



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

New Years Greetings 2020

Workers Long March in West Bengal



The Concluding Rally in Kolkata



A Section of Long March – Chittaranjan to Kolkata

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Anganwadi Employees March in Karnataka

Tumakuru to Bengaluru



Led by CITU, tens of thousands of Anganwadi employees converged to Tumkur on 10 December for a state level 70 kms March to Bangalore opposing the state government's policy to introduce LKG and UKG classes in the existing government schools; demanding withdrawal of government's circular on this, that these classes take place in the existing Anganwadi centres, strengthen these centres and the ICDS scheme etc. Prior to State level Padayatra, six regional jathas were held a week before.

To prevent the gathering and the March, BJP's Yeduryappa state government deployed huge number of armed forces in Tumkur. Police put Anganwadi employees leader Nagaratna and others under house arrest night before; stopped motor vehicles en route coming to Tumkur; and pressurised the vehicle owners and drivers not to move out their vehicles.

Despite these, by the evening more than 50,000 Anganwadi employees had gathered at Tumkur; they refused go back, stayed indefinitely day-night at Glass House Maidan and other such grounds, cooked food for the night meal.

A public meeting of Anganwadi employees at Tumkur was addressed by national and state leaders of CITU and of its Anganwadi federation AIFAWH including A. R. Sindhu, S. Varalaxmi, Meenakshi Sundaram, K. N. Umesh, Syed Mujeeb and renowned theatre personality and social activist Prasanna of Gram Seva Sangh.

On the insistence, a delegation was taken to Bangalore for a meeting with chief minister. But the talk failed as there was no concrete assurance from the CM. Hence, the agitation continued and the leaders deciding to organise Padayatra or sit-in next day. Later the CM was forced to meet the union leaders within 24 hours. A written assurance was given for an exclusive meeting to settle the issues of strike. On that basis the strike was deferred till 16 December. WCD minister Shashikala Annasaheb Jolle publicly announced her support to the demands of the Anganwadi union.

WORKING CLASS

JANUARY 2020

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Forward to 8 January 2020 Strike**— Defeat Divisive & Diversionary Agenda —**

Workers National Mass Convention of 30 September 2019 in New Delhi gave call for countrywide Workers General Strike on 8 January 2020. In addition to the demands of all sections of the workers, the convention declaration raised the burning issues of other sections, some of which are in the 12 point charter of demands including the issues to stop price rise and increasing unemployment. The declaration raised the issues of land, remunerative prices and loan waver for the peasantry; and also against the communal and divisive policies of the ruling dispensation.

Since then the country has witnessed the people's anger bursting out in spontaneous and organised agitations against atrocities against women; new education policy of privatisation, commercialisation and communalisation of education and increasing fees in governmental institutions; against CAA, NRC and NPR. These issues are part of the workers national convention declaration and of general strike.

Modi government's Divisive Agenda are also part of its Diversionary Tactics to divert attention from the people's burning issues of rights and livelihood. While focusing on the rights and livelihood of the workers and the people as the issues of 8 January general strike, it is imperative to expose and defeat the divisive agenda of Modi government and defeat their diversionary tactics from the livelihood issues of the people. Unity of the workers and the people is supreme for the working class movement. On both counts, it has to be defeated.

Already peasants organisations have decided peasants strike on 8 January 2020 as 'Gramin Bandh' on peasants own demands. The students' organisations have decided Educational Institutions Bandh on 8 January 2020 on their own demands.

This time, it will not only be the solidarity actions with the working class by other class and mass organisations; but also will be synchronised strike/movement of different sections for their own demands marching towards formation of broadest Democratic Platform of Action of the class and mass organisations on 8 January 2020.

Forward to 8 January 2020 general strike.

CITU 16th Conference

Information on Arrangements

- **Weather:** Pleasant; Temperature: between 20°C min - 29°C max;
- **Help Desks:** 22 till 23 January morning, at railway stations and airports, help desks will be functioning;
- **Local Transport:** Reception Committee made arrangements of local transportation of delegates from Airport / Railway stations to their respective places of stay.
- **Lodging:** Delegates lodging arrangement is made from 23 morning to 27 January in respective hotels. Delegate arriving before or leaving after is to inform the Reception Committee, well in advance, for appropriate arrangement at cost.
- **Conference Venue:** YMCA Grounds, 24, West Cott Road, Royapettah, Chennai – 600014, (Opposite Royapettah Government General Hospital), at the distance of 5 kms from Chennai Central Station and 16 kms from Airport.
- **Food:** Breakfast, Tea, Lunch and Dinner will be provided at the conference venue.
- **Help Desks at Conference Venue:** There will be Help Desks in Conference venue to assist, coordinate and provide information to the delegates about conference programme, tours (if any delegate requires), transport, accommodation etc.
- **Advance information required:** (i) District-wise arrival with date, time and mode of arrival; (ii) Number of Men and Women delegates and (iii) Number of Vegetarians and Non-Vegetarians.

Reception Committee's Phone Numbers

1. Sounderarajan, President – 9841748076
2. G. Sukumaran, General Secretary – 9443569130
3. V. Kumar, Assistant General Secretary – 9840819206
4. K. Thiruseivan, Assistant General Secretary – 9444577036
5. K.C. Gopikumar, Secretary – 9443091730
6. R. Viswanathan, Reception Committee – 9444040413.

- Reception Committee

More Privatisation **After Privatisation Drive in Defence Production; It is Now Military Cantonment Properties**

The Central government has decided to open ownership rights of the properties in military cantonment areas for private players across the country including lands and buildings. The committee for this purpose, headed by retired IAS officer Sumit Bose, has submitted its report, recommending that the properties in all 62 military cantonments be opened to private players despite opposition by army. For this, key changes are being made in the Army Cantonment Boards giving overriding powers to Adarsh Society scam tainted Directorate General of Defence Estates, which manages defence land worth several lakh crore rupees.

(Source: IANS; 22.10.2019)

Labour Codes & CITU's Intervention

R. Karumalaiyan

BJP's Modi government introduced two labour codes in the last monsoon session of the Parliament – the 'Code on Wages' Bill, 2019 (Wage Code) and the 'Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code' Bill, 2019 (OSH Code). While the Wage Code was passed by the Parliament and, after Presidential assent, it was notified as law; the OSH Code was sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Labour. On 1 November, the government issued public notification on Draft Rules under Wage Code.

Meanwhile, the other two labour codes – the 'Industrial Relation Code' Bill, 2019 (I R Code) and the 'Social Security Code' Bill 2019 (SS Code) have also been introduced in the just concluded winter session of the Lok Sabha. Thus, all four labour codes, replacing all 44 erstwhile/existing labour laws, which were proposed by Modi-1 government, are now in the various stages after introduction in the Parliament since the Modi-2 government came to power.

At every stage since Modi-1 government proposed and introduced drafts labour codes, redrafting these several times since then, and Modi-2 government getting those passed through the Parliamentary process for enactment; CITU took initiative in propagating the contents and their serious adverse impact on the rights and livelihood of the workers; recording its views, objections and amendments independently and jointly with other central trade unions to the government and Parliamentary committees and widely disseminating the same and conducting struggles.

Wage Code

When the Wage Code bill was introduced in the Parliament, CITU centre assisted Left MPs in moving amendments focusing on the criteria for fixing minimum wages based on 15th ILC recommendations and Supreme Court Judgment 1991 in Raptakos case in the background of Modi government's attempt to change these criteria through the so-called 'Expert Committee's' report on it. This was backed by outside campaign. CITU national secretary Elamaram Kareem, MP moved the amendments in the Rajya Sabha. Though the amendment got only 8 votes in the House; the Draft Rules later had to incorporate all the criteria.

On the Draft Rules under the Wage Code, CITU submitted amendments to the union labour ministry. Following this, all 11 central trade unions including BMS held discussion in a ILO arranged meeting and finalised joint memorandum on 35 amendments in the Draft Rules and submitted the same to the ministry. Some of the suggested major amendments are (i) 6 criteria of minimum wage calculation should be in the Act itself (*not in the Rules*); (ii) 8 hours a day (*instead of proposed 9 hours*) and 48 hours a week; (iii) wage calculation shall be monthly first to be divided by 26 to arrive at daily wage and daily wage divided by 8 to arrive at wage per hour (*instead of proposed daily wage calculation first, then multiplied by 26 to arrive at monthly wage and dividing daily wage by 9 to arrive at hourly wage*); (iv) 30% of total minimum wage on food plus clothing plus 20% on fuel etc. as per 7th CPC recommendation for central government employees (*instead of 10% proposed*); (v) 100% neutralization of the cost of living index; (vi) 6 members family unit instead of 3; (vii) minimum wage shall be the Floor Level Wage etc.

OSH Code

The OSH Code amalgamated and subsumed 13 laws related to the working conditions, safety, health and welfare of the factories, mines, dock workers; building and other construction workers; plantation workers; contract labour; inter-state migrant workers; working journalists and other news paper employees; motor transport workers, sales promotion employees; beedi and cigar workers; cine workers and cinema theatre workers.

CITU submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee section-wise amendments in the OSH Code Bill including opposition to repeal special Acts for Working Journalists and Sales Promotion Employees removing them from all labour rights. Subsequently, all central trade unions met at BTR Bhavan and jointly finalised the approach to the amendments in the OSH Code Bill and, on that basis, independently submitted such amendments to the Parliamentary Standing Committee and, invited by the Standing Committee for the meeting with it on 19 December 2019, presented their views as per the submissions.

The CITU's critique of the Bill and amendments centered round the OSH Code violating the ILO Conventions including the first Convention No.01 on 8 hours work, which was ratified by Indian government, and the relevant Conventions on Inspections etc; as to how it dilutes the existing workers' protective provisions in the present 13 Acts; as to how the government's rhetoric on universal application is being camouflaged in the definitional clauses and in threshold limits which invariably leads to more exclusion than inclusion of workers under the coverage of the Code.

CITU also has drawn the attention of the Standing Committee on how the political executive is usurping the power of the Parliament that too on 182 matters under sections 125, 126, 127 and 128 on the substantive issues connected with safety standards and welfare. All these operation is being undertaken by the ruling dispensation to facilitate 'Ease of Doing Business' for the corporates at the cost of workers safety and health.

In the meeting with the Parliamentary Standing Committee, CITU central secretariat was represented by R. Karumalaiyan and Amitav Guha; and by the leaders of its federations - FMRAI by Santanu Chatterjee and Pratha Rakshit; and Plantation Workers Federation by Zia-ul-Alam and Saman Pathak.

(R. Karumalaiyan is invitee-member in CITU's national secretariat)

NO CAA; NO NRC **Defeat BJP Government's Move to Divide & Divert**

Pushpendra Tyagi

Through a statement on 14 December, CITU called upon the workers and trade union movement in general; and CITU units and its unions in particular to unitedly launch countrywide movement against BJP government's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) and also join with all other toiling masses in the countrywide democratic movement against these.

CITU condemned RSS-led BJP government for getting the discriminatory Citizens' Amendment Bill hurriedly passed in the Parliament and, after immediate Presidential assent, converting it as an Act. This is the blackest act in the country's legislative history. It is an attack on the secular, democratic and equality based inclusive foundation of the Constitution of India; an assault on the humanity perpetrated by the communal forces guided by fascistic ideology to change the basic character of India's Constitution towards 'Hindu Rashtra', CITU said.

BJP government's machination is to divide the working class, who are already battling against the aggressive neoliberal policy regime, and the people and suppress their movement against economic and social exploitation and repression.

CAA and NRC can be defeated by the people through united struggle at every stage and in every front. People are already on the streets in different parts of the country opposing the CAA and NRC. Trade union movement must take the lead, CITU said.

On 17 December, 10 central trade unions issued joint statement strongly protesting against discriminatory CAA and NRC; condemning police attack on the protesters killing 3 persons in Assam, brutal assault on the students in JNU, AMU, JMI etc. injuring many and en mass arresting peaceful protesters. CTUs demanded repeal CAA, not to proceed with NRC and stop police atrocity on the protesters and called upon all their unions to organise wide campaign among the workers and participate in the protest actions.

The ongoing countrywide protests against CAA and proposed NRC that initially began in Assam and other north eastern states attracted national and international attention. Anger and condemnation spread across the country after the brutal police assault on the students of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The agitation further spread and intensified on 19 December responding to the call of the Left parties and joined by the workers and various other organizations. Protesters came out on the streets defying prohibitory orders in BJP-ruled states. University students were in the forefront across India since the police atrocities in JMI and AMU.

Tens of thousands assembled and marched peacefully across the country including metropolitan cities opposing the unconstitutional and dangerous move of Modi government. Police resorted to high handed actions in BJP ruled states to suppress the movement killing several persons including 16 persons in Uttar Pradesh and 2 persons at Mangalore so far.

In national capital Delhi, under BJP-led central government's diktat, the police did not allow peaceful protest to take place; cracked down on the protesters as soon as they started gathering at Mandi House and near Red Fort from where they were to march towards Jantar Mantar and ITO respectively. Police arrested and dragged the leaders and activists and pushed them inside buses. Thousands were arrested including leaders of political parties, of different mass organisations of workers, Kisans, women, youths, students and others including CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D. Raja, CITU and other mass organisations national leaders and others. 20 metro stations and internet services were shut. Student leaders and trade union activists led the protesters march from Mandi House to Jantar-Mantar with placards and raising slogans opposing CAA and NRC and staged a massive 10,000 strong demonstration. The earlier detained leaders later joined the rally at Jantar-Mantar.

At Varanasi, PM's parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh, large number activists of CITU, other mass organisations and Left parties have been arrested and sent to jail for participation in the 19 December agitation against CAA and NRC.

Police atrocities against students in JMI and AMU and opposition to CAA and NRC have evoked countrywide condemnation and solidarity actions by the students of other universities and premier educational institutions. The students, teachers and renowned writers, cultural and social activists also joined. There was wide condemnation of police high handedness against the renowned historian Ram Chandra Guha in Bangalore.

A delegation comprising of AIKS national leaders Hannan Mollah and Krishnaprasad; CITU Delhi state leader Virendra Gaur; JNUSU president Aishe Ghose visited JMI campus on 16 December.

There is international echo of the movement against police atrocities and CAA and NRC. Students of prominent universities joined in solidarity actions in several parts of the world including in United States, U.K. and in Europe.

Indian Workers Association (IWA) staged a demonstration in front of Indian High Commissioners office in London on 19 December. In a joint statement by its president Dayal Bagri and general secretary Joginder Bains denounced Modi government's move saying 'we as patriotic Indians feel let down and angered that our great country, that led the way in diversity and tolerance should act in such manner.'

(Pushpendra Tyagi is CITU centre's activist and its GC member)

INDUSTRIES & SECTORS

Oil & Petroleum

Against Privatisation **Countrywide Massive Strike**

Swadesh Dev Roye

Jointly led by 3 national federations of 25 unions of oil and petroleum workers of the country; around 30,000 regular and contract workers of BPCL, HPCL and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL owned by ONGC) resorted to a day's countrywide successful strike on 28 November to resist Modi government's suicidal move to completely sellout these oil PSUs to giant private business of its choice in oil sector. The strike hugely affected both the refinery and marketing operations throughout India.

Among refineries, the epicentres of the strike were Mumbai, Kochi and Mangalore. Obviously, the strike was complete in Kochi Refinery in the Left-led state of Kerala. The unions of all central trade unions' affiliations participated in the strike with full strength. All 1250 permanent and 6356 contract workers were on strike. Militant and colourful procession, demonstration and dharna by the striking workers were organised in and around the refinery complex.

In Mumbai Refinery the strike was complete. Marketing workers from far flung locations of Mumbai travelled down to the Chembur Refinery gate, many with their family members; and around 500 workers, wearing Black T-Shirt, staged powerful demonstration. Later, a 2,000 strong *Workers' Long March* was organised covering about nine kilometers distance from Refinery gate to Ambedkar Gardens near Chembur railway station culminating into a big public meeting. Many prominent trade unions leaders addressed the striking workers. In Mangalore Refinery, around 5,000 regular and contract workers were on strike.

The workers of HPCL refinery in Vizag organized a march and staged demonstration. However, the contract workers in the marketing operation in HPCL and in IOCL and tanker lorry workers in all the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh participated in the strike in full strength.

At the main gate at Numaligarh Refinery (NRL) in Assam, regular and contract workers staged demonstration supporting the strike and opposing privatization of BPCL. Facing serious protest and agitation by the people of Assam in general and the workers of NRL and people from the nearby villages in particular, the government had to agree to keep NRL as a public sector entity separating it from BPCL.

There has been significant sweep and spread in the successful strike in marketing operations in around hundred locations throughout the country. All the workers engaged in the bottling plants, bulk storage installations and in regional headquarters overwhelmingly took part in the strike.

Around 250 striking workers from the Northern RHQ in Noida and surrounding states organised a rally before the Parliament at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. The rally was addressed by several MPs and central trade union leaders. The biggest Bottling Plant of Asia, situated in the Western Region at Uran near New Mumbai, had to be shut down due to the impact of the strike.

Solidarity Actions

In Kerala, at the joint call of CITU, AITUC, INTUC, HMS, UTUC and TUC; large number of workers all over the State participated in solidarity action by organizing street rallies and wearing black-badge.

In another significant development, electricity workers in Kerala, under the banner of Electricity Employees' Federation of India (EEFI), organized a huge demonstration in front of the Kochi Refinery gate on 30 November in solidarity with the struggles of Kochi Refinery workers opposing privatisation.

At the call of All India Coal Workers Federation of CITU, coal workers of CIL, its subsidiaries, and in SECL across the coal bearing states; joined in solidarity actions with the striking oil workers by holding gate meetings and pit meetings, and burning effigy in 55 collieries including 19 in ECL, 5 in BCCL, 14 in CCL, 5 in WCL, 7 in SECL collieries and at 5 places of CMPDI.

Such large scale solidarity actions in support of the striking workers of one energy segments (oil & petroleum) by the workers of other energy segments (coal and power) are unprecedented. These strategic sectors *“economically dominate the centre and are the nerves of the entire economic system of capitalism.”*

Under the impact of systemic crisis of capitalism and conspicuously capitalist class oriented anti-people policies of the Modi Government in dealing with the crisis; the public sector energy industries have also been pushed into the grip of the crisis. Amongst the 8 core sectors, which have suffered contraction in growth, worst in last 14 years; 5 are from energy sector – coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and electricity. Clearly the energy industries in public sector are exposed to economic and political onslaught are leading to dismantling, down sliding in commercial strength and ultimately being pushed to privatization. The situation is full of challenges and providing opportunities for integrated united resistance struggles of entire energy sector workers.

Integrated Struggle of Entire Energy Sector Workers is Imperative

All the segments of energy sector are under challenge of different dimensions. It may be noted that the CPSUs, which are currently under privatization, pertains to oil and petroleum, coal, power and shipping and container sectors which are already under the business domain of Modi government's two crony capitalists - Ambani and Adani.

The energy sector as a whole – Coal, Power and Oil & Natural Gas is worst victim of the policies of neo-liberalism. The successive governments have been carrying out legislative onslaught of dismantling the time tested statutes which are supportive to self-reliant, social welfare oriented and people centric energy industrial policies. They are enacting private sector supportive legislations. Further, through executive orders structural destruction of PSUs is being implemented.

The message from the 28 November strike is loud and clear for integrated and united struggle of all the segments of energy sector to defeat the move to handover the domination and control of energy sector as a whole to the cronies of Modi government.

Strike's Dimensions & Next Course of Action in the Convention in Kolkata

The magnitude of the strike has clearly demonstrated the determination of the workers to fight back Modi government's move of privatisation of oil PSUs. It is necessary to note that the workers have participated in the strike braving the threat and intimidation by Modi government and prohibitory orders, obtained by the managements at the behest of ministry of petroleum & natural gas, from various high courts. Many new encouraging developments have been witnessed centering round the 28 November strike. Workers, at the locations which are historically weak in strike participation, this time recorded exceptional success. Voice of condemnation of the Modi government's policies was in high pitch in rallies and dharna. Participation of women workers was

remarkable. Strike day demonstrative mobilization throughout the country on the roads was massive and militant in character.

The post strike National Convention of Oil & Petroleum workers under the banner of the three National Federations will be held in Kolkata on 22 December, 2019. There is perceptible enthusiasm amongst the unions regarding participation and conclusion of the forthcoming Kolkata convention.

(S. Dev Roye is CITU's national secretary and president of EFFI)

NTPC Employees Countrywide Protest

Thousands of executive and non-executive employees of NTPC staged protest demonstrations at the gates in the morning and brought out candle light processions, with family members in all 50 units of NTPC across the country on 15 November against proposed disinvestment of this high profit earning CPSU.

At CITU's initiative, a national convention of NTPC workers will be held in New Delhi on 4 January against Modi government's privatisation move of NTPC.

Construction

Impressive Workers March to Parliament

Led by CFWI (Construction Workers Federation of India) of CITU, more than 15,000 construction workers, coming from all over the country, joined the March to Parliament on 5 December with flags, festoons and banners and with one crore signatures on the petition to Lok Sabha speaker; and, when blocked by police barricade at the Parliament Street, it was converted into a mass rally staging demonstration and holding meeting demanding to stop proposed repeal of the two exclusive labour laws for the construction workers – the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1996 (BOCW) Act and Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996 (BOCW) Cess Act - through Modi government's anti-workers two proposed labour codes – the Code on OSH and the SS Code.

CFWI president and general secretary and national trade union leaders - CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, its national secretary E. Kareem, MP and LPF general secretary M. Shanmugam, MP – addressed the rally. A five-member delegation of CFWI met the Lok Sabha speaker and submitted the Petition with mass signatures.

The March to Parliament was the culmination of 3 months long countrywide signature campaign on the Petition to Lok Sabha speaker urging to stop repeal of BOCW Act and BOCW Cess Act. During the countrywide propaganda campaign, state, district and block level conventions, rallies and street corner meetings were held with mass collection of signatures on the Petition. Intensity and spread of the movement were impressive in the northern states of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Himachal and Delhi resulting in workers greater participation from these states.

Crores of construction workers of the country are going to be the worst victims of the Modi Government's anti-worker policy of bundling-up all the 44 labour statutes into 4 Labour Codes curbing fundamental trade union rights, benefits and facilities including safety, health and social security, deleting or diluting substantially.

BOCW Act and BOCW Cess Act provide statutory provision of various social welfare schemes like pension, accidental compensation, house building loan / assistance, maternity benefit,

children education allowance / assistance, minor / major medical operation assistance, safety & health. These two Acts are being subsumed and repealed in two Labour Codes – Labour Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (Code on OSH) and Labour Code on Social Security and Welfare (SS Code) resorting to ‘cut, delete or dilute, and paste to satisfy the employers.

Occupational safety and social security protection for construction workers are most crucial because they work in construction-related safety hazards. Biggest number of victims of fatal accidents is from construction industry. Biggest numbers of migrant workers – rural to urban, inter-state and internationally are from construction industry. The way government is taking away the safety and social security protection of the construction workers, it is bound to bring nightmare for construction workers in respect of their lives and livelihood.

These rights and benefits concerning occupational safety, health and social security have been the achievements of long drawn struggle on the streets and sacrifices of the workers in late 1980s. Such struggles had strengthened in taking up the matter in the Parliament including moving ‘Private Members Bill’ by the then MPs of CPI (M) including Samar Mukherjee.

The March to Parliament has created enthusiasm among the construction workers in strengthening their resolve to fight the anti-workers policies of the government, particularly the dismantling of the labour laws.

The immediate encouraging impact this March to Parliament shall undoubtedly be reflected in the participation of construction workers in the forthcoming nationwide general strike called by the joint platform of CTUs and federations. (*Inputs: From the write up of S. Dev Roye*)

Scheme Workers

Himachal Pradesh High Court: Midday Meal Workers to get 12 months Pay

As a big victory of the struggle of Midday Meal workers, on 31 October, 2019 the Himachal Pradesh High Court has held that they are entitled to 12 months wage as honourarium instead of 10 months as being paid now.

Delivering the judgement in the writ petition CWP No. 8457 of 2010, filed by Himachal Pradesh Midday Meal Workers Union of CITU; Justice Ajay Mohan Goel bench of Himachal Pradesh High Court on 31 October, 2019 held that the act of the government of “*restricting honorarium payable to Midday Meal Workers for a period of 10 months in a calendar year as arbitrary, discriminatory and thus violative of Article 14 of the Constitution of India*”.

Hence, in the judgement, the Court directed the government “*to pay honorarium to the Midday Meal Workers for the entire calendar year and not restrict the same for the period of 10 months as has been done till date.*” Explaining the effect of the judgement, the Court said, “*henceforth (effective 1 November, 2019) members of the petitioner-union / Midday Meal Workers in the State of Himachal Pradesh shall be entitled for wages for the entire calendar year.*”

The judgement relied on the Supreme Court’s judgement in Rattan Lal and Others Versus State of Haryana and others (1985) (4 SCC 43), in respect of *ad hoc teacher*. The Supreme Court’s judgement had deprecated the practice of the government denying *ad hoc teachers* salary and allowances for the period of summer vacations. In that judgement the Supreme Court had ordered that *ad hoc teachers* shall be paid salary and allowances for the period of summer vacations also.

The present judgement on Midday Meal Workers also referred to an earlier judgement of the Division Bench of the Himachal Pradesh High Court in Baldev Singh and others Vs State of H.P. & others [LJ 2009 (HP) 293] in respect of *contract teachers*. The Division Bench judgement had said, that the “The teachers were appointed on contract basis have worked for a period of more than 2 to 3 years and cannot be deprived of the benefit of salary for the vacation period”.

Media

Against Labour Codes **Journalists Marched to Union Labour Ministry**

Following their earlier submissions to the government and appeal to the Members of the Parliament in July; the working journalists in Delhi, led by the National Alliance of Journalists (NAJ) and Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), heightened their movement by organising a march from the Press Club of India premises to the Union labour ministry and staging demonstration and holding meeting on 17 November to register their protest against Modi government’s move to remove the working journalists from all statutory labour rights through enactment of labour codes in a brazen attempt to control the media.

The journalists are deeply concerned that there are provisions in the Code on Occupational Health, Safety and Working Conditions 2019 (OSH Code) to repeal the Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service & Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1955, selectively taking away all statutory labour rights of the working journalists, and the Working Journalists (Fixation of Wages) Act, 1958, ending wage boards for working journalists for future.

The journalists unions have been demanding amending the Working Journalists Act to include TV journalists and all forms of online digital media. The labour code has no provision to meet their demands of ending contract system, risk insurance, protection from criminal defamation, proper pensions and other needs. Instead it takes away the existing benefits of wage boards, three months’ retrenchment pay and other benefits; and all legal protection and trade union rights. The corporate media will be free to pay what they choose, impose arbitrary working conditions and adopt hire and fire policy, the unions statement stated.

The journalist formed a Solidarity Committee to continue campaign against the Codes. The protesters were addressed by NAJ president S.K. Pande and jt. secretary A.S. Suresh Kumar; DUJ general secretary Sujata Madhok and secretary A.M. Jigeesh; Kerala Union of Working Journalists secretary Jinesh P. and Siddique Kappan; veteran journalist T.K. Rajalakshmi and CITU Delhi state secretary Siddheshwar Shukla.

Journalists’ Protest in Other States

Assam

In a memorandum to the Union labour minister on 1 August, the Journalists Union of Assam (JUA), an affiliate of Indian Journalists Union, strongly opposed the repeal of the Working Journalists Act and the Working Journalist (Fixation of Wages) Act through the OSH Code and demanded its withdrawal.

JUA statement said that the government “has brazenly favoured the corporate media barons who have persistently been demanding to abolish the Wage Board and do away with the Working Journalists Act. The media houses time and again challenged the recommendations of the wage boards for the newspaper industry and the constitutional validity of the Working Journalists Act in Supreme Court unsuccessfully.”

“JUA wants to remind the government that the basic foundation for the Working Journalists Act was laid by the Press Commission in 1954 when it put into perspective the nature of the journalists’ job saying ‘his work cannot be measured as in other industries’ and that “insecurity of tenure is peculiar to this professionunemployment would not necessarily have that result in other professions.”

“JUA, therefore demands the government to immediately withdraw the anti working class, anti journalists and media workers labour code bills immediately.”

Arunachal Pradesh

Under the banner of Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ), wearing black badge, the journalists in Arunachal Pradesh staged a sit-in on Friday, 2 August, protesting against and demanding withdrawal of the provisions to repeal the Working Journalists Act (1955) and the Working Journalist (Fixation of Wages) Act 1958 along with other labour laws in the Labour Code Bills placed in the last budget session of the Parliament, reported PTI.

India in the Scale

Consumption Slowdown with Note Ban: RBI data

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data reveals that post-demonetisation, consumer goods loans have dipped by huge 73% till September 2019. It dipped by 5.2% in FY 2017-18; by astounding 68% in FY 2018-19 and continued dipping this fiscal to date. Experts attribute this dipping phenomenon to post-demonetisation due to earnings coming down especially in the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). (Source: Deccan Herald; 7.9.2019)

This Slowdown - Deep and Prolonged

- A disruptive monsoon, high NPAs and self-defeating policies resulted in India’s economic growth’s decline to a 6 year low of 4.5%.
- Agrarian crisis and consequent fall in rural consumption have caused 2017-18 consumer spending to decline for the first time in 4 decades.
- Unemployment is at a 45-year high.
- Food inflation has risen sharply in October to 6.9%, a 39-month high. This has caused retail inflation and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) jumped up by 4.6%.
- The fiscal deficit is already 102% of the Budget estimates. Nominal GDP growth at 6.1% is half of assumed 12% in the Budget.
- Actual revenues are expected to be far lower than the estimates.
- India’s exports declined by 0.4% in Q2.

(Source: BusinessLine; 5.12.2019)

STATES

West Bengal

Workers Long March

West Bengal witnessed historic two parts '*Workers Long March*' traversing most of the West Bengal districts both beginning on 30 November and concluding on 10 / 11 December 2019. The joint platform of central trade unions and federations in the state led the '*Workers Long March*' – one from Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) to Kolkata and the other from all 7 districts of North Bengal converging to Siliguri – moving through industrial centres, towns, tea gardens and rural areas.

Together, two parts workers Long March traversed 654 kms covering steel township of Durgapur; Howrah, once known as engineering hub of Bengal; Hooghly, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas, famous for jute and other manufacturing industries; Paschim Bardhaman and Paschim Medinipur, the agro based districts; Refinery and Dock area of Purba Medinipur; hand loom and powerloom industries of Nadia, Bidi industry of Murshidabad, tea industry in Terai, Doors and Hills; and power industry in Malda.

Besides, district, mohalla, subdivision, block, municipality and panchayat wise rallies were held before joining the main Padayatra at different stages. Total around 6,000 km stretches in the State were covered and around 4 lakhs workers took part in the historic event.

The programme was actively supported by the organisations of the peasants, agricultural workers and the organizations of women, youths, students, pensioners etc. Districtwise meetings of these organizations were held, districtwise and industrywise joint conventions were held in October-November involving thousands of workers and also from other sections of the people.

On behalf of joint T.U. platform, CITU organised extensive campaign throughout the state on the demands of the *Long March*. The response of the people was enthusiastic. Throughout the entire route, local people gathered on both sides of the roads and greeted the participants of the *March*.

The Issues of Long March

'Workers Long March' was to oppose and resist Modi government's move of dismantling government's and public sector units and privatisation drive; and against other burning problems including huge jobloss; spiraling unemployment; against New Education Policy, commercialization of education and increase in fees; and against divisive policy by imposition of NRC.

Successive central governments have closed 56 PSUs in West Bengal during past one decade which resulted in huge joblosses and severe crisis amongst the workers of those industries. BCPL, Bridge & Roof, ASP-Durgapur, CLW and some others are in the list of Modi-2 government's aggressive privatisation drive. This will further deteriorate the situation of unemployment. The state government too has not taken any initiative to save the central and state PSU. Further, the issue of increasing the ability of navigation of Kolkata and Haldia ports is not being addressed.

Besides, in the name of NRC and CAB, the Central government intends to disrupt the social harmony in West Bengal.

From all these, slogans emerged out “Save PSUs, Save Industries; Protect Jobs and Wages; Save the State - Save the Country” and “No NRC”.

The Long March to Siliguri

One part of the ‘Workers Long March’ began on 30 November from each of the 7 districts in ‘North Bengal’ part of West Bengal. After arduously covering 371 kms in 11 days the Marchs converged in Siliguri on 10 December for the joint March and rally. During these 11 days, hundreds of padayatras and rallies were held in each district, sub-divisions, blocks and municipal or panchayat areas and tea gardens. Thousands of workers of around 50 tea gardens in Doors and Hills actively participated in this programme.

On 10 December, the *Long March* of North Bengal culminated into a mammoth rally and meeting at iconic Baghajatin Park in Siliguri. The meeting was addressed by the Mayor of Siliguri Ashok Bhattacharya MLA, CITU state general secretary Anadi Sahu, Ujjwal Choudhury of AITUC, Mani Kr. Jainal of INTUC, Rajib Sanyal of HMS, Ashok Ghosh of UTUC, Dipak Mukherjee of TUCC, Abhijit Roy of AIUTUC, Basudev Basu of AICCTU, Ziaul Alam from the joint platform of tea workers, K. B. Wattar, the leader of peasants’ movement and Sankar Malakar, MLA.

The Long March to Kolkata

The main part of Long March began from GM-office of CLW at Chittaranjan on 30 November and marched 283 kms distance. 200 participants formed the core of the 12 days long march from 30 November to its culmination on 11 December in Kolkata. In phases, total around 4 lakh workers and other sections of the people from different sectors, spheres and industries took part in the programmes. During these 12 days, the arrangement for food, stay and medical care were arranged by respective district committees.

On 11 December, more than one lakh workers joined by other toiling sections from across the State entered the city of Kolkata with red flags, aprons, caps etc, turning it as the confluence of red, for holding a rally before Raj Bhavan. However, TMC state government put up barriers and created obstacles in different ways to hinder the rally. The rally and meeting were ultimately held at Rani Rashmoni Avenue. More than one lakh of people marched to the venue with the “padayatris”. Many roads were blocked by police with the intention to stop the processions joining the *March*. Microphones were forcibly disconnected leaving only a small area. Despite these, the participants poured in and the Esplanade, the heart of the city, came to a halt.

The rally, at the end of historic *Long March*, and the huge meeting was addressed by CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, vice president Ratna Dutta and its West Bengal state secretary Anadi Sahu; national leaders of AIKS (36 Canning Lane) Ashok Dhawle and of AIKS Atul Anjan; and other central trade union leaders - G. Debrajan of TUCC, Ashok Ghosh of UTUC, Nirendra Nath Banerjee of AICCTU, B.C. Pal of HMS, Ashok Das of AIUTUC, Kamaruzzaman Kamar of INTUC (state), and leaders of BEFI, BSNL and 12 July Committee.

On behalf of the presidium Subhash Mukherjee initiated the meeting with his short deliberation. The speakers greeted the participants of the unprecedented Long March and called for preparing the people for making the General Strike on 8th January 2020 as total and comprehensive in the state.

This unique Workers Long March created huge enthusiasm amongst the workers and all other sections of the working people paving the way for its onward march for the success of 8 January, 2020 strike.

Delhi

Absence of Safety Norms

In National Capital Territory

Workers Dying Regularly in Factories

In a statement on 13 December, CITU expressed its deep shock and anguish on learning the details, collected through its cadres in Delhi, of the ghastly fire at Anaj Mandi in North Delhi in the early hours of Sunday, the 8 December, 2019.

The fire resulted in tragic death of 43 workers and injury to 56 workers, some of them in critical conditions, in the bag manufacturing factory. The victims were migrant workers, mostly from Bihar; some of them were child labourers, working in long hours of shifts, beyond permissible limits, at a paltry sum of Rs.150 per day in gross violation of minimum wages declared in Delhi. The illegal factory in the congested residential area has violated all safety norms and labour laws.

The CITU cadres, who visited the place several times to investigate the cause, found that all three authorities - the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), the Government of NCT Delhi and the Union Government are responsible for this tragedy, misgovernance and of corruption.

NDMC is the sanctioning authority and responsible for large scale illegal factories in the congested residential areas like the factory where the fire incident took place.

Government of NCT Delhi is responsible for gross failure of its labour enforcement authorities in implementing safety norms, prevention of child labour and enforcement of labour laws including the recently declared minimum wage.

The Union Government is responsible for ending 'inspection' of factories and failure/ complicity of Delhi police, under its Home Ministry, for allowing such illegal activities in the residential areas.

Absence of safety norms is rampant in Delhi causing fire repeatedly breaking out including the major fire that took place in Jhilmil industrial area this July 2019 causing workers deaths.

CITU expressed its deepest condolences to the bereaved families and sympathy to those injured. CITU demanded adequate compensation to the families of those who died; and medical care and compensation to those injured.

CITU demanded proper and speedy investigation of the incident, system failures and corruption involved and punishment to the guilty.

CITU also demanded urgent investigation of the deficiencies in all industrial establishments in Delhi, publish report and take corrective measures; and enforcement of safety norms and labour laws in all such establishments.

Trade Unions Investigation

Led by its state president Virendra Gaur, a four member team of CITU in Delhi rushed on the same day to the place of the factory fire at Anuj Mandi in the early hours on 8 December.

On 9 December, a team of Delhi state leaders of central trade unions (CTUs) - AITUC, HMS, CITU, SEWA, UTUC, AIUTUC, ICTU and INTUC - visited the place at Anaj Mandi, where fire broke out a day before killing 43 workers and injuring several others in a bag making factory; and collected information from the workers and residents of the locality. They also met the local police SHO. Anurag Saxena and H. C. Pant from CITU and CPI(M)'s local leader and its state secretariat member Nathu Prasad were in the investigating team.

They found that locking doors from outside while workers are staying inside is the common practice in such factories. The SHO informed about the deaths and injured workers; arrest of the factory owner, filing FIRs under sections 304 and 308 of IPC and attempts for statutory compensation and justice to the victims' families through Delhi Legal State Services Authority.

In a joint statement, the CTUs said that such incidents are taking place repeatedly. 3 months before such incident took place in Jhilmil industrial area where 3 workers died. On that occasion, a joint delegation of CTUs had submitted memorandum to Delhi chief minister pointing out that 6 industrial accidents took place last year alone in absence of safety norms, set out in the Factory Act, at all such work places causing death to more than 100 workers in Delhi. The delegation demanded urgent enforcement of all safety norms at all work places; establishment of tripartite committees in all industrial areas; and to ensure safe working environment. But, unfortunately, Delhi government failed to take any action on the memorandum. On one side Delhi government has not been enforcing labour laws, on one side Modi government is amending labour laws in favour of the employers.

There are lakhs of migrant workers in NCT Delhi. But, they are neither being registered nor the minimum wages are being paid to them. The employers treat them as slaves. Labour department remains paralysed and non-functional. In 11 district level labour offices there are only 16 labour inspectors. These facts were repeatedly and jointly brought to the notice of Delhi government. But, there was no improvement.

The CTUs jointly demanded urgent registration of all workers; maintenance of all statutory records by the owners including appointment letters, ESI, PF, attendance registers etc; enforcement of all labour laws in all industrial and service establishments and fixing accountability of the officials.

The CTUs demanded Rs.50 lakh compensation and job to one of each of the families of those died; punishment to the culprit employer and responsible officers of various departments.

Fire in Jhilmil Industrial Area

On 13 July, 2019 morning fire broke out in a sanitary parts manufacturing unit at Jhilmil industrial area in NCT Delhi in which 3 workers died, including 2 women, and injuring several other workers due to gross violation of safety norms and absence of statutory coverage of workers.

After the fire, an investigating team of CITU Delhi state committee visited the place; collected information and found that the industrial area, having about 500 units, engages about 50,000 workers. It has many multistoried illegal constructions in narrow lanes preventing entry of firefighting vehicles in case of emergency. Labour laws are being grossly violated including all safety norms. It is common practice in this industrial area to work by the workers inside while keeping the only entry/exit gates of the factories locked from outside and emergency gates, if at all, blocked with dumping materials.

While, in the name of 'Ease of Doing Business' Modi government is going all out to make pro-employers labour law changes throwing to winds the workers safety norms and protection; Delhi's Kejriwal government is reluctant to take any initiative to enforce even existing safety norms and labour laws. As a result, during one and half years since early 2018, there were 13 incidents of big and small fire breakout in which about 150 persons died.

In the specific case of fire breakout on 13 July, the investigating team found that only half of the workers in the factory had ESI coverage. Only one among the 3 workers, who died, had ESI coverage. This is happening in most of the establishments as Modi government completely stopped inspection of factories by ESI inspectors. The factory, where fire broke out, was not even registered under Factories Act. The exit gate was locked from outside and the emergency door was blocked with dumping materials.

After this incident, Delhi units of CITU, AITUC, UTUC, HMS, AIUTUC, AICCTU, INTUC, LPF with IFTU and MAC jointly staged protest demonstration before the residence of Delhi labour minister Gopal Rai on 16 July.

Following this, an urgent meeting of the government with CTUs was held very next day and, after discussion, 7 points decisions were taken which include (i) Holding district level tripartite meetings on violation of Factory Act; (ii) Factory inspector to hold district level meetings where unions can lodge complaints directly on violation of Factory Act; (iii) Publication of Rules under the Factory Act in newspapers; (iv) Even after these efforts, if the owners continue to violate the Factory Act's provisions, prosecution process will be initiated; (v) Unions can lodge complaints with the district magistrates on violation of fire safety norms in Factory Act and MCD Act; (vi) Present List of 29 Schedule Employment will be expanded with inclusion of security guards, internet work, domestic work etc to extend benefits of minimum wages to them; and (vii) On rest of the demands in the 20 July, 2018 strike charter another meeting will be held with the labour commissioner within a month.

But, none of the above decisions has yet been implanted by Delhi government and for this failure 43 workers laid down their lives on 8 December at Anaj Mandi. (*inputs: Anurag Saxena*)

INTERNATIONAL

Asia Pacific Regional Meeting of UITBB

R. Singaravelu

12th Asia Pacific Regional Meeting of UITBB (TUI of Construction, Wood, Building Materials and Industries of WFTU) was held in Hanoi of Vietnam on 9-11 October 2019 attended by 44 delegates from India, Japan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Cyprus including 8 delegates from India - 4 delegates of CWFI of CITU including its president Sukhbir Singh and vice presidents R. Singaravelu, Debanjan Chakraborty and Kotam Raju; and 4 delegates of AICBCW of AITUC including its president Vijayan Kunicherry, treasurer Selvaraj and 2 others. Nguyen Thi Thuy Le, President of the Vietnam National Union of Building Workers (VNUBW), welcomed the delegates.

In his address, the general secretary of UITBB Michalis Papanikolaou pointed out the significance of reunification of Vietnam defeating US imperialist aggressors on 30 April 1975; the need to oppose US imperialists' continued intervention in the countries of geo-strategic importance and of energy resources, its withdrawal from Paris Agreement and from the fight against climate change; and to work for improving world situation in general and Asia Pacific region in particular.

He pointed out that the working women in the construction industry are being doubly marginalized - as gender and as class, deprived of equal wage for equal work and sexual harassment at workplaces. There is need to not only increasing women employment, but also create safe environment of work for them. Construction workers unions must intervene in getting equal justice to migrant and foreign workers.

Though the construction industry accounts for only 5-10% of the total workforce, it accounts for 17% of total fatal accidents. There is need for total ban on the use of asbestos in all construction sites, which is a major health hazard leading to work related diseases. Big multinational construction companies have been exploiting the workers in large scale while building stadia in Tokyo for 2020 Olympic Games and World Cup in Qatar in 2022 ignoring the safety and health requirements of the workers resulting in continued accidents. UITBB organized demonstration outside the offices of Federation of International Football Association around the world. UITBB also organized demonstration outside the Australian embassy against wrongful arrest of John Lomax. UITBB is committed to implement the Platform of Action of WFTU by observing actions days.

The meeting was then held in three sessions on three specific issues.

Session 1: Women Workers in Construction Sector

Presiding over the first session on 'Women Workers in Construction Sector' R. Singaravelu in his introductory remarks pointed out about the working conditions of working women in the construction sector - no job guarantee, no proper crèches facility, no equal wages; and sexual harassment at the work places. There is need of developing young women cadres and working women subcommittees at states and national level. To solve the problems of the working women, both men and women workers have to struggle together and defeat fascistic designs of dividing the working class. The delegates then presented country-wise reports.

Japan: There is workforce shortage. Women workers work under strong traditional division of labour by gender. Substantial number of women workers leave jobs at the time of marriage or childbirth. Equal

Employment Opportunity Act in 1985 and Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace Act in 2015 were enacted. As per national survey in 2015 there are 6.92 lakh of women workers out of total 36.5 lakh construction workers. In 2014, the government set out the goal to double the number of women skilled construction workers in 5 years under an Action Plan.

Vietnam: There are 53,000 women construction workers. They get equal wages for equal work. Women workers play important role in taking care of their family, in the development of the country and in labour matters and in production. To ensure implementation of gender equality and advancement of women in construction sector, VNUBW nominated one of its vice presidents in the Committee for the Advancement of Women under the Ministry of Construction to cooperate, monitor, give guidance, etc. There are 26 women out of total 192 leaders and managers in the department under the Ministry of Construction. 70% of women workers received periodic health check. Under the current law of Vietnam, women are entitled for six month maternity leave with social insurance benefits. Women workers, nursing mothers of infants under 12 months of age, are not required to work at night shift or overtime. They have 60 minutes off every day during their working time with full benefits. 176 women workers have been praised as outstanding and creative workers of Vietnam.

Indonesia and Bangladesh: In Indonesia, women workers get only half the wages for equal work. In Bangladesh, trafficking of women and girls is in the increase. Bangladesh Construction and Woodworkers Federation has been working to reduce this.

Session 2: On Social Insurance, Occupational Safety and Health

Indonesia: During 24 - 30 September, 2019 big demonstrations, joined by construction workers union, were staged against authoritarian government of Indonesia. Some were shot dead. Due to more than 12 hours of work a day, many accidents take place in the construction sector.

Japan: Pneumoconiosis is common occupational disease in the industry due to drilling operation in tunnels and mines in the Japanese landscape and many new tunnel constructions are expected to extend high speed trains or expressway. The union has struggled for more than 30 years to realize fair and decent compensation for pneumoconiosis patients.

Vietnam: OSH education for the workers is promoted by the unions at all levels, especially on the safety rules and regulations, workers' rights and responsibilities. With about 70,000 enterprises and more than 40 lakh workers by the year 2018, the number of fatal accidents in construction sector makes up about 28% of the total labour accidents nationwide. Workplace unions and employees jointly establish and manage activities of OSH activists' network in every work unit, whose function is to encourage and instruct workers for compliance with OSH and safety rules and regulations.

Session 3: On Migrant Workers, Seasonal Workers and Technology Changes

India: Debanjan Chakraborty placed a paper on migrant labour. World economic crisis, unemployment, low wage, no social security - all these lead to migration from one country to another. Non allocation of required fund in infrastructure development in some countries leads to shrinkage of construction work. In India, in 2019 unemployment is the highest within the last 45 years. Cheap labour is the demand of the day in advanced capitalist countries. Some countries take initiative to have bilateral agreement with the capitalist countries on migrant labour. In India, the government made bilateral agreement with 10 countries of Europe and Arab countries to protect the Indian migrant workers. But workers are not protected as per agreement. Gulf cooperation

council countries are the top remittance sending countries in the world. Total official value was 9 crore dollars. Within the last 15 years or so millions of workers were compelled to migrate as refugees from their homelands to other countries. These refugees are being tortured en route and lost their lives. Millions of women, young girls, and children are being illegally trafficked from poor countries to rich countries. The passports of migrant workers in the Gulf Region are being confiscated. The workers have to put in excessive working hours under poor working conditions. Only 54 countries have ratified the convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers. ILO has evolved conventions in 1949 and 1975. WFTU Conference at Brussels in May 2013 had adopted a workers charter on migrant workers.

Japan: Birth rate in Japan has declined. Many foreign workers migrate to Japan and work with low wages. Due to work stress in Olympic Stadium construction works some workers committed suicide.

Vietnam: The construction industry has highest proportion of migrant workers. Trade unions disseminate information and mobilize for membership development; give guidance on the conclusion of labour contracts; protect legal and legitimate rights and interests. 8,21,662 Vietnamese workers are working in 40 countries. Particularly in the field of construction, since 2016, there have been 1,27,628 workers going to work overseas, focusing mainly in Japan, Taiwan and Malaysia. Song Da Corporation, a unit under the Ministry of Construction, has thousands of employees working on hydroelectric projects built by different companies of the Corporation in Laos. On an average, migrant workers send home about US \$250 crores annually.

Resolution

As the conclusion of the meeting, a resolution was adopted unanimously. The resolution featured that the workers are under continuous and vicious attacks by the international capital to maximize profit at the expense of the working class; expressed solidarity with the struggle of UITBB members in the Asia Pacific Region; and called to remain vigilant against the evil attempts of imperialism to divide the working class on religious, racist grounds.

The resolution called upon the unions to go for struggle to regain rights, for better living and working conditions for the workers and their families; against gender discrimination; equal wages for equal work for women and migrant workers; for total ban on the use of asbestos in all construction sites. All workers shall enjoy all political and trade union rights.

The participants also resolved to make 17th Congress of UITBB in Athens successful.

(R. Singaravelu is CITU WC member & UITBB Sect. member)

France

Workers Strike against Pension Cuts

“France grinds to halt in the biggest strikes of Macron’s presidency. Rail and air transport as well as schools and policing hit by walkouts over pension changes”: News-headline in The Guardian on 5 December, 2019.

President Emmanuel Macron is facing the biggest strike of his presidency as French rail workers, air traffic controllers, teachers, government and public sector employees including policemen began

their strike and took to streets since 5 December against the proposed changes in the pension system. The strike continues unabated.

Rail services grounded to a halt with 82% of drivers on strike and at least 90% of regional trains cancelled. In Paris, 11 out of 16 metro lines were shut. About half of the scheduled Eurostar trains between Paris and London have been cancelled. Many schools were closed and police unions resorted to 'symbolic' closures of certain police stations. Shops along the route of a march in Paris were closed. The tourists were turned away at the Eiffel Tower because of the strike.

Tens of thousands of French workers took to the streets to protest. CGT union's estimate is 1.5 million workers participated in the countrywide protest marches; whereas ministry of interior estimates 8 lakh workers participation, including 65,000 in Paris as well as in Lyon in the south and Nantes in the west.

The continued strike and street demonstrations by the workers are against Macron government's move of amending pension system proposing removal of all 42 category-wise pension schemes; making the pension system universal; and reducing total value of pension by computing yearly wage during entire span of service replacing the present system of last drawn wage. To earn same pension a worker has to work more number of years.

Unions say that 'universal' pension system means millions of workers in both the public and private sectors will be facing severe drop in the value of their pensions. The move is to introduce universal points-based pension system linked with raising retirement age from present 62 to 64.

Since his election in 2017, pro-business Macron has been moving in several anti-workers labour reforms for a 'flexible labour market' by changing 'work code.'

After months of anti-government protests by the Yellow Vest movement, an opinion poll conducted in November found that 89% of French people felt the country was experiencing a 'social crisis'. One opinion poll put public support for the latest strike action at 69%.

The Macron administration may be facing repeat of the country's general strike over pension reforms in 1995, which crippled the transport system for 3 weeks and drew massive popular support, forcing a government's reversal. (14.12.2019)

In the USA

Top 1% gained \$21 trillion in wealth; Bottom half lost \$900 billion

Break down of Federal Reserve's recently released 'Distributive Financial Accounts' data series shows that top 1% owns nearly \$30 trillion of assets while the bottom half owns less than nothing, meaning they have more debts than they have assets.

Between 1989 and 2018, the top one percent increased its total net worth by \$21 trillion, while the bottom 50% actually saw its net worth decrease by \$900 billion over the same period.

"We have the worst inequality in this country since 1920s," wrote Jayapal, co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "Three wealthiest people in America have as much wealth as the bottom 50 percent." (Source: Matt Bruenig Of People's Policy Project; 14.6.2019)

WORKERS-PEASANTS UNITY

Kisans National Convention Declares **Grameen Bharat Bandh on 8 January, 2020**

For the first time, the workers and peasants have decided synchronised action on 8 January 2020 for their respective demands. 10 central trade unions and national federations in their National Mass Convention on 30 September 2019 in New Delhi gave call for Workers General Strike. More than 100 Kisan organisations in their National Convention in New Delhi on 30 November 2019 gave call for Grameen Bharat Bandh on peasants and agricultural workers demands.

The 3rd national convention of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC), held at Mavlankar Hall in New Delhi on 30 November 2019, was joined by 800 delegates from 25 states. The convention was addressed by all members of National Working Group including its convener V. M. Singh, Raju Shetty, Hannan Mollah, Medha Patkar, Atul Anjan, Dr. Ashish Mittal, Yogendra Yadav, Dr. Sunilam, Rajaram Singh, Dr. Darshan Pal, Satyawan, Pratibha Shinde, Avik Saha and Kiran Vissa.

In addition to the working group members, leaders of more than 100 organisations from across India addressed the convention about the issues and activities in their states and made suggestions for the action programme of AIKSCC.

The farmers' charter of AIKSS covering 21 issues was presented and discussed at the convention. The convention raised the various issues affecting the farmers and demanded early resolution of forest rights act; against massive dumping of agricultural produce and domination of MNCs in and control of the agriculture sector; comprehensive legislation for rights of agricultural workers and sharecroppers; against corporate loot of farmers; for pension of Rs.10,000 for all rural work force; on revamping crop insurance and disaster compensation and on losses suffered by J&K farmers.

The future programme of AIKSCC was discussed and declared in the concluding session of the convention. Subsequently, the leadership of AIKSCC consisting of the national working group members led by the convener V. M. Singh addressed a press conference and announced the future programme.

AIKSCC declared that the farmers of the nation will organize a nationwide Grameen Bharat Bandh on January 8 in protest against the anti-farmer policies and inaction of the centre and the state governments on the demands of the farmers. The protest will highlight the governments failure on various fronts – its failure in ensuring minimum support prices at C2+50% for all crops, in providing freedom from indebtedness, in implementing effective crop insurance and disaster compensation in the face of drought, floods and unseasonal rains, in implementing forest rights act etc and on other burning issues in the states.

The convention also adopted a plan for strengthening the state units of AIKSCC across the country leading up to the 8 January protest. The state units of AIKSCC will plan preparatory and conduct outreach in various districts in their states.

Modi Government Climbs Down

In a very significant development indicating Modi government's climb down; the Union Labour Ministry ultimately invited INTUC (including its two other factions) in a joint meeting of all central trade unions on 2 January, 2020 to discuss on the three points agenda – "(i) Improving ESIC Services; (ii) Initiative Taken for the Welfare of the Workers; and (iii) The Issues Relating to the Demands of the Trade Unions."

It may be recalled that all Central Trade Unions, except BMS, have been boycotting the meetings, called by the Union Labour Ministry, since the Modi government decided to exclude INTUC from the list of the central trade unions.

India's Downslide in Global Competitiveness

India slips 10 places in sharp decline in global competitiveness index, reports PTI quoting Global Competitiveness Index 2019, released on Wednesday, 9 October 2019, by the Geneva based World Economic Forum (WEF) and ranked 68th among 141 countries surveyed.

It is among the worst-performing BRICS nations along with Brazil. China is ranked 28th (the highest ranked among the BRICS) while Vietnam is the most improved country in the region this year. Singapore has become the world's most competitive economy in 2019, pushing the US to the second place.

WEF said that India ranks high in delinquency rate (NPAs), which contributes to weakening of its banking system. Among major shortcomings in some of the basic enablers of competitiveness are poor health conditions and low healthy life expectancy. In life expectancy, India ranked 109th and is one of the shortest outside Africa and significantly below the South Asian average.

Its labour market is characterised by a lack of worker rights' protections, insufficiently developed active labour market policies and critically low participation of women. With a ratio of female workers to male workers of 0.26, India has been ranked very low at 128th place.

The WEF report said 10 years on from the global financial crisis, the global economy remains locked in a cycle of low or flat productivity growth despite the injection of more than USD 10 trillion by central banks

Non-Regular Employments replaces Regular Employment

Commissioned by the Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister, the study "Emerging Employment Pattern of 21st Century India" shows that regular (permanent) employment are being substantially replaced by non-regular employment.

While non-contractual (non-regular) was 2.44 crores and contractual (regular) employment was 2.65 crore in 2004-05; in 2017-18 the non-contractual employment was 3.61 crore and contractual 2.80 crore.

The study was based on the employment data from National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), the Employment and Unemployment Survey 2004-05 and Period Labour Force Survey of 2017-18.

(Source: Indian Express; 26.10.2019)

TSRTC Workers Glorious Strike Ended

Telangana Road Transport workers' strike, which began on 5 October, was called off on 25 November evening. The Joint Action Committee (JAC) which led the movement, while making this announcement appealed the workers to report for duty from 1st duty on 26 November. JAC informed the management and the government that no condition should be imposed to the workers who joined duty. The JAC and AIRTWF in their statements said that "this withdrawal of strike is to go to the people to get more support and strength to prepare for another struggle to safeguard the industry as well the rights of the workers".

Following this, the Telangana chief minister, who earlier announced summary dismissal of all 48,000 plus strike workers, on 28 November asked all the striking 48,563 workers to join duties without any condition; and announced that there would be no disciplinary action against them; Rs. 100 crore would be given to TSRTC as emergency measure; compassionate appointment to each of the family of deceased workers during strike; privatisation of TSRTC would be kept aside for the time being etc

Protest against Atrocities against Women & Children **CITU called to Observe Nirbhaya Day on 16 December**

On 6 December, 2019 CITU called upon all its state committees to organize protest demonstrations in districts / mandals across the country with the active involvement of respective coordination committees of working women and other women's organisations and submitting memoranda to the authorities on 16 December (Nirbhaya Day).

CITU expressed concern over the increasing incidents of violence and crimes against women and children and noted countrywide protests against these crimes including the heinous crime against rape victims Disha in Hyderabad and burning alive the victim girl at Unnao. The victims include infant girls of 3 months to women of 90 years being raped and killed within their houses in high security workplaces and police stations; in metropolitan cities to remotest villages. These reflect the rot in the society during ongoing economic, political and social crisis.

Since coming to power of the Modi-led BJP government, which is vigorously pursuing the neoliberal ideology and is guided by the RSS, committed to the 'manuvadi' ideology; violence against women has reached in alarming proportions. The statements by some legislators in support of the culprits and the protection extended to them, particularly by those in power, emboldens the perpetrators of such crimes. The low allocation of Nirbhaya Fund and its non-utilization indicates the apathy of the governments. Justice Varma Committee recommendations lie on paper in many places. Further, this issue needs to be taken up at various levels of the society to make a change in the attitude toward women, CITU said.

CITU strongly condemns these monstrous atrocities against women and demanded of the government to take all necessary measures to ensure safety and security for women; and to initiate strong action to end discriminatory and patriarchal attitude towards women prevalent in the society.

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

State	Centre	Sep 2019	Oct 2019	State	Centre	Sept 2019	Oct 2019
AP	GUNTUR	292	297	MHR	MUMBAI	321	322
	VIJAYWADA	296	303		NAGPUR	403	405
	VISHAKHAPATHNAM	300	303		NASIK	369	375
ASM	DOOM DOOMA TINSUKIA	292	294		PUNE	353	355
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28 November 2019

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Solidarity at Numaligarh Refinery



At Mumbai Refinery



At Tamilnadu Bottling

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