



# THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

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**In Covid Lockdown**

**Observing CITU Foundation Day 2020 at Centre**



At BTR Bhavan



At 15 Talkatora Road



At P R Bhavan

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# Central Trade Unions' Call

## 3 July 2020 - Nationwide Protest

- **“We**, the workers / employees and trade unions need to do everything possible to be in solidarity with each other, unitedly face the disease taking all precautions necessary, stand with each other to defend our rights of unionization, collective bargaining, decent working condition, wages and future securities etc. This Government has demonstrated cruel insensitivity of the basic human needs of the workers and people. This cannot be endorsed and cooperated with.
- **“We** cannot accept lying down the designs for imposition of slavery on workers through total nullification of all labour laws; nor can we remain onlooker to the Government's project of wholesale privatization of our PSUs through multipronged routes; we cannot silently accept the aggressive structural changes in the agricultural economy in favour of corporate-landlord lobby putting already distressed majority of the agricultural populace in deeper miseries besides endangering food security for the entire people. Trade union movement cannot endorse or cooperate with this process; we have to totally non-cooperate, defy and resist through united struggles such disastrous anti-people, anti-worker and anti-national designs being imposed on the society taking advantage of the lockdown situation in an unscrupulous manner. The Central Government has defied its constitutional obligation.
- **“Hence, We**, the Central Trade Unions, Independent Federations and Associations in this back ground have jointly decided to observe Nationwide Protest Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, by the workers and employees of formal & informal sector and service establishments, maintaining physical distancing and other precautions. This programme is in preparation and prelude to further united struggle of prolonged Non-Cooperation and Defiance of the anti-people, anti-national policies of the Government and in defence of our rights and basic entitlements. Preceding the nationwide protest, to generate awareness about the changes being made in labour laws and other policy issues, the state level joint meeting / seminars / conventions may be held.
- **“We** demand upon the Government to immediately hold the long overdue Indian Labour Conference to dwell upon the 12 point Charter of Demands, the labour and trade union rights, issues of job losses, wages, job security, the migrant workers' issues including their journey to home and return journey to those who desire to join back their work, instead of frequently meeting only the employers and corporates organisations.
- **We** call upon the working class and trade unions of all affiliations to make the programme of Nationwide Protest Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020 a massive success throughout the country, in all workplaces and centres in preparation to countrywide united struggles of Non-Cooperation and Defiance to anti-worker, anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-national policies of the Government for at least six-months period to defend the rights of the people and save and defend the national economy. The concrete form of Non-Cooperation and Defiance including nationwide general strike will be decided by the joint platform of Central Trade Unions and independent Federations and Associations at appropriate time in the next phase after the observance of the Nationwide Protest Day.

**INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPF, UTUC  
Together with the Federations and Associations of Various Sectors**

## Strengthen Organisational Network; Improve Both Ways Communication

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**WORKING CLASS**

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'It is now or never', 'We will never get this opportunity again, seize it' - were the corporates refrains about Covid-19 lockdown, quoted in the Times of India on 12 May. (See page 27) In the same vein NITI Aayog designed the framework and Modi government announced packages diluting/eliminating statutory labour rights; foreign and domestic corporates' takeover of country's natural resources and public assets through FDI and privatisation routes. All these are taking place in the name of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' to mislead the people from real issues. Big push has been given in agrarian sector through ordinance route for corporatisation of land and agricultural produce dispossessing marginal farmers and agricultural workers of their livelihood. Added to this are crores of dispossessed migrant workers returning to their villages relying on land and agricultural produce for their livelihood.

All these have thrown the new issues and big challenges before the workers and the peasants' movement. Class conflict has intensified, hidden and open, with Covid-19 lockdown as a powerful weapon in the hands of the ruling elites to keep it suppressed.

CITU and central trade unions are preparing ground to intensify class struggles with demonstrative and striking programmes commensurate to the new situation under Covid-19 lockdown which is bound to stay for a long time to come because of the spread of disease and advantage to ruling classes.

In this background CITU secretariat concluded common understanding and mass actions including strike action consistent in the present situation; and the central trade unions meeting concluded about the present situation and sustained movemental including strike.

Despite several constrains under lockdown, using IT technology, CITU experienced wide and quick both ways communication and participation of wider sections in demonstrative programmes.

It has, therefore, become all the more necessary to strengthen functioning of organisational network of committees of CITU units, unions and federations at all levels

and opening/improving channels of live contact and both ways communication using all forms of IT technology, but under organisational framework.

## **New Situation, Our Strategy and Immediate Tasks**

The Covid 19 pandemic and the country wide lockdown that followed have created a new situation. The online meeting of the CITU secretariat held on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020 discussed this on the basis of a draft note prepared by the CITU centre. It has come to a unanimous understanding about the challenges before the working class in the present situation and our strategy to effectively counter them.

This note outlines the understanding of the CITU secretariat on the present situation, our strategy and the immediate tasks based on this understanding.

### **Major Features of the New Situation**

- **Loss of employment:** CMIE estimated that 14 crore jobs were lost during this period, including in the organised and unorganised sectors. Migrant workers employed in all sectors including in industry and agriculture were the worst affected. Images of lakhs of migrant workers walking thousands of miles with their families including small children, carrying their belongings on their heads and shoulders, starving and hundreds of them dying in accidents or exhaustion, to reach their native places – capture their distress which cannot be described in words. The directions/ advisories of the government not to retrench workers and deduct wages, not to evacuate them from their rented houses remained on paper.
- **Distress of the workers of all sectors:** These are workers who are indispensable in producing the wealth of our country; in providing services to our country; who create the GDP of our country. Workers, who lived a life of dignity, proudly earning their livelihood through hard work, suddenly find themselves homeless, hungry and compelled to depend on charity, searching for where their next meal would come from. This is not only the plight of the migrant workers but of most of the workers in the unorganised sector. Lakhs of migrant workers have been walking or cycling back to their homes to find solace in the company of their family members, but they are not sure about the future, their work and lives; with agriculture continuing in crisis, there is no guarantee they would be able to sustain themselves on it. They are being deprived of all their entitlements from all segments of governance including the institutions of justice. It is a shame for those who govern the country to drive them into such plight.
- **Rush to crush legal protection to workers:** The developments after the announcement of lockdown clearly indicate a calculated and vicious decision of the BJP government led by Modi to utilise the lockdown, when the workers and the toiling people of the country are in severe distress, to push its anti worker anti people and anti national neoliberal agenda. The notifications and ordinances issued or announced in rapid succession by the BJP governments in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Assam, Karnataka, Tripura, as well as the Congress led Rajasthan, Punjab and BJD led Odisha etc could not have come without a clear direction from or concurrence of the PMO. This was what happened during the previous regime of the BJP government of Modi. In stark contrast it was only the LDF government in Kerala which has categorically announced that it was not going to make any anti worker amendments to the labour laws.
- **Attitude of the ruling class parties:** It is not only of the attitudes of the governments; the lockdown also brought out into sharp focus the difference in the attitudes of the political parties

towards the workers. None of the major political parties have opposed the anti worker policy direction of the BJP led government. It was only the Left parties that have been opposing these in a sustained manner and supporting workers' struggles. This was visible also in the case of Code on Wage bill when it was only the Left MPs in Rajya Sabha and only three from other opposition parties that voted for the amendments proposed by Elamaram Karim, National Secretary of CITU and member Rajya Sabha.

- **Authoritarianism:** The BJP government at the centre is utilising the National Disaster Management Act, which it has invoked to deal with Covid pandemic, to empower itself with the authority to override state governments, to suppress civil liberties, to crush dissent, to put all citizens under surveillance, and even impose censorship; the ruling classes want to consolidate their political power and increase their profits under the garb of lockdown.

- **Deceptive packages:** The deception behind the announcement of the so called Rs 20 lakh crore 'package' became crystal clear with the unveiling of the five tranches of the package by the finance minister. The real intentions of the BJP – to serve its foreign and domestic corporate landlord masters were nakedly exposed. The lockdown, though necessary, was not intended to buy time to equip the country to protect lives by acquitting the necessary testing, quarantine, isolation facilities, personal protective equipment and other facilities and to strengthen the health infrastructure to meet the health crisis. All these are being highly neglected; India continues to be among the countries with the lowest proportion of tests. But this was utilised to push through the BJP government's neoliberal agenda, which the ruling classes were not able to fully implement during the last three decades due to the stiff resistance of the working class and toiling people.

- **Lockdown utilised to push neoliberal agenda:** As we have repeatedly noted, these measures of the government show the desperate attempts by the ruling classes to protect their profits by throwing the entire burden of the economic crisis on to the shoulders of the working class. This they were trying to do even before the pandemic; now they utilise the situation of lockdown and isolation to push their agenda more aggressively. As some of their ideologues said, it is a 'now or never situation' for them. They were asked to 'seize it' and they did seize it to empower themselves to crush the organised movement of the working class, disarm it of its only weapon of united struggles and push it into servility. The distress of the workers is seen as a good opportunity by them. The cruelty and barbarity of the capitalist system is thus laid bare in all its ugliness, before the people.

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat(?):** The five day announcements by the government in the name of stimulus cum relief package under the grand but misleading name of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" is a clear indication of their desperation. The entire project is nothing but a comprehensive neoliberal programme to put the national interest on auction, covering all sectors of the economy and society. It is structured and thrust upon the nation at the behest of the capitalist class, taking advantage of lockdown that has severely restricted democratic space for opposition, debates and dissent. In essence, the so called package of Rs 20 lakh crore focussing on Land, Labour, Liquidity and Laws (as formulated by PM in his address) is a project for permanent empowerment of the exploiting classes, to deny, deprive and kill basic human entitlements of people for survival with dignity. That reflects the comprehensive design for imposing slavery on the toiling people, to pave the way for complete authoritarian governance. And all these actually have been eroding self-reliance of the national economy in a big way to the advantage of international finance capital. It is reflected in a complete paradigm shift in land management, procurement and trade in agricultural products etc in favour of big-landlords and corporates including foreign agencies; in complete elimination of labour rights in workplaces; in full-fledged privatisation of public sector entities including those in defence, minerals, fuel, pharmaceuticals and public utilities through multi-pronged routes; in

permanently legitimising default in debt and non-compliance of concerned laws by private corporate/big-business and so on so forth.

- **Capitalist system exposed:** It is this cruelty, this barbarity, this ugliness and unjustness of the capitalist system that we have to expose before the people today. Most of the workers out of the crores who lost their jobs and incomes and are walking thousands of kms to their homes, desperate to be with their families, have lost faith on the bourgeois political parties; they don't trust them; they don't expect any support from them. It is only the LDF government in Kerala that has the trust of the common people. Yes, the ruling classes feel the isolation and desperation of the people as an 'opportunity' to rush through their anti people anti worker policies. But, we must realise that this situation also provides us a never before opportunity to expose the ruling classes. The ruling classes today have lost their credibility in the eyes of the working class and the toiling people. The subservient corporate media might continue to laud the government's Rs 20 lakh crore 'package' announced in five tranches, but the common people are losing their faith. This is the time for us to explain to the people the inherent barbarity of the capitalist system and the alternative for it. This must be taken up as the challenge with full confidence that we will win. We have to mobilise all our intellectual, ideological and organisational strength towards exposing the neoliberal regime and the capitalist system as well.

- **Machinations of divisive forces:** The RSS and its virulent communal outfits including BJP have been trying to communalise even Covid when what was required was unity of people to face this challenge. The capacity of the communal and disruptive forces to divide people on the basis of religion, caste, language, region, gender etc can never be underestimated or overlooked. They will go to any extent to disrupt unity and weaken united struggles to serve their corporate masters. While being vigilant at their machinations, uniting the workers and all sections of the toiling masses and strengthening united struggles must be taken up by us with topmost priority

## Experiences

The entire CITU has gained very rich experience during the now around two months of lockdown. It has brought to the fore many of the commendable aspects of our organisation, our committees, cadres and activists as a whole.

### Some of these are

- **Solidarity** - The ability to bring out the feeling of solidarity among the workers and toiling people.
- **Relief** - The initiatives in providing relief to the distressed workers – drawing attention of the government to the workers' problems, providing assistance including arranging for shelter, transport, food and other essentials etc – mostly beyond their regular capacity. The relief work has also witnessed the involvement of all fraternal mass organisations also in many states.
- **Actions** -The possibility and the ability to utilise that possibility - to vent the discontent among workers and formulate action programmes that matched the mood of the workers; involve family members and common workers outside our organisational structure; to take our slogans and flags beyond work places up to the residential areas. This was proved in the 21<sup>st</sup> April, May Day and 14<sup>th</sup> May observance across the country, which has also drawn the participation of other mass organisations also in number of places. Same experience is also witnessed in the programmes, various state committees and federations/unions have organised at their own initiative. These demonstrated our potential to 'reach the unreached'. This needs to be fully and consciously

utilised to consistently expand it further. The next step —‘link up issues with policies; expose the politics that govern the policies’ should also be consciously put into practice.

- **Social media** - All our communications and dissemination of information were done through social media networks at different levels – national, state, industry levels, union, district etc, during this period. These have helped in taking our decisions up to the lowest levels of our organisation at a short notice and in their effective implementation. They need to be strengthened with appropriate guidelines on their functioning
- **Involvement of lowest level cadres** – The initiative, imagination and creativity of and their sense of direct involvement in union activities among our cadres, activists and common workers were unleashed. This was the key for the success of our various calls. They did not wait for the leaders’ presence as this was not possible. It needs to be further widened and strengthened.
- **Efforts for democratic functioning** - Despite the lockdown, in many states more or less regular consultations/ discussions were held through on line meetings at state centre, office bearers, committee levels
- **Sending reports** - Reports of activities, mainly through photos in the groups were sent more or less promptly, though shortcomings still remain in sending quantified reports on the part of some states; these need to be overcome.
- **Organisation** - In several states, our committees prepared records and made preliminary attempts to keep in touch with the migrant workers with a view to bring them into our organisational fold; these must be shared with the CITU centre
- **Education** - Some states have also utilised the period to conduct on line classes for cadres on current topics and also some basic political and ideological subjects

## To Sum Up

### The pandemic and lockdown has brought into focus

- **The class character of the present BJP government** – During the entire Corona pandemic and the preceding period of economic slowdown, the ruling parties representing the class interests of the big bourgeoisie and succumbing to the dictates of international finance shamelessly mortgaged people’s welfare for corporate profits. They became more authoritarian and deployed poisonous communal machinations to polarise society and disrupt unity. This needs to be comprehensively understood as the strategy of the ruling classes to sustain themselves in the midst of the deepening capitalist crisis for which they have no solution within the existing capitalist framework
- **The character of the ruling classes** - The continuing project of ruling class on aggressive privatisation even of the strategic and core sectors of the economy, natural resources as well as health care network are not facing any serious opposition from almost the entire political community except the Left. That is why, the project of so called reforms of labour law regime aimed at totally eliminating labour rights in favour of the capitalist class, are receiving opposition only from the Left and rest of the political community remained lukewarm and indifferent, endorsing this rabid design of imposing slavery on the working people. That is why the measures like expanding the working hours from 8 to 12 hours through executive order have only been condemned and opposed by the Left parties and none else among the political community.
- **The real face of the capitalist system** - The pandemic and lockdown have brought forth the most cruel and inhuman character of the capitalist system; its utter failure in bringing about development of the society as a whole despite the huge scientific, technological and human

resources at its disposal. It is not just the failure of this or that of their political agents in governance. It has to be noted that several crores of migrant workers who happen to be the most crucial and indispensable section of our productive workforce in both unorganised sector and organised sector industries have been subjected to most brutal repression and sufferings during the lockdown period, losing everything they had by way of retrenchment, wage cut, eviction from residences along with family members etc-all perpetrated by the same capitalist class; but when the opportunity of their return to their home state opens up, it is the same capitalist class and their political operators are shamelessly doing everything to block their return to home states by getting the trains cancelled. The entire capitalist class are more or less standing unitedly behind this inhuman as well as barbarous expropriation process so also the entire bourgeoisie irrespective of their politics.

### **The Contrast between the Capitalist System and the Socialist System**

The stark difference of the BJP and other bourgeois landlord governments at the centre and in several states, and the LDF government in Kerala, in their approach while formulating policies to address the pandemic and lockdown. Despite serious limitation imposed by the system and many other difficulties, the LDF government stood firmly in support of the toiling people and openly declared that it was not going to change the labour laws in favour of the employers.

This entire situation vindicates the understanding of our 16<sup>th</sup> conference. The new situation demands that the working class movement must raise united struggles to the level of defiance and resistance. This is the right path for the working class to follow.

The rich experience of our activities during the lockdown period gives us the confidence that together we can do this. It reinforces our confidence since the advent of the neoliberal regime, when CITU took the initiative to unite the entire trade union movement to fight against the anti worker policies. It is through such united struggles that the working class of India was able to stall the process of anti worker amendments to the labour laws in our country till now, as opposed to many other countries in the world. Even the BJP government at the centre, led by Modi, which started the codification process immediately after coming to power in 2014 could be contained with passing only one code through united resistance of the working class movement. Despite all its attempts, till now, it was not able to totally dismantle the public sector.

The working class will not allow the desperate attempts of the BJP government led by Modi to push its neoliberal agenda now taking advantage of the Covid and lockdown.

Let the BJP government and the ruling classes be reminded. We are workers. It is we who produce the wealth of the nation. It is we who take care of the nation. We will not allow the nation to be sold to private interests, either domestic or foreign.

Let the BJP government and the ruling classes be warned. As workers, we are not ready to sacrifice our dignity and pride in our contribution to the nation. We are not ready to allow permanent empowerment of capitalist-landlord clique to deny our basic entitlements. We have won our dignity and entitlements through united struggles. We will protect our dignity and entitlements through united struggles. None can stop us. We are many; you are few.

As and when the neoliberal agenda was thrust on the nation by the Congress government in 1991, so also now, when the BJP government wants to desperately thrust it utilising the lockdown, CITU had taken initiative and has been taking initiative with a continuity to unite the entire working class movement in the struggle. CITU has to redouble its effort and initiative to unify the toiling class as a whole up to the grass root level, to defy and resist, based on the above understanding. We have also to continue our initiative for workers-peasants joint activities and struggle.

This understanding has to be percolated to all levels of our organisation up to the grass root level members and activists of CITU so that much bigger initiatives can be unleashed. All state committees have to plan and ensure this.

## **Immediate Action Programme**

It is with this understanding that the CITU secretariat decided the following immediate action programmes:

1. Translate this note into local languages and take it to the lowest level of our cadres, activists and members.
2. Our initiative to prepare the data base of our contacts among the migrant workers and share them with the Centre, keep alive the contacts through various activities and interaction with them and finally to bring them in our organisational fold in respective areas/workplaces as conveyed through our previous circular must continue with all seriousness.
3. Our opposition to the anti-worker, anti-labour and anti-national measures announced by the BJP government should be made more visible with increasingly direct and active participation of workers.
4. This should start with the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020 joint trade union protest action.
5. In view of the way in which the onslaughts on the people are being mounted, at the same time prolonging of restrictions on normal activities, we have to find innovative methods to confront these attacks within the prevalent situation. The barriers imposed on gatherings etc must be overcome to prepare the ground for stiff resistance. We have to overcome the obstacles with more visible and direct actions with a clear class perspective.
6. The possibility of going on strike – by the workers in individual workplaces, industrial units, industrial clusters, wherever open or at the state level – in the month of June, should be examined and explored. Wherever possible, strike action should be considered either jointly or independently.
7. Possibility of such strike actions should also be explored by the industrial federations.
8. 30<sup>th</sup> May, the foundation day of CITU should be observed by -
  - a. Hoisting of CITU flags at all union offices, all workplaces wherever they are functioning, at city/ village chowks, street corners, individual houses, along with family members;
  - b. Human chains observing physical distancing (i.e. without holding hands) should be formed wherever possible – e.g. in several places in a town/city/ village etc; we must target to mobilise not less than 10 lakh workers and their family members and friends, whoever supports the demands, in such human chains;
  - c. Placards with slogans should be prominently displayed by people participating in the human chains; the main slogans will be communicated soon.
9. On line classes – All state committees, should try and conduct online classes for four days from 26<sup>th</sup> May (the day when our foundation conference started in 1970) on the following topics -
  - a. 50 years of CITU's struggle for unity and struggle;
  - b. The present new situation, challenges and our tasks;
  - c. The deception of the Rs 50 lakh crore package;
  - d. Recent nullification of labour laws and its implications.

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# Lockdown Exposé of Migrant Workers Miseries; **Fight against Employers' and Governments' Policies**

**K. Hemalata**

The brands that they made are everywhere. The companies, which sell these 'brands', are highly visible. But those, whose labour makes these 'brands' and make these companies rich, remain invisible, holed up in their world of drudgery and want. It is as if they did not exist, at least for the world outside. But, when they came out of their dingy quarters, dirty lanes and by-lanes, in small groups, which soon grew to hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands and started walking on the streets and highways towards their villages, the world was aghast. They were not mobilised. There was no campaign. They did not plan any 'long march' to highlight their demands or make a representation to the government.

Since end of April, migrant workers in thousands and lakhs started walking hundreds and thousands of kilometres. They walked under the hot sun with their meagre belongings on their heads, small children and women toeing behind. Pregnant women and toddlers walked from morning to evening, hungry, thirsty and shattered. Many died on their way, due to exhaustion, accidents – on railway tracks, railway platforms, in the trains and on the roads. Many faced humiliation; authorities sprayed disinfectants; police lathi charged treating them as criminals; even after reaching their villages, many were not allowed to enter due to the panic that Covid 19 created; they had to quarantine themselves outside the village, under the trees for several days. There was no help of any sort from the governments.

The pictures that were flashed on the electronic media, those that went viral on the social media, or those printed in the newspapers will stay forever in our minds. Tired workers lying on railway tracks run over by a speeding train, the toddler trying to wake up his dead mother on a railway platform, the 15 year old girl cycling over 1000 kms with her ailing father on the back, the young boy taking care of his friend who fell ill and died in his hands while travelling back home together, and many many such images - can these ever stop pricking our conscience?

Mind you, these are workers who till the other day were part of the production process; producing the goods that all of us use every day, that the industry uses in their factories, small or big. These are workers who create the wealth of our country. They lived a life of dignity and pride that they were creating the wealth of the country; that they were not parasites depending on someone else's labour. They earned their living through honest and hard work.

Holding only Covid and the lockdown totally responsible for their misery will be deceptive. Their conditions were always precarious. The lockdown has seriously aggravated their plight; it pushed them to the brink.

Their working and living conditions deteriorated due to the economic slide that preceded the lockdown. It was predominantly this section of the workers - the contract workers, the daily wage workers, temporary, fixed term, apprentices, and trainees etc; majority of who were migrants – who were seriously affected. Lakhs of them lost their jobs. Their working conditions were attacked. They were forced to work for long hours. Labour laws were not being implemented, rather they were being dismantled. The BJP government was already on its way to remove the little legal protection that the workers had, to turn them into virtual slaves to serve the profit greedy employers who wanted to beat the crisis by riding over the workers. The lockdown announced suddenly

without any time for them to prepare, worsened their conditions. With no help coming from the government they were compelled to go to the streets.

What was unprecedented was the manner the migrant workers gave vent to their frustration at the total apathy of the government towards them. Through their silent rebellion, these workers have brought to the attention of the entire world, how India treats its workers. By relying on their feet, once they realised that the government was not willing to provide any support, they silently yet powerfully conveyed their resentment against the government and the administration.

Ignoring the real reasons for their miserable conditions and confining only to show of sympathy would be hypocrisy. It is not just sympathy that they need. They do need food and financial support immediately for their survival. But equally, if not more important, are measures to set right the conditions that put them in such precarious situation. It is the policies adopted and implemented by successive governments at the centre that have pushed the workers, who produce the wealth of our country, who serve the people of our country, into such a quagmire. These need to be changed. As CITU has been repeating, the link between their problems and the policies has to be revealed and the politics that decide these policies must be exposed. A united campaign, ruthless exposure and determined fight to the end to change these policies are the urgent need of the hour.

'Rigid labour laws' has been a high pitched excuse of the employers for not investing, governments, whether led by the BJP or Congress nodding their heads in agreement. But what is the reality? 93% of our workforce is not covered by any labour laws. The migrant workers, we saw on the roads, fall under that category. Their wages range between Rs.10,000 and Rs.15,000. Not more than that. Most of them do not have any social security benefits. They do not have job security. A survey by Azim Premji University says that 80% of the urban workers lost their jobs during the lockdown and 61% of urban households did not have the means to buy even a week's worth of essentials. Does this, by any stretch of imagination, indicate a situation of 'rigid' labour laws? Or connivance of employers and governments where labour laws are flouted with impunity?

During the lockdown period, the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry wrote a letter to the union labour minister lamenting that they find it impossible to reduce the minimum wage fixed by the government. How much did the government of India fix? The union labour minister announced 'floor level' wage of Rs 178 per day though it was not notified. The wage for MGNREGA workers has been increased to Rs 202 in the 'package' announced during the lockdown, which comes to around Rs.6,060 for 30 days. They don't want to pay even this meagre amount. But they demand that the workers, wherever they have gone, must come back and report within 3 days of the announcement of starting operations. They were not bothered whether the worker was eating, where he and his family were sleeping during the lockdown period, when they threw them out of their jobs. But now they demand that once they decide to start operation of their industries, workers should be ready at their beck and call to work like slaves. Is there any limit to cruelty in this system?

As an eye wash the government issued directions that there should be no retrenchment, no wage cut and no evacuation from houses during the lockdown period. But it was not implemented for more than 90% of the workers. Neither did the government do anything to get them implemented. After 54 days it withdrew the directions. Can this be called rigidity? But the employers are not satisfied. They want more flexibility, no minimum wages, no trade unions for workers and the right to 'hire and fire' for themselves. They want workers to be pushed into 19<sup>th</sup> century conditions, denying them dignified and decent existence, forcing them to work 12 hours like modern day slaves. The labour secretary of government of India promptly wrote to the state governments to consider increasing working hours and changes in labour laws. For the government, obviously

these are orders from the donors, to be obeyed. The Prime Minister is in regular touch with them. But *Manyavar Pradhan Mantriji* is not willing to talk to the workers' representatives even once.

The government announced with much fanfare Rs.20 lakh crore 'package'. But it has nothing for these desperate workers. What it had were promises of and guarantees for loans. In addition, it reiterated the already announced 'reforms' of the BJP government with much more emphasis, expansion and determination - elimination of public sector, annulment of labour laws, corporatisation of agriculture. These are meant to hand over all our valuable resources, human, natural and our national wealth in the form of public sector units to the big corporates, domestic and foreign. While killing our self reliance, this is deceptively termed 'self reliance'.

It is nothing but taking the country back into conditions when we lived under British rule. If these policies are allowed to be implemented, our workers, our peasants and our agricultural workers will have to live at the mercy of the domestic and foreign monopolies and business houses. The BJP government has given concessions and relaxations worth Rs.15.62 lakh on different counts, to them big but it is not ready to spend money for providing relief to the workers and peasants in distress due to the lockdown imposed by the government. This, it is argued, fiscal deficit will increase, if it does so. And international finance will not accept that. Obviously, BJP government is more loyal to international finance than it is towards the workers and peasants of our own country, who have voted it to power. Workers who pay tax on each and every item they purchase are denied relief derogatorily calling it 'dole'; the super rich who evade taxes, wilfully default on bank loans and flee the country are given 'incentives'.

This is capitalism, the system driven by greed for profits, not welfare of the people.

Not taking cognisance of this, supporting the government's policies and expressing shock at the conditions of the migrant workers only amounts to shedding crocodile tears. These policies must be strongly opposed, defied and changed.

It is to develop this understanding up to the grass root level CITU cadres, activists and all workers that we have to campaign in the coming days. This campaign cannot be confined to only the workplaces and towns. It has to be taken to the villages and interior corners of the country. Our experience of the activities during the lockdown period has proved the potential, the possibilities to do this. It has to be fully utilised and expanded. The limitations of physical movements must be overcome by activating our minds, thoughts and creative abilities, and that of our cadres, to take united struggles to the grass root level and higher stage.

This should be our approach to the joint trade union call for an all India protest day on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, to the call of non cooperation and defiance the details of which will be worked out by the joint trade union platform, and also of the call of the CITU along with AIKS and AIAWU, which will be finalised on 9<sup>th</sup> June.

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## **CITU Denounces DA Freeze**

CITU denounced the Central Govt's order of 23 April to freeze, rather confiscate outright, the legitimate dues of the employees and pensioners on DA increase, falling due in January 2020, July 2020 and January 2021 due to price rise, on the plea of Covid-19. CITU demanded withdrawal of this order and to extend financial help to state governments to enable continuity of variable DA payment to their employees.

CITU called upon the Govt employees' movement in particular and the trade union movement in general to unitedly oppose this retrograde anti-worker measures.

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## From CTUs' Statement

# Background of 3 July Nationwide Protest

The Central Trade Unions (CTUs), in their meeting on 3 June 2020 in New Delhi, congratulated the workers for the successful nation-wide protest on 22 May against governments' attacks on labour rights and for demand to stop anti-labour changes in labour laws.

The government not only failed to implement its own orders of full payment of wages and no-retrenchment of workers during lockdown period; but also withdrew the same in the face of its challenge by the employers in the Supreme Court. The government did not make cash transfer of Rs.7,500 to all non-income-tax-paying-households including unorganised labour (registered or unregistered); distribute universal ration; not made workers safe-journey to home; as were demanded by the CTUs. Instead, the Central government chose Covid-19 lockdown to push through its agenda of disinvestment and privatisation; 1005 FDI in core sectors; took steps favouring corporates, Indian and Foreign, to usurp natural resources and businesses of the country while mouthing '*Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat*'. The decisions, taken earlier and during Covid-19 lockdown, on privatization / corporatization / commercialization in Defence, Coal, Space Science, Atomic Energy, Insurance, Banks and PSUs are being pursued aggressively. The government imposed DA freeze of 48 lakh central government employees and DR freeze of 68 lakh pensioners and did not withdraw despite vehement opposition by the employees and CTUs.

The meeting welcomed sectoral agitations of electricity workers and engineers against Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 on 1 June; and supported the protest programmes of defence federations including "strike ballots" and those in the coal mine sector on 10-11 June. CTUs supported agitation and demands of the frontline workers warriors in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic including ASHA, Anganwadi, MDM; Safai Karmacharis, 108 ambulance employees; the nurses and doctors demanding appropriate safety measures, proper healthcare and social security and insurance coverage.

The so-called 20 lakh crore package of the government is nothing but a hoax and cruel joke on the suffering people comprising of loan guarantee, previously announced budgetary allocations and welfare schemes etc to mislead the people. CTUs demanded enhanced coverage of MNREGA to cover returned migrant workers also; but, only a paltry sum was announced for this. CTUs also demands universal social security, healthcare and food support and extension of MNREGA in urban areas to include all workers including the most suffering unorganized sector workers.

The re-opened industrial units are not engaging full complement of workers employing only a small percentage that too with reduced wages and refusal to pay lockdown period salary. The jobless are more than 14 crore; and adding the daily wagers, contract and casual workers it is more than 24 crores. Unemployment rate has already reached 27%. ILO, in its report, has said that more than 40 crore people would be pushed into deeper poverty.

Modi Government has most insensitively dealt with the problem of Covid-19 merely as a law and order issue instead treating it as medical emergency for the human being and society. It has caused immense miseries to millions of workers, farmers and other vulnerable sections of the society; while standing only by the corporates and big businesses.

A Government which has no respect and concern, towards the rights and basic survival-entitlements of workers and the people does not deserve any co-operation.

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## **Covid-19**

# **BJP-RSS Governments' Drive for Capitalist Consolidation; and the Working Class Movement**

**J. S. Majumdar**

It is necessary to underline two basics, related to Covid-19, - one is about the management of this national disaster and the other one is about Covid-19 itself.

### About Disaster Management

Covid-19 related lockdown and other directions/guidelines are being issued by the National Disaster Management Authority, a 9-member authority with the Prime Minister as its chairperson, under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The members are appointed for 5 years and the Prime Minister, as its chairperson is the supreme authority. There is a National Executive Committee to execute its decisions. All decisions of this Authority have to be followed by the Central and State governments.

The National Disaster Management Authority has the extraordinary authoritarian power to (i) curtail civil liberties including trade union rights; (ii) curbing Centre-State relations and federal rights; and (iii) of censorship.

### About Covid-19

It is one in the Corona Virus group named as Corona Virus Disease of 2019 (COVID - 19) by the WHO.

There is no medicine against any virus. It is only the antibody, developed through body immunity, which protects against the virus – by self-defensive mechanism and/or through hired one, the vaccination.

Covid-19 is a new virus in corona virus group transmitted from animal to human recently; and, therefore, humans are yet to develop antibody through body's immunity system; and it will take time to develop vaccine against it.

Due to its virulence, mortality rate and pandemic spread; there is justified lockdowns and restrictions. But, these measures are only delaying and prolonging the process of further exposure, providing more time at disposal so that it can be effectively combated through more effective public health care measures. How, body immunity will develop, none has a clue yet. Covid-19 is going to live permanently with us as we are living with small pox and chicken pox viruses, but those lost their disease causing capacity due to vaccination. We shall develop mechanism against Covid-19 also and live with it with protective measures in future.

### **Drive to Consolidate Capitalism in Covid-19**

It is said that war and crisis, due to epidemic or otherwise, always help the rulers. It is true for Covid-19 also. It is more so because of its pandemic nature. The countries, following the path of capitalist development, are consolidating capitalism in this Covid-crisis situation and heaping huge miseries on the vast toiling masses. This is always true in capitalist system.

For example, when neoliberal policies failed, after its initial boost, the capitalist countries adopted the 'bail-out' and/or 'bail-in' packages to usurp public fund and individual bank deposits by

the corporates. Similarly, when ongoing world economic crisis developed by end 2007 / early 2008, the developed capitalist countries attacked on jobs, pension and social security in a big way at the dictates of IMF and European Central Bank.

### **Heaping Miseries on the Workers, Peasants and Other Toiling Sections**

Due to Covid-19, countrywide lockdown and restrictions in India were imposed by the order of Disaster Management Authority on and from 25 March 2020. It is being periodically extended with new guidelines. The lockdown will have Up/Dn guidelines as per spread of the disease for a long time to come.

Covid-19 lockdown brought untold miseries on the workers and people, owing to insensitivity and brazenly anti-people policies including in public health-care management, huge number of migrant workers among them, and other marginalized sections - the peasantry and other toiling sections.

Jobless, wageless, shelterless, hungry and driven by anxiety for the dear ones, left behind in their villages; forced Lakhs of 10 Crore plus migrant workers, with additional huge number of other migrant poor, to desperately walk thousands of kilometres in absence of regular rail or road transportation due to lockdown and hundreds of them died of accidents and hunger on rail tracks, roads and recently in trains. Instead of sympathy, they faced humiliation, ruthless assault on roads and states borders by the police and enforcement authorities. This national tragedy and shame will go down in the annals of the workers conditions after 70 years of the formation of the Indian Republic.

In agricultural sector, due to lockdown the harvesting was delayed or caused crop-loss; agricultural workers lost their work and livelihood; peasant faced crop-loss, market-loss and price-loss of their agricultural produce. Many others marginalized sections lost their day to day livelihood due to lockdown.

### **Imposing an Authoritarian Regime**

During Covid-19 lockdown, an authoritarian regime is established at the Centre curbing democratic and parliamentary system and curbing workers and people's right to protest by arresting, detention and dispersal of gathering by use of police force on the plea of lockdown. Police / intelligence are keeping vigilance on the activities of the opposition parties and mass organisations.

### **Consolidating Capitalism**

At the same time, the ruling dispensations are consolidating capitalism in India with renewed aggressiveness and vigour. The Prime Minister is leading this in the name of self-reliance, 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

NITI Aayog has analysed the situation with the outlook of consolidating capitalism. It has five points' conclusions.

(i) Work From Home (WFH): According to NITI Aayog it is the best time to encourage WFH giving up any working hours, per day limitation like 8 hours a day. WFH will eventually become piece-rated work and, that too, on contract basis. This will also save expenses on office space and others, transportation cost etc.

(ii) Breaking Supply Chain out of China: According to NITI Aayog, Covid-19 pandemic created a world situation which will break the supply chain out of China, like of pharmaceutical active ingredients, mobile parts, auto-parts etc to India. In this situation, the Central Government is

estimating that many of the multinational corporations will shift their production base from China to other countries where labour is cheap and other conditions are favourable to them.

India is vying with some other countries to grab this opportunity and, hence, (i) there are 'labour reforms' by the Centre and State Governments in favour of private industry-owners; (ii) diluting FDI norms; and (iii) speeding up corporatisation and privatisation.

#### Pro-capital Labour Reforms

The Central Government is trying to get the rest of three of the four Labour Codes passed by the Parliament. Code on wages has already been passed and became an Act. Code on OSH and Code on IR were before the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Labour – both reports have hurriedly been submitted to the speaker even during Covid-19 lockdown. CPI(M), CPI and DMK members in the Standing Committee submitted their notes of dissent.

Central Government Labour Minister talked to some Chief Ministers to initiate labour reforms in the States favouring employers, particularly of increasing working hours. State Governments of UP, MP, Gujarat, Punjab and some others hurriedly increased working hours through executive order. The Central Government Labour Ministry then issued Letters of Advisory to State Governments on 5 May 2020 inter alia suggesting 'Actions needs to be expected' and under it "Increasing Working Hours from 8 to 12 a day to address Covid-19." So far 15 State Governments issued such notifications.

In addition, some State Governments like of UP, MP and Gujarat have put labour laws inoperative in next 3 years / 1000 days etc.

#### Diluting FDI norms

The Central Government announced FDI through automatic route and diluting State/domestic holdings even in strategic sector including pharmaceuticals, defence production etc.

#### Corporatisation & Privatisation

Corporatisation of Railways, Ordnance Factories; outsourcing of Defence Production; Privatisation of Coal mines for commercial purposes, even of Space Research and Atomic Energy in PPP model are being pursued compromising country's security.

#### Tax Concession & Waving Wilful Corporate Defaulters

In addition, there is heavy tax concession to the failed corporates to the tune of Rs.5 Lakh Crore and waving off public sector banks loans of wilful corporate defaulters including the fugitives like Choksi, Vijay Mallya et al. All these are to help them to take privatisation cake and join in PPP model.

#### (iii) Phenomenal Rise of Tele-medicines

The NITI Aayog came to the conclusion that Covid-19 would cause phenomenal rise of 'Tele-medicines', an euphemism of the patient-doctor-prescription relation through IT. What the NITI Aayog suggesting is a mechanism to replace public health services network, the inadequacy of which have been glaring revealed in organising Covid-19 testing and treatment. This is in addition to the insurance driven health services, private hospitals in the loop, in the Aushman Bharat project already in place.

#### (iv) Increasing Contactless Delivery like E-Commerce, E-Pharmacy

NITI Aayog considers the Covid-19 as an opportunity to promote E-Commerce and E-Pharmacy in the retail trade. Corporatisation of retail trade including foreign big corporates like

Amazon will hugely affect employment and livelihood of crores of people. Retail trade in India accounts for 10% of the GDP, employs about 4 Crores or 3.3% of the total population in the country, next only to agricultural sector, and 20 Crores of the people's livelihood, including family members, are dependent on it.

E-pharmacy is a part of this corporatisation drive aiming to replace self-employed 5.5 Lakh medicine retailers and their more than 12 Lakh employees. All India Organisation of Chemists & Druggists has already been agitating including strike against E-pharmacy.

(v) Policy of Structural Reforms

The NITI Aayog's conclusion prescribes rapid adoption of policy for structural reforms taking advantage of Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the policies for the structural reforms in labour, FDI, corporatisation and privatisation, tax concessions etc are already in place. More are offing.

**PM's 20 Lakh Crore 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' Covid-19 Relief Fund and FM's Five Tranches Packages**

For this very structural change, the Prime Minister announced Rs.20 Lakh Crore 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' Covid-19 Relief Fund. PM's declaration was immediately followed by the Union Finance Minister's windy five parts serial speeches announcing Five Tranches Packages of this Relief Fund to make 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. CITU called these as steps as steps for 'Foreignisation'; 'Empowerment of the Corporates' and 'Disentitlement of the Toilers' – workers, peasants, agricultural workers and other toiling sections; and 'Destruction and De-industrialisation'.

This Rs.20 Lakh Crore Covid-19 Relief Fund is a mathematical jugglery and consists of public sector banks liquidity, already announced by RBI; loans; delayed tax collection; EPF contributions etc while actual Government's contribution will not be more than Rs.50,000 Crore.

The FIRST and SECOND Tranches have been announced for migrant workers relief and for labour intensive MSMEs. The announcements are full of distortions and untruths. The FM spoke more of future housing and infrastructural development, not of immediate relief.

The delivery of the announced 5kg/person food grains and 1kg/family of *Chana* (chickpeas) per month is questionable as due to absence of sincerity of purpose and instruments of identity, 80% of such relief in the past did not reach to the beneficiaries.

The Package includes Rs.3 Crore Emergency Working Capital Facility to Businesses 'including MSMEs'. This 'including MSMEs' has been designed for the big businesses to grab it.

The THIRD Tranche is for Land Management and on Agricultural Produce. The package is designed for big thrust in acquiring agricultural land for SEZs through creation of land-bank; Corporatisation of agriculture and Contract farming; and Private Procurement of foodgrains endangering food security; Free Marketing sidelining Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees; Amendment in Essential Commodities Act and Removal of customs encouraging free trade, export and future trading of agricultural produce.

The FOURTH Tranche is a big bonanza to the corporates, more of foreign origin, with 74 per cent in Defence Production through automatic route compromising country's security; 100 per cent FDI through automatic route in Coal and other minerals; Privatisation of Aviation sector; Privatisation push of the most vital public utility Electricity sector through Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 with establishment of centralised authority, phasing out subsidy; Privatisation of Space Research and Atomic Energy.

The FIFTH Tranche of Package is a big attack on federalism putting Modi Government's pro-capital reform agenda including acceptance of electricity reforms, withdrawing free electricity to farmers; and other condition for 'ease of doing business' etc.

## **Working Class Resistance**

BJP-RSS Governments' attacks on the labour laws are against the historical and Constitutional direction. To understand historical direction, it is necessary to underline five significant points related to working class movement in India – (i) that, the spontaneous working class protests developed to become part of freedom movement and, after the formation of first central trade union organisation, the trade union movement remained aligned with and became integral part of freedom movement; (ii) that, labour laws are the outcome of glorious working class struggles during national freedom movement and also in post-independent India; (iii) that, there was struggle in restoring the working class unity and the line of struggle against the line of collaboration; (iv) that, neoliberal reforms could be slowed down and resisted through the unity and struggle despite changes in the ruling dispensations; and (v) that, inheriting the above four, the working class movement in India shall be able to meet effectively the pro-corporate challenges in Covid-19 and shall emerge out stronger.

### **Labour Legislations and Constitutional Direction**

This unity and struggle of the working class and being part of the freedom movement prepared ground for labour legislations and incorporation in the Directive Principle in the Constitution of India. Under the Directive Principles of the State Policy of the Constitution of India, Article 43 envisages “*The State shall endeavour ... to all workers ... a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life ...*”

Immediately after India attaining independence, number of labour laws were enacted including Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Factories Act 1948, EPF Act 1952 etc. Minimum Wages Act has serious consequential changes in the five criteria of the 15<sup>th</sup> ILC recommendations in 1957 endorsed by the Supreme Court adding one more criteria in its Raptakos Brett judgement in 1992. The trade union movement continued their strike struggles in Independent India and earned Bonus Act 1965; Contract Labour Act 1970; Gratuity Act, 1972; Contract Labour Welfare Board Act 1996 etc.

BJP-RSS Governments suspension of labour laws is against these historical and Constitutional directions.

### **Advancement of the line of Unity & Struggle**

After formation of CITU in 1970, in post emergency period, after defeat of emergency dispensation, the unity and struggle line advanced which reflected in the historic rally against I R Bill in 1978. This was followed by the workers first general strike in Independent India on 19 January 1982 joined by other toiling sections leading it to Bharat Bandh facing ruthless suppression in which 10 persons including workers, agricultural workers, students were killed due to police firing in different parts of the country.

### **Neoliberal Onslaughts and the Working Class Resistance**

The then Union Finance Minister Manmohan Singh introduced the International Finance Capital dictated neoliberal LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) agenda. Since then, all successive Governments at the Centre of NDA's or UPA's carried on the same agenda with aggressiveness, variations and virulence according to changed world situation including that of Covid-19 lockdowns.

But, by that time, the united trade union movement was ready with their most powerful weapon of strike and mostly could resist and slow down in certain areas on the implementation of neoliberal agenda. Apart from series of sectoral struggles, 18 workers' general strikes have taken

place; RSS-affiliated BMS remaining absentee since RSS led Modi Government came to power at the Centre.

### Working Class shall meet Pro-Corporate Challenges in Covid-19

Despite Covid-19 lockdown, the massive participation of the working class and people on 21 April, 2020 protest, in short time online notice, has added a chapter of people's protest in new form involving families and other sections in wide areas. This was followed by equally successful joint trade unions protest on 22 May 2020.

CITU is examining the possibility of mobilisation and establishment / industry wise strike and state level actions depending on the situation as instruments of struggle during Covid-19 lockdown, while maintaining physical distancing and other preventive measures. As the situation changes, more forms of struggle will emerge out to face the new challenges during Covid-19 lockdown and effectively put the spanner in the high profile pro-corporate agenda of structural change by the rulers of the country today.

Without underestimating the seriousness of the present challenge before the working class and the people; from the experience of the past and response in the present; one can safely conclude that even after present phase of Covid-19, the direction of India's economic structural changes generally will remain same; and the vigilant and united working class shall be able to meet these challenges and shall emerge out stronger. History will be the witness.

## Media Industry

### **Huge Attack on the Journalists and Other Workers**

There are large scale dismissals, pay cuts/non-payment of wages of the journalists and other employees in the media industry, using the pretext of Covid lockdown, contrary to the Government's notification. Indian Newspaper Society, has stated, "*at best, the (Government's) advisories can be considered a moral or humanitarian obligation cast upon private establishments during lockdown and this moral obligation cannot be converted into a legal obligation;*" and, that, "*the onus to compensate workers is on the government which cannot be shifted upon employers in the private sector.*"

There is also total absence of Safety gears, Insurance coverage and Compensation package to the working journalists who are working in the field as Covid frontline warriors.

In this background, on 27 April, a three-member Supreme Court Bench has admitted a writ petition filed, on behalf of the working journalists and other employees, by the National Alliance of Journalists, Delhi Union of Journalists and the Brihanmumbai Union of Journalists.

The petitioners have urged the Apex Court to suspend with immediate effect all terminations, resignations, wage deductions and directions to go on leave without pay that have been taking place in the media after the announcement of the nation-wide Covid lockdown. The court had issued notice to the respondents - the Union Government, the Indian Newspaper Society (INS) and the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) giving two weeks' time to file replies.

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## **COVID Lockdown**

# **Relief by State Committees**

*(Continued from May, 2020 2<sup>nd</sup> Supplementary)*

### **Himachal Pradesh**

#### **Distribution of Relief**

Earlier, more than 300 families of migrant and local workers have already been provided relief. On 8 April CITU activists have distributed ration to about 100 families of local and migrant construction workers at Kathua. On 9 April, CITU and DYFI leaders distributed about 10 quintals of ration of wheat flour, rice, pulses, edible oil, salt etc to 60 families of migrant workers in the CITU office, Jyoti Basu Bhavan, at Hamirpur. These migrant workers are construction workers mostly from UP, Bihar and mainly from Kashmir region of J&K.

On 10 April, CITU and DYFI leaders distributed ration to 146 families, having about 700 members, of the migrant workers. Till 12 April, ration was distributed to 3,696 workers in 9 districts. On 14 April, CITU and DYFI leaders distributed ration to 105 families of migrant workers at CITU office at Hamirpur. Due to extension in lockdown period, the food / ration problem among the migrant workers also increased. On 15 April, ration is distributed to 51 families in Kuthera area of Hamirpur block and ration packets of 5kg rice, 5kg aatta, 1kg dal and 2kg salt were distributed to 201 families of migrant workers in CITU office at Hamirpur. There were few local workers also. On 17 April, ration was distributed to 17 families of migrant workers at CITU office, Hamirpur.

The relief work is continuing.

#### **Collection of Relief Materials**

9 April – About 9 quintals of ration were collected by 13 village committees of the unions in Bhoranj Block under the leadership of construction workers union. Many other village committees have also collected ration which will be distributed in following days.

15 April - More than 15 quintals of rice, aatta, pulses etc. were collected by 13 village committees in Hamirpur. Ration is collected mainly by MANREGA and Construction workers of these villages. On 16 April, ration is collected from 10 village committees of MANREGA and construction workers unions. On 16 April, ration is collected from 10 village committees of MANREGA and construction workers. On 17 April, about 20 quintals of rice, aatta, pulses, refined oil etc. were collected from 16 village committees of construction workers.

### **Haryana**

On 27 March itself, state and district level helpline was established; and where-ever there was call for help, it was promptly responded to. For relief work, our efforts was coordinated with some NGOs and also pursued with the government departments. In the state, more than 500 CITU activists have participated in this relief work mainly in Gurgaon and Jind. In some districts, AIDWA, Sarb Karmachari Sangh extended appreciable support.

In Gurgaon region, where the workers were mostly affected, with the help of some NGOs and citizens, more than 1.73 lakh ready to eat food packets; and ration kits, worth Rs.800 each, among 5658 families were distributed up to 18 April in 40 localities by about 150 CITU activists with

AIDWA activists. In the state, altogether ready-made food were distributed to about 10,000 persons daily including 300 persons through community kitchen run by CITU at Jind.

In Jind, Bhiwani, Kaithal, Hissar, Fatehabad and Rohtak, CITU local functionaries themselves collected fund and ration and distributed the same to the needy families. In other districts ration kits were distributed to more than 8,000 families; 50% of them were provided by CITU activists themselves collecting fund and ration by and rest with the help of some NGOs. At some places masks, sanitizers and fruits were also distributed.

## **Jammu & Kashmir**

Our construction workers unions collected 7 quantals grains, 100 kg pulses, 100 kg salt, 150 kg potato, 100 litre edible oil and distributed the same among migrant workers of Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and its GREFF (General Reserve Engineer Force) workers mostly from Chhattisgarh, Bihar, UP etc residing in shanties in Jammu region. The relief work is continuing. In Kathua, relief materials were distributed among about 100 migrant workers. In the Kashmir valley, in Kugam district, our comrades collected grains and pulses and distributed among the poorest section of the society. In Ganderbal district, 42 construction workers belonging to West Bengal, reaching just 4 days before the lockdown, were facing starvation. Our construction workers unions helped them by providing Rs.6000 in cash and 2 quintals of rice, tea leaves, pulses, potatoes, milk, tomato, salt and is continuing to help them. Our comrades have also distributed masks, sanitizer to the poor people in the district.

Thousands of unorganised workers including the migrant workers in Jammu & Kashmir have lost their income during the lockdown period. Majority of migrant workers, who are from Bihar, UP, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal etc. and are employed in various sectors, were thrown out of jobs. Having lost their income, they had been starving for days. For instance, there are more than 300 railway loading & unloading workers, who are living in shanties, were not provided any relief by the contractors, railways authorities or local administration. Same is situation for other migrant workers.

Nearly 14,000 ASHA workers, who play crucial role in the public health sector, have been engaged in frontline for door to door campaign, tracking those who came from affected countries and from other parts of country and doing public surveys during the COVID-19 epidemic. It is shocking that the ASHA workers are not provided with proper training and personal protective equipments for safety. They are even asked to purchase hand sanitizers and masks out of their own pockets.

## **Karnataka**

CITU Karnataka state committee informed:

26 March: A public appeal - We from CITU are working to help the unorganized sector workers who are unable to earn their livelihood due to lockdown. We are providing groceries kit of 18 items per family of the workers like street vendors, domestic workers, head load workers, construction workers, mid day meal workers, auto & taxi drivers, municipal workers and such others who are in need. Including the packing and transportation charges per unit cost will be Rs.800. We shall be much obliged if everyone comes forward to sponsor as much units as possible. Our target is to serve 10,000 families. Join hands with us.

Thanks to every one for the great response in few hours. (There was) overwhelming support of those who responded positively and donated around 2000 units within a short span of 48 hours of the call for sponsoring.

31 March: Food Packets distributed to Hamali workers @ RMC yard Yeshwantpur & @ Dasarahalli to domestic workers, auto drivers today; shall continue to distribute everyday in phased manner @ different places in Bengaluru & elsewhere in the state.

Groceries were distributed to migrant workers from West Bengal by powerloom workers union (CITU) @ Dommasandra of Anekal Taluk.

State government agreed to open food distribution centres in all 198 wards of Bangalore for migrant workers. The address and location of food distribution centre of each ward will be shared on Monday. This information can be passed to the migrant workers, who are in Bangalore, by the respective states.

Our volunteers are having problem in mobility because of Sec.144 and lockdown of the city. Migrant labourers from Bengal, Assam and Odisha are supplied with food materials in the Whitefield area, Bangalore.

Veteran CITU leader and former Supreme Court judge Gopala Gowda, along with other trade union comrades distributed ration packets to the 625 families of migrant workers, belonging to Nadia and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal, at Kundanahalli in East Bangalore.

## **Kerala**

CITU Kerala state report as on 29 March:

The LDF Government of Kerala is taking all efforts to help and provide relief to the unorganized sector workers and all others who are affected by the Covid-19 lockdown. CITU is active engaged in extending support in these efforts of the state government.

There are welfare fund for most of the unorganized sector workers. Advance is being given from the welfare fund to the workers. Consumer federation, civil supplies corporation etc. are providing essential items to the people. CITU is ensuring that essential commodities are reaching the needy.

Young CITU workers are acting as volunteers for various works in coordination with local bodies. Private nursing homes and several educational institutions are taken over for the stay arrangement of people in quarantine. CITU is providing volunteers in these places. School councilors' organization of CITU is counseling the people who are in quarantine and in isolation.

ASHA workers are the ones who work in the ground level to collect information about people coming from outside, those who are having fever etc. CITU organization of ASHA and other NHM workers are fully engaged in such works.

CITU loading unloading workers union is freely doing loading and unloading work of the essential commodities. They also are distributing kits to the elderly and ailing persons. Mid day meal workers union of CITU is fully engaged in the work of community kitchen, opened all over the state. Essential commodities are being arranged and supplied to plantation workers through CITU unions. Distribution of food items to migrant workers at Trivandrum was done by CITU comrades.

CITU Kerala state unit has been collecting good fund for Chief Minister's relief fund for the relief work during Covid-19 lockdown.

## **Maharashtra**

CITU formed Whatsapp group for distressed people in Mumbai and Maharashtra. Hundreds of telephone calls coming from various parts of the country including West Bengal, Kerala, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Delhi were attended; information was collected; and passed to committees in the areas where the migrant workers are standard. In Maharashtra,

the relief work for stranded migrant workers is being done by CITU, DYFI and AIDWA, working in coordination.

Mumbai district committee, especially Andheri, Bhandup extended cooked food and grocery to more than 10,000 people mainly the migrant workers. In Pune and Nagpur, food and grocery were provided to the standard migrant workers and others affected people. In Sholapur, Kolhapur, Aurangabad, Amravati, Gondia, Chandrapur and Nagpur hundreds of stranded migrant workers were given assistance. In Nashik 1,100 workers, who were not paid salary for months, victimized workers and domestic workers, construction workers, self employed were given grocery kit including wheat, rice, oil, pulses, sugar etc. CITU is giving food to 160 standard migrant workers in Wardha City.

CITU collected funds and also spent from unions funds for the relief work. For providing food to the needy, we are also interacting with others especially the Gurdwaras, NGOs and some Muslim organisation.

CITU Andheri unit on the very first day has distributed food packets to more than 250 migrant construction workers at Jogeshwari West, Ville Parle, Khar Road, Bandra, Shastrinagar Naka, Mahim in West Mumbai. Next day food packets were distributed to more than 350 workers. For these food packets, street vendors provided free vegetables and Mumbai West Corporation provided vehicles for distribution.

CITU took up issues of ASHA, sugarcane cutting, construction, industrial workers; rickshaw, and taxi workers with the concerned ministers and administration officials and have been able to gear up the machinery for relief to the affected people. This work is also continuing.

1.31 lakh sugarcane cutting and transport workers of 38 sugar factories in the state were stranded in various districts of Maharashtra. They suffered due to lack of ration, drinking water and of other necessities. CITU affiliated sugarcane cutting and transport workers union took up their issue, through memorandum and personally, with the CM, Dy. CM and others on power and continuously pursued. Ultimately, on 17 April, order was issued by the state disaster management authority asking the factories to conduct medical examination of all these workers; prepare the list of workers and the villages they belong to; and make arrangements to transport them and their families to their native places. CITU had demanded immediate implementation of this order.

## **Odisha**

At the very beginning, 300 groceries packs - each with 5 kg wheat flour, 500 gm pulses, 2 kg potato, 1 kg onion, 250 ml edible oil and soap - were distributed among the migrant construction workers at Cuttack jointly by CITU district committee and Cuttack City Coordination Committee.

## **Punjab**

Immediately after imposition of lockdown, CITU state committee took initiative to help the needy workers and gave call to all its unions to contact the migrant workers in their colonies and work places. CITU's Anganwadi, ASHA and village Chowkidars unions are taking initiative everywhere to help the needy in different ways. The activists of CITU unions in of brick kiln, construction, MNREGA have also been active.

As per reports, CITU and its unions in the state have contacted over 20,000 workers, mainly migrant workers and dalits, and helped them in different ways including providing readymade food and groceries.

CITU's relief work is being conducted all over the state, but is most visible in Ludhiana, Raikot, Nangal, Pathankot, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Hoshiarpur, Barnala,

Bathinda, Ropar and Sangrur. All the relief camps at Raikot, Ludhiana, Nangal, Barnala, Ropar, Pathankot and Bathinda are supplying ration and cooked food to the needy workers especially the migrant workers and dalits. In other districts CITU activists are approaching the people at their residence or at work places. At several centres, door to door food supply is also being made.

Apart from CITU, several other organizations, of Sikh masses and Kisans, which are also working to help the migrant workers and the needy. All Gurdwaras are feeding migrant workers, some of those round the clock. People of Punjab are giving them both help and respect.

CITU has also succeeded in getting the full wages of all categories of workers paid for the month of March. On receipt of any complaint, we promptly intervened. State's principal labour secretary has also issued notification to ensure full wages for the period of lockdown to all the workers including contract, outsourced and piece rated workers. At the initiative of CITU in the state, the long pending due wages of MNREGA workers have been deposited in their bank accounts.

Anganwadi Mulajam Union of CITU decided to prepare 1 lakhs masks in next week and distribute to the same to the needy people. (11.04.2020)

## **Tamil Nadu**

CITU state centre initiated Corona relief work from the beginning of the lockdown and advised the district committees to identify the migrant workers and help the needy with our own resources and with the help of the government; and immediately attended and acted upon to lots of calls from West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Jharkhand, Tripura etc.

CITU all district committees in Tamilnadu and Puducherry and its unions have started relief activity on 26 March itself, in coordination with some NGOs and government departments and with active involvement of DYFI and AIDWA, provided food, provisions and other help to thousands of stranded migrant workers mainly from West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha; provided food and cooking materials to the workers who came with patients for treatment at Vellore, Chennai etc and in Puducherry; provided food to needy at the local areas and to the local tribal workers etc; and helped the stranded students; on some occasion made arrangement for transportation and accommodation.

## **Telangana**

### **Covid-19 Relief (22 March 22 – 15 April)**

In all 34 districts of the state, CITU distributed 214 quintals of rice to 5,800 families at 150 centres; 182.25 quintals of vegetables to 5,800 families; groceries to 7,198 families at 250 centres; 25,108 safety maska at 120 centres; readymade meals to 9,330 persons in 60 centres; soaps and sanitizers to 5,058 persons at 80 centres; gloves to 248 persons at 5 centres; Rs.500 cash each to 200 workers at 2 centres; and 7 persons donated blood to help the covid-19 victims.

28 CITU activists participated as volunteers in Covid protection programme, organised by the Government. Relief work was joined by the workers of industrial areas in Hyderabad, Rangareddy, Medchal, Sangareddy and Nalgonda; unions of the employees and workers of Insurance, Singareni Collieries, Anganwadi, Electricity, Powerloom, Medical & Sales Representatives, Road Transport, Medical & Health, Private Transport, Hamali, PACS etc.

### **Summary of Covid-19 Relief Activities (18 May, 2020)**

- Total number of help-centres, established for relief work across the State, was 1,360;
- Relief provided to nearly to 1.82 Lakh workers;

- Total monetary value of the provided relief materials was nearly Rs.1.14 Crore;
- Number of distributed masks and sanitizers was above 91,000 costing more than Rs.8.55 Lakhs;
- 47 persons donated blood in 9 blood donation camps to help Covid victims;
- Total number of cadres involved in the relief work was 1,919.

## **Uttar Pradesh**

### **Relief Work (25 March - 19 April)**

Both Central and State Governments issued notification to all government and private sector to pay March wage within 7 April. Yet, railway contractor companies at Lucknow and Ghaziabad did not pay wage in time and the issue was taken up with the authorities by CITU.

At Lucknow, Bilaspuri migrant workers from Chhattisgarh, domestic workers, railway cleaning workers were provided ration. 260 construction workers at Lucknow were provided ration / readymade food by pressuring the companies including big companies like L & T and Green Gas. 230 ration kits were distributed in association with PWD ministerial association with 5 kg rice, wheat flour 3 kg, 1 kg pulses, 1 litre edible oil, 1 kg sugar, masala and soap in each kit. More are being distributed. CITU union of construction workers provided 88 families of 248 persons with ration kits having 5 kg rice and 1 kg pulse each.

Migrant workers in construction and cold storage and street vendors, mostly from West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Kashmir, are provided relief in Varanasi, Allahabad, Kanpur, Meerut, Bareilly, Sonbhadra, Ballia, Itawa, Gorakhpur, Mau, Muzaffarnagar, Rampur, Moradabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Hamirpur and Gonda districts.

Relief was provided to plywood workers at Rampur, Sitapur and Barabanki districts through labour department.

## **West Bengal**

After imposition of sudden lockdown, CITU state committee's primary focus was to arrange relief to lakhs of migrant workers of West Bengal who were stranded in different parts of the country. Already more than one lakh of such workers have been contacted and connected to the respective CITU state committees and government nodal officers. All district committees have sent to the state centre details of the migrant workers from the districts and are contacting their families in the state with necessary relief materials.

The district committees have also reached to the families of the migrant workers of other states and other districts and provided relief to them arranging medicines, groceries and other necessary items. Around 300 migrant workers from Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha, who walked from their working places to the border of the state in Hooghly district on their way to their respective native places, were detained and harassed by the police. After immediate intervention of the CITU district committee, they were released and put in two camps. Kolkata district committee arranged relief for 500 head loaders mostly from Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha; 400 of whom were later sent to their native places.

Relief work by the respective district committees are being organised among the migrant workers from other states and districts; camps have been organized to accommodate them and providing readymade food, groceries, vegetables. Relief, in terms of cooked food, food grains, vegetables, soaps and other necessary items are being arranged on regular basis by all district committees and its unions, alone or jointly with other fraternal organizations, for the workers' families and very poor people badly affected by the lockdown. Masks, gloves and sanitizers are being

distributed in workers residential areas in most of the districts and also in tea gardens. Some districts provided financial support to the very needy families of the workers, who are stuck away from their home within or outside the state. Blood donation camps were also organised by the district committees.

Railway hawkers' union is keeping contact with their members who are badly hit by the lockdown. With the help of other trade unions and mass organizations, food grains, vegetables are being arranged for them. WBMSRU has arranged blood donation by their members in the hospitals / medical colleges; its 16 district units have distributed gloves, masks, sanitizers, food grains, vegetables and also readymade food to the workers in different areas. Good number of gloves, masks and sanitizers were also donated to the hospitals for the usage of the medical staffs. In Durgapur, CITU unions jointly distributed 460 packets of relief materials from HSEU/DSP union office; provided relief to nearly 700 persons in the office of UCWU union on 20 April; and distributed relief from HSEU ASP union office on 3 May.

Hundreds of volunteer groups in the state, each with 2/3 young CITU members and DYFI and SFI activists, provided help to the elderly persons.

District committees raised demand to the government and employers for wage and ration to the economically affected unorganised sector workers; transport workers including of auto, taxi, bus, truck; self-employed workers, street vendors etc; especially for the migrant workers in jute, brick kiln, construction, leather industry, municipal contract workers in conservancy work.

Issue of payment of wage to the workers tea, jute, MSMEs, rice mills, grinding mills, cold storages, brick kiln and construction has been taken up with their respective employers. In few cases it is yet to be redressed and being follow up.

Demand has already been raised to the state government for extension of the recently introduced health insurance scheme, which presently includes the medical and para-medical staff, to the ICDS workers also. Despite repeated commitments by the State government, masks, gloves, sanitizers, soaps and other necessary protective materials were not provided to the ICDS and ASHA workers. Despite that, ICDS and ASHA workers are executing their responsibilities undertaking high risk.

Complains have been lodged with the police against those employers who are not making full payment of wage during lockdown period. Large number of rice mill workers are denied wage for the lockdown period. Consequently, at CITU Howrah district committee's instance, notice has been served by the district labour authority to 9 out of 14 jute mill owners for paying full wage for the lockdown period.

Regular contact with the construction workers is being maintained; organized them to send applications for financial assistance of Rs1000, as declared by the government. Food materials are being distributed among them across the state.

## **Coal Workers Countrywide Protest**

4 recognised coal workers federations of AITUC, INTUC, HMS and CITU in a joint meeting decided to observe All India Protest Day on 10 June by staging dharna and demonstration, wearing black badge, holding pit meetings etc and Black Day on 11 June 2020 by burning effigy of the Central Government in protest against private commercial mining of coal and separation of CMPDIL from CIL; and pursuing other demands of coal workers and Covid-19 related people's demands.

# INDUSTRY & SECTOR

## Electricity

### Against Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020

### **Nationwide Protest by Electricity Workers and Engineers**

Electricity workers and engineers under their united platform successfully observed National Protest Day on 1 June, 2020 wearing black badge, raising black banners and staging demonstrations at all work places of power utilities at 9,895 centres in all metro cities and 680 districts of all states and union territories of the country to oppose the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020. Protest was held in front of power companies headquarters in state capitals; their zonal, district, circle, division and sub-divisional offices; power plants, sub-stations, section offices, consumer-care centres, call centres etc.

The leaders of the federations and unions, while addressing the demonstrations, strongly criticized the Government of India for introducing Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 for privatization of distribution of all power utilities when the entire country is under Covid-19 lockdown and electricity employees and engineers are in the forefront to maintain continuous power supply in the cities and hospitals.

The proposed Bill has prescribed 3-tier privatisation in distribution business, last tier being the franchises not requiring any license. The proposition is informalisation of risk-prone electricity distribution job requiring high level of skill and acumen. The main object of the Bill is for transferring assets of the power network from Generating Station Bus to the doors of 25 crore households and farmers' fields, which are developed during seven decades at the cost of public exchequer; to the crony capitals. The Bill, if enacted will endanger the food security of the country. Governments of Telengana, Tamilnadu, Kerala, Bihar and a few other states have refuted the Bill intending to convert electricity from the Concurrent List to Central List in gross travesty of the Constitution.

*(Inputs: Prasanta N. Choudhury)*

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## **Times of India Editorial Page**

(12 May, 2020)

**“It’s now or never: States are driving bold reforms,  
We will never get this opportunity again, seize it.”**

“In one of the boldest and bravest initiatives since the reforms of 1991, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have ushered in radical labour market reforms by freezing a vast number of acts and giving industries flexibility. Covid-19 has acted as a catalyst in eliminating red tapism, inspector raj and all that was antiquated in our labour laws. MP has also initiated a series of ease-of-doing-business process reforms – a single form for registration; valid licenses for the life of a project with no annual renewal; shops can open from 6am to midnight; from 61 registers and 13 returns for industries to just one return with self-certification and virtually no inspection by the labour department.”

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# **Full pension after 15 years deductions is restored; Extra-deducted amounts after 15 years being refunded**

During last 5 years, CITU has continuously been taking up issues of injustices being meted out to the EPF pensioners by the Government and EPFO.

One of these was the commutation facility which was used by the Government to convince the Supreme Court that EPS-95 was a beneficial scheme. But this facility along with 'return of capital' was withdrawn unilaterally by the Government without even informing the CBT members.

Then there was the issue of the pensioners who got the benefit of commutation but the deduction was continuing endlessly. When CITU representative raised the issue, the reply given was that the rules did not stipulate anything on stopping the deduction. The injustice was that the pensioners, getting less than the "Minimum Pension" of Rs.1000, were forced to re-pay nearly double the commuted amount as deduction was continuing. Even after discussion and decisions several times in the CBT meeting, the Government was not taking any decision about it. Finally, in February 2020, the Government announced that the deductions would be stopped after the repayment is made for 15 years. (*That order of the Government was published in March issue of the Working Class*).

But, there was no clarity in the order regarding the deductions made for more than 15 years. This issue was raised in the CBT meeting during the first week of March, 2020. Government clarified that the additional deducted amounts will be paid back.

However, the implementation of the order was getting delayed during lockdown. This issue was taken up and EPFO has implemented the order now and the arrears is also being paid along with the pension payable on 1st June 2020.

Now onwards for all those, whose deductions have completed 15 years, to them full pension is restored.

- AKP

Ministry of Labour & Employment

## **EPFO Pensioners to Get Enhanced Pension**

Posted On: 01 JUN 2020 3:42PM by PIB Delhi

EPFO released Rs 868 crore pension along with Rs 105 crore arrear on account of restoration of commuted value of pension.

On the recommendation of Central Board of Trustees (EPFO), the Government of India accepted one of the long standing demands of workers to allow restoration of commuted value of pension after 15 years. Earlier there was no provision for restoration of commuted pension and the pensioners continued to receive reduced pension on account of commutation lifelong. This is a historical step for the benefit of pensioners under EPS-95.

EPFO has more than 65 lakhs pensioners catered through its 135 regional offices. EPFO officers and staff battled all odds during this Covid-19 lockdown period and processed pension payment for May, 2020 to ensure credit of pension in the bank account of pensioners on schedule.