

**Workers, Arise! Unite!
To Save The Country –**

**From Anti People Neoliberal Policies!
From Communal Divisive Destruction!**

**Strengthen the Left!
Decisively Defeat BJP!**

The first phase of voting for electing members to the 17th Lok Sabha will start in a fortnight. We, the workers often think that elections are something to be battled out by the political parties; we don't have anything to do with it; our job is only to vote for a candidate of our choice.

No comrades and friends, not at all. This is not the case. It is not a battle simply of the political parties or individuals contesting the elections, as it seems outwardly. Of course, some of the '*aya Rams, gaya Rams*' and '*Jumping Johns*' convert it into a circus providing occasional entertainment to us, sometimes earning our choicest epithets. But it is a serious issue that deserves more attention from us.

Elections through which we elect **our representatives, people who are supposed to represent our voice, voice our demands and support our struggles from inside the Parliament, are equally, rather more important for us, the working people of this country. It is our battle.**

Particularly, this election to the 17th Lok Sabha is a crucial battle for the working class of this country. Its outcome, probably as never before, will determine the future of our country as a democratic secular Republic where the common people are guaranteed their Constitutional rights; it will determine whether the workers and toiling people are able to unite irrespective of their religion, caste, region etc and organise themselves to unitedly fight for the realisation of these rights, to fight the policies that deny them their rights.

The major political parties want us to believe that it is their battle, not ours. They treat us only as *voters*, whose job is over once we vote, not *citizens*, who have the right and responsibility to think and express their opinions on the various issues concerning the country and its people including the policies pursued by those in power.

It might be, and it is, a business for the major political parties and most if not all regional parties; an occasion to invest money to earn multiple returns in various forms in the next five years. Not for us. At stake for us is our future, the future of our children and the future of our country, our nation. It is we who build this country, through our sweat and blood. It is our sons and daughters, the soldiers who protect this country. We want peaceful and harmonious conditions; conditions that would enable all of us to work together, utilise all our resources – human and natural, and all our energies, for the development and advance of our nation.

That is why we just can't remain spectators to this *tamasha* confining ourselves to voting.

Our issues, the issues of the toiling people of our country, the workers and peasants who produce the wealth of this country never form the centre of the discourse of the major political parties during the elections. They believe that they can influence us by spending huge amounts of their unaccounted money, our money actually, which they have managed to accumulate while in power. They think that they can sell dreams for votes knowing fully well that they would not be implementing them after coming to power. They also think that they can invoke religion, caste, region etc to influence us and get our votes.

Of course this has been happening for long. Many of us believed their promises; many of us were influenced by their speeches that often roused communal, casteist and regional chauvinist feelings. They have often succeeded in diverting our attention from examining what they and their parties did in the Parliament to improve our day to day living and working conditions. In fact, they were able to mislead most of us and prevent us from recognising and realising who and which party consistently stood by us, supported our demands and fought for us inside the Parliament and other legislative bodies; and who advocated and supported the policies that are making our lives miserable.

We must remember that this happened in the last Parliament elections also, when we believed that 'jobs would be aplenty, corruption would be wiped away, prices would see a steep fall and *'acche din'* would be round the corner, if Modi came to power. Many of us voted for the BJP and now we all feel cheated.

Not only have our conditions, the conditions of the workers and employees, the peasants and agricultural workers and artisans, not improved. In fact, for an overwhelming majority of us, they have deteriorated.

On the eve of these elections, when we are about to vote again, is it not time for us to examine - how and why? It is time for us to make it clear that we can't be taken for granted. We will exercise our right to examine, analyse and decide whom to vote, based upon our own experiences.

Yes, many of us did vote for the BJP in the last elections. Of course the BJP never promised the moon to the workers. What it said in its election manifesto in 2014 was that it would carry out 'labour law reforms' 'to create conducive atmosphere for investors'. BJP and Modi were able to mislead people into believing that by creating such 'conducive atmosphere for investors' Modi would be able to fulfil the promise of creating two crore jobs a year. Employees and workers could not grasp what the real impact of 'labour law reforms' would be. Soon after coming to power, the Modi government embarked upon measures to climb up the ladder of 'Ease of Doing Business Index' 'to attract investment'. It hastened the so called 'labour law reforms' which in effect enabled the employers to 'hire and fire' workers as per their will. Labour became 'flexible'; labour laws became 'flexible' for the benefit of the employers, the big corporates and business houses. The invitation to 'Make in India' extended to the foreign investors was a lightly veiled invitation to 'come, loot our workers; we will look the other way'.

What is the result?

Worsening working conditions

Already, after the advent of the neoliberal policies in our country by the then Congress government, permanent workers were being overwhelmingly replaced by contract workers. Now under the BJP government led by Modi, contract workers are also being replaced gradually by outsourced workers, fixed term employees, apprentices and trainees. No more permanent jobs; no job security; no social security; no labour rights for us or our children. Tens of lakhs of workers are today left staring aghast at their declining bargaining power and at their deteriorating working conditions. The Modi government drafted four 'Labour Codes' to disarm the working class of their organised strength by making it difficult to get organised and fight collectively. It sought to push them into slave like conditions, to live at the mercy of the employers. Is this what we wanted?

Increasing unemployment

Has this resulted in employment generation? Not at all; according to a CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) report, 1 crore and 10 lakh jobs were lost in 2018 alone. The National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) Periodic Labour Force Survey 2017-18, which the BJP government desperately sought to suppress, reports that there was an employment loss of 4.7 crore, 4.3 crore in rural areas and 0.4 crore in urban areas between 2011-12 and 2017-18. Women were the worst affected in the rural areas.

Lakhs of small and medium enterprises are yet to recover from the blows of demonetisation and GST. Tens of lakhs of workers employed in these enterprises are yet to recover their jobs and earnings. Unemployment has soared to a 45 year high!

Stagnation in Wages

Wages have stagnated. For workers in many sectors they have declined. According to the Azim Premji University Report 2018, 67% of households at the national level reported that they earned below Rs 10000 a month. According to the 2015-16 report of the Labour Bureau, the maximum monthly income of 57% of the self employed was Rs 7000. The average monthly income of over 50% of total employees was up to Rs 5000 only. The Modi government has adamantly refused to notify Rs 18000 per month as the national minimum wage despite agreeing to this recommendation by the 7th Pay Commission, for the central government employees. Recently an 'Expert Committee' appointed by it to determine 'the methodology for fixing the national minimum wage' has come up with an arbitrary and ridiculous recommendation that the national minimum wage should be Rs 9750 per month; i.e. around half of that recommended by the 7th Pay Commission, accepted by the BJP government and being demanded by the entire trade union movement since 2016. This, after increasing the family size to 3.6 from 3 as considered by the 15th Indian Labour Conference for fixing the minimum wage! Family size increases, but requirements come down! Prices rise but wages must come down! What does it mean? Workers must work but they and their families should starve?!

Weakening of Welfare

The around 1 crore scheme workers who hoped that at least they would be recognised as 'workers' as per the recommendation of the 45th Indian Labour Conference, that their conditions would be improved are dismayed that they were totally forgotten till just before the Parliament elections. Even then, the midday meal workers were 'missed'! Not only that. The government did its best to privatise these schemes depriving the poor women and children of the minimum welfare benefits that they were getting under these schemes. This too, for the benefit of the corporate packed food manufacturers and corporate NGOs. It is only to the credit of the massive struggles of the scheme workers across the country that the BJP government could not totally wind up these schemes as it wished and got recommended by the NITI Ayog.

Easier Business For Corporates, Harder Life For Workers

Who benefit from this obsession with 'Ease of Doing Business'? The workers? NO. The Unemployed? NO. Did the country attract any worthwhile employment generating new private investment? Again, NO. It is only the big corporates and business houses who have amassed wealth at the expense of the workers and toiling people of this country. Today, in our country 9 individuals, the Ambanis, Adanis, etc, own the same wealth as the bottom half, i.e. around 65 crore people of the country. In addition to exploiting the workers their wealth is also swelling through their investments in the share market. In fact they find it more profitable to invest in the share market than investing in production and manufacturing that generate employment. They don't want to produce because they are finding it increasingly difficult to sell their products, in this country or in other countries, particularly since the global crisis of 2008 that has not gone away still.

And to facilitate this, the Modi government is diverting the hard earned money of the workers into the share market. Already it has decided to invest 15% of provident fund accumulation in the share market, despite opposition from the workers' representatives in the central board of trustees of EPFO. It has decided to deploy Rs 75000 crore of Employees' State Insurance (ESI) fund for speculation through Reliance Company despite opposition. Now it has come up with another *jumla* - the pension scheme for the unorganised workers. While an unorganised worker has to go on contributing for not less than 20 years from today, the return will only be a meagre monthly pension of Rs 3000; nobody knows what its real value will be after 20 years. After his/ her death, his/her spouse will get the pension; after the death of the spouse, the entire money will go to the government to be invested in the share market to lift it for the benefit of the big sharks. The workers' family will not get a single paisa. What an innovation in deceit?!

Neoliberal Policies –Transfer Of Peoples' Wealth Into Corporate Hands

Why is the Modi government so anti worker? After all, workers and employees constituted large sections of those who believed in him and voted for him! Why this obstinacy towards flexibilisation of labour, despite the ILO making it clear that 'increasing flexibility in the labour market is the key factor behind decline in wage share' and thus the living conditions of the workers?

It is, because, the BJP and Modi are hard core supporters of the neoliberal policies, as is the Congress which initiated these so called 'economic reforms'. The neoliberal agenda ordains that governments formulate policies to benefit big corporates, domestic and foreign, at the cost of the workers, the people and the country and its public wealth as a whole. So it is that we see Mukesh Ambani's Jio being promoted by none other than the Prime Minister at the cost of BSNL. So it is that we see a brand new company with no experience in aeronautic manufacturing, Anil Ambani's, being selected as the offset partner for Rafale at the cost of the public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). So it is that all the six airports being managed by the public sector Airport Authority of India are handed over to Gautam Adani who has no experience of managing airports. The list can go on. And so it is that railway stations, ports and prestigious ancient monuments including the Red Fort are being handed over for management to big private corporates – the Bansals, the Dalmias etc.

Wake Up India! 'Make In India' Is A Fake!

Despite all the advertisement spree in the media, Modi's 'Make in India' has turned out to be a big fake! What is really happening is that our own employment generating manufacturing industries are being consciously destroyed through privatisation to benefit the foreign multinational corporations. These MNCs who are in search of places to sell their products, in the midst of the continuing global recession, are finding a willing partner and friend in the Modi government.

Let us have just one look at Modi government's claims of 'nationalism' and 'patriotism', another ploy to influence us. Immediately after coming to power, it dismantled the Planning Commission, appointed the NITI Ayog and mandated it with preparing a list of public sector undertakings to be sold off, disinvested, and privatised; the public sector, which is instrumental in developing industrial base of our country and self reliant economy. Defence, railways, insurance, civil aviation, telecommunication, everything was put for privatisation. It is to the credit of the working class who, through their sustained struggles, along with other factors, could stall this to certain extent.

Leading the country towards deindustrialisation, mortgaging the country's resources to foreign and domestic corporates, kowtowing to imperialism – this is BJP and Modi's brand of 'nationalism' and 'patriotism'! Can anything be more hypocritical?

Increasing welfare expenditure for the common people, for their health, education for their children, is a strict No, No under the neoliberal agenda. But the ruling parties have to face elections every now and then, when they do face uncomfortable questions. So, these *jumlas*, pre poll announcements of various schemes, stone laying ceremonies, to keep the people under illusions and get their votes. In fact they have found an innovative method to divide their services between the super rich and the common people of the country. Amuse the common people and keep them in good humour with attractive promises before the elections. Get their votes and come to power. With power in hand, serve the super rich, the big corporates and businesses. To hell with the people, till the next elections!

Dangerous, Divisive, Disruptive

What is equally dangerous, is that the divisive and disruptive machinations of the BJP and its ideological mentor, the RSS, have reached unprecedented heights under this Modi government.

The commitment of the BJP and the RSS to '*manuvad*' that decrees the *varnashrama dharma* and treats dalits, adivasis and women as inferior beings to be suppressed and kept under control, is well known. The RSS and BJP feel proud about it. Will washing the feet of a few dalits wash away the crime of allowing hundreds of dalits to die in manholes? Or of throwing dalit women into such miserable conditions that they are compelled to clean human excreta from dry latrines in return for one or two *rotis*?

Instead of promoting what is best in our Indian philosophy, history, culture and science, the RSS and BJP promote obscurantist, retrograde and unscientific ideas in the name of 'nationalism'; ideas which seek to suppress the dalits, adivasis and women and benefit the rich, so called 'upper caste' and dominant sections of the society. They spray venomous ideas to divide the people on the basis of religion, caste, gender, region etc and disrupt their unity. Thus they serve their corporate masters by weakening united struggles and making workers and the people indulge in fratricidal fights. This Modi government is doubly dangerous because of its aggressive implementation of neoliberal policies as well as its pursuit of the poisonous and divisive communal ideology.

Under the Modi regime such human feelings like love between a boy and a girl, faith, eating habits, culture are all used to make people fight, lynch and kill thus polarising entire societies. Can anything be more cruel and inhuman than this? Has the country ever witnessed a situation where the Prime Minister, under Constitutional Oath, campaigning against the values of equality to all citizens enshrined in our Constitution and against the Supreme Court judgment? Prime Minister Modi had this unique distinction of opposing the Supreme Court judgment allowing women of all ages entry into the Sabarimala temple. In addition to exposing the attitude of BJP and RSS towards women's equality, this also exposes their opportunistic stance to fish in troubled waters to gain political mileage. Of course, the people of Kerala, women and men, and the LDF government effectively thwarted all their heinous attempts.

But for Modi and his BJP, nothing can come between them and their hunger for power. Even the sacrifices of our soldiers become weapons in their ugly quest for power. The Modi government paid scant attention to improve the conditions of our soldiers in normal times. It neglected the genuine demand for One Rank One Pension of the armed forces. It remained totally unmindful of the harsh working conditions of our soldiers. It did nothing all these years to improve them and provide them some relief. Now, it seeks to gain politically from their sacrifices. Can anything be more mean and lowly than this?

Deafening Silence On People's Livelihood Issues

Use Ayodhya; use Sabarimala; use the cow; use the soldier; talk about anything. But NOT the burning livelihood issues of the people. That has become the desperate tactics of the BJP now to garner votes. The workers and the toiling people cannot and should not allow this. Allowing BJP to come to power again means allowing ourselves to be

mortgaged to the interests of the big corporates; it means surrendering ourselves to be pushed into a situation of slavery; it means agreeing to lose our basic democratic and labour rights to an authoritarian regime; it means succumbing to the pressure of international finance and lose our national sovereignty. The working people, as the builder and protector of the nation, can never and will never allow this.

‘Workers’ Charter’

This is the reason that the ten central trade unions which have been spearheading the struggle to defend the rights of the workers, to safeguard their working conditions and to fight against the predatory neoliberal policies, held a national convention in New Delhi on 5th March 2019. They have unanimously adopted a ‘Workers’ Charter’ and demanded that all political parties incorporate these in their election manifestos. The convention called upon the working class to rise as one man to defeat the BJP, whose government has contemptuously neglected these issues despite repeated appeals from the central trade unions. It refused to pay any attention to the workers’ demands despite these being repeatedly raised through 3 country wide general strikes in the last five years and many more representations. The convention asserted that it is the responsibility of the working class to defeat the anti worker, anti people and anti national BJP, in order to save the nation. The resolution including the ‘Workers’ Charter’ adopted in the convention is given in the annexure.

The Alternative

There is no doubt whatsoever that this BJP government under Modi must be defeated. It has no right to seek another term. At the same time, we also have to identify who, which party and which forces support our demands, support our struggles - on the basis of our own experiences. We have to strengthen their presence in the Parliament by voting for them so that our interests can be effectively projected, our struggles are reflected in the discussions and our case argued from inside the Parliament.

What is that force? Which is such Party?

Which party or parties have consistently opposed the disastrous neoliberal policies?

While the Congress government initiated them, successive governments at the centre have continued the same. The BJP governments were rather more aggressive. It is the CPI (M) and the other Left parties that have consistently, since 1991, opposed these policies asserting that they would adversely impact the working and living conditions of vast majority of our population. Now, we see they have been proved right. The Left led state governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura have desisted from implementing them in their states despite their limited powers and immense pressure from the government of India.

Which party or parties consistently opposed anti worker amendments to labour laws?

The BJP led governments fast tracked amendments to labour laws, to provide so called ‘flexibility’ though the process started with the advent of neoliberal policies under the

Congress regime. Several state governments ruled by the regional parties too have amended them.

It is only the Left parties who have consistently opposed such amendments both inside the Parliament and outside in the field of struggles. The Left led state governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura have refused to carry out such amendments to the labour laws. They refused to permit the police to intervene on behalf of the employers in cases of disputes between employers and workers and in workers' struggles and strikes.

No anti worker amendment to the labour laws could be carried out when the Left had a strong presence in the Parliament, as when the UPA I government depended on Left support for its survival. In fact, along with the trade union resistance from outside the Parliament, the pressure of the Left parties inside the Parliament compelled the UPA I government to withdraw the notification allowing fixed term employment issued by the BJP government led by Vajpayee.

Which party or parties opposed curtailment of welfare benefits of the workers?

It is the CPI (M) and the Left parties which have all along been consistent in opposing any curtailment of welfare benefits for the workers. The Left opposed converting the assured benefit system for pension into assured contribution system. It did not allow introduction of the PFRDA Bill during the Vajpayee regime or during the UPA I regime. It is only when the Left presence was weak in the Parliament that the UPA II managed to pass it with the support of the BJP, then in opposition. It was the Left MPs and Left MPs alone who voted against the Bill in both the houses of Parliament.

Even after its passage in the Parliament, the Left led governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura have refused to implement the NPS. On the other hand, the BJP government in Himachal Pradesh started implementing it even before the Bill was passed in the Parliament. The UDF government which later came to power in Kerala started implementing the NPS. The LDF, after regaining power in the state has appointed a committee to study and suggest how the OPS can be revoked. In Tripura, the BJP government which came to power in 2018 has repealed the OPS and introduced NPS.

Which party or parties consistently opposed privatisation?

We know privatisation is an integral part of the neoliberal agenda. While the Congress government initiated the process, BJP governments went a step ahead. BJP government under Vajpayee appointed a Disinvestment Ministry. BJP government under Modi dismantled the Planning Commission and appointed the NITI Ayog which was mandated to prepare list of public sector undertakings to be privatised in different ways – disinvestment, outright sale, strategic sale etc

It is only the Left parties that consistently and strongly opposed privatisation by any means, both inside the Parliament and outside. Along with the struggles of the public sector workers and the resistance of the entire trade union movement, they have been able to stall dismantling of the public sector to a large extent though the BJP government has been going ahead with disinvestment in certain PSUs. Left leaders in

several states have physically participated and led the struggles of the public sector workers against privatisation. The LDF government in Kerala has taken several measures to revive the PSUs made sick during the UDF regime and converted many of them into profit making units.

Which party or parties have consistently supported the struggles of the working class to protect their rights?

Again, it is the Left parties and Left parties alone which have always uncompromisingly supported the struggles of the workers in defence of their rights and for improving their conditions. The working class has gone on 18 country wide general strikes against the impact of the neoliberal policies on their working and living conditions and the attacks on their basic trade union and labour rights. In addition, scores of sectoral struggles and strikes have taken place – of the insurance, bank, central and state government, BSNL, railway, defence, electricity, transport employees, medical representatives, scheme workers, workers in the modern private industries, of the unorganised workers etc, during this period.

The Left parties supported all these struggles and strikes. Left leaders have physically participated in demonstrations in solidarity with the workers, often facing police attacks along with the workers. Left MPs always tried to raise their issues in the Parliament. Many times, they have conducted demonstrations in support of the strikes in front of the Parliament.

This support of the Left to the demands and struggles of the workers is not accidental; neither is it opportunism – to gain votes. It is based on the Left ideology that seeks to end exploitation. That is why it has been firm, committed and consistent, never showing any vacillations, whether inside or outside the Parliament.

Supporting the Left in this elections and sending more MPs from the Left to the Lok Sabha is a sure way of having our supporters inside the Parliament, to raise our demands and intervene on our behalf even while policies are being formulated. Our struggles on the streets and at the factories will have their reflection inside the Parliament too.

That is why we, as workers must support the Left wherever we have an opportunity. At the same time we have to create widest awareness among the workers during this elections by popularising the 'Workers' Charter' to prepare the workers to confront leaders of other political parties about what their stand is. This will also prepare the ground for wider and more intense struggles to reverse the neoliberal policies, whichever government comes to power at the centre, after the elections.

The Country Has The Resource!

There is one question that is almost invariably raised by the government, the corporate friendly media, and several intellectuals who are ardent supporters of the neoliberal agenda – Where are the financial resources? Where is the money to ensure food security for all? Where is the money to ensure health for all of you? Where is the money to provide free education for all your children? How can the government provide jobs to all of you? Why can't you stand up, start an enterprise and provide

jobs to a few people yourself? Why can't you sell pakodas? Why can't you open pan shops? Why can't you rear cows? Why do you depend on the government for everything?

Let us make this very clear. We are not averse to sell pakodas, or run a pan shop or rear cows or do anything. We have been doing all these and many more. What we want is the government to ensure conditions so we earn adequate income to lead a decent, dignified and comfortable life. Is it too much to ask? The problem is the policies of the government are not allowing us to do this. For example, when lakhs of workers in the small and medium enterprises, the construction workers, the unorganised workers etc, lost their jobs and incomes due to demonetisation, we the pakodas sellers and pan shop owners lost our income too. These workers were our customers. Even the *chaiwallahs* among us lost customers and incomes.

It may sound strange and surprising. But the reality is that it is not we that are dependent on the government. It is the big corporates and business houses that are sucking out our money from the exchequer. Every year, during the last over ten years, as per the government budget records, the government has been providing over Rs 5 lakh crore as tax concessions to the big corporates and business houses. Whose money is this and why should a government voted to power with our votes give away our money to the few super rich? Not only this. Every year the tax evaded by these super rich amounts to over Rs 7 lakh crore. Add to this the loan defaults, our money saved in the public sector banks, which has been given to these corporates as loans and they have not returned it back. This amounts to over Rs 12 lakh crore. And they demand cheap credit, free or cheap land, control over our forests, mines, water bodies, our public sector undertakings in addition to formulation of policies and Acts in their favour – all from willing governments ever ready to satisfy them. We only demand that this injustice be stopped and this people's money be spent for the benefit of the people, not a few corporates.

Recently some intellectuals and people of eminence in different fields met in New Delhi and showed how the resources can easily be mobilised to meet the just demands of the people. According to them:

- Levying 20% inheritance tax, wealth tax in rising slabs for wealth above Rs 10 crore, corporate social tax linked to turnover, not profit, green taxes to encourage less carbon emission, pollution tax etc will enable the government to:
 - Expand employment guarantee programme to 150 days of work to all adults in rural and urban areas at minimum wage
 - Expand public education at all levels, provide quality education, fill up all vacancies in education, health and other essential public services
 - Treating all workers in essential services like health and education (like the anganwadi workers and helpers, ASHAs, midday meal workers etc) as regular government employees
 - Universal public distribution system in rural areas, adding pulses and oil to those being supplied in the ration shops
 - Maternity benefit of minimum wages for 3 months, to all who are not covered by the employers
 - Universal pension at half the minimum wage

- Increasing government expenditure on health care to 3% of GDP gradually over 5 years will enable the government to:
 - Strengthen government health system at all levels, mainly focussing on primary, preventive and promotive care
 - Improve health infrastructure providing necessary health staff, medical supplies
 - Employing two ASHAs, instead of one, with salaries and other benefits at par with government staff
 - Regulate medical colleges, abolish capitation fees, reduce tuition fees and improve standards in private education

- Increasing expenditure on education to a minimum 6% of GDP will enable the government to:
 - Set up a national village education fund to support state governments to improve the quality of education in rural schools
 - Set up rural colleges and universities that focus on rural issues
 - Fill up vacancies in teachers' posts at all levels
 - Tenfold increase in Industrial Training Institutes over the next five years
 - Upgrade Kasturba Balika Vidyalayas and provide residential facilities for under privileged students up to the college level

What Is Lacking Is The Political Will

So, comrades and friends, it is clear that the country has adequate resources. As the adage goes 'Where there is a will, there is a way'. The way is there. What is lacking is the will on the part of the BJP and other political parties that have been ruling the country.

Defeating the BJP is our immediate and urgent task. It is the need of the hour. The working class must take the lead in this crucial battle. Besides, as working class, we have to do all we can, to strengthen the presence of our true friends, the Left, in the Parliament.

At the same time we have to continue our united struggle, whichever government comes to power, to achieve our genuine demands; to ensure that people's money is deployed for people's welfare, not to fill up the deep pockets of a few. This requires much broader united struggles, struggles at a higher plane aimed at reversal of the neoliberal policies. We want alternative pro worker pro people policies. This is possible. We can achieve this. Defeat of the anti worker, anti people, anti national BJP is a precondition for this. We must do this in these Parliament elections and march ahead with bigger struggles to achieve our ultimate goal.

WORKERS CHARTER OF DEMANDS
ADOPTED AT NATIONAL CONVENTION OF WORKERS
ON 5TH MARCH 2019, CONSTITUTION CLUB ANNEXE, NEW DELHI

Dear worker brothers and sisters!

We, the workers, along with the peasants and other toiling people produce the wealth of our country. It is we who contribute to the economic growth of our country. Yet our burning issues, our serious problems, and our urgent demands have been totally neglected by the government at the centre.

The joint trade union movement has been repeatedly raising the issues of concern to the working class for the last many years. We have repeatedly tried through various means, the latest being the two days' country wide general strike which has received massive support from all sections of the toiling people, to bring our demands to the notice of the government and sought redress, but to no avail.

Today, the country is in a deep crisis. All aspects of our daily life, as that of peasants and agricultural workers and other working people are in crisis. The hard won trade union and labour rights are under attack. Agrarian crisis and rural distress continue unabated. Thousands of peasants are committing suicide. Agricultural workers and poor peasants find no work in the rural areas and are migrating to the cities in large numbers competing with the unorganised sector workers for low paying jobs without any social security.

Prices of all essential commodities, housing, transport, electricity, education and health etc are increasing. But wages of workers have stagnated. In many sectors and for most of the contract, casual and daily wage workers and workers in the unorganised sector, in fact real wages have come down due to the price rise. The workforce in the informal economy, being worst sufferer, is devoid of any kind of social security. The workers in tea & coffee plantation continue to be fleeced by employers and those in sick industries are on the verge of losing jobs.

The government is stubbornly refusing to implement the consensus recommendation of the Indian Labour Conference to notify minimum wages as per the 15th ILC formula along with the Supreme Court judgment in the Raptakos & Brett case.

It is not implementing the Supreme Court judgment and the consensus recommendation of the ILC on equal pay and benefits to the contract, casual workers doing the same job as permanent workers.

Despite the consensus recommendation of the ILC the government refuses to recognise the around 1 crore workers engaged in its various schemes, most of them women, as workers. It pays shamefully low remuneration to them in the name of 'honorary'/'incentive' etc. Labour force participation of women is on a continuous down fall. Discrimination against women workers continues. Sexual harassment at workplace is on the rise.

Unemployment has become a matter of serious concern, not only for the youth but also to hundreds of thousands of workers who are losing their jobs due to closure and shut down of industries. Employment generation has in fact turned negative in most of the labour intensive sectors.

Despite strong opposition from the workers and their trade unions, the government is aggressively pushing ahead with its programme of amending labour laws, for its goal of climbing up the ladder of 'Ease of Doing Business Index'. It has decided to scrap 44 central labour laws merging them into 4 labour codes. The intention is to deprive the workers of whatever little rights and social security benefits that they have achieved through decades of struggles and sacrifices and push them into virtual slaves of the employers.

Even before amending labour laws it has found an innovative way to gift employers with the right to 'hire and fire'. It has extended Fixed Term Employment to all sectors through a notification. Through programmes like NEEM (National Employability Enhancement Mission) and NETAP (National Employment Through Apprenticeship Programme), the government seeks to finish permanent employment altogether. Even contract workers are being replaced by apprentices and trainees. The future of our young looks dismal with no permanent employment, job security or social security.

The government has also been adamantly pursuing its policy of privatisation through disinvestment, strategic sale, outright sale etc. It has allowed 100% FDI in all strategic sectors like defence production, railways, insurance, banking, retail trade, etc. It is moving in the direction of denationalisation of coal mining sector and allowed private commercial coal mining. 600 railway stations along with the land around them belonging to the Railways have been identified for handing over to private players. Around 272 items being produced by the public sector ordinance factories including weapons and critical equipment have been outsourced. Contrary to the claims of 'Make in India', these measures will destroy our manufacturing capability and research initiatives assiduously developed through the last six decades. Public sector undertakings in other strategic sectors like energy, petroleum, telecom, steel, civil aviation, ports, non coal mines, road transport etc. are also under the privatisation onslaught of the government.

The government has totally neglected its constitutional obligation of providing universal education and health to all its citizens. While government schools, colleges and hospitals are being deprived of finances and neglected, private corporates in the education and health sector are being provided exemptions and concessions.

The demonetisation causing sudden withdrawal of over 86% of the currency has not only caused immense hardship to common people, lakhs of small and medium enterprises have been closed. Lakhs of workers in the unorganised sector have lost their jobs. Lakhs of small peasants have lost their incomes. Not one of the declared goals while pronouncing demonetisation was achieved. It was only the digital payment platforms that have benefited.

GST too has wrecked havoc with the lives of the small enterprises and lakhs of workers employed in these. Thousands of small and medium enterprises and retail traders are yet to recover from its impact.

Thousands of crores of rupees, money that the workers and the common people have saved in public sector banks is being looted by corporate swindlers who are defaulting and fleeing the country. Over 80% of the NPAs of banks are due to the big corporate houses, not more than fifty in number. The government which declines to spend adequate money to ensure basic needs and social welfare to the poor is providing tax concessions and exemptions worth more than Rs 5 lakh crores every year to the big corporates, domestic and foreign.

It is clear that this government is working overtime for the benefit of their corporate masters. It is resorting to authoritarian measures to suppress opposition and resistance to its policies. People, social and human rights activists working to safeguard the democratic rights of dalits, minorities and workers are branded 'anti national', persecuted and even killed.

Not only that. The government at the centre is promoting hatred and animosities and encouraging spreading of communal venom by the various communal organisations. This is meant to divide the workers and other sections of toiling people, disrupt their unity and weaken their struggles against the neoliberal policies. These attempts to foment hatred and hostility on the basis of religion, caste, region, language etc are a serious threat to working class unity, which is the utmost need of the hour to intensify our struggles against the neoliberal policies that have been attacking our lives and livelihoods.

We, the workers, have been unitedly fighting against these policies since the last over two decades. We have jointly conducted 18 country wide general strikes during this period in addition to scores of sectoral strikes. The participation of workers in these strikes has been continuously increasing.

But when it comes to elections, through which the governments that formulate the policies so vital to our livelihoods and living conditions are elected are concerned, most of the major political parties are totally silent about us or on our issues. Our issues, our demands, the issues and demands of the workers and other sections of toiling people, not even the basic issues and problems relating to a decent and humane living and livelihood get any place in the discourse during elections. Many of the political parties try to consider people as 'vote banks' on the lines of religion, caste or sub caste, region etc. and take them for granted. Issues not at all concerned with our day to day problems or demands are raised to provoke and polarise people for their electoral benefits. After coming to power, we are totally neglected by the parties. Those in government start obeying orders of their corporate donors and enrich themselves in the process.

How long should this continue? While we need to defeat the present BJP led government which has been aggressively pursuing anti worker, anti people and anti national policies, we should also demand reversal of these policies and formulation of alternative pro worker and pro people policies, whichever government comes to power at the centre.

It is time that workers' issues are raised during the elections. It is time that workers' issues form a major part of the discourse during elections. Let us place our demands,

the Workers' Charter, before the political parties and compel them to concretely express their stand on these issues before we decide whom to vote.

Workers' Charter:

1. Fix national minimum wage as per the recommendations of 15th Indian Labour Conference and Supreme Court judgement in the Raptakos & Brett case, which has been reiterated unanimously by subsequent 45th and 46th Indian Labour Conference.
2. Abolish Contract Labour system in perennial nature of job pending which strictly implement equal wage and benefits to contract workers doing the same job as permanent workers, as per Supreme Court judgment.
3. Stop outsourcing and contractorisation of jobs of permanent and perennial nature.
4. Strict implementation of equal pay for equal work for men and women as per Indian Constitution and equal remuneration act and also reiterated by Supreme Court.
5. Minimum Support Price for the produce of the farmers as per the recommendations of Swaminathan Commission, strengthen public procurement system.
6. Loan waiver to farmers and Institutional credit for the small and marginal farmers.
7. Comprehensive legislation covering social security and working conditions for all workers including agricultural workers.
8. Take immediate concrete measures to control sky rocketing prices of essential commodities; ban speculative trading in essential commodities. Expand and strengthen public distribution system; no compulsory linkage of Aadhar to avail services of PDS.
9. Check unemployment through policies encouraging labour intensive establishments; link financial assistance/incentives/concessions to employers with employment generation in the concerned establishments; fill up all vacant posts in government departments; lift the ban on recruitment and 3% annual surrender of government posts.
10. Assure minimum pension of Rs 6000 per month and indexed pension to all.
11. Recognise workers employed in different government schemes, including anganwadi workers and helpers, ASHAs and others employed in the National Health Mission, Mid day Meal workers, Para teachers, teaching and non teaching staff of National Child Labour Projects, Gramin chowkidars etc as workers and pay minimum wages, social security benefits including pension etc to all of them.
12. Immediately revoke 'Fixed Term Employment' which is in violation of the spirit of ILO Recommendation 204 which India has ratified.
13. Stop disinvestment/strategic sale of public sector undertakings. Give revival package to the important PSUs in the public interest.
14. Revival and opening of sick Jute, industries and Tea plantations, as thousands of workers in these industries are facing distress, malnutrition and deaths due to closure.
15. Revoke the decision to privatise Railways, Defence, Port and Dock, Banks, Insurance, Coal etc. Immediately revoke decision allowing commercial mining of coal mines.

16. Stop privatising Defence production and closure of Defence Units. Strengthen and expand State Owned Defence Industry to achieve self reliance in Defence.
17. Stringent measures to recover bad loans in Banks, take criminal action against deliberate corporate defaulters, Do not pass on the burden of bad loans on banking public through penalties and higher service charges. Stop merger and amalgamation of public sector Banks. Stop closure of Bank Branches. Increase interest rate on Bank deposits to offset inflation rate.
18. Periodic wage revision to all CPSU Workers without insisting any affordability condition.
19. Withdraw the Motor Vehicle Act (Amendment) Bill 2017, and Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2018.
20. Immediately resolve the issues of the central government employees related to the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission.
21. Scrap NPS and restore the Old Pension Scheme.
22. Stop anti worker and pro employer amendments to the labour laws and codifications. Ensure strict implementation of the existing labour laws.
23. Implement paid maternity leave of 26 weeks, maternity benefit and crèche facilities for women workers no incentive be given to employers who are following amended provision of Maternity Benefit Act as proposed by the Government.
24. Strict implementation of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act.
25. For increase political participation immediate enactment on 33% reservation for women in state legislatures and Parliament.
26. Ratify ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and Right to Collective Bargaining along with the ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers.
27. Stop dilution of OSH & Welfare provisions through merger of 13 Acts in one Code. Ensure implementation of existing Acts and rules. Vacant posts of factory inspectors, Mines inspectors etc and lift ban on inspections. Ratify ILO C-155 and recommendation 164 related to OSH & Environment. Tripartite audit of human and financial loss due to accident should be mandatory.
28. Strengthen Bipartism and Tripartism; make recognition of trade union by the employers mandatory in every establishment; no decision should be taken on any issue related to labour without consensus through discussion with trade unions, ensure regular, meaningful social dialogue with workers representatives.
29. Cut the subsidies given to the corporates.
30. Right to work as fundamental right by amending the Constitution.
31. 300 days of work under MGNREGA. Enact similar legislation to cover urban areas. Fix minimum wages not less than minimum wages of the state.
32. Strict measures to stop the inhuman practice of manual scavenging. Compensation, as per Supreme Court judgment, to the families who die while cleaning sewers.
33. Strict implementation of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act
34. Immediately fill up all backlogs in the posts reserved for SC/ST; reservation of jobs for SC/ST in private sector employment also.
35. No eviction of Adivasis from their habitats, strict implementation of Forest Rights Act for Adivasis.
36. Protect couples opting for inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. Ensure strict actions against those encouraging/ resorting to so called 'honour killings'.

37. Ensure strict punishment for all guilty of rape and other cases of violence against women. Make such offences “Rarest of the rare” with capital punishment to ensure safety of women in letter and spirit.
38. Ensure effective implementation of Article 51 A of the Constitution that calls upon all citizens to promote harmony, spirit of common brotherhood, diversities and to transcend religious, linguistic, regional and sectional culture and to denounce policies derogatory to the dignity of women.
39. Free and compulsory education to all children up to Class XII along with technical education. The budget allocation for education should be 10% of the GDP.
40. Free health care for all. Strengthen health infrastructure, particularly in the rural and tribal areas. Increase government expenditure on health to 5% of GDP.
41. Potable drinking water to be provided to whole populace.
42. Protection of street vendors should be ensured. States should frame rules accordingly.
43. In order to protect the interests of Home Based Workers which is women dominated sector ILO Convention 177 for Home Work be ratified along with an Act for Home Based Workers.
44. Workers should have active and effective participation in all Welfare Boards constituted for their welfare. The unspent amount of cess collected under Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board be spent only on welfare of workers. Welfare Boards should have adequate workers representation. The functioning of the boards should be strengthened so that the workers can get registered with the board and have easy access to welfare benefits.
45. The Government should direct the States to frame the rules for inclusion of waste recyclers of the solid waste management in the cities at all levels.

Working Journalists Act should be amended to include journalists and workers from all media organisations to ensure decent wages and job security. Constitute new wage board for journalists in print, electronic and digital media to revise wages in media organisations.

Signatures