country observed National Action Day as “Save anganwadis Day” on 1 October 2020.

This mass protest programme was organized as the culmination of the massive grassroots level campaign among the anganwadi workers and helpers and beneficiaries against the government policies affecting various components of the ICDS – nutrition, health and education/ECCE including the NEP -2020 to highlight the Children’s right to nutrition, health and education and the need to strengthen ICDS. Massive mobilizations were held at the project level in AP, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, HP, Jharkhand, Kerala, MP, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, UP, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

AIFAWH (All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers) has launched a protest campaign to write 5 lakh letters to the Minister, WCD on the exploitation of the anganwadi workers and helpers by the Ministry of WCD from 1 October 2020. In a shocking incident, Smt Smriti Irani, Minister for WCD, Government of India in reply to the question in Lok Sabha (Unstarred Question number 4511) on 20 September 2020 had stated that “In the recent past no complaint regarding the exploitation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers has been received in the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).” To give such an answer in the Lok Sabha, the highest democratic forum in our democracy, when innumerable protests have been held by the anganwadi workers and helpers against the exploitation in the recent past is atrocious and disgusting behaviour. AIFAWH has submitted at least a dozen complaints during the last six months and at our call the state and lower level committees have sent innumerable complaints detailing the exploitation suffered during the pandemic and lockdown, including putting the lives of anganwadi workers and helpers under risk, non implementation of minimum wages, retrenchment without pension or gratuity, absence social security, non-payment of wages etc. Nothing more is expected from a government which is continuously lying to the people of the country. The protest letters by every worker and helper shall be collected at the project level and sent to the WCD Ministry by Courier/Registered post.

AIFAWH congratulates the Anganawadi workers and helpers for the success of the protest and calls upon them to be prepared for heightened struggles in coming days to Save ICDS.



Some Images from 1 October National Action Day From Different States



Bihar



West Bengal



Punjab



Gujarat



Andhra Pradesh



Kerala



Chandigarh

Protest by Scheme Workers of Anantnag, J&K

Anganwadi workers and helpers, ASHA workers and construction workers observed a peaceful protest under the leadership of CPIM J&K secretary Malik Gh Nabi. The scheme workers demanded the withdrawal of the proposals for the privatization of the delivery of basic services like health, nutrition (including ICDS and MDMS) and education.

In return, the workers had a few demands of their own. Centrally Sponsored Schemes like ICDS, NHM and MDMS should be made permanent with adequate budgetary allocation. The recommendations of 45th and 46th ILC for the regularization of scheme workers as permanent workers should be implemented, and all such workers should be paid minimum wages Rs. 21000 per month and a pension of Rs. 10000 per month, along with ESI and PF provisions. No pro-employer change in the labour laws should take place either in the name of codification or Covid-19, including no increase in the daily working hours.

Additionally, safety gear should be provided for all frontline workers, especially the ASHA workers, anganwadi workers and health sector workers, with PPEs for those who are engaged in containment areas and red zones. Frequent and free Covid-19 tests should be available to all frontline workers, and those who are above 60 years of age or have health issues should not be engaged in Covid-19 Duty.

Lastly, all frontline workers should receive insurance cover of up to Rs. 50 lakhs, covering all deaths on duty, pension/jobs for the dependents of the workers, and coverage of treatment for Covid-19 for the entire family. Risk Allowance of Rs. 10,000 per month should be provided for all the contract and scheme workers engaged in COVID -19 duty, especially ASHA, anganwadi and NHM workers. Timely payments of all dues must be ensured.



11,000 Grameen Safai Karmacharis' Agitation

Though recognised as frontline workers fighting Covid pandemic, 11,000 Safai Karmacharis have had 4 months of wage and annual dress allowance deducted by the BJP government of Haryana, across the state under the cover of Covid-19.

Against this wage cut and demanding implementation of the earlier written assurance of the Chief Minister about wage increase and on other service related issues, thousands of Safai Karmacharis gheraoed the sub-divisional offices in 19 districts across the state on 24 August, which was lifted after written assurance of government on meeting the union's delegation next day. Next day, the Dy. CM Dushyanta Choutala and the union's delegation met. Government asked for 15 days time to consider all issues and assured them they would fix a meeting after 15 days.

Recruited as 'volunteers' in 2007, 11000 Safai Karmacharis, all of them Dalits, are organised by CITU through the Grameen Safai Karmachari Union Haryana and have been carrying on a powerful statewide movement that began in 2009, substantially improving their service and working conditions.

Initially safai karmacharis were paid Rs.3525 as an honourarium by the village panchayats. The higher caste and influential panchayat heads forced these hapless Safai Karmacharis to work for free at their houses and farms. Because of the movement that took place in 2013, the honourarium began to be paid from the BDPO office. However, as soon as BJP came to power, it reverted back to the older panchayati system, though this was withdrawn the very next year in 2019 under the pressure of a movement that included a demonstration before the CM and also resulted in an increased honourarium of Rs.11,000 plus Rs.3500 as annual dress allowance.

Calling it insufficient, the union once again launched an agitation, and after 18 days of striking the Chief Minister issued an order to increase wages to Rs.12500, bring safai karmacharis under EPF, issue them identity cards, provide upto Rs.10 lakh accident insurance, and prescribe norms for ESI coverage. The present agitation is for the implementation of this order.



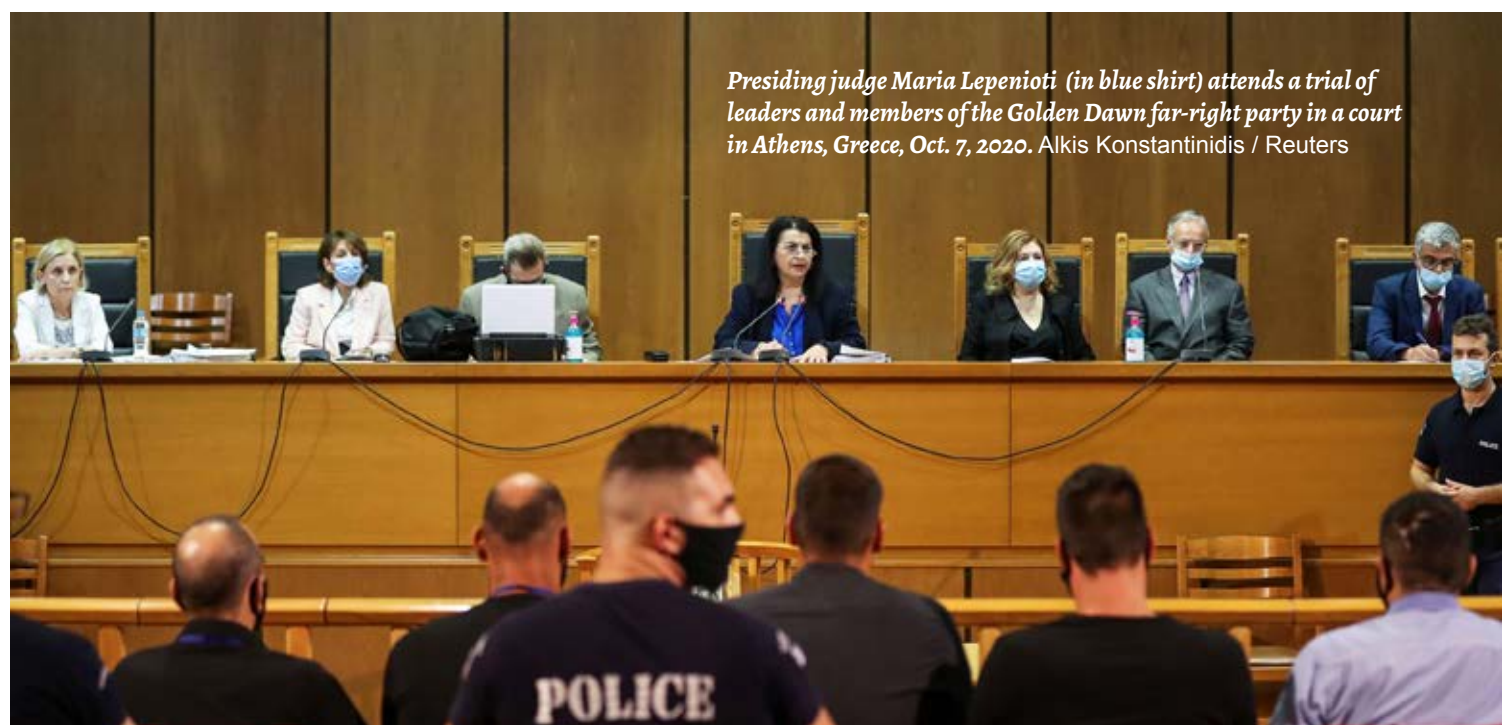
Image source : Dainik Jagran

The Women Who Brought Down Greece's Golden Dawn

Female legal experts played key role in confronting far-right party's violent tactics

Behind the bench, before her mostly male audience, as the marathon trial of Golden Dawn entered its last act, supreme court justice Maria Lepenioti did what she has done every week: she kept the peace.

It has not been easy. Emotions have often run high. Even as the curtain was about to come down on proceedings with a ruling on whether those convicted should be jailed pending appeal, the Greek judge, both laconic and low-key, has had to pull off an extraordinary balancing act presiding over a case that has put more Nazi leaders and sympathisers in the dock than at any time since Nuremberg.



Presiding judge Maria Lepenioti (in blue shirt) attends a trial of leaders and members of the Golden Dawn far-right party in a court in Athens, Greece, Oct. 7, 2020. Alkis Konstantinidis / Reuters

In her court every word has counted. There has been no tolerance for the extreme rhetoric that fuelled the neo-fascist group's spectacular rise. Nor for jibes from the other side.

"Day after day, session after session, she has managed to keep the harmony," says Giota Tessi, a reporter with the centre left Syntaktwn paper who has observed the proceedings almost since they began in April 2015. "Her knowledge of the case file is incredible. She has been a model of restraint but she has also been very aware of the weight of the moment."

Historians will look back at the women who played a seminal role in Golden Dawn's downfall. Under Lepenioti's seemingly expressionless gaze, the three-member tribunal has gone where many in Greece had formerly feared to tread.



↑ A picture taken on September 28, 2013 shows the leader of ultra-right wing Golden Dawn party 'Fuhrer' Nikos Michaloliakos being escorted by masked police officers to the prosecutor from the police headquarters in Athens, Greece. Angelos Tzortzinis / AFP photo

After its landmark verdict that the far-right, ultra-nationalist party was a criminal organisation bent on extinguishing enemies real or perceived, sentences have been delivered that will almost certainly ensure its leadership remain behind bars for years to come. The party's founder, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, and the tattooed macho militants who comprised his inner circle, all received 13-year prison terms.

With the last chapter in the story of Europe's most violent political force finally written, it will not be lost on the protagonists that punishment, in the end, was meted out by a woman.

"It's undeniable that in this case justice was female," said Maria Stratigaki, professor of gender studies at Panteion University, noting the number of female prosecutors and investigators who also participated in drawing up the dossier against Golden Dawn. "For a party whose ideology is based on male supremacy, whose worldview is so militaristic, it's humiliating and will hurt." Stratigaki is among the many who believe there are lessons to be learned.

The dark episode of Golden Dawn – its meteoric rise from being a fringe movement 40 years ago to Greece's third-biggest party on the back of protest votes over EU-dictated austerity – has raised disquieting questions.

When historians look back they will also see a nation whose political class was inexcusably slow in dealing with the right-wing menace and a society whose silence was deafening. A police force whose complicity enabled the extremists to act with impunity – until their murder of a popular anti-fascist Greek hip-hop artist, Pavlos Fyssas, provoked a backlash that was impossible to ignore – has already been illuminated by the trial. Officers who sympathised with the group, covering up attacks on leftists, migrants and refugees and the LGBTQ community, were among the hearing's 68 defendants.

Instead, it took the justice system, viewed as one of the country's few meritocratic institutions, to confront the party's violent tactics and thuggish behaviour.



↑ A banner of leftist Greek rapper Pavlos Fyssas at a protest at the close of the trial for leaders and members of the far-right Golden Dawn, in Athens, Greece, Oct. 7, 2020. Costas Baltas / Reuters



↑ Magda Fyssa, mother of anti-racist Greek rapper Pavlos Fyssas, who was killed in 2013 by Golden Dawn supporter Giorgos Roupakias, reacts after the trial verdict in Athens, Greece, Oct. 7, 2020. Alkis Konstantinidis / Reuters

Graffiti remembering the murder of Greek musician Pavlos Fyssas by members of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party.

IF YOU'D HAVE REACTED
TO IMMIGRANT MURDERS
PAVLOS MAY BE ALIVE

“Justice stepped in where others should have stepped before,” Stratigaki told the Guardian. “And our justice system is full of female judges because it is they who do better at exams and rise to the top.” Lepenioti, at 62, is the same age as Michaloliakos, Golden Dawn’s rambunctious leader whose extremist ideas and embrace of national socialism were cultivated during the 1967-74 Colonels’ regime. Upon the restoration of democracy, fresh out of law school as a star student, she would go on to become part of Greece’s first generation of female judges.

No trial since the collapse of military rule has been as politically significant. But as professor Statigaki is quick to note, it might never have gotten to this had it not been for the courage of other women in the justice system who would assemble the voluminous case file against Golden Dawn. Within days of Fyssas’ assassination, Ioanna Klappa and Maria Dimitropoulou were assigned by Efterpi Koutzamani, the first female prosecutor to be appointed to the supreme court, to investigate the murder.

The magistrates spent the next nine months, watched over by armed guards, trawling through computers confiscated from the party’s leaders after they were arrested and jailed in pre-trial detention. Despite threats and almost daily intimidation, they examined countless witnesses, wading through thousands of videos, pictures, speeches, documents and blogs detailing the militants’ obsession with the toxic ideology of Hitler and the Third Reich. Their 15,000-page dossier ultimately laid the case against Golden Dawn. Given the impossibility of banning a party elected by democratic process, it became vital in exposing the extremist group as a criminal organisation.

“The best defence of any liberal democracy is the rule of law and the courage and bravery of individuals like these women,” said Aristides Hatzis, a professor of law at Athens University. “As importantly women were also pivotal to the demise of Golden Dawn collectively,” he added referring to the party’s failure to be admitted into parliament at the last general elections in July 2019. “Many who had previously voted for them did not last time ensuring their defeat.”

On the bench Lepenioti has served justice. But in her audience there is one woman who has faithfully always been there too. For many she is the image of Pavlos, her slain son, a poignant symbol of the battle of right over wrong. No one so single-handedly has raised interest in the trial as much as Magda Fyssa, a seamstress before Pavlos, a working-class hero, was knifed to death in the suburb of Keratsini in September 2013. Nothing, she knows, will bring him back but as she screamed – in an outburst of joy and emotion within minutes of the court pronouncing judgment on the neo-Nazis – “Pavlos you did it!”

For now, the poisonous past had been laid to rest. Truth and beauty had emerged triumphant with the passing of Golden Dawn.

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National Protest Day

23 September 2020



Bihar



Uttarakhand



Jharkand



Punjab



Tamil Nadu

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