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Vol. 48 No. 11 July 2018 Price: Rupees Ten

THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

30 May 2018

CITU 48TH FOUNDATION DAY

CITU Members Taking Pledge

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CEAT Factory in Mumbai

In Punjab

National Convention of Electricity Employees & Engineers

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CITU General Secretary Tapan Sen addressing; Leaders on the Dias; The fighting Delegates

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Editorial

On to 5 September Mazdoor Kisan March

CITU along with AIKS and AIAWU gave call to the workers, farmers and agricultural workers across the country to join the massive All India Mazdoor-Kisan March to the Parliament on 5 September, 2018 and make it historic.

This Mazdoor-Kisan March is to give final warning to the RSS-BJP government at the Centre to immediately stop and change the anti-people neoliberal economic and communal divisive policies creating economic, agrarian and social crisis heaping untold miseries on all toiling sections.

This Mazdoor-Kisan March is defend lives, livelihood and hard earned rights of the workers, peasants, agricultural workers and of other economically deprived and socially oppressed and marginalised sections; and to defend the democratic rights of the people.

This Mazdoor–Kisan March is to demonstrate the class unity and united mass movement; and to defeat the designs of the big corporates and landed gentries to keep the toiling people divided and disrupt the growing class and mass struggles.

This Mazdoor-Kisan March is to demonstrate the unity and determination to unitedly fight against the increasing attacks on the rights of the minorities, SCs, STs and women and against their discrimination, deprivation and marginalization.

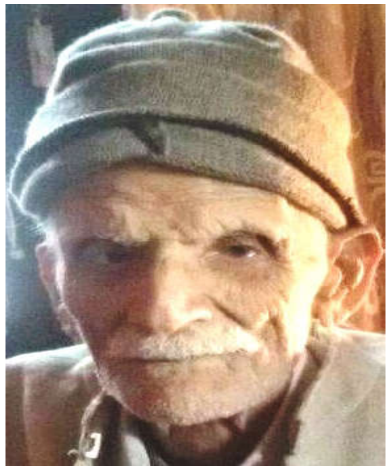
Before 5 September Workers-Peasants March to Parliament, they have to cross one more milestone on 9 August by courting arrests in districts headquarters; and another milestone for the workers to cross celebrating midnight 14 - morning 15 August, 2018 to recall the promises of ‘We the People of India’, as enshrined in the Constitution, on the eve of Independence.

Let the Unity of the Hammer and Sickle, as embossed in CITU flag and inherited from united workers-peasants struggle world over fructify in this All India Mazdoor-Kisan March on 5 September and thereafter.

On to 5 September, 2018 All India Mazdoor-Kisan March to Parliament !

Condolence

Comrade Satyaprakash



In a condolence statement CITU expressed its grief on the demise of Comrade Satyaprakash, freedom fighter, veteran trade unionist and the president of Uttarakhand state committee of CITU; on 14 June 2018 at the age of 94.

Comrade Satyaprakash, popularly known as ‘Babuji’, was a father figure among vast number of democratic section of the people in the State. He led many militant struggles of the workers, peasants and displaced people for land rights, labour rights and rehabilitation. His demise is an irreparable loss to the democratic movement in general and the trade union movement in particular in the State.

CITU paid respectful homage to the departed leader and conveyed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family of Comrade Satyaprakash.

India’s Bad Loans:

Here is the list of 12 companies constituting 25% of total NPAs

According to the RBI, just 12 companies are estimated to account for 25% of the gross NPAs, while there are 488 others. Following are these 12 companies.

Companies	NPAs *(Rs.in crore)*	**Companies**	NPAs *(Rs.in crore)*
Bhushan Steel	44,478	Monnet Ispat and Energy	12,115
Lanco Infratech	44,364	Electrosteel Steels	10,273
Essar Steel	37,284	Era Infra Engineering	10,065
Bhushan Power	37,248	Jaypee Infratech	09,635
Alok Industries	22,075	ABG Shipyard	06,953
Amtek Auto	14,074	Jyoti Structures	05,165

Workers – Peasants – Agricultural Workers
5 September Joint Rally before Parliament

Issues of Campaign

Rising Prices

The Modi government boasts that it has reduced inflation to virtually nothing in the last four years. It cites figures from the official wholesale price index to buttress this claim. Like most boasts of this government, this one too is empty, as the working people know only too well from their own experience and the daily struggle to make ends meet. Even the official consumer price index estimates that prices in rural India have risen almost 21% on average between May 2014, when this government was formed, and April 2018, the last month for which the index is available. In urban areas, the index suggests prices have risen by about 17%. Even the Reserve Bank of India is sceptical of the government's claims of having brought inflation under control.

Even if we take the official price index numbers at face value, they can at best capture the average variation in prices over a period. What that papers over is the fact that prices of specific commodities have spiked to astronomical levels from time to time over these four years. For example, who can forget that the price of arhar dal had reached Rs 200 per kg in Sept-Nov 2015? Or that sugar prices had crossed Rs 50 a kg in early 2017. Onion prices had crossed Rs 100 a kg within the first year of the Modi government and there have been repeated spikes in onion prices since then too. In October 2015, mustard oil prices had reached over Rs 150 per kilo.

For the relatively well-off, the constituency that the Modi Sarkar really caters to, such spikes in food prices might be just temporary problems that hardly pinch, but for the working people who are somehow eking out a living, the weeks or months for which such high prices persist mean that they have no option but to consume less. Had the government really been concerned about these sections, there are enough ways in which it can intervene to prevent such volatility, but the Modi government has chosen not to do so. Wedded to the theory that markets know best, it has let them have free play, and the poor have had to pay the price for it.

Had these spikes in prices of food items been a result of higher income for farmers, we could have argued about whether they are worth it. But the fact is that even as prices of food items have sky-rocketed, we read reports every day of farmers being on the roads and dumping their produce because they are not getting suitable prices. This is primarily because the prices of inputs that they use – fertilisers, pesticides, diesel, fodder, etc. – have continued to mount inexorably while the prices they are given in the market or by government simply are not good enough to match these rising costs. For instance, just in one year, between 2015-16 and 2016-17, the price of high speed diesel used for irrigation pumps went up by 23.7%. Similarly, cattle feed went up by nearly 11%. In Modi's rule, all these prices have increased, bringing widespread misery for farmers. Thus, whether it is the producer of food in the form of the farmer or the consumer, including farmers who are net buyers of food, both have been hit by spiralling prices of all commodities essential for their human survival. There cannot be a bigger indictment of a government's policies.

It is a paradox that on the one hand, farmers, the producers of food and other agricultural products are not getting remunerative prices for their produce; on the other, common people including a large section of farmers themselves have to purchase the same products from the market at high prices. Where does the money collected through such high prices go? Not to the real producers, the farmers, but to the big traders-money-lender nexus dominated by corporate-big landlord class. Two thirds of the country's farmers-marginal, small and even some medium farmers - are deprived of institutional credit from banks and are dependent on the private money lenders, dominated by landlords and the rural rich. It is this class who purchases the produce from the small farmers at cheap rates and sells at high rates. They control the market and the products and indulge in speculative trading, which is one of the major factors for the rise in the prices. The government refuses to control speculative trade in the name of ensuring 'Ease of Doing Business'. It is not concerned about the distress caused to the common people by the rising prices.

Health services and education – without which a decent human existence is not possible – continue to become costlier by the day as the government pushes the expansion of the private sector in these areas. Modi is fond of bragging that he has brought down the prices of cardiac stents and orthopaedic implants, but his government is actually bringing in policies that will make basic healthcare increasingly unaffordable not just for the poor but even for the middle class. Its faith in the discredited PPP (public-private partnership) model and in health insurance rather than public provisioning of health, as the panacea is evident from the policy proposals emanating from the Niti Aayog. This is a recipe for disaster and impoverishment of millions. Already, healthcare expenses are the second biggest reason for indebtedness and things are steadily getting worse.

The biggest betrayal by this government on the price front has been the cynical manner in which it has used the opportunity provided by low international oil prices to rake in taxes rather than providing some relief to the people. As of 7 June this year, the price of diesel in Delhi was Rs 68.73 per litre, while petrol was at Rs 77.63 per litre. The highest levels of prices these two commodities have witnessed have been in late May this year; they have come down only by a few paise since then. The trend is the same in other cities and states, except that the price levels are even higher. Why are prices at all-time highs? The government claims that the oil companies are allowed to set their own prices every day since they were making losses when the government administered the price. This is utter nonsense. When the BJP was desperate to win Karnataka, these same companies were persuaded to keep prices frozen for almost three weeks. But what is damning is that less than half the price you pay for petrol, about 48% in Delhi, goes to the oil companies and in the case of diesel this proportion is only slightly higher, at about 59%. The rest is in the form of taxes. The government's own data shows that the Centre's share of taxes on petroleum crude and products has risen from Rs 1.26 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 2.73 lakh crore in 2016-17, the last full year for which this data is available. That's an extra Rs 6,000 per family every year. The government could cut its taxes on petroleum products, as the pro-people Kerala government did, but it refuses to do so. For, successive governments at the centre, this has become a constant source of looting the people. That is why the administrative pricing of fuel that could regulate prices, was dismantled. The government would argue that this burden is only borne by those who buy petrol or diesel and the poor don't. But the reality is whether you buy diesel or not, you pay for it in the form of higher transportation costs for everything you do buy.

Even when the price of crude oil declined and reached less than half of what it was before 2014, the BJP government refused to pass it on to the consumers. Instead, it has neutralised it by increasing taxes.

Hence prices of daily essentials do not automatically rise; they are made to rise by the government to satisfy the hunger for profits of the big-business-big landlord class at the cost of common people. This is the real face of neoliberal capitalist order and its servants in governance.

Prices can be controlled:

- By banning speculative trade in food items;
- By universalising public distribution system (PDS) and covering the 14 essential commodities of daily life under PDS;
- By reducing the taxes on petrol and diesel and putting in place actual cost plus reasonable return based pricing of petroleum product scrapping the import parity pricing;
- By increasing government expenditure on education and health, and providing free education and health services to all needy through government institutions.

The united trade union movement too made similar demands to contain price rise.

But, governments committed to neoliberal agenda of looting the people and the country are not ready to do this; because they will hurt the interests of the big business houses and corporations. The 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' before Parliament on 5th September is to make the above demands.

Health for All

Health is our Right. But in our country, which under the present BJP government led by Narendra Modi, claims to be the fastest growing economy in the world, health has become the preserve of only those who cam pay for it. Today, our health care system is ranked at 154th in 195 countries, at the lower end. Basic health indicators are well below the global averages. 20% of all maternal deaths and 25% of all child deaths in the world occur in India. Communicable diseases account for 53% of all deaths in the country.

Is it necessary to mention that it is the poor who account for a disproportionately large share of these deaths? Is it unavoidable? Why should lakhs of people, mostly the poor, particularly women and children, die due to such preventable and easily curable diseases like Tuberculosis, diarrhoea, anaemia and several pregnancy related causes, in a country which boasts of having some of the best doctors and medical facilities in the world; in a country that talks of promoting 'medical tourism'?

It is because the public healthcare network in our country has long been neglected. It suffers from lack of funds, infrastructure and personnel; suffers from administrative failures. A Parliament Committee report of 2016 reveals that there is a shortage of at least 5 lakh doctors in government hospitals; only 74% of the required skilled birth attendants are in place. There are 18000 vacancies of ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse cum Midwife) in health sub centres. At the Community Health Centre (CHC) level, there is 82% shortage of specialists including surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists, physicians and paediatricians. Many of the sub centres, PHCs and CHCs do not have electricity or running water; large numbers of them are running in dilapidated buildings; they do not have proper approach roads.

As a result, people are compelled to seek health care from private hospitals. 70% households in urban and 63% in rural areas depend on private hospitals and spend large parts of their income on health. High out of pocket expenditure on health has led to families to incur 'catastrophic health expenditure', 'one of the major contributors to poverty, as the government's own Health Policy 2017 admits. The poor find it impossible to come out of it.

The thrust of neoliberal policies is to cut down welfare expenditure by the government. This has resulted in successive governments cutting down expenditure on health and privatising health care in the name of Public Private Partnership (PPP). With its strong commitment to neoliberalism, the BJP government led by Modi is totally dismantling the public health care system. Health care is becoming increasingly out of reach for the poor.

Under neoliberalism, health care is no more being treated as an essential service, a basic right of the citizens of the country. Instead, it is treated as an 'industry'. The National Health Policy 2017 of the BJP government led by Modi talks of the 'emergence of a robust health care industry estimated to be growing at double digit' and the policy direction is to 'align the growth of private health care sector with public health goals'. This is nothing but government's withdrawal from its basic responsibility of ensuring health to all its citizens. Those who can afford can go to the private hospitals, those who cannot, may suffer or die.

The Ayushman Bharat programme, touted as 'Modicare', has schemes meant to privatise health care and convert the entire health care into an insurance driven system.

The BJP government has already announced privatisation or outright sale of all the public sector drug manufacturing companies. The Rs 1200 crore allotted to purchase essential medicines and diagnostics will go to the private drug firms.

The BJP government in Rajasthan has already privatised 42 rural and 43 urban PHCs and called for tenders for 50 more rural PHCs. Under this PPP model, the state government would pay Rs 30 lakh per PHC and the private entity would take over the management and all operations of the PHC. The BJP government in Chattisgarh decided to run 9 CHCs including 4 in the state capital of Raipur, 2 in Bhilai Steel City in the PPP mode. Again, the Yogi led BJP government in Uttar Pradesh announced that the state government would establish 1000 hospitals in the PPP mode as part of the Ayushman Bharat programme. It has already asked the foreign consultancy firm Ernst & Young to prepare a project report. The PPP model envisages that the government would provide 3 acres of land in the CHC area and the private party would build the hospital to carry on the health care business. To make up for the shortage of doctors in the existing hospitals, doctors would be recruited on contract basis by the private firms. The NITI Ayog established by the BJP government soon after assuming power at the centre, issued guidelines for PPP model in district hospital for non communicable diseases, stipulating that the state governments have to pay penalties if they default on paying their private partners.

The government has made the grandiose announcement, in its 2018 Budget, of providing 10.74 crore poor and vulnerable families, around 50 crore people with insurance coverage of Rs 5 lakh per family under the 'National Health Protection Scheme'. This will subsume the previous 'Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana' (RSBY), the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme and the state sponsored health care schemes. Experience of insurance based health care, including the RSBY, shows that it is the big insurance companies and the big private hospitals that actually benefit from these schemes, not the poor. Experience of the crop insurance scheme Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana for the farmers also show that while the insurance companies earned huge profits through premium, peasants continued to commit suicide as their claims for crop loss were not honoured.

Thus the entire aim of the government is to benefit the *'Trimurti'* of corporates – in health, insurance and drug manufacturing. NHPS is meant for that. This government which invokes 'nationalism' at the drop of a hat is promoting the multinational corporations in health care, through the FDI route. $4.83 billion FDI has been invested in corporate hospitals and diagnostic centres. The government has allowed 49% FDI, through automatic route, in insurance sector and 100% FDI in new ventures and up to 74% in the case of takeover through automatic route, in pharmaceuticals.

Despite all this, the allocation for health in the Budget has come down from 2.4% last year to 2.1% this year. It has dropped to 1.1% of GDP, among the lowest ten in the world.

The eagerness of the BJP led government committed to neoliberalism to serve corporate interests, does not stop at this. It has allowed e retailers like Amazon and Walmart to enter medicine supply market replacing around 7.5 lakh medicine retailers employing around 20 lakh people.

The BJP government did not leave medical education too. It has proposed setting up a National Medical Commission (NMC) to replace the Medical Council of India. The NMC is envisaged to remove regulations in starting medical colleges and allow automatic approval route. It will raise the management quota in private medical colleges from the present 15% to 60%; fees will be left to the discretion of the management. This will drastically cut down seats for economically weaker sections and for SC/STs.

The government seeks to allow a free hand to the big pharmaceutical companies, both domestic and foreign, to fleece people through exorbitant prices of medicines. It is not prepared to touch the drug companies that indulge in corrupt practices by bringing in specific law to punish bribe giving drug companies.

Rising Prices of Medicines

First Drug Prices Control Order (DPCO), 1979 was based on manufacturing cost of medicines and had brought all medicines under price control. Medicines price control was gradually diluted by the subsequent DPCO. With the onset of neoliberalism, in 1995, all drugs except essential drugs were removed from price control by DPCO; then the list of essential bulk drugs was drastically cut down from 140 to 76; and the Mark Up, i.e. maximum allowable addition in the price of the medicine over manufacturing cost of essential drugs, was increased to 100%. The new DPCO 2013 removed all medicines from price control except 348 medicines in the new National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM). Note, this list is of 'medicines', i.e. the final products, thousands of which are produced through various combinations of 'bulk drugs', and not that of 'bulk drugs' alone; prices of these medicines are decided not based on the cost of production but on 'market prices'. It has also allowed the drug companies to raise their prices every year without prior approval of the government. As a result the pharmaceutical companies are reaping huge profits by selling medicines at prices even up to 1000% above the cost of production.

Tax Burden on Medicines under GST

The BJP government's GST structure has also resulted in increase in the prices of medicines. The government has resorted to the fraudulent method of excluding most of the 376 essential medicines from the 'list of essential medicines charging 5% GST' and imposing 12% and 18% on most of the essential medicines in the NLEM. This has resulted in escalation of prices of all essential medicines.

Today, we have all the resources that can ensure health for all. We have technically qualified and efficient doctors, nurses and other para medicals; we have the resources to train many more and we have young boys and girls who can be trained to provide effective health care to all our people. We have the financial resources. The governments during the last over a decade extending tax and other concessions worth more than Rs 10-12 lakh crore every year to the big national and foreign corporates. They are allowed to swindle our money saved in the banks and flee the country.

If these resources are properly utilised, for the benefit of the people and not for the profit of the corporates, the basis necessity of life, health, can be provided for all our people. What is necessary is to change the policy direction.

The 5th September 2018 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' at Parliament is to demand this. It is to emphatically demand the government to:

• Ensure health for all; • Stop privatisation of health care system; strengthen and expand public health infrastructure to provide health, medical and maternity services free of cost; • Raise public expenditure on health to 5% of GDP; • Revive public sector drug companies; • Regulation of private health care centres; • Control of prices of essential drugs by adopting a cost based pricing formula.

Employment

BJP with Narendra Modi as its Prime Ministerial candidate rode to power because one of the key promises that he made was that he would ensure 1 crore jobs every year. This was heartily welcomed by people who had suffered 10 years of jobless growth under the previous UPA rule. However, four years later it has turned out that Modi has failed to be true to his promise. This is not surprising because he has pursued the same type of policies that the previous governments have adopted.

In fact, things have become worse because jobs are being lost. It's now job-loss growth. Under Modi's first two years, over 10 lakh jobs were lost, according to a study by the Reserve Bank of India. Total number of people working in the country went down by 7.7 lakh in 2014-15, and further by 3.8 lakh in 2015-16. Then things went from bad to worse. Of all the 15 years and above people in the country, some 43% were working in 2016. By 2018, this share had fallen to 40%, according to CMIE. That means 1.43 crore working people had lost their jobs. Women's employment continues to languish with the 2016 Labour Bureau report saying that just 22% of women in the 15+ age group were working. This is amongst the lowest in the world.

A quarterly survey of eight key industries carried out by the Labour Bureau since April 2016 has shown that in 18 months ending October 2017, only 5.56 lakh jobs were added. That's an annual growth rate of a mere 1.8% of the labour force or about 4 lakh jobs per year. This is eroded if jobs are lost in other sectors as has been happening. Meanwhile, unemployment has touched 5% according to CMIE estimates. That's about 2 crore persons. In addition, it is estimated by the government's Labour Bureau in 2016 that about 35% of the workforce is either not finding year round work or is forced to work in very low paid casual work. That's about 13 crore people.

This is the reason we hear startling reports of 2.5 crore people applying for 1 lakh job vacancies in the railways or 23 lakh persons applying for 368 jobs of peons in Uttar Pradesh or over 18,000 persons applying for just nine posts in a court in Haryana or over 12,000 persons applying for 18 posts in the Rajasthan state government secretariat.

Government that Kills Employment

The government and the public sector directly create only a small part of the total employment in India. But the steady decline in government and public sector employment shows that the Modi government is a destroyer rather than a creator of jobs.

Jobs in Central Government Establishments (Ministries, Railways, Postal Department, Police, etc.) have declined consistently every year since the BJP government came to power in 2014. In that year, employee strength of central government was 33.28 lakh which dipped to 33.06 lakh in 2015, 32.85 lakh in 2016 and further down to 32.53 lakh in 2017, according to Union Budget documents. So, by 2017, about 75,000 government jobs had disappeared and the trend is still continuing.

In addition to this, there are also over 330 Central Public-Sector Enterprises (PSEs) which employed 16.91 lakh persons in 2014 – mainly in mining, steel, oil, heavy and medium engineering and fertilizer sectors. This has shrunk to 15.24 lakhs in 2017 – a loss of 1 lakh 67 thousand jobs in three years. The greatest decline has happened in the non-executive category where skilled workers went down by 1.11 lakh and unskilled by 77,000. These were partially replaced by casual and contract workers whose numbers have gone up from 3.4 lakh in 2014 to 3.93 lakh in 2017, according to government figures. Thus, lesser and more irregular employment in PSEs has been one of the gifts of the Modi government to the nation!

In public sector banks, jobs had increased initially from 7.25 lakh in 2014 to 9.47 lakhs in 2015, but then Modi turned the screws and in the next two years some 35,000 jobs were lost bringing total jobs in banks down to 9.12 lakh, according to RBI data. Most of the job losses have been in the clerical and subordinate staff categories.

The Crisis of industry and Construction

The industrial and construction sectors have been the worst hit by job losses. In the first decade of the 21st century, the construction sector grew at over 10% every year. In the four years of the BJP government, the average is under 4% per annum. As a result, jobs in this sector, which were taken up by distressed agricultural labourers, have shrunk dramatically.

Industrial growth has been poor throughout this decade and the BJP government has been able to do nothing to change it. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) which measures industrial output growth has been up and down, dipping from 3.8% in 2014-15 to 2.8% in 2015-16 then inching up to 4.5% in 2017-18 on an average. In fact, total factory employment (ASI) increased by just 7.61 lakhs in the first two years of the current government, compared to an increase of 7.36 lakhs in 2011-12.

With demonetisation and GST disrupting the economy further in the next two years, the problem has only worsened. These have also hit more the unorganised manufacturing, which was already in a poor situation and was not being able to generate jobs even before.

It is therefore hardly surprising that Government Schemes like Skill India (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana) have failed miserably. Out of the 41.3 lakh people trained in three years under the programme, just 6.15 lakhs or 15% got placed because there are no jobs available. The government claims that people are becoming self-employed giving figures of Mudra Loans worth Rs. 4.6 lakh crores given to 10.38 crore people. That works out to a mere Rs. 44,000 per person, enough to perhaps set up a pakoda selling pavement shop, as Modi himself suggested, but nothing more.

Deepening Agrarian Crisis: The Heart of the Employment Crisis

In India, traditionally agriculture has been a major source of employment – both self-employed as well as wage-work. However, with more and more peasants losing land and the increasing unviability of agriculture, more and more people have been driven out of agriculture and forced to seek work elsewhere. The BJP had promised to double farm incomes and increase the employment potential of the agricultural sector. In reality, farmers incomes have declined, rural wages are stagnating and in conditions of declining jobs more people are forced to join the army of unemployed.

The deepening agrarian crisis has implications not just for employment in agriculture but also that outside agriculture. As the number of job seekers increases, employers are able to keep wages low.

Low wages and agrarian distress mean that working people cannot buy too much – thereby depressing demand in the economy which in turn hits job growth adversely. Joblessness decreases wages and brings down buying power. This leads to decline in production. So, more jobs are lost. This is the vicious cycle into which the BJP government has pushed the economy into!

The government thought that it would boost production and jobs by exports, through policies like Make in India. However, exports of non-oil products have been completely stagnant over the 4 years of the government – giving no boost to output and employment growth. On the other hand, imports, which compete with domestic production, have increased somewhat, destroying local industry and making more people jobless.

Why the Employment Crisis Persists?

The Modi government has been steadfastly committed first and foremost to promoting the growth of big corporate houses and their profits. It therefore does not want to expand the public sector but kill it slowly but surely. It also has not taxed the rich and the corporate sector and expand public expenditure. Instead it has fondly hoped that private sector will generate wage employment and those who can't get such work will find their own employment.

However, because the government has not been willing to spend enough it has not been able to increase demand.

Instead, the government's policies have:

a) Aggravated the agrarian crisis; and

b) Constrained the growth of employment even in sectors like health and education because here too it wants to promote private profiteering. Whatever little it has spent has either taken forms like insurance premiums for lining the pockets of private sector insurance companies or disastrous schemes like Make in India and Skill India. From the point of view of gainful employment, the last four years have been an unmitigated disaster.

The 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' before Parliament on 5th September is against policies that perpetrate the vicious cycle of jobless growth, declining purchasing power of large sections of people, diminished production and loss of more jobs. It is to demand the reversal of these disastrous policies that benefit only the big corporates, domestic and foreign at the cost of the vast majority of the toiling people. It is to demand policies that generate decent employment for all those ready to work, particularly our youth.

Minimum Wage

• Minimum wage of not less than Rs 18000 • For all workers including scheme workers

• Link minimum wage with Consumer Price Index

Because of the ever rising prices, the family budgets of workers across the country, in all sectors, are being squeezed. Whatever meagre increases they achieve through their struggles are offset by the rising prices. In effect, this means that for the same money workers are able to buy less and less amounts of the commodities.

The situation has become even more difficult for the lakhs of contract and casual workers who are not even paid the statutory minimum wages. Their wages are not even linked to the consumer price index (CPI). In many places workers are so desperate that they are forced to take up two jobs. They are compelled to work for 10 – 12 hours, at normal wage rates - not double wages as stipulated for over time – just to make ends meet. Such a harsh exploitation has blown away the concept of 8 hour working day for many in our country.

On the other hand, big corporate houses, both domestic and foreign, continue to reap super profits. They seek to maintain their profits by cutting down the 'cost' of labour – by reducing the number of workers, increasing their work load, reducing or 'freezing' wages, by contractorisation. The government, instead of providing relief to the workers, is dancing to the tune of the monopolies and corporates like the Ambanis, Adanis, Tatas and Birlas etc. It receives directions from the industry bodies like the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) etc., even while they are not willing to even meet the representatives of the workers.

Since 2016 the joint trade union movement has been demanding minimum wage of Rs 18000 per month. All the trade unions are also demanding that the minimum wage should be linked to the CPI.

How is it justified? The Seventh Pay Commission for the central government employees appointed by the BJP led government has recommended Rs 18000 as minimum wage. According to the Seventh Pay Commission, this was based upon the formula unanimously adopted by the 15th Indian Labour Conference (ILC) and the directions of the Supreme Court in the Raptakos and Brett case, which was reiterated by the 44th ILC in 2012 and again by the 46th ILC in 2015

The formula evolved by the 15th ILC for fixing minimum wage and the Supreme Court directions are as follows:

1) Per capita food intake of at least 2700 calories for a worker's family comprising three units (2 adults and 2 children);
2) Per capita cloth of at least 18 yards per annum;
3) Provision of housing as per minimum rent charged by government industrial housing scheme for low-income category
4) Fuel, lighting, miscellaneous expenditures to constitute 20 per cent of the total minimum wage.
5) The Supreme Court Judgment (1992) stipulated additional 25 per cent of the minimum wage for education, medical expense, recreation and provision of old age and marriage to be taken into account while fixing minimum wage.

The Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers has challenged this recommendation on the grounds that the minimum wage should be Rs 26000 on the basis of the ILC recommendation and Supreme Court directions at the prices prevalent in 2015. However, the BJP led government has accepted the recommendation of the Seventh Pay Commission and decided the minimum wage of Rs 18000 for the central government employees.

The ILC recommendations and Supreme Court directions for minimum wages are the same for all workers and employees. Prices are the same for everybody. In fact, prices of almost all essential commodities and services, particularly food, clothing, transport and medicines have considerably increased since 2015. Hence, the demand of Rs 18000 minimum wage is absolutely justified. The government should immediately concede the demand.

But what is the government doing? Instead of accepting the just demand of the workers and amending the Minimum Wages Act accordingly, the BJP led government has introduced the Code on Wages Bill in the Lok Sabha, amalgamating the Minimum Wages Act, the Payment of Wages Act, The Bonus Act and the Equal Remuneration Act. In fact this is an attempt to remove wage fixation from the ambit of labour laws altogether.

This Wage Code Bill leaves fixation of minimum wages to the discretion of the government, the central government and the state governments. It provides for the constitution of a Minimum Wage Advisory Board. But the recommendations of the boards are not binding on the governments.

The Wage Code Bill totally ignores the unanimous recommendations of the ILC and the directions of the Supreme Court on the criteria for fixing the minimum wage.

It reiterates the atrocious provision of deducting eight days' wages for one day strike, if the strike is declared 'illegal'. If the draft Industrial Relations Code Bill, another atrocious draft amending labour laws, becomes an Act, then almost all strikes can be declared 'illegal'.

The provisions on enforcement of minimum wages including regular payment of wages are highly diluted that all the other provisions will be rendered totally meaningless. Whatever teeth the erstwhile Payment of Wages Act, the Minimum Wages Act, the Equal Remuneration Act and the Payment of Bonus Act had, are all diluted to the extent that enforcement of law will become a casualty. Employers will be empowered to violate the law as per their will.

What is even shameful is the reply of the Labour Ministry of this BJP government led by Modi to a specific question why the consensus recommendation of Indian Labour Conference on the minimum wage formula was not incorporated in the Code on Wages Bill. It said that this was done to 'provide for flexibility, adaptability and to cater for dynamic requirements of various components...' Is any more proof required for the government's intent on whose interests it wants to serve, the employers or the workers?

Making policies that help the big corporates, domestic and foreign, amass wealth by increased exploitation of the workers and the toiling people, is a major part of the neoliberal agenda, which the successive governments have been following since the last over twenty five years. The BJP government led by Modi has further hastened and perfected this disastrous policy.

The 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' before Parliament on 5th September is to demand:

- Minimum wages for all workers, wherever they work, in the factories, offices, mines, agricultural fields or forests. It is to demand the reversal of these policies that starve the toiling people to feed the big corporates.

Universal Social Security for All workers

We want universal social security, that is, social security for all workers, wherever they might be working.

Today a very small section of workers, mainly in the organised sector only are covered by social security benefits like provident fund, ESI, medical benefits, maternity benefit, accident compensation, gratuity, pension etc. Given the tardy enforcement mechanism, encouraged by the governments themselves, even fifty percent of the workers in the organised sector, particularly the contract workers, are also deprived of their legitimate social security benefits.

Despite contributing to over 60% of the country's GDP, the unorganised sector workers do not get any social security benefits. Some segments of the unorganised sector workers like the beedi workers, construction workers, mine workers, cine workers etc are of course statutorily entitled to some social security benefits. But not even 30% of these workers are covered in practice because of the total absence of effective enforcement machinery for these schemes, either at the central level or in the states.

Ensuring 'ease of doing business' for the employers has become a priority under the neoliberal policies. For the present Modi led BJP government, this appears to be the determining factor of government policy. Enforcement of labour laws is the first casualty of such a policy. During the last one and a half decade, hardly 25% of the fund collected through cess for the construction workers' welfare scheme was spent on providing benefits to the construction workers. The situation related to beedi workers and others is not much different.

The BJP led government's high decibel advertisements proclaim that its Code on Social Security is going to cover the entire workforce including the rickshaw pullers and domestic workers.

But cover with what? There is no answer. No specific social security scheme is proposed.

Who will be covered exactly? Establishments will have to be registered for the workers to be covered. The threshold number of workers will be decided by the government. What will be the threshold level? This BJP government has raised the threshold level of employment under the Factories Act to 40. That means that more than 72% of factory workers who were being covered by the Factories Act will now be thrown out. Will the factories with less than 40 workers be eligible for registration under the Code on Social Security? Will the workers of these establishments be eligible for whatever benefits are provided under this Code? No answer.

What is clear is that the government is not contributing a single paisa for social security for the workers. (Except of course spending some thousands of crores of rupees on advertisements, to secure its own future and to benefit the owners of corporate media) Unorganised workers will have to contribute at the rate of 12.5% of their wages for the social security benefits. If the employers are not identifiable, the workers are categorised as self employed and they have to contribute 20% of their earnings.

15 existing social security legislations - (1) Employees State Insurance Act; (2) Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, (3) Employees Compensation Act; (4) Maternity Benefits Act; (5) Payment of Gratuity Act; (6) Unorganised Workers Social Security Act; (7) Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act; (8) Beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act; (9) Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act; (10) Iron Ore Mines, Manganese Ore Mines and Chrome Ore Mines Labour Welfare Cess Act; (11) Iron Ore Mines, Manganese Ore Mines and Chrome Ore Mines Welfare Fund Act; (12) Mica Mines Labour Welfare Cess Act, (13) Limestone and Dolomite Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act; (14) Cine Workers Welfare Cess Act and (15) Cine Workers Welfare Fund Act, - are amalgamated into this Code on Social Security.

The entire fund with the existing central funds like the EPF, ESI, CMPF, Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Fund etc, amounting to around Rs 12 lakh crore, along with the huge amount that will be collected from the unorganised workers and self employed, will be placed at the disposal of the National Council of Social Security, to be chaired by the Prime Minister. There will be an advisory Board to advise the National Council of Social Security. But this will not be strictly tripartite in composition. It is deliberately meant to undermine trade unions' representation. This will then be made available for speculation in the share market to satisfy the finance capital lobby.

But while hijacking the entire fund vested in 15 Social Security schemes as per the legislations, the Social Security Code has not specified anything on the social security benefit that would be delivered to workers. The government may leave that to be decided by beaurocrats through rules, once the legislation on Social Security Code is passed by Parliament. But the net results of the entire exercise would be that even the guaranteed social security benefits under EPF, ESI, Construction Workers Welfare Scheme, Beedi Workers Welfare Scheme being delivered through concerned organisations will stand dismantled and demolished. The Social Security Code proposed by the government does not ensure at all the continuity of those benefits under the proposed Code – a novel exercise of deception and fraud!

Is the Social Security Code a social protection or blatant deception?

Remember, the erstwhile UPA government had enacted the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act in 2009. No new social security benefit had been formulated under that Act; neither during the tenure of the UPA government nor under the present BJP led Modi government. No funds were allotted for the social security schemes under this Act; either by the then UPA government or by the present BJP government. Only some already existing social security schemes, most of them meant for BPL people were made applicable to the unorganised workers. The present government made even the National Social Security Board constituted under the Act totally non functional. Some of the old schemes were discontinued and launched with new names.

Cutting down social welfare expenditure and pampering the big corporates, big business and finance capital – is the hallmark of neoliberal policies. And this BJP government led by Modi can stoop down to any level of fraud and deception to befool the people while serving their corporate masters. The Social Security Code is an exemplarily dubious exercise in that direction.

What is actually required?

If the government is really serious of providing social security benefits to all workers, it has to:

· Strengthen the existing social security schemes under the concerned legislations; take stringent measures to ensure their effective implementation

· Widen the coverage to all entitled workers under the concerned legislations; today social security schemes like EPF, ESI and the other 13 do not cover even 50% of the workers legally entitled to these benefits

· Put in place a government funded comprehensive social security scheme ensuring health care including maternity, accident protection, superannuation for pension, children's education etc for all other sections of working people including agricultural workers and peasants, with a token contribution just to facilitate enrolment

This is possible. We have adequate resources. What is required is the will to formulate policies to serve the people and not the corporate-business nexus.

The 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' before Parliament on 5th September is to demand such effective social security for all working people; to warn the BJP led Modi government that policies aimed at dismantling existing and functional social security schemes and legislations will not be tolerated.

Increased Minimum Wages (Centre)

By a notification on 3 April, 2018, the Central Government added VDA, based on price index upto 31 December, 2017, to the minimum wages in Central Sphere raising the minimum wages rates effective 1 April, 2018. These include:

(Per Day in Rs)

Agricultural Workers; Areawise - A / B / C

Unskilled – 352 / 321 / 318; Semi-Skilled – 385 / 354 / 325; Skilled – 418 / 385 / 353;
Highly Skilled – 463 / 430 / 385; Clerical – 418 / 385 / 353;

Mines: Above Ground / Underground

Unskilled – 370 / 462; Semi-Skilled – 462 / 553; Skilled/Clerical – 553 / 645;
Highly Skilled – 645 / 722;

Construction

Unskilled – 553, 462, 370; Semi-Skilled – 612, 522, 433; Skilled/Clerical – 673, 612, 522;
Highly Skilled – 732, 673, 612;

Stone Quarries: Soft Soil / Soft Soil with Rock / Rock / Removal &Stacking

372 / 561 / 743 / 299

Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar Andolan (JEJAA)

23 May Countrywide 'Pol Khol Halla Bol' Campaign

On the occasion of the 4th anniversary of NDA government, more than a lakh of people joined 'Pol Khol Halla Bol' movement against Modi government in 23 state capitals and in district headquarters on 23 May under the banner of Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar Andolan (JEJAA) of different class and mass organisations.

In **Delhi**, thousands of people from Delhi and NCR marched from Mandi House to Parliament Street in the scorching heat. Addressing the rally and public meeting at Parliament Street the national leaders of JEJAA called upon different sections of the people to intensify their sectoral struggles and mobilise maximum people in the joint struggles to make it a political force to change the policies or, if not, change the government. Those who addressed the rally include JEJAA national convener and AIKS (36 Canning Lane) general secretary Hannan Mollah, general secretary of AIKS (Ajay Bhawan) Atul Kumar Anjan, Satyavan Rathee of AIUTUC, Santosh Ray of AICCTU, Manoj Bhattacharya ex-MP of UTUC, S. N. Chauhan of All India Agragami Kisan Sabha, Ritu Kaushik of AIMSS, Suchanda of MEC and Nathu Prasad of DSMM. Anurag Saxena of CITU conducted the proceedings. R K Sharma, Satyanarayan, Purushotam and Sangwari of Bangla Manch and AIDSO cultural groups presented revolutionary songs. A resolution condemning the brutal police firing in Thoothukudi killing of 13 people was placed in the New Delhi public meeting and the protesters observed one minute silence to condole the deaths.

The national leaders of JEJAA including Tapan Sen, Hemalata, Amarjeet Kaur, Annie Raja, Kavita Krishnan, Rajeev Dimri, Medha Patkar, Dr Suneelam, Ashok Choudhury, Nikhil Dey, Madhuresh Kumar (NAPM), Vikram Singh (SFI) participated in demonstrations held in various states.

In **Tamil Nadu**, JEJAA Tamilnadu committee as *Tamilaga Makkal Medai* with 23 organizations jointly held demonstrations in all districts. The protest included condemnation of Sterlite brutal police firing and killing in Thoothukudi. More than 5,000 people participated in Chennai demonstrations.

In **Assam**, 34 mass organisations under JEJAA held joint protest rally and public meeting in Guwahati. While people from Kamrup, Kamrup(m), Nalbari, Darrang, Nagaon and Hojai had joined the rally in Guwahati; rallies and demonstrations were held in the headquarters of Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Golaghat, Tezpur, Silchar, Karimganj, Barpeta, Kokrajhar districts. About 20,000 people participated in the statewide protest.

In **Manipur**, a protest rally was held in Imphal addressed by state JEJAA convener Sarat Salam of CITU, L Sotinkumar of AITUC, L Purojit of MGSF-AISGEF, Kshetrimayum Santa of CWFI, Dr M Nara, Mutum Kulla of BSNLEU.

In **Andhra Pradesh**, a rally was held in Vijayawada. A huge protest rally of 15,000 people was held in the state capital Patna of **Bihar.** Huge demonstrations were held in state capitals – Ahmedabad in **Gujarat**, Jaipur in **Rajasthan**, Bhopal in **Madhya Pradesh**, Kolkata in **West Bengal** and Agartala in **Tripura**. In **Haryana**, demonstration was held in Karnal, the residential city of the chief minister. In **Uttar Pradesh**, **Himachal Pradesh**, **Punjab**, **Karnataka** and **Maharashtra** demonstrations were held in state capitals and in district headquarters.

30 May 2018 - CITU 48th Foundation Day
Thousands of CITU Members Took Pledge

Thousands of CITU members across the country took pledge on the 48th Foundation Day of CITU on 30 May 2018 to • continue fight for workers demands, defend rights against neoliberal onslaught and improve their working and living conditions; • Strengthen CITU to achieve its objective of an exploitation free society, for a decent and dignified life for all toiling people; • Unite entire working class irrespective of religion, caste, region or gender in the struggle; • Strengthen and broaden struggle resisting onslaughts on working people's and trade union rights; and • Resist and defeat any attempt to divide the toiling people.

At many places thousands of CITU members signed on the pledge. Following are some reports received at CITU Centre.

Kerala: CITU foundation day was observed all over the state by hoisting CITU flags in every trade union offices,; by cleaning public places like markets, hospitals, workplaces etc and taking CITU pledge. The programmes were inaugurated by CITU state and national leaders including state president Anathalavattam Anandan in Thiruvananthapuram, P. Nandakumar at Kannur, K.K. Divakaran at Palakkad, K. Chandranpillai at Ernakulum and K.O. Habeeb at Alappuzha. In all other districts CITU state office bearers participated.

Tamilnadu: CITU foundation day was celebrated in all districts by conducting various programmes including flag hoisting, holding conventions, addressing gate meetings and public meetings and taking pledge.

Punjab: CITU 48th Foundation Day was celebrated all over the state and in UT Chandigarh by bringing out rallies and holding meetings and taking CITU pledge. Ralles were held at Ludhiana, Barnala, Raikot, Pathankot, Amritsar, Tarantaran, Bathinda, Jalandhar, Ropar, Nawanshehar, Mukatsar Sahib and Mohali. Over 10,000 workers participated.

Maharashtra: 500 CITU members took pledge CEAT Tyre in Mumbai in two shifts. The meeting was addressed by Vivek Monteiro, Sayeed Ahmed and Vinayak Shinde.

Bihar: The Foundation Day was celebrated in 21 districts by hoisting flag in union offices, holding meetings and taking pledge. About 2000 workers participated.

Rajasthan: The Foundation Day was observed in a big way in different parts of the state by hoisting CITU flag, holding meetings and taking pledge. Thousands of CITU members signed the pledge.

INDUSTRY & SECTOR

Postal

16 Days GDS Workers Strike Ends in Victory

16 days long total indefinite strike of more than 3 lakh Gramin Dak Sevak (GDS) employees in 1.29 lakh plus rural Branch Post Offices, which began on 22 May, *(The Working Class June, 2018)*; and continued with determination and total unity despite government's attempt to break the unity and the strike using threat of victimisation; and rejecting government's pre-condition 'withdraw the strike first' before discussion; ended on 6 June in glorious victory and concluded in jubilant rallies across the country after Modi government's cabinet accepted their long pending demand of wage rise.

All GDS unions separately served notice of indefinite strike on and from 22 May 2018. Except BMS union, all other GDS unions came together for joint movement and maintained total unity during the entire period of strike.

All the postal employees' federations (NFPE, FNPO, BPEF) extended full support and solidarity to GDS workers strike. In Kerala, West Bengal, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana all departmental employees also went on solidarity strike for 4 to 10 days. Central trade unions (CTUs) - CITU, AITUC and INTUC, Confederation of Central Government Employees & Workers, WFTU and many other organisations extended full support and solidarity to GDS strike. CTUs jointly wrote to the union telecom minister demanding early settlement of the GDS workers demands to end the strike. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury and the chief minister of LDF government in Kerala also wrote to the prime minister demanding immediate settlement. The left MPs also intervened.

Government treats GDS workers as 'extra departmental employees' and pay meagre 'monthly allowance', instead of regular salary, ranging from Rs 2290 to Rs 4575 plus DA depending on their total hours of work. They are denied the other benefits of regular employees. As such, the government refused to include GDS under 7th Central Pay Commission; instead, appointed Kamalesh Chandra committee to look into the wages and service conditions of GDS. The Committee submitted its report in November 2016 with recommendations including increase in allowances, composite allowance, education allowance, three time-bound promotions, 6 months paid maternity leave, 35 days' leave etc. But, even after the lapse of 18 months, the Government was not ready to implement these recommendations.

Ultimately, the Union cabinet, in its meeting of 6 June, approved the major recommendations of Kamalesh Chandra committee report on wage revision with retrospective effective from 1 January, 2016 and payment of arrears of differences in wage in single instalment. There will be 3% annual wage increment.

With this revision, a GDS worker who was getting 2,295 will get Rs.10,000; who was getting Rs 2,745 will get Rs 12,000; and who was getting Rs 4,115 will get Rs.14,500 reported *Business Standard* quoting the union telecom minister after the cabinet meeting. However, there is around 56% wage rise across the board and dearness allowance will be 7%. In addition there are hikes in other allowances.

(Input: M. Krishnan, Secretary General of the Confederation of Central Government Employees & Workers)

Banking

2 Days Total Strike in Banks

About 10 lakh bank employees and officers of 40 banks including 21 public sector banks, 12 old-generation private banks and 7 foreign banks were on 2 days total strike on 30 and 31 May, 2018 bringing normal banking operations into a grinding halt across the country.

United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) of all 9 unions of bank employees and officers gave the call of strike after staging demonstrations in front of the banks across the country on 9 and 10 May in protest against IBA's offer of 2% wage increase on the plea of banks' loss. The wage revision is due since 1 November, 2017. (*The Working Class June, 2018)*. Last wage settlement, November 2012 - October 2017, had 15% wage increase.

The conciliation meeting, held by the CLC (Central) with the representatives of UFBU, IBA and the Ministry of Finance on 28 May failed. In the meeting UFBU said that bad loans and consequent losses of banks cannot be linked to wage revision. The UFBU leaders quoted figures to show how operating profit has doubled, staff expenses have reduced, business has more than doubled.

BEFI on Banks' Profit and Loss

BEFI in a statement on 30 May said that public sector banks (PSBs) together have earned operating profits of more than Rs.1.38 lakh crore, Rs.1,36 lakh crore and Rs.1,58 lakh during preceding 3 years, 2014 - 2017.

Enormous growth of NPAs and associated astronomical provisioning against it are of very recent origin. Total NPA of all PSBs together that stood at Rs.2.29 lakh plus crore at the end of 2013-14 fiscal has more than trebled to Rs.7.70 lakh plus crore as on 31 December 2017. More than 85% of these NPA are accounted for by big corporates having unholy nexus with political bosses at the centre and top echelons of banks. RBI identified 12 big corporates having NPA of Rs,2,53,733 crore against which the PSBs had make provisions as much as Rs.1.00.900 crore, Rs.1,54,918 crore and Rs.1,70,370 crore in these 3 years. While the profits are generated through dedication and toil of the workforce, the corporates are allowed to siphon out through the subterfuge of provisioning against NPA.

While 1% wage increase entail an additional burden of only Rs.500 crore annually.

[CARE Ratings report states that NPAs of the 26 banks that have declared 4th quarter results so far (of FY 2017-18) show a 15% jump over 3rd Quarter]

Electricity

Against Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2014

Employees & Engineers to Strike Nationwide

25 lakh employees and engineers in power sector across the country will be on 24 hours strike from 6 AM to 6 AM on 7-8 December, 2018 protesting against Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2014. This was decided in a national convention of electricity employees and engineers on 8 June in New Delhi.

There is also understanding among the participating unions and federations, and supported by central trade unions (CTUs), that the day Modi government attempts to get the Bill passed in the Parliament, there would be Flash Strike in power sector throughout the country.

The convention was held under the banner of National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOEEE) in association with CTUs. More than 500 delegates, representing all unions and federations of 25 lakh employees and engineers in power sector across the country, attended.

The convention unanimously adopted a declaration with 10 point demands and on strike action. The demands, inter alia, include Ï% Withdrawal of Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2014; Ï% Ensure Right to Electricity as Human Right Ï% Review of adverse impact of Electricity Act, 2003; Ï% Stop disinvestment of PSUs in electricity: Ï% Save electricity PSUs; Ï% Stop privatisation of energy resources; Ï% 'Equal pay for equal work' and regularisation of contract, casual, outsourced workers; Ï% Old pension scheme for all; and Ï% Safe working conditions.

Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2014 proposes bifurcation of power distribution into 'carriage' (network carrying electricity to consumers) and 'supply' (sale of electricity to consumers). 'Carrying' would mainly be responsibility of the governments while selling electricity would be handed over to multiple private suppliers, competing among them for the high level consumers for profit without any investment, and leaving one government owned licensee to cater to loss making supply mainly to rural poor. This amendment would end the system of cross subsidy of electricity; cause high tariff rates to domestic consumers and increase manyfold accumulated losses of public sector power distributing companies, Discoms.

Addressing the convention CITU general secretary Tapan Sen said that this struggle of the power employees is to protect the common people, the poor. He said 30% of the people in the country do not have access to electricity despite Modi's tall promise of 100% electrification. He said the Bill is likely to be taken up for adoption in the next session of the Parliament. None other than the Left is firm in opposing it. It has, therefore, become imperative to intensify struggle and take it up with the people through massive campaign. AITUC general secretary Amarjit Kaur said that the Right to Electricity must be recognised as human right without which it is impossible to survive in modern life. Rightly, NCCOEEE demanded Right to Electricity to every citizen. Several other leaders of NCCOEEE and its unions and federations also addressed the convention.

This convention was the culmination of regional conventions and series of protest actions including a massive protest rally before the Parliament on 3 April last.

Central Public Sector

CPSU Workers Preparing for Countrywide Strike

All India Convention of Central Public Sector Workers, held in New Delhi on 30 May, 2018 decided countrywide strike at the earliest in all Central Public Sector Units (CPSUs). The date of strike will be decided jointly by the participative organisations. The convention also gave call to launch intensive campaign among CPSU workers and the people, to hold gate meetings and bring out rallies at work places and residential areas and to stage black badge demonstrations within July.

The convention was jointly organized by CITU, INTUC, AITUC, HMS, LPF affiliated public sector unions and federations, JAF Bengaluru and CPSU TUCC Hyderabad. Around 350 representatives from all major CPSUs from all over the country attended.

A declaration was jointly signed and adopted in the convention which include 8 point demands including • No disinvestment / privatization of CPSUs; • Revival of CPSUs; • Scrapping 'Fixed Term Employment' notification; • Wage revision of contract workers in continuation with permanent workers; • No amendment to Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act 1970; • Immediate conclusion of satisfactory wage settlement; • Scrapping of DPE stipulations on profitability and review of wage agreement after every 3 years; and • 5 years settlement period.

Modi Govt's Latest All Out Attack on CPSUs

Within a week after the national convention of CPSU workers, Modi cabinet took two policy decisions which will have devastating effect in all Central Public Sector Units (CPSUs) - one is for total and effective private control of all functional CPSUs and the other is quick demolition of all so called sick / loss making CPSUs.

Modi Cabinet has initiated steps to bring down government's share holding in each and all CPSUs to 49% which would give effective private control of all the CPSUs. Directive is being issued by the government that the board of directors of all the divested CPSUs shall have private management perspective and practices. All together there are more than 250 CPSUs in which the government holding is 51% and above. Some such major CPSUs include NTPC, SAIL, Power Grid Corporation of India..

By other decision, Modi cabinet, in its meeting on 6 June, has approved a new policy for time bound disposal of so called sick or loss making CPSUs and selling out all the movable and immovable assets own by these CPSUs.

STATES

Rajasthan

Solidarity Rally with National Handloom Workers

On 43rd day of movement of CITU affiliated National Handloom Karamchari Union in Jaipur on 26 May, a massive solidarity rally and meeting was held in front of National Handloom Corp which was joined by thousands of CITU workers and members of other mass organisation.

STATES

West Bengal

Against Skyrocketing Petrol Diesel Price Increase

Workers Statewide Rasta Roko Agitation

2 June: More than 30,000 workers joined the statewide 1 PM – 1.30 PM simultaneous *rasta roko* (road blockade) agitation on 31 May protesting against spiraling increase of petrol and diesel prices and demanding substantial cut in central excise duty and withdrawal of central and state cesses. The call of workers protest was given just one day before, on 30 May, from a meeting of West Bengal state units of central trade unions, held at CITU state centre, in the background of skyrocketing petrol and diesel prices heaping more miseries on the people. Left parties supported the programme.

By corresponding increase in excise duty, the Central government did not pass on the benefits to the people when there was fall in international prices of crude oil. But, the people were overburdened due to corresponding increase of taxes with every rise of price of petroleum products due to ad valorem system.

The preparation for the success of the programme was made in war footing. The workers responded magnificently despite short time notice and there was wide support of the people. At several places other sections of the people also joined. *Rasta roko* agitation was successfully held at 273 places in different parts of the state. CITU leaders at all levels joined the *rasta roko* programme.

At some places, TMC-led government's police tried to prevent the *rasta roko* agitation; resorted to lathi charge and arrested the agitating workers and their leaders.

Haryana

16 Days Municipal Workers Strike

Ended in Magnificent Victory

2 June: The 16 days statewide indefinite strike in all three tier municipal bodies in Haryana ended in magnificent victory for the workers when government accepted all their major demands following discussion between the union of the striking workers and the State government on 24 May.

It was agreed that safai, sewer and fire brigade contractors employees would be in the direct pay roll of respective municipal bodies and decision would be taken for regularisation of remaining categories of contract worker after study; the recruitment process for filling up 1646 posts of fire operators was cancelled and already working 1360 firemen and drivers under contractors would be considered as already recruited with seniority weightage and rest of sanctioned posts would be filled by new recruitment; policy on regularisation of jobs would be finalised; minimum wage was raised from Rs.11,500 to Rs.13,500; cleaning allowance was raised from Rs.350 to Rs.1000, broom allowance from Rs.5 to Rs.150, and duty allowance on rest day from Rs.600 to Rs.1000; state vigilance would investigate on the failure to deposit the deducted EPF and ESI amounts and criminal cases would be filed against the culprits; all post retirement benefits would be released in time; all actions taken against the striking employees by the government and administration would be revoked and strike period would be treated as on duty.

Nagar Palika Karmachari Sangh (NPKS) affiliated to and led by Sarb Karmachari Sangh (SKS), the umbrella organisation of state government, semi-government and municipal employees in Haryana; the workers of all three tier municipal bodies – Corporations, Councils and Committees (nagar panchayats) – were on strike from 9 May, 2018. *(The Working Class June, 2018)*

BJP in their 2014 state election manifesto promised to end contract system, regularisation of jobs and Rs.15,000 as minimum wage after coming to power in the state. NPKS had been pursuing these issues with the BJP-led state government through memoranda since 2015; resorted to 2 days strike in October 2016; and issued 3 days strike notice on 12-14 July, 2017. Just a day before, on 11 July, the principal secretary of the chief minister invited the NPKS for discussion and agreed on several issues other than implementation of 7th pay commission for municipal workers. But, government betrayed the municipal workers by not implementing any of the other agreed issues.

In 2018, the agitated municipal workers staged dharna and demonstrations in front of all deputy commissioners' offices and submitted memoranda for the chief minister and urban development minister during 13-28 February; about 7,000 workers staged demonstration in front of the residence of the urban development minister on 18 March; resorted to relay fast on 2-3 May in all municipal committees; brought out torchlight procession on 8 May and went on strike on 9 May in all 10 municipal corporations, 16 councils and 61 committees.

The chief minister invited the striking union NPKS and Sarb Karmachari Sangh leaders for discussion. BMS neither has any union of municipal workers in the state nor did it support the strike; yet, BMS leaders were already sitting with the chief minister when the striking workers leaders arrived for discussion. In protest that BMS was not with the strike, the leaders of striking NPKS union and SKS boycotted the meeting. The meeting was resumed only after BMS leaders were asked to leave the place. However, the meeting ended without any result. But, the ministers and BMS leaders issued false statement that agreement was arrived at and that the strike was called off. But, workers saw through the game and continued the strike with determination and facing government's repression.

As the strike continued, the government deployed hired people, agencies and NGOs to break the strike and resorted to police repression including lathi charge, arrests and sending striking workers and their leaders to jail in some districts. The government tried to deploy village safai workers for garbage clearance in urban areas. But, CITU affiliated Gramin Safai Karamchari Sangh intervened and foiled government's attempt. Protesting against police action and arrest of striking workers and their leaders, CITU state committee and Sarb Karmachari Sangh jointly staged demonstrations across the state.

Ultimately, on 24 May, on invitation from the government, led by Sarb Karmachari Sangh general secretary Subhas Lamba, an 11 members delegation of the striking union leaders, including NPKS president Naresh Kumar Shastri, its general secretary Jarnail Singh Chinalia and deputy general secretary Shiv Charan held hours long discussion with the government's subcommittee with urban development cabinet minister Kavita Jain, ministers of state Manish Grover and Krishna Bedi and principal secretary of the chief minister Rajesh Khullar as members with departmental principal secretary, chief minister media adviser and Faridabad municipal corporation commissioner.

The meeting concluded into an agreement and on that basis 16 days long indefinite strike was called off.

Even after this development, the ministers in the government's subcommittee tried to mislead the press on 24 May that the 'agreement was arrived at after discussion with the municipal union and BMS' despite the fact that BMS was neither in the strike nor was in the discussion with the government nor was the party in the agreement. CITU condemned such mischievous attempt of BJP ministers in Haryana.

Assam

Opposing Citizenship on Religion Basis

CITU & the Left Agitate

Protest against Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 and against price rise, particularly of petrol and diesel, have become important agenda of agitation for CITU and the Left parties in Assam. CITU in Assam has been campaigning for unity and amity among all sections of the people and CRU, its units of medical and sales representatives, has launched a statewide signature campaign against the Bill and also organising protest rallies.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, now before the joint select committee of the Parliament, seeks to provide citizenship on religion basis mainly to grant citizenship to Hindu 'illegal migrants' since 1971 cut off year, but denying it to such Muslims migrants in Assam. The Bill also reduces duration of 'naturalisation' from 11 years to 6 years for granting citizenship. The amendment is as per BJP's 2014 election manifesto. This amendment also added to confusion by nullifying the National Register of Citizens (NRC) as per Assam Accord and as was ordered by the Supreme Court.

Taking advantage of the situation BJP and Sangh Parivar are trying to polarize the people of Assam between Hindus and Muslims and targeting the Left for opposing the Bill. Some chauvinistic forces have become active and trying to turn it as an anti-Bengali agitation.

Trade Unions Reject Assam Government's 'Labour Welfare Society'

Government of Assam has constituted 'Assam Labour Welfare Society' registering under Society Act comprising of 40 members with BJP MLAs, Panchayat Pradhan etc purportedly "for better coordination and management of the labour issues."

Against the notification on the formation of the 'Assam Labour Welfare Society', six central trade unions – CITU, INTUC, AITUC, AICCTU, HMS and AIUTUC - rejected it and decided to jointly oppose the same. This society will be performing the job of labour law implementation minimising the role of labour department. This is intended to replace 'labour rights' by 'labour welfare'. The trade unions have submitted a memorandum to the state labour minister demanding withdrawal of the notification.

Jharkhand

Anganwadi Employees Massive Rally

Jointly organised by CITU and other central trade unions' affiliated and independent four Jharkhand state unions; thousands of Anganwadi employees, coming from distant parts of the state, brought out a massive state level procession from local Moradabadi ground in the state capital Ranchi on 30 May and marched towards the government's secretariat in protest against state government's betrayal and demanding implementation of the earlier agreement. The procession was led by CITU Anganwadi federation AIFAWH general secretary and CITU national secretary A. R. Sindhu and Anganwadi state unions' morcha leaders Sundari Tirkey, Sushila Hansda, Purnima Choudhury, Minu Murmu, Ashok Kumar Singh, Sanjay paswan, Lakhanlal Mandal and others. The procession was stopped at police barricade near Raj Bhawan where it converted into a rally and mass meeting presided over by the morcha leader Daymanti Devi.

Addressing the rally, A. R. Sindhu said that before 2014 Lok Sabha election BJP promised to increase wages of Anganwadi employees. But, soon after coming to power, in the very first budget Modi government cut allocation to ICDS by about 60%. Now the government intends to privatise entire ICDS programme and wind up this major welfare programme serving about 8 crore children and 1.9 crore pregnant and nursing mothers which contributed significantly in reducing child malnutrition and child and mothers deaths rates in the country.

Addressing the meeting prominent morcha leader Sundari Tirkey said that Anganwadi employees are in the forefront fighting against malnutrition in the country. Yet, they are most neglected. They are not recognised as government employees; even minimum wages are not paid to them.

Morcha leaders gave 15 days notice to the government to respond to their demands failing which they would jointly announce major agitational programme.

Bihar

Defence Contract Workers Victory after Strike

Led by CITU affiliated Defence Production Contract Workers Union, the contractor workers of the defence production unit at Rajgir in Bihar were on total indefinite strike from 24 May, 2018. They were protesting against arbitrary actions of the local management in respect of their job protection and working conditions particularly removing them from jobs by oral order, giving 20 days work in a month in the name of rotation etc.

The strike ended after discussion between the union and the general manager and 4 point agreement stating that no worker will be removed from job and will work full month; no action will be taken against the striking workers; a management – union committee will be formed to address the day to day grievances of the workers; and that on other demands necessary action will be taken soon.

Other demands include annual statement on EPF accounts; providing ESI cards; to stop lowering of and deduction of wages without giving sufficient reasons and return of such deducted amounts; bonus for 2017-18; payment of dearness allowances with arrears; entitlement of leave and holidays equal to those of permanent workers; to ensure overtime payment; payment of wages in scheduled time; etc. CITU state committee greeted the workers for this victory. *(Inputs: Shankar Shah)*

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

State	Centre	Mar 2018	Apr 2018	State	Centre	Mar 2018	Apr 2018
AP	GUNTUR	278	278	MHR	MUMBAI	287	290
	VIJAYWADA	277	276		NAGPUR	323	325
	VISHAKHAPATHNAM	280	280		NASIK	304	303
ASM	DOOM DOOMA TINSUKIA	260	260		PUNE	292	293
	GUWAHATI	249	249		SHOLAPUR	295	294
	LABAC SILCHAR	257	258	ORI	ANGUL TALCHER	301	302
	MARIANI JORHAT	241	244		ROURKELA	305	301
	RANGAPARA TEZPUR	240	244	PUD	PUDUCHERRY	307	307
BIH	MUNGER JAMALPUR	307	307	PUN	AMRITSAR	297	295
CHD	CHANDIGARH	287	289		JALANDHAR	292	292
CHS	BHILAI	311	312		LUDHIANA	276	278
DLI	DELHI	264	264	RJN	AJMER	265	265
GOA	GOA	311	319		BHILWARA	276	275
GUJ	AHMEDABAD	268	266		JAIPUR	275	275
	BHAVNAGAR	268	270	TN	CHENNAI	265	267
	RAJKOT	277	276		COIMBATORE	270	273
	SURAT	258	258		COONOOR	289	293
	VADODARA	264	264		MADURAI	275	277
HRY	FARIDABAD	259	261		SALEM	273	274
	YAMUNANAGAR	275	276		TIRUCHIRAPALLY	280	284
HP	HIMACHAL PRADESH	256	257	TEL	GODAVARIKHANI	292	293
J&K	SRINAGAR	269	269		HYDERABAD	249	249
JRK	BOKARO	283	282		WARRANGAL	293	295
	GIRIDIH	309	314	TRP	TRIPURA	261	260
	JAMSHEDPUR	335	336	UP	AGRA	316	317
	JHARIA	316	317		GHAZIABAD	293	292
	KODARMA	328	333		KANPUR	299	302
	RANCHI HATIA	330	333		LUCKNOW	290	291
KNT	BELGAUM	294	295		VARANASI	288	289
	BENGLURU	286	288	WB	ASANSOL	310	313
	HUBLI DHARWAR	311	312		DARJEELING	271	267
	MERCARA	297	297		DURGAPUR	312	313
	MYSORE	296	297		HALDIA	317	320
KRL	ERNAKULAM	297	301		HOWRAH	277	277
	MUNDAKKAYAM	301	303		JALPAIGURI	281	280
	QUILON	329	330		KOLKATA	269	273
MP	BHOPAL	288	289		RANIGANJ	261	263
	CHHINDWARA	289	291		SILIGURI	263	265
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CITU 48TH FOUNDATION DAY

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Pledge & Cleaning Programmes in Kerala

Foundation Day Pledge in Rajasthan

Anganwadi Rally in Jharkhand *(Report Page 25)*

Public Sector Convention in Delhi

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Municipal Workers Strike in Haryana

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Meeting with the Chief Minister

Date of Publication - 30.06.2018
Posted at ND PSO, N. Delhi - 1. RNI 18560/71. Postal Regd, No. DL(C)-01/1194/18-20 Delhi
1st - 2nd day of Every Month. Licensed to post without prepayment under License No. U(C-39)/2018-20

JEJAA's 'Pol Khol Halla Bol' Movement

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Patiala, Punjab

Jaipur, Rajasthan

Ballia, Uttar Pradesh

Imphal, Manipur

Printed by: Tapan Sen; Published by: Tapan Sen; on behalf of: The Centre of Indian Trade Unions and printed at Progressive Printers, A-21 Jhilmil Industrial Area, Shahdara, Delhi - 95 and Published at: Centre of Indian Trade Unions, B T Rana-dive Bhawan, 13-A Rouse Avenue, New Delhi - 110 002, Phone: 23221288, 23221306 Fax: 23221284, email: citubtr@gmail.com; **Editor: K Hemalata**