



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

Avalanche Disaster in Uttarakhand

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CITU Union at Disaster Site



Delegation at Disaster Site



Delegation with the Workers



CITU in Haryana with Kisan Movement

(Report page 23) (Photos: CITU, Haryana)



Fighting Working Women of India

WORKING CLASS

MARCH 2021
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In this issue of *The Working Class* we focused on the women as workers and farmers contributing in the country's industrial and agrarian production and services and country's economy and GDP; with huge number of them as workers in unorganized sectors - in construction, brick kilns, loading-unloading, MNREGA, home based industries, as migrants, scheme workers etc, vast majority of them remaining outside the trade union reach and of organized peasants' movement in the country.

Yet, we are witnessing the spontaneous women's participation in the ongoing farmers struggle at Delhi borders and across the country and workers joining them. The spectacular women's participation in the unprecedented *Rail Roko* movement on 6 February in different parts of the country had to be noted even by the mainstream print media with awe.

These movements have gone beyond the caste barrier, which is inherited in the Indian semi-feudal patriarchal society, and the communal divisions, inherited from British colonial rule and fascistic ideology; both of which are further promoted by the ruling dispensation with increasing atrocities committed against Dalits, women, minorities and by imposition of communal law to prevent inter-faith marriage.

These opposite developments are taking place – one is the movement for integration and against oppression; and the other one is by the rulers for division and suppression.

These movements, however, will not automatically break the caste and communal barriers. There is need of conscious ideological inputs for social reform in the long drawn movement from below integrating with the spontaneous burst of movements as of now. Only conscious organized working class movement can advance it. CITU at grass root has a role to play.

On the eve of International Women's Day 2021, we dedicate this issue of *The Working Class* to these fighting working women of India.

The Police State

Govt. Slaps Goonda Act on CITU leader

CITU Varanasi District Committee, in a statement on 11 February, condemned BJP-led Yogi government's administration in Uttar Pradesh for slapping Goonda Act to CITU Varanasi District President Shivnath Yadav. Earlier, similar notices were issued to AKS district secretary Ramji Singh, Varanasi textile workers leader Mobin Ahmad and others.

CITU district committee demanded withdrawal of cases against Shivnath Yadav and others.

CITU national General Secretary Tapan Sen, ex-MP also issued statement condemning Yogi Government of Uttar Pradesh for invoking UP Goonda Act against CITU leader Shivnath Yadav and other leaders and activists of Varanasi. The authoritarian Yogi government has been utilising police force to suppress the trade union and democratic movement, civil liberties and people's rights in the State, particularly in the Prime Minister's Parliamentary constituency in Varanasi.

Yogi Govt's Penalty Notice to farmers

BJP government in Uttar Pradesh has been issuing notices to farmers owning tractors for personal bonds and sureties of huge amounts to prevent them from joining the ongoing farmers' agitation. 162 farmers of Sitapur alone were served with such notices of exorbitant amounts upto Rs.10 lakh each.

However, the administration informed Allahabad High Court on 2 February that the government *"there is no further apprehension to breach of peace or disturbance of public tranquility"*, reports *The Hindu* on 3 February.

The Division Bench of the High Court, however, was not convinced as the government counsel could not justify, in the first place, the reason for issuing such notice to the farmers. The Court directed the District Magistrate and SDMs of Sitapur to be more "cautious" in passing such orders in future. "Their orders, act and conduct should not be such which reflects arbitrariness and against the principles of natural justice," the Court has said.

UP 'Love Jihad' Law 1 Month, 14 cases, 49 in Jail

Since the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020 came into effect on 28 November 2020, RSS brand name 'Love Jihad' law, to prevent inter-faith marriage, records show that police filed 14 cases and made 51 arrests, of whom 49 are in jail, reported national daily *Indian Express*. Of the 14 cases, 12 cases are filed by the relatives. In all cases, except one, the women are adult. In eight cases, the couple are said to have been either friends or in a 'relationship'; while one couple claim to be married.

International Women's Day 2021

Recognise Women's Work as 'Workers' and 'Peasants'

Hemalata

The International Women's Day

The decision to observe International Women's Day focusing on the issues of women was taken by the second international conference of socialist women held in Copenhagen in 1910. In 1911 millions of women marched on the streets on the occasion of International Women's Day. Over the years March 8 has come to be accepted and observed all over the world as International Women's Day.

The origin of International Women's Day lies in the struggles of women workers against their exploitative working conditions and to assert their rights and this struggle continues to this day.

Through their struggles women have indeed won some rights and no doubt achieved some improvement in their working conditions. But patriarchal attitudes, undervaluing women's work, inequality in wages and opportunities and other types of discrimination continue to dominate across the globe even today. Women today bear the brunt of neoliberal attacks on the conditions of workers and all other sections of toiling people.

Worsening Conditions of Women under BJP Rule

Women's conditions in India are further on the downslide after the BJP government came to power at the centre. Retrograde and patriarchal views confining women's role to taking care of the family and children are being promoted under the BJP regime. Women's rights to befriend people of their choice, choose and marry as per their choice, their right to dress and to lead their lives as per their choice – are all under attack by the right wing forces. Incidences of violence against women have increased.

India's position in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2019 – 20 came down by four notches from that in 2018 - to 112 out of 153 countries. Within a span of 14 years India has fallen 39 places on the World Economic Forum's economic gender gap, from 110th position in 2006 to 149 in 2020. Economic opportunities for women in India today are among the lowest in the world. According to the data released by the World Bank in June 2020, India's female labour force participation (FLFP) is the lowest in South Asia. From 30.3% in 1990, it has dropped to 20.3% percent in 2020, falling behind Pakistan (22.2%) and Afghanistan (21.8%).

Unrecognised, Undervalued, Unpaid, Underpaid

This does not mean that women in India are not working; this is mostly because most of women's work is undervalued and unpaid. According to eminent economist Jayati Ghosh, *'the decline in women's employment really reflects a shift from paid to unpaid work'*. Domestic work is not counted as 'work'; collection of food, fuel, cattle feed, water and sewing, tailoring, weaving etc for household use are also not counted as 'work'. According to an OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) report women in India spend nearly six hours a day on unpaid work, while men spend only 52 minutes a day. Researchers have found that if women's domestic work and other forms of unrecognised and undervalued work are counted, female work participation in the country would be 86.2% compared to 79.8% for men.

It is important to note that this lack of recognition of work done mainly by women is not something that impacts women alone. By devaluing the work performed by women within the household, the work itself is undervalued, even when it is performed outside the household, for the society. The wages paid for these jobs, performed by women outside their households are very low. Despite all the

talk of 'women's empowerment' by the government, the reality is that the government itself undervalues women's work in our country. The lakhs of women employed by the government of India in its various schemes, like the anganwadi workers and helpers of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and the Urban Social Health Activists (USHAs) of the National Health Mission (NHM) or the midday meal workers – all of whom cook and feed women and children, take care of their health etc – are not even recognised as workers and are paid a measly amount as 'honorarium' or 'incentive'. It is seen as an extension of their domestic responsibilities to the society, and called 'social work'.

In addition, India is one of the countries where the wage gap between men and women performing the same jobs, is very high. On an average, women are paid only two thirds of the wages paid to men.

The same attitude is displayed towards women in agriculture. Women form the backbone of our agriculture. They perform many of the tasks in cultivation, in management of livestock, poultry, collection of forest produce etc. Around 73% of women workers in rural areas of the country depend on work in agriculture. But their contribution to agriculture is not recognised. They are not recognised as farmers. This patriarchal attitude is also reflected in the recent comments of the chief justice of India asking why women and the elderly were being 'kept' at the protest sites.

Unpaid work by women is not specific to India alone. The time spent by women in unpaid work across the world is several times that by men. Even in Norway, considered to be one of the most gender equal countries in the world, second in rank in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, women spend almost double the time spent by men on unpaid domestic work. In Japan, it is more than four times. Undervaluing women's work is rooted in the historical division of labour between men and women and the evolution of patriarchy with the development of private property and its inheritance.

Fight to be Recognised

Today, women continue to fight for recognition of their work as work, against undervaluation of their work, for equal opportunities, equal wages and equal rights as citizens.

Women workers, particularly the scheme workers, are fighting to be recognised as 'workers', for 'wages' for their work, not honorarium; women workers are fighting for equal wages, for maternity benefits, crèches and safe sexual harassment free workplaces and dignity at workplaces as well as in the society. They are also joining the struggle against the attacks of the ruling classes on the working class in the form of labour codes, on the workers' hard won rights including the right to organise and collective bargaining. Hundreds of thousands of women workers and employees in different sectors have been participating in the strikes and demonstrations called by the trade union movement.

Women farmers are fighting to be recognised as 'farmers', for registration of land in their names, credit and other benefits on par with male farmers. They are also joining the farmers' protests against the three farm laws that threaten the very survival of the farmers, handing over our agriculture to big corporates.

While raising the immediate demands, these struggles also are against the neoliberal policies being pursued by the BJP government led by Modi, which are meant to protect corporate profits and for the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. By participating in these struggles in large numbers, women are not only fighting for their class interests but also challenging the patriarchal values promoted by the present system.

Such struggles against the policies have to be intensified further by involving the mass of toiling people, men and women. Defeat of the neoliberal policies and changing the system that nurtures patriarchy alone will facilitate women's march towards emancipation, for attaining their rightful place in society.

On this International Women's Day, let us pledge ourselves for carrying forward such struggles.

CITU's Call on International Women's Day 2021

As concluded by its All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (AICWW), CITU called upon its units, committees, federations and unions to observe the International Women's Day on 8 March 2021 in a befitting manner in the background of ongoing countrywide intense struggle of the farmers and workers.

The International Women's Day 2021 shall be observed on issues and demands of -

- Recognition of women as 'workers' and 'peasants' – unpaid or unequal wages;
- Contraction in women's work participation, job losses and unemployment;
- Increase in violence against women and children;
- Removal of all protective legislations;
- Entitlements and representation in elected bodies including 33% reservation in Parliament and Assemblies;
- Regularisation, minimum wages and pension for scheme workers.

The programme of action includes maximum participation of women and submission of memorandum on the demands. CITU called to gear up the state CCWWs and launch campaign by state, district, local and workplace level mobilisations of women workers; and taking initiatives for joint activities with fraternal organisations and their women's subcommittees of fraternal trade union organisations.

For Privatisation New Public Sector Policy for '*Atmanirbhar Bharat*'

Modi Government has announced its New Public Sector Policy for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. On 4 February, 2021 DIPAM (*Department of Investment and Public Asset Management*) under the Union Finance Ministry issued memorandum on '*New Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) Policy for Atmanirbhar Bharat*'.

Under this new policy, the public sector commercial enterprises are being classified as '*Strategic*' and '*Non-Strategic*' Sectors.

Strategic Sector

- i. Atomic Energy, Space and Defence;
- ii. Transport and Telecommunications;
- iii. Power, Petroleum, Coal, and other minerals; and
- iv. Banking, Insurance and Financial Services.

Policy

- Bare minimum presence of the existing public sector commercial enterprises at Holding Company level will be retained under Government control;
- Remaining enterprises will be considered for *privatisation*; or *merger*, or *subsidiarization* with another PSE; or for *closure*.

Non-Strategic Sector

- Rest of the PSEs

Policy

- PSEs in non-strategic sector shall be considered for *privatisation*, where feasible, otherwise for *closure*.

The Himalayan Disaster

Hundreds of Workers Missing

On Sunday the 7 February 2021, deep in the Himalayan mountains an avalanche roared down with deadly mixture of ice, rock and water at furious pace from miles away consuming nearly everything in its path through the village of Raini in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, where a new railroad was being constructed by the Hyderabad-based Rithwik Railway Company. Except 5/6 workers all others workers are still missing, reported media portal *CNN*.

The office of CITU-affiliated *Samvida Shramik Sangh*, which on normal days saw bustling activity with lot of workers, wore a desolate look. 115 workers of Ritwik construction company and 21 workers of Om Metal Company, both working in the NTPC project at Tapovan, are untraceable since last 4 days, reported a joint delegation of CITU, other mass organisations and of CPI(M) after visiting disaster site on 10 February.

Devinder Khanera, the President of the Union is inconsolable. He himself had managed to survive as he had come up to the project office minutes before the disaster struck. His uncle, a nephew and a cousin were washed away and only the nephew's body could be retrieved. Devinder stayed back to assist in the relief work and to help other distraught workers despite his personal loss. Rajinder Rawat and Rajinder Kentura, both drivers in the project, barely managed to survive. One of their vehicles was washed away. Both are active members of the Union.

The delegation visited the labour camp and interacted with the survivors. At the Rishi Ganga Project also 56 workers are untraceable. Many workers survived only because of the fact that the disaster struck on a Sunday when the attendance is skeletal. The loss of lives otherwise would have been much higher.

Many relatives of the missing workers had come searching for their dear ones. The visiting team was informed by the lone survivor from Jharkhand that 12 others were missing. Ashish, a worker from Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh informed that around 25 workers from the district were still missing. One body was identified and taken to Lakhimpur Kheri so far. A person had come from Saharanpur looking for his nephew Sadique who was missing. There were relatives and friends of Basharat, engineer at Rishi Ganga Project, who came in search of him. Ravi, who was working at Tehri project, had come with his uncle looking for his brother who was also missing.

The distraught relatives and friends said that no help was forthcoming from the BJP-led state government and there was no assistance. So far 18 bodies could be recovered of which 15 could be identified. Few mutilated parts were recovered making it almost impossible to identify the victims. Even after 4 days, more than 38 workers bodies could not be retrieved from the tunnel that is filled with silt and debris.

Nearly 12 villagers including some women shepherds, who had gone to graze cattle or cut grass, were also missing. In all 13 bridges have been destroyed cutting off more than 33 villages totally. One bridge on the main Highway was also destroyed. Many houses also have suffered damages.

The delegation also met the Project officers who have been standing with the workers in their hour of grief.

The State Government has announced meagre and inadequate compensation of Rs.4 lakh to families of each deceased. NTPC announced compensation of Rs.20 lakh and Rs.2 lakh from Prime Minister's Relief Fund. The delegation felt that the response was insensitive and demanded Rs.50 lakh compensation per family and a government job for one member of the bereaved family. The seriously injured must be given a compensation of Rs.5 lakh.

The workers have died in the line of duty because of gross dereliction of even the minimal precautions or disaster warning protocols. The Government should immediately review the different

construction activities like tunneling, blasting, drilling etc in this ecologically sensitive Nanda Devi Biosphere region.

The delegation demanded reconstruction of buildings like shops or houses and speedy restoration of bridges. There was only a small first aid camp by Red Cross and Khalsa Aid was serving food as well as medical aid. The Government should arrange for food and stay of relatives of victims. This predominantly tribal region should be provided with essential foodgrains. Restoration of communication and transport facilities should be taken up as a priority for this purpose.

The delegation traveled from Dehradun all the way up to Raini village taking over 14 hours to cover the 310 kilometres. Massive drilling work for the Chardham Highway as well as tunneling for railway lines in the ecologically sensitive region caused landslides and made it a tortuous journey.

The delegation was comprised of AIKS national Joint Secretary Vijoo Krishnan, CPI(M) Uttarakhand State Secretary Rajendra Negi and its Chamoli district Secretary, CITU district President and General Secretary, SFI State Secretary Himanshu Chauhan, other leaders and a senior journalist.

CITU Condemned Further Disinvestment of SAIL

CITU denounced central government's decision to further divest 10% shares of the public sector Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) at throwaway price. This is nothing but putting the valuable national assets on auction to the detriment of national interests and for the benefits of private corporate, a statement of CITU said on 14 January, 2021. It is shameless sabotage of the Maharatna Company SAIL, having huge asset base, pushing SAIL towards phased privatization that too at throw away prices only to benefit the private corporate, both foreign and domestic.

Already around 25% shares of SAIL have been sold by successive governments. When SAIL has been facing a difficult situation financially, followed by sharp decline in share price to around Rs.74. DIPAM has put SAIL shares under Offer for Sale (OFS) at a floor price of Rs.64 per share, thereby, further reducing the offer price from the level of market price.

Entire trade union movement of the country are opposing such sabotaging activities by reckless disinvestment and privatization of country's PSUs facilitating a loot on national assets by private corporate, both foreign and domestic.

CITU called upon the working class and the steel workers movement in particular to voice their united protest and condemnation to the Govt move for disinvestment of share in SAIL.

Withdraw Excise Duty Hikes on Petro-Products

By a statement on 18 February, CPI(M)'s Polit Bureau strongly denounced yet another hike in the prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas. These hikes in excise duties come at a time when international oil prices have dropped by 50%, from Rs.47.12 in 2014 to Rs.29.34 in 2021.

The main reason for these escalating prices is the unbridled hike in the excise duties by the Central government. The tax levied by the Centre increased by a whopping 217% since this Modi government assumed office in 2014.

The Modi government's bonanza to the rich and its cronies is sought to be made up by these excise duty hikes imposing further burdens on the people, who are already groaning under the double whammy attack on their livelihoods by the pandemic and the economic recession.

The hikes in prices of petroleum products will result in higher transportation costs which will increase the prices of all essential commodities. The cascading inflationary effect will further worsen the economic recession.

Decoding the Labour Codes

R. Karumalaiyan

Following are some outlines of Modi government's attacks through Labour Codes on the workers' working conditions and rights replacing the 44 labour laws which were earned by the workers through strikes and struggles during British rule and after Independence.

12 Hours Work

Addressing the media on 8 February 2021 Union Labour Secretary said the Government would soon bring provision in the Codes / Rules for 48 hours work per week with flexibility clause on number of days to work - four days at 12 hours per day, five days at 10 hours per day and six days at 8 hours per day "to be in sync with changing work culture in the country."

Code on OSH section 26 (1) says that "No worker shall be allowed to work in an establishment for more than six days in any one week" (there is no bar in reducing the number of days); and Rule 28(1) states that "No worker shall be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than forty eight hours in any week". Labour Secretary says that "48 hours is sacrosanct."

All earlier drafts of OSHWC Code (one even tabled in the Parliament on July 23, 2019), had left the issue of "daily working hours" to be decided by the 'appropriate government' in the Rules. However, facing all round opposition and criticism, finally the Government introduced 8 hours work a day. Section 25(1)(a) of the OSH Code, 2020 provides, "No worker shall be required or allowed to work, in any establishment or class of establishment for more than-eight hours in a day".

But, Rule 28 empowers the 'appropriate government' prescribing 12 hours as 'spread over' time. Spread-over provision of 12 hours empowers the employers to detain the worker in workplace for 12 hours.

IR Code: Restrictions on Trade Union Rights

Subscription

Under Section 7(f) Government is empowered to prescribe the subscription to be paid by members of trade unions.

Government is also empowered to regulate the donations that trade unions may receive from their members and others.

No Action against Strike Breakers

Section 93(1) provides that no member can be expelled, fined, impose penalty or deprive of any benefit by the trade union for refusal to take part in a strike, which government considers illegal.

Section 93(2) enables the worker, against whom any such action is taken, to approach the civil court for relief and empowers the court to either grant restoration of membership or issue order to the trade union for payment of compensation or damages to the concerned worker.

Minimum membership requirement

10% of the total workers or 100, whichever is less, will be required for registration of a union replacing 7 workers in the earlier law.

Registration of trade unions

Even on fulfilling requirements, the Registrar may refuse granting registration under Sec. 9(1) to a union.

Cancellation of registration

Section 9(5) empowers the Registrar to withdraw or cancel the registration of any trade union.

Section 9(5)(ii) empowers the Registrar to cancel registration of any union on receiving information about the contravention by the trade union of the provisions of the Code or the Rules in respect of trade union. There will be no requirement for any prior notice.

Appeal

Cases regarding the cancellation of registration of trade unions may be filed before an Industrial Tribunal. However, the tribunal has no power to stay cancellation or cancel the order of the registrar.

Attempts to Enslave Workers

Dipon Mitra

The labour codes have been created with the sole aim of increasing the 'Ease of doing Business' to please mainly the international capital and finance that in its very making process has provided the domestic capital and finance a complete and brutal command over the labour class.

Industrial Relations Code: Some Key Provisions

Fixed Term Employment

The IR Code has introduced 'fixed term employment' which means engagement of a worker for a fixed period. This provides legal right to an employer to engage workers for the period as long as it wants. There will not be any retirement age for them.

Lay-off, Retrenchment and Closure

According to previous law, in an establishment, employing 100 workers above, any layoff/retrenchment of the workers warranted prior permission from the appropriate government. The new IR code, in its place, increases the threshold to 300 workers allowing vast number of industries, below 300 workers, to layoff/retrench workers without prior permission from the appropriate government.

Take Home Pay decreases

In a wage packet if the allowances cross 50% of the total pay, the excess over the 50% will be included in the basic pay and thus the take home pay will be decreased. On the other hand the superannuation dues will increase provided the same is paid when the worker retires.

Strikes and Lockouts

The workers have been disarmed of their most effective weapon, the right to strike since the conditions have been made so severe that it has become almost impossible to strike.

Under the IR Code, no person employed in an industrial establishment can go on strike inter alia: (1) without giving notice within 60 days; (2) within 14 days of such notice; (3) before expiry of the date of strike specified in the notice; (4) during the pendency of any proceedings including conciliation proceedings and litigation and arbitration proceedings and 60 days after the conclusion of such litigation and arbitration proceedings; (5) during any period in which a settlement or award is in operation, in respect of any of the matters covered by the settlement or award; etc.

Under the ID Act, such provisions related to strikes and lock-out were restricted only to public utility services, as defined under the ID Act. The IR Code has made these provisions applicable to all industrial establishments.

Continued Ill Health Leads to Termination of Job without Compensation

The IR Code makes it clear that how inhuman the ruling classes can be to the workers that a chronic worker-patient may easily be terminated without any compensation since it does not fall under definition of retrenchment.

Notice of Change in Conditions of Service

IR Code has introduced a new proviso whereby no advance notice of any change in conditions of service of a worker is necessary provided it agrees with the orders of the appropriate government. This means in cases like government mandated lockdowns or prohibitions to conducting certain business it will work fine for the employer.

Penalties for Employers made Benign

Penalties for employers have been made gentle. For instance, previously, violation of the law relating to retrenchment could send the employer behind the bar. But, now he will be subject to monetary fine ranging from Rs.1 lakh to Rs.10 lakh only.

Employment Standing Orders

Every industrial establishment where 300 or more workers are required to frame standing orders i.e., industrial establishments less than 300 workers will not be required to frame standing order.

Recognition of a Sole Negotiating Union

If only one (1) registered trade union of workers is functioning in an industrial establishment, then that industrial establishment will, subject to such criteria as may be prescribed, recognise such a trade union as the negotiating union.

In the event that more than 1 registered trade union of workers are functioning in an industrial establishment, then the trade union having 51% or more workers on the muster roll of that industrial establishment will be recognised as the negotiating union.

Representation in Negotiating Council

When there is no union having 51% workers as members, the employer will set up a team comprising 1 representative from the unions which have at least 20% following. Earlier, this was 10%.

Code on Social Security, 2020

The 2020 Bill makes a mandatory provision for registration of all 3 categories of workers - unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers.

The coverage under the Social Security Code excludes these categories of workers. Construction sites employing more than 10 workers will be covered under the Code but personal construction work is totally exempted from coverage.

Factories employing more than 20 persons are required to implement Provident Fund clauses, which exclude the bulk of the medium and small-scale sector from this obligation. These workers have been either partially or inadequately covered or not covered at all in the Codes.

A wage ceiling of Rs.18,000 per month has been prescribed for workers to qualify as inter-state migrant workers.

Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions

1. The worst part is that in case of an emergency, the government can exempt, by notification, any establishment, a class of establishments or any class of contractors from any or all provisions of the Code.
2. Code increases the existing workers threshold from 10 to 20 workers having manufacturing process with electricity and (ii) from 20 to 40 workers without electricity excluding vast number of establishments from the provisions of the OSH Code.
3. The Code applies establishments or contractors employing 50 or more workers.
4. OSH Code relaxes when the normal functioning of the establishment is (i) ordinarily done through contractor, (ii) do not require full time workers for the major portion of the day or (iii) there is a sudden increase in the volume work in the core activity which needs to be completed in a specified time.

5. While trying to show that employment opportunities is provided to women, the OSH Code says women will be entitled to all kinds of work, including mining, before 6 a.m. and beyond 7 p.m. The Code fails to lay down the safeguards that employers must put in place before allowing women to work at all hours. It does not even lay down harsh penalties for violations.
6. While the Code restricts work under 18 years of age in mines, it permits the hiring of persons above 16 to work as apprentice.
7. The penalties for the offences under the Code range from fines to imprisonment up to three months and even here no court will be allowed to proceed with the trials of the offence except with the previous sanction of the appropriate government.
8. The OSH Code provides coverage to the concerns employing 250 or more workers. This will exclude 90 per cent of the units from the ambit of such committees.
9. The fixed time workers (FTE) workers can be fired without notice and will not be able to participate in strikes along with other workers. (From: befiNEWS, January 2021; edited)

Impact of Labour Codes on Working Journalists

Historical Background

Keeping in mind the freedom of press, Parliamentary debate took place on the conditions in the print media and of the Working Journalists during the Constitution (First Amendment) Bill 1951. The Prime Minister assured the Parliament on appointing a Press Commission to examine these matters in depth. The issue came up again in the Parliament during the debate on Press (Objectionable Matter) Bill, 1952.

Indian Federation of Working Journalists in its conference in Calcutta in 1952 adopted a resolution demanding of the Government to appoint the Press Commission soon.

Ultimately, the Government of India appointed the Press Commission in 1952. Press Commission submitted its report in 1954. On the basis of Press Commission report, the Parliament passed the Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955 (in brief Working Journalists Act).

Two Special Aspects of Working Journalists Act

The Press Commission report and the Parliamentary debate emphasised on two specific aspects of working journalists.

First Aspect - Their Special Nature of Work: The Press Commission carefully considered as to whether the general industrial relation law – the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 - was applicable and sufficient for the working journalists; and came to the conclusion that the nature of work of the Working Journalists, unlike other workers, is of special nature. Therefore, there should a separate law governing their service and working conditions in addition to the applicability of I. D. Act and others labour laws.

Keeping in view the special nature of work of the Working Journalists the Parliament enacted the Working Journalist Act, 1955.

The Second Aspect - The National Wage Board: Press Commission report recommended fixation of minimum wage as part of the service conditions of the working journalists in the suggested specific law for the working journalists. During the debate in the Parliament, the question arose as to how to fix minimum wage. Question also arose why it should confine only to minimum wage and not fare wage for the working journalists particularly in the light of Constitutional objective of providing 'decent living wage' of the workers.

Ultimately, in the wisdom of the Parliament, it was decided to incorporate the provision of appointing National Wage Board for the Working Journalists by the Government of India.

Thus, appointment of National Wage Board for the Working Journalists became a provision in the Working Journalists Act.

Modi Government's Labour Codes passed by the Parliament

The incumbent government at the Centre hurriedly passed 3 Labour Codes Bills and 3 Farm Bills in the Parliament - on 17 September in Lok Sabha and on 20 September 2020 in Rajya Sabha which became laws after hurried assent by the President on 27 September itself. Code on Wages was adopted by the Parliament in 2019.

Repealing Working Journalists Acts

Ignoring the historical background and two special features of the Working Journalists Act, - (i) the special nature of work and (ii) the National Wage Board as provision in the Act - Modi Government at the Centre through the Code on OSH (Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions) repealed both - the Working Journalists Act and the complimentary Act - The Working Journalists (Fixation of the Rates of Wages) Act 1958.

End of National Wage Board for Working Journalists

With the repeal of the Working Journalists Act (and its complimentary Act), the National Wage Boards for the Working Journalists came to an end after 64 years of existence since First Wage Board of 1956.

Controversial inclusion of the Working Journalists in IR Code

Working Journalists do not fall in any category of the workers who mainly are having different nature of work like 'skilled', 'unskilled', 'manual', 'technical', 'clerical', 'supervisory'. Yet, they have been included in the omnibus I. R. Code. Therefore, they have been included in the definition of 'worker' through backdoor. The definition of the 'worker' in Sec. (2)(z)(r) of I. R. Code "includes working journalists as defined in clause (f) of section 2 of the Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1955."

The inclusion of the Working Journalists in the definition of 'worker' in I. R. Code is bound to be challenged by the media industry leading to large number of litigations because the inclusion is fallacious. By the Code of OSH, the Working Journalists Act has been repealed. I. R. Code includes the definition of 'Working Journalists' from the repealed and non-existent Act!

Working Journalists Excluded from the Code on Wages

Forget about Wage Board. The working journalists are even deprived of all wage related legal benefits as available to other workers through Code on Wages.

The Code on Wages has two different definitions – one of 'Employees' and the other of 'Worker'. While all other workers are included in both the definitions, Working Journalists and Sales Promotion Employees are included only in the definition of the 'worker' and excluded from the definition of 'Employee'. And, the Code on Wages is applicable only to the 'Employees' and not the 'Workers'.

[From the presentation by J. S. Majumdar, Vice President of CITU, in the Webinar on 'Deconstructing New Labour Codes: Implications on the News Media Workforce' organised by the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), New Delhi and Delhi Metropolitan Education, Noida on 27 January, 2021]

INDUSTRY & SECTOR

Construction

Construction Workers for Countrywide Multi-Days Strike

The Construction Workers Federation of India (CWFI) had its Working Committee meeting at Hyderabad on 14-15 February, 2021 inaugurated by CITU national Secretary S DevRoye. Working Committee paid homage to the departed CWFI leaders K.V. Jose and Sealam Satyam. The meeting adopted a time bound *Programme of Action*.

The action programme includes preparing the construction workers for countrywide multi-days strike in defense of Construction Workers Acts and Inter-State Migrant Workers Act after elections in the five States of Kerala, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

The other programmes include: (1) Observing Solidarity Day with the farmers movement on 10 March by mobilisation of construction workers and holding public meetings; (2) Working in support of the Left, democratic and secular parties' candidates, and defeat of BJP and other right wing parties candidates; holding street corner meetings and organising door to door campaign among construction workers and their families in the forthcoming 5 states elections; (3) CFWI to publish booklet on the Kerala LDF government's contribution in the welfare of the workers and the people for wide circulation in regional languages across the country; (4) Publication of leaflet on the adverse impact of Labour Codes for wide circulation and (5) Organising 2 days state-wise trade union classes for leading cadres.

Financial Sector

Privatisation Drive

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made three significant announcements in respect of financial sector in the budget proposals 2021-22 FY for '*Atmanirbhar Bharat*'.

1. FDI in the insurance sector would be increased from 49% to 74% and allowing foreign ownership in insurance with some safeguards;
2. Government has plans to privatise one General Insurance company and two Public Sector Banks;
3. Government would bring the LIC IPO in this Financial Year; for this, necessary amendments to LIC Act have been incorporated in the Finance Bill with the budget proposals.

All India Insurance Employees' Association (AIIEA) opposed all the three proposals on justifiable grounds as these are not in the interest of the insurance industry, the Indian economy and the people.

Bank Employees to Strike on 15-16 March

United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), the united platform of all employees - workers and officers – organisations in banking sector, announced 2-day strike on 15-16 March 2021, to be preceded by campaign and other demonstrative programmes, against the Government's move of privatisation of banks.

In the budget speech, the Finance Minister proposed strategic disinvestment of BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India, Container Corporation of India, IDBI Bank, BEML, among

others including privatisation of two public sector banks with one General Insurance Company to be completed within FY 21-22.

Immediately the bank employees responded by staging protest demonstrations across the country on 4 February at the call of UFBU.

BoB's Grameen Banks Workers-Officers to Strike

The Joint Forum of Bank of Baroda Sponsored Grameen Bank Unions served notice for strike, to begin on 1 March, to the Government of India, NABARD and the Chairman of Bank of Baroda (BoB) in protest against sudden stoppage of recruitment process in all the three BoB-sponsored Grameen Banks in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

As per existing norms, on the basis of 2020 business, the managements of the three Grameen Banks issued indent to IBPS. While the recruitment process was in final stage, suddenly, as directed by the BoB headquarter, the managements of three Grameen Banks wrote to the recruitment authorities to stop all recruitments despite the fact that these banks are suffering due to staff scarcity. The stoppage of recruitment process is discriminatory only against BoB sponsored Grameen Banks; will deprive youths from getting employment; and will increase unbearable workload on the existing staff, a statement of the Joint Forum stated.

IT & ITES

IT MNC Increases Working Hours in WFH Model

The National Coordination Committee of IT & ITES Employees Unions of CITU on 4 February 2021 called upon all its constituents to organize protests on 12 February, send protest letters to the management of Cognizant and also to the concerned Labour Commissioners for their urgent intervention in the matter of arbitrary increase of working hours by the US multinational IT company Cognizant.

Cognizant announced increasing work of the employees by one hour per day to 9 hours, excluding usual breaks, effective 15 February, 2021. Cognizant employs around 2.8 lakhs of IT and ITES employees globally majority of them are in India among the countries.

The increase in work comes back-to-back to Modi government's Labour Codes draft Rules allowing Work From Home (WFH) model for IT and Service Sectors.

MNCs have reported increase in productivity in WFH model while the hardship of the employees has increased manifold due full-day work and increased stress. To maintain the increased productivity MNCs arbitrarily imposed increased working hours neglecting the ill effects of WFH model on the employees and their families.

Petrol Diesel Prices

Between January 2020 – January 2021

1. **Crude Oil Price Drop: (-)14.0% (per barrel \$63.65 > \$54.77)**
2. **Country-wise Drop/Rise of Prices: China (-)1.4%, USA (-)7.5%, Brazil (-) 20.6%, UK (-) 1.8% & India – (+) 13.6%**
3. **India - Excise Duty Rise in the Prices: Petrol– 26.6% > 37.1%; Diesel– 23.3% > 40.1%.**

(Source: Indian Express; 16/2/2021)

STATES

Andhra Pradesh

Workers & People's Struggle

Against Privatisation Attempt of Vizag Steel Plant



By a public statement on 8 February, CITU congratulated the workers and people at Vizag for their collective initiative to resist the disastrous move of the government to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, RINL through strategic sale.

In the statement CITU briefly recalled the people's struggle for establishing and defending the public sector RINL, its contribution and stated, "The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant came into being following peoples' consistent struggle and agitation for setting up the integrated steel plant in Visakhapatnam.

"Right from the inception, the entire project had faced numerous difficulties and roadblocks by the vested interests but all could be defeated and Vizag Steel Plant was built up and got stabilized.

"Since then the RINL has consistently improved its operational efficiency and undertaken modernization and expansion successfully and workers played a great role in that process. RINL could consistently contribute to national exchequer in the form of dividend and taxes for quite a long time besides providing employment to a large number of people both directly and also contributing immensely to community development. And such signal achievement RINL could make despite being grossly discriminated by way of denial of allotment of captive iron-ore/coal mines vis-à-vis other integrated steel plants.

"The very idea of privatization of such an efficient steel plant with huge potential is a reflection of a destructive and sabotaging attitude towards national interests," CITU said.

Appreciating the people's movement in defence of public sector steel plant, CITU said, "It is welcome that people and the working class of Visakhapatnam or in that matter the entire Andhra Pradesh responded immediately in an appropriate language of united agitation to the disastrous and most retrograde move of the BJP Government with a determination of not to allow such dubious intent to materialize. Ongoing agitation against privatization of Vizag Steel Plant is being participated by all the trade unions and also the people en masse."

CITU extended solidarity to such united struggle of the people and workers to resist the nefarious move to hand over RINL to private hands and calls upon the working people in general to express solidarity to the ongoing struggle at Visakhapatnam.

CITU said, “Everywhere privatization move must be resisted and must not be allowed to materialize through peoples’ collective action and intervention in order to defend the nation and the national economy.”

Kareem’s Letter to Minister Opposing Privatisation

On February 2021, E. Kareem, CITU’s national Secretary and CPI(M)’s leader in Rajya Sabha wrote to the Union Minister for Steel Dharmendra Pradhan opposing government’s attempt of privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant.

“Privatization of such a highly efficient integrated steel plant having high potential to turn around is no way a prudent decision. Neither it is in the national interest”, Kareem stated.

“You are definitely aware of the huge unrest created among the mass of the populace of Visakhapatnam or in that matter the entire Andhra Pradesh by such decision of the Govt for strategic sale of RINL including workers of Vizag steel plant, which is getting reflected through various agitations determined to defend this PSU,” he stated.

“I urge upon you to kindly appreciate the gravity of the issue and its impact on the society and the economy and appropriately intervene so that RINL is not privatized and any move to dilute the PSU status of RINL is abandoned forthwith; I will also request you to please help RINL to tide over its present difficulties arising out of extraneous factors and also allot captive iron – ore mines and coal mines to meet its basic raw-materials requirement economically and more efficiently”, Kareem concluded.

International Solidarity

Through its digital publication on 9 February 2021, LAB trade union of the Basque Country, a WFTU affiliate, has sent solidarity message to the workers who are struggling and resisting privatisation attempt of Vizag plant in Visakhapatnam, India and also to CITU, which is also a WFTU affiliate. “First of all we want to denounce the disaster that supposes for workers the privatisation by the Indian government of the aforementioned company, a privatisation also means serious setback for the workers’ labour rights”, it said.

Odisha

Attempt to Close NTPC’s Talcher Power Plant

Shamika Ekataa Mancha of the unions of CITU, INTUC, HMS and others in Talcher Thermal Power Station of NTPC in Odisha (TTPS), through their joint memorandum to the Prime Minister on 8 February 2021, strongly opposed the under-cover, illegal and unjust attempt of closure of the plant.

They alleged that the management of the plant informed their executives through emails about the proposed closure of TTPS while no such application was made for taking prior approval from the appropriate government giving copies to the workmen’s representatives as required under I. D. Act. TTPS has 200 regular and 2000 contract workers.

The memorandum further pointed out that TTPS was inaugurated in 1964, started generating power in 1968 and has been giving continuous and uninterrupted service to the whole of the State of Odisha. Thousands of big and small industries in Odisha are depending on it for power supply. Over the period, TTPS has proved its excellence in economic, social and ecological sustainability.

Delhi-NCR

Protest against Labour Codes

Against Central labour codes and for other demands, led by CITU Delhi state committee, hundreds of workers-employees including industrial workers, DJB and DBC employees, street vendors and construction workers marched in procession from Shaheed Bhagat Singh Park at ITO to Delhi Government Secretariat in New Delhi on 4 February culminating in public meeting chaired by CITU Delhi General Secretary Anurag Saxena and addressed by CITU All India Treasurer M. L. Malkotia and Delhi State President Virender Gaur and unions' leaders.

Later, a delegation submitted memorandum to the Delhi Government demanding of Delhi government not to implement the labour codes in the State of Delhi and take active steps in resolving the burning issues of the workers.

Arrests of TU leaders for Supporting Farmers Movement

In a joint letter to the Chief Minister of Delhi on 11 February, Delhi units of central trade unions protested against police atrocities on trade union leaders in Delhi.

'Delhi for Farmers' and trade unions jointly had given a call for peaceful public meeting at Shahid Bhagat Singh Park in New Delhi on 6 February to express solidarity with countrywide farmers 'Chakka Jam' movement on that day. Delhi was kept out of that programme. Letter was submitted to police for permission for holding meeting.

Instead, Delhi police under the Union Home Ministry, like in Emergency days, swooped at the residences of the trade union leaders from early morning and detained them in police custody, under house arrest and confinement in the offices in the name of 'preventive custody'.

The detained leaders include CITU Delhi state President Virendra Gaur, its North District leader Vipin Kumar, AIUTUC state Secretary Manager Chaurasia, IFTU state President Animesh Das, SEWA leader Lata along with her husband, AICCTU Delhi Secretary Surya Prakash, women organisation PMS General Secretary Poonam Kaushik.

Tamilnadu

Anganwadi Employees Three-Phase Actions

Tamilnadu Anganwadi Workers & Helpers Union's (CITU) three-phased actions to pursue their charter of demands began on 22 January in the first phase staging demonstrations before CDPOs offices, participated by around 35,800 Anganwadi employees at more than 329 blocks in 30 districts; followed by around 22,000 employees staging demonstrations before the Project offices on 29 January in 30 districts. In the third phase, more than 30,000 employees from 30 districts staged demonstrations before the Project Director's office in Chennai addressed by CITU state General Secretary G. Sukumaran, state Treasurer Malathy Chittibabu and other including T. Daisy General Secretary and Rathnamala President of the Union.

Talks were held between the union leaders and the officials of the department assuring to send the demands to the CM assuring favourable decisions.

IN THE PARLIAMENT

Major Port Authorities Bill 2020

Kareem's Speech in Rajya Sabha Strongly Opposing Bill



Steps to Privatisise & Handing Over Assets of the Ports

"First of all, I would like to register my strong opposition to this Bill.

"The proposed Major Port Authorities Bill, 2020, is nothing but an attempt to convert the ports into Corporate Entities. It will make them an easy target of acquisition by corporate/multi-national companies at throw away prices including its huge lands and other assets.

"It will severely impact not only the trade but also end up with huge loss of employment opportunity to lakhs of people. Land and infrastructure of the Port Trusts with huge public investment will be transferred to private hands. With the port trust becoming a port authority, the ports will be transformed into a "landlord" model, making it easier to outsource all of the core activities that ports which are now performed directly. "The alienation of the land and other assets will also be accelerated.

"The bill doesn't have any clear provisions for the protection of employees and retirees. It has provisions allowing persons as per the government's wish to become the Authority Board member as union representatives, bypassing the recognized trade unions. Which is very serious and the government should step back from such move. Section 53 of the Bill makes it easy for the Port Authority to become a company and thereby complete privatization through an executive order using excessive powers vested in the Central Government through it. The proposed Bill is only an interim arrangement as it will definitely lead to conversion of the Ports into "Authorities" in a later stage and ultimately privatizing the Organization. Clause No. 33 and 53 (1) & (2) of the Bill is having provisions for this."

Threats to National Security

"Since the Major Port Trust Act 1963 is a unique enactment already in place, there is no justification in repealing this Act and introducing the Major Port Authorities Bill 2020. Whereas if it is inevitable to give more functional autonomy and financial powers to Port Trust, suitable and appropriate amendments can be made in the relevant clauses of the MPT Act 1963. But the government carried on with this new Bill through which it can enable the privatization easily. National safety and security would be under threat if the proposed Bill becomes an Act in the present form.

"According to the Parliamentary Standing Committee, which says that, "*The Committee notes that the Government intends to attract investors in the ports. However, the ports like Cochin, Visakhapatnam, Mumbai and Goa are handling defence cargo. If the private operators are given authority to handle such confidential cargo, there may be chances of leakage of the details to anti national elements. The Committee recommends that while handing over the port related activities*

to private operators, there should not be any compromise on the national security and safety aspects. (Para: 235)

“The Standing Committee also recommended that the Ministry in the first instance should remove the fears of the stakeholders on the issue of “privatization of ports” and ensure that the administrative, managerial and financial control of the Port will remain with the Port managements. I would like to hear from the Hon’ble Minister that whether the government considered these recommendations and observations by the standing Committee? Looking at the Bill it is evident that the government has not shown any consideration to neither the Committee recommendations nor the concerns raised by stakeholders.”

Complete Structural Change

“It is pertinent to note that, the very intention of the proposed Major Port Authorities Bill 2020 is to change its “structure” from the existing “Major Port Trusts” into “Major Port Authorities” which I feel would be the first step to privatize the Major Ports of the country under the pretext of ensuring more autonomy and transparency in the Management of the Major Ports. I totally disagree with the government’s arguments & contentions because the Major Ports Act 1963 provides Authority to Port Trust Boards to operate the Ports efficiently and adequate powers have been given to procure equipment and additional infrastructure and the Board has got Authority to manage and administer the Port. The main functions of the Major Ports are cargo handling: Loading the cargo to vessels for export and unloading the cargo brought by import. Certain Major Ports also maintain their own Railway Services for internal cargo transportation. Besides, the Major Ports provides assistance in various means to Indian Navy. The Major Ports are described as 2nd ROW OF DEFENCE. Hence, penetration of Multi-National Companies in Port Sector is harmful to national security and detrimental to the national interest. Various important and strategic recommendations of previous Parliamentary Standing Committees on Port Sector have not been heeded by the Central Government. As a result, the very existence of various Major Ports is under stake. Many of the newly developed/developing private Ports are invested with huge funds for providing basic facilities such as Roads, Rail Connectivity, Deep Draught Channel etc. Once the proposed Bill becomes an Act, the Port loses its status as “Port Trust” and would become “Port Authority”. The Board also is dissolved which is so representative and to take keen interest, including Trade, Government and Labour.”

Union Budget 2021-2022 – The Harbinger

“Sir, as all other legislations of this government, this Bill is also an instrument to appease the corporates. Privatization of public assets is the sole aim of this government. The Union Budget presented yesterday is also a move in this direction. In this Bill also it is evident that the intention of the government is for privatization and selling of assets to corporates and multinational companies. This is why I would like to register my strong opposition and I hereby urge the government to review this Bill.”

{E. Kareem is CITU national Secretary, its Kerala state General Secretary and leader of CPI(M) in Rajya Sabha}

MPs against Communalism

MPs Demanded Action against Delhi Police for Raids at Lawyers Place

Opposition MPs in a joint letter protested to the Prime Minister against Delhi police raids at the office of the Supreme Court advocate Mehmood Pracha and seizure of documents. Advocate Mehmood is representing number of cases of the victims of communal violence during Delhi riot. MPs demanded of the PM to take strict action against the concerned Delhi police personnel.

The signatories of the letter include Elamaram Kareem and Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya of CPI(M); Binoy Viswam of CPI; Syed Nasir Hussain, Akhilesh Prasad Singh and Shaktisinh Gohil of Congress; Tiruchi Siva, N. R. Elango, M. Shanmugam and P. Wilson of DMK; and Manoj Jha of RJD.

WORKERS-PEASANTS UNITY

Farmers Struggle - Total *Rail Roko* across India

Rail movement across came to a standstill for 4 hours, from 12 to 4 (daytime) on 18 February as thousands of farmers, workers and all other toiling sections resorted to *rail roko* in response to the call of SKM (Sanjukt Kisan Morcha).

An AIKS statement greeted the protesters for the successful action across India. The action was massive and peaceful throughout the country. Women's participation was noticeable particularly in Haryana, Punjab, UP, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan.

Till late afternoon reports have come of successful *rail roko* at 77 stations in West Bengal, 65 in Jharkhand, 55 in Telangana, 30 in Odisha, 23 in Andhra Pradesh, 21 in Rajasthan, 11 in Madhya Pradesh, 9 in Karnataka, 5 in Tripura and 5 stations in Maharashtra. In Kerala, massive demonstrations were staged in front of the Central Government offices in 14 districts.

100 activists including AIKS national Joint Secretary Badal Saroj were arrested in Gwalior by MP police. Arrests have also been reported at Bettiah including AIKS Bihar State President Lallan Choudhury; at Bangarpet in Kolar district of Karnataka; 500 farmers including AIKS State Secretary T. Sagar in Telangana. AIKS condemned these arrests. (19.2.2021)

WFTU in Solidarity with Farmers Movement

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), in its communication of 5 February 2021 to the Director of ILO, International Labour Standards Department; registered protest against the Government of India for violating ILO Conventions Nos C011, C098, C141 and C144. These conventions are ratified by the Government of India who is the signatory to these protocols including the Fundamental Convention 98 of 'Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949.

WFTU also protested against the authoritarianism of the Government of India and its treatment to the farmers who are demanding the repeal of the three Farm Acts.

The farmers' struggle is lasting over 70 days with hundreds of thousands of them continuously camping at the borders of the national capital Delhi; and protesting and demonstrating across India. Instead of ensuring effective consultations as per ratified ILO conventions, the Government of India is treating its farmers as the enemy across the borders, WFTU wrote.

WFTU strongly condemned cruel repression of the just struggle of Indian farmers and denounced the provocative acts, defamation and inhuman measures of Delhi police to cut down water and electricity, ban on internet and even deprive the farmers access to toilets and sanitation facilities; and demanded immediate ending of all these unacceptable practices, resorted to by Delhi police on the pretext of maintaining law and order.

WFTU demanded of ILO and other International Organizations to take immediate action and concrete measures in these matters for ensuring effective consultation between the farmers and the Government, ending of the violations and upholding the fundamental rights of farmers as per ILO conventions; and the Constitution and laws of India.

CITU in Haryana with Historic Peasant Movement

Jai Bhagawan

Peasant movement has been creating new history every day boldly facing every challenge of the government. CITU in Haryana has ensured increasing workers participation in this peasant movement of the century.

Government's attacks and Resistance

Taking advantage of 26 January Red Fort incident, Khattar government's police on 28 January attacked workers' and farmers' indefinite sit-ins at the toll collection centres; forcibly removed picketing at 6 toll collection centres and restarted toll collections; food langars at various places, including those at toll centres in Panipat and Karnal, were forcibly closed; farmers' 'Delhi blockade' at Palwal border was forcibly removed,

However, CITU and other workers and farmers organizations mobilised people at toll collection centres in bigger numbers; and, by late evening same day the situation changed. Same night farmers' convoys of thousands of tractors started rolling in Ghazipur, Tikri and Singhu borders; farmers joined in increasing number, women participating in a big way. Status quo ante situation restored at toll collection centres and the government retreated; a huge mahapanchayat of farmers was organised in Palwal and from 1 February the protesters reoccupied it Palwal border protest site.

Seeing the sudden change in the momentum of the movement, the BJP government in Haryana became so scared that it raised 12-layer barricades at Ghazipur, 7-layer at Tikri and 4-layer at Kundli borders to prevent farmers from entering Delhi; concrete walls were constructed against their own citizens; and suspended internet and SMS services since January 29 in 17 districts.

Despite these, the movement is spreading and the share of farmers and general public in it is also increasing. In solidarity with the farmers' movement, CITU started the programme of gherao of the cabinet ministers and high officials of the Government.

Gherao of DCs - CITU and Sarv Karmachari Sangh jointly gheraoed the Deputy Commissioners' offices successfully in all 22 districts on 18 January in which more than 22,660 workers and employees participated with huge numbers in Yamunanagar, Gurgaon, Jhinda, Hissar and Panchkula districts.

Republic Day Parades - On the Republic Day, 26 January, workers brought out two-wheeler rallies and foot march in all 22 districts. Those farmers, who could not join tractor rallies in Delhi borders, also joined the workers' march in districts. Large number of women workers and farmers participated in these marches.

Programme of Gherao of Cabinet Ministers - Haryana State CITU had planned to gherao Cabinet Ministers including the Chief Minister at 8 centres on different dates in February. They include Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar in Karnal on February 14, Dy. CM Dushyant Chaitala in Uchana on 7 February and in Sirsa on 12 February, Agriculture Minister J P Dalal in Bhiwani; Women and Child Development Minister Kamlesh Dhanda in Kaithal; Education Minister Kavar Pal Gujjar in Yamunanagar on 13 February, Transport Minister Mool Chand Sharma on 16 February and Union Minister Rao Indrajit in Gurgaon.

For this purpose 22 districts were grouped in 8 regions for 8 centres of gherao. A month-long Jatha campaign has been launched in which all CITU unions actively participated. The Jatha campaign began from 1 February addressing meetings of workers and farmers in large number of villages.

(18.2.2021) (Jai Bhagawan is CITU Haryana State General Secretary)

With Farmer-Protesters at Shahjahanpur Border

Sayanti Sengupta

A team, comprising of Bikashranjan Bhattacharya, MP and President of the All India Lawyers Union (AILU); CITU national leaders J. S. Majumdar and R. Karumalaiyan; and Jameer and me, the two young lawyers of Kolkata High Court associated with Bikas Bhattacharya; visited the farmers' protest site at Shahjahanpur border of Delhi-Jaipur highway on February 11, 2021 to express our support to their demands and solidarity with their movement.

Farmers' camps on road, trailers, trolleys and tractors for day-night indefinite sit-in protest dotted over a kilometer long stretch on the towards-Delhi side of the highway at Rajasthan border. On Haryana side, large contingent of heavily armed police was guarding the blocked Delhi side and manning the other side of the highway exhibiting the power of the state against the peaceful protest of the farmers.

At Shahjahanpur protest site, large number of farmers have been mobilised from different parts of Rajasthan by All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS). Farmers are joining each day, some in rotation. When we reached at the border, the AIKS was having its state committee meeting at the border itself.

The participation of youths is remarkable - from organising medical camps to maintaining ration, accounts and most importantly organising daily meetings have shown us the exact meaning of collective force. The day we reached, the post-lunch public meeting began which was addressed by Bikashranjan Bhattacharya and J. S. Majumdar as guest speakers. J. S. Majumdar spoke on Government's anti-farmer policies and trade union solidarity actions at the borders and across the country including the tractor rallies at several places on 26 January by the trade unions of tractor drivers.

Bikashranjan Bhattacharyya spoke on how he expressed solidarity towards the farmers by posting on social media, writing open letter to the Prime Minister, raising question in the Parliament, participating in the farmers March on 26 January 2021 and now meeting the protesters at Shahjahanpur border.

Participation of the women

Modi Government has left no stones unturned to suppress the voice of women. But women-led protest at Shaheen Bagh has shown the way to fight with boldness and strength of the women, courageous and fighting. Same spirit was visible and witnessed at Shahjahanpur border. I interacted with several women farmer-protesters.

Women of rural India contribute directly towards agriculture production in the form of labour in the farms as well as indirectly by doing household works and taking care of the family. Women even actively participate in farming by cooking food and serving to the farmers at the field.

A similar scenario was visible at the protest site. Women protesters were actively taking part in the meetings, cooking and distributing food for the protesters and even the visitors. The team met one lawyer cum activist Nisha Sidhhu who is also an active member of Kisan Sabha. She has been working towards the cause of women and workers for long.

The protesters are from diversified sectors but retained strong unity and human resource. When the present Government has intentionally refused to recognise the voice of women, the

protesting farmers celebrated Women Farmers' Day across India and at Delhi borders on January 18, 2021 to respect the role of women in agriculture sector. When I interacted with Nisha Siddhu, we came to know that though she is a lawyer by profession, her family is engaged with agriculture and she has joined the movement since the very beginning and has decided to devote 24x7 towards the movement till the farm laws are repealed by the Government.

Bikasanjan Bhattacharya met the protesters on various occasions and in one public meeting said, "The Women protesters have reminded me about the role played by famous Indian revolutionary Matangini Hazra during freedom struggle. The present farmers' protest has also been showing the way to struggle against this fascistic and corporate-friendly BJP-led government." "When the questions are being raised in the Parliament against the new farm laws, BJP MPs reply that the farmers are being misled to protest. It is high time for the ministers to realise that the farmers are intelligent enough and are aware of the Constitutional provisions more than any minister sitting in the Parliament," he said.

Agriculture sector is one of the most important areas of Indian economy. Approximately 60% of the Indian population is engaged in the agrarian production and contributing about 18% to India's GDP. Over the years this sector got entangled in rancorous trap due to the change in land holdings, growing cost of cultivation, climate change, decline of public investment, individualization of agricultural operation, no real remunerative price of the farm products creating debt trap for the farmers and leading to large number of them committing suicide. Therefore, throughout the country the immediate demand of Minimum Support Price (MSP) of all agricultural produce evoked spectacular response.

The plight of the farmers was added by the three farm laws as introduced by the BJP-led Government circumventing any discussion in the Parliament. Instead of ensuring MSP, the three farm laws have made way for the corporates control of agri-land use; all India market of agri-produce and opening unequal bargaining to the benefit of corporates and destroying the farmers.

While farmers protest is not new, the present one has gained momentum with huge involvement of youth, women and children. The farmers protest at every site has garnered unparalleled community support and also support of several eminent personalities, groups, organisations etc.

While the Prime Minister stigmatized them as 'Andolonjeevi'; the waterlogged tents, soaked firewood and blankets, bitter cold, deaths of farmers - nothing could taint or tire up the determined farmer-protesters. As the democracy is at stake, the only option is "Andolan" to gain freedom from this fascistic BJP-led Government.

Attempt to divide

In his Parliamentary speech, the PM narrated the three Farm laws as beneficial to small farmers. This time such divide-and-rule tactics did not benefit the Government. All sections of the peasantry are united in their resolve to fight against three farm laws. They are aware that all sections of the peasantry including agri-labourers have been targeted by introducing these farm laws. Commercialization comes with high technologies which would lead to unemployment of most of the farm labourers. By weakening the government's price guarantee system, the laws may end up hurting small and poor farmers most who constitute 80% in this sector 23% of them living below the poverty line. These changes will affect the small farmers the most because their low output does not allow them any bargaining power.

The protesters are ready to carry on with this struggle till the farm laws are repealed. It is the high time to spread this protest and strengthen the unity of all toiling sections of the people to save the democracy and uphold the Constitution.

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

State	Centre	Nov. 2020	Dec. 2020	State	Centre	Nov. 2020	Dec. 2020
AP	Guntur	121.3	120.8	MHR	Mumbai	114.0	112.9
	Nellore	116.0	116.0		Nagpur	118.2	118.6
	Visakhapatnam	129.8	129.9		Nasik	116.1	115.9
ASM	Biswanath-Chariali	130.9	127.5		Pune	115.8	115.4
	Doom-Dooma Tinsukia	137.8	136.4		Solapur	117.0	119.4
	Guwahati	128.8	127.3		Thane	113.4	112.4
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	Numaligarh-Golaghat	119.7	117.9	ODI	Angul-Talchar	128.3	126.7
	Sibsagar	121.7	119.8		Cuttack	126.6	126.0
BIH	Munger-Jamalpur	120.8	118.9		Keonjhar	124.9	124.6
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Rail Roko across India

(Report page 22)(Photos: AIKS)



PROTEST IN STATES



In Delhi (Report page 19)



In Tripura Protest March against police attack on para teachers

Rail Roko across India

(Report page 22)(Photos: AIKS)



Rail Roko by women at At Jind in Haryana (Courtesy: Indian Express)