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The Voice of the Working Woman

Scheme Workers' All India Strike

Joint Meeting on issues of Working Women

A meeting of representatives of CITU, AISGEF, CCGEW, AIIEA, BEFI, FMRAI and BSNLEU was held on 16th January 2018 at BTR Bhawan, New Delhi to discuss a joint campaign and activities on the issues of working women. K Hemalata, A R Sindhu, Usharani and Ranjana Nirula (CITU), Gita Bhattacharjee (CCGEW), M Girija (AIIEA), Kalyani Chakrabarti(BEFI), Arpita Mitra Roy (FMRAI), Ramesh Chand and Chandra Prabha Muchhal (BSNLEU) attended the meeting. The AISGEF representative could not attend the meeting.

The meeting reviewed the joint campaign and activities held last year and discussed how to develop joint movement on the issues faced by women workers. Last year it was decided to have a joint campaign from 9 March to 30 April 2017 on common demands of working women.

The campaign could comprise of joint state, district level conventions, meetings, rallies, distribution of leaflets, posters etc. It was also decided to have signature collection on a memorandum to be submitted to the district collectors on 10 April 2017(Birth anniversary of Vimal Ranadive).

The meeting noted that only a few states – Telangana, Maharashtra, Odisha and Haryana - had conducted joint meetings or some activity. The meeting felt that it is necessary to continue the joint activities more effectively and the joint campaign and activities taken up last year on a common charter of demands need to be continued.

The meeting also discussed the recent development in which the Supreme Court has issued notices to the Central Government and various state governments on the issue of implementation of the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act.

The meeting agreed upon the following activities:

1. Joint meetings of CITU, AISGEF, CCGEW, AIIEA, BEFI, FMRAI and BSNLEU to be held at state level in all states to plan the implementation of the joint campaign and activities
2. 8 March 2018, International Women's Day to be observed jointly wherever possible highlighting the issue 'Defend Women's Democratic Rights'. A note is to be sent by the CITU Centre.
3. Popularise the Socialist origins of International Women's Day. The book "*The Real History of 8th March, International Women's Day*" by R Jawahar to be printed, after translation into local languages and circulated extensively either jointly or by individual organisations.
4. Jointly conduct a survey on the existence and functioning of sexual harassment complaints committees in a) Government and public sector, b) Private sector, c) Unorganised sector. On the basis of the result, take up the issue at various levels. A sample questionnaire for the survey will be sent from the CITU centre.
5. Joint Campaign on Violence against women will be planned at the national level along with women's organisations and other mass organisations.
6. Increase the Circulation of 'The Voice of the Working Woman' and 'Kamkaji Mahila'.

The ***Voice*** *of the* ***Working Woman***

Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)

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A Time of Struggle and Resistance

The latter part of 2017 saw many huge struggles by different sections of the people for their lives and livelihood , protesting against the policies of the Modi government.

From 9 to 11 November 2017 the central trade unions (with the exception of the BMS) conducted a Mahapadav on Parliament street in which around 3 lakh workers participated. After a massive struggle in Rajasthan and a cross country jatha, on 20,21 November the farmers and peasants held a huge Kisan Sansad in Delhi. Through the year, there were student agitations in many universities , and women's protests all over the country.

The very first day of the New Year 2018 started with a big Dalit gathering at Bhima Koregaon in Maharashtra on 1st January, which was attacked by right wing elements one person was killed, leading to a Maharashtra Bandh the next day. Reports are coming in from the states about the overwhelming response to the Central trade unions call for a nationwide strike of Scheme workers on 17th January. The Jail Bharo programme on 30 January, called by the central trade unions will be over by the time this reaches you.

The spurt of struggles and protests by different sections, all over the country, is due to the agrarian crisis, demonetization and the resultant job loss, unemployment, starvation deaths and the increasing violence in society. In this time of the "*acchhe din"* promised by our Prime Minister, not only does one farmer commit suicide every 30 minutes but one student also commits suicide every hour.

Indifferent to all these, the Modi government is diligently serving its corporate masters through privatization in the railways, defence, education, health sectors, and writing off of corporate loans of lakhs of crores, in the banks. The Aadhaar scheme is being used not only to cut down benefits to the people but also for surveillance. To add insult to injury are the election bonds which make corporate funding of the electoral process opaque. There are doubts raised about government intervention even in judicial processes. The recent press conference by four senior Supreme Court judges are an indication of this. All these form a part of the attack on the democratic institutions of our country and our constitutional rights.

When the people rise up to oppose and protest, communal and caste polarization are used to divide and divert them. Communal appeals are made in election campaigns and casteist attacks are becoming all too frequent. Our democratic right of freedom of choice in what to eat, wear, whom to marry, are all sought to be curtailed, especially for women. This is accompanied by the reactionary Hindutva ideology which is pushed down people's throats, while science is sought to be replaced by mythology. Any opposition to these is projected as anti national and unpatriotic.

At this time it is crucial that we, the working, toiling people stay united. For this we must make our CITU slogan of "Reach the unreached" a reality. We must expose the policies of this government and the politics behind them. We must resist and fight back against these policies and force a change in them, in favour of the people.

A Strike to Defend the Basic Rights of the People

Nearly sixty lakh scheme workers went on All India Strike on 17 January 2018
Twenty lakh women workers came out on streets against the policies of Modi

It was a historic day for the trade union movement of the country on many counts, when nearly sixty lakh scheme workers, almost ninety percent of whom are women, went on strike on 17th January 2018. This is the first time the joint platform of central trade unions is giving a call for strike for a particular sector of workers.

Nearly 60 lakh scheme workers including anganwadi workers and helpers, mini anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, Mid Day Meal workers, NCLP teachers, small savings agents, workers under SSA, NRLM, MNREGA field assistants, para teachers, etc went on strike.

The strike was a total success in spite of threats by various state governments. In many states the workers were threatened with retrenchment and wage cuts of one week to a month wages for a one day strike. In Telengana one DRDO issued notice to the MNREGA field assistants that their strike is against the sovereignty and integrity of the Nation! Apart from this the Modi government and also BMS, which has totally surrendered to the Modi government, also tried to misguide the workers by spreading rumors of increase in wages, ESI, PF etc. In West Bengal, the Chief Minister herself openly threatened the workers that she will terminate all those who participate in the strike.

But the scheme workers belonging to the central trade unions, independent unions and even non unionized workers took part in the strike and also came out in demonstrations in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, HP, Jharkhand, J&K, Karnataka, Kerala, MP, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Pondicherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telengana, Tripura, UP, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. In Andhra Pradesh the strike will take place on 23 January. The scheme workers held demonstrations in more than five hundred districts.

The main demands

1. Implement the recommendations of the 45th ILC on scheme workers: recognition as workers, minimum wages not less than Rs.18,000 per month and social security including monthly pension not less than Rs.3000 to all scheme workers. Give coverage of EPF and ESI to scheme workers.

2. Adequate financial allocation in the Union Budget 2018-19 for the Centrally sponsored schemes including ICDS, MDMS, NHM, SSA, NCLP etc to ensure increase in wages for the workers to the level of minimum wages and universalisation of the schemes with adequate infrastructure and quality services.

3. No privatisation of the schemes in any form and no subversion by way of cash transfer or exclusion of beneficiaries

In Assam, despite of the Bihu festival, anganwadi, ASHA, mid day meal workers organised demonstrations in several districts. In Bihar various central trade unions organised demonstrations independently in some places and jointly in others. In Chhattisgarh a huge rally of anganwadi workers and helpers was

organised by five trade unions in Raipur. District level demonstrations were also held in the state.
In Gujarat anganwadi, ASHA, mid day meal workers organised protests in 22 districts. More than 75,000 workers participated. In Kerala all the trade unions jointly held marches to the central government offices. In Haryana anganwadi, ASHA, midday meal workers held huge mobilisations in all the districts. ASHA workers are planning for a four day strike next week in Haryana after 20000 ASHA Workers out of a total of 22000, struck work on the 17th.

In Jammu and Kashmir also scheme workers came out under the CITU banner to demonstrate. In West Bengal a huge rally was held at Kolkata apart from the district level demonstrations. Report says that the workers defied the threat by the CM and administration and took part in the rallies as well. In Mursheedabad district two anganwadi centres were forcibly shut by the administration, the next day.

In many states like Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, demonstrations and dharnas were held in front of the camp offices of ministers of the Modi Government.

In Karnataka, the scheme workers held a 24 hour Padav in front of the four central ministers from the state. In Sirsi in front of Annathkumar's house near about 5000 workers protested and submitted memorandum and in front of Sadanandagowda's residence near about 4500 workers protested. He promised to meet the representatives next day to receive the memorandum. In Bijapur Ramesh Ginjanagi central minister was forced to reach the protest place and receive the memorandum, more than 4500 workers participated.

The ministers were forced to hold discussions with the trade unions. There Mid day meal workers have decided to go on an indefinite strike next week. In most states the demonstrations were held jointly by the central trade unions. In a few places the programs were organised independently.
In Delhi, the scheme workers from Delhi and a few anganwadi workers from Punjab marched from Mandi house to Parliament Street where they were stopped by the police. The workers broke through the barricade and marched to Parliament Street where they held a meeting. The march was led by leaders of central trade unions including Dhirender Sharma (AITUC), Manjeet, Rajender (HMS) A R Sindhu, Usharani, Ranjana Nirula, Anurag Saxena (CITU), Santosh Roy(AICCTU), M Chourasia (AIUTUC). Later, the joint memorandum was submitted to the Finance Ministry.

The unprecedented response to the call for an all India Strike of scheme workers shows that the days of neoliberal Modi government are numbered. The Central trade unions in a joint statement congratulated the workers for the successful strike and declared that the future course of the joint struggle including indefinite strike and Padav will be decided after the Union Budget 2018-19, depending on the response of the government.

The Central trade unions in a joint statement congratulated the workers for the successful strike and declared that the future course of the joint struggle including indefinite strike and Padav will be decided after the Union Budget 2018-19, depending on the response of the government.

The Central Trade Unions have given a call for immediate protest on 1st or 2nd February 2018, immediately after the budget, in case there is no proper allocation for the scheme workers and the schemes.

Fact Check:
Amit Shah's Claims in Tripura are Wrong

Subodh Varma

Shah seems to be relying on untruths and half truths to campaign for a failing BJP in Tripura

BJP President Amit Shah launched his party's election campaign in Tripura by issuing a series of lies and half truths about the Left Front government. Before looking at them in detail, what is striking is the hubris of Shah in thinking that lies can sway people and win elections. Perhaps he thinks that deception works with people in a remote state, far removed from the scrutiny of national media. But little does he realise that people of Tripura are far wiser and conscious having lived through such arrogant rulers and deceivers in the earlier days, before choosing the formidable Left Front. Shah and Modi will need to rethink their electoral strategy by the time these elections (slated for March this year) are through.
But that's in the future. Let us look at the first edition of lies by Shah.

- "*Tripura's share in central taxes have been increased from Rs. 7,283 crore (13th Finance commission) to Rs. 25,000 crore (14th Finance commission) under Modi government."*

This has nothing to do with the Modi government! The 14th Finance Commission was set up in 2013 and gave its report in 2015. It increased the share of taxes to be given to all states, not just Tripura, from about 32% to 42% of the shareable Central taxes. Amit Shah is trying to claim credit for nothing.

- "*While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has enhanced the minimum wage for daily labourers to Rs 340 per day across the country, the Communist government here is still giving them only Rs 170 per day."*

Another blatant falsehood! The central government increased the daily wage rates of its own employees (see Gazette notification) in January 2017 to Rs.333 (for big cities), Rs.303 (for towns) and Rs.300 (for other places). This has nothing to do with other employees or workers. In fact, in June 2017, Labour Minister Bandaru Dattatreya issued a D.O. declaring that the National Floor Level Minimum Wage should be Rs.176 per day (DO No. 11012/1/2015-WC).

Crores of workers have been agitating for the last three years demanding a minimum wage of Rs.18,000 per month but the Modi government has been refusing to discuss the matter. This is despite the fact that the demand is based on accepted norms as laid down by the 15th Indian Labour Conference and supported by the Supreme Court in 1992.

- "*The Tripura government is neck-deep in corruption."*

This is a wild allegation with not one instance or proof given by Shah. While he and other BJP leaders have been trying to malign Chief Minister Manik Sarkar and his government in various speeches, nobody has any proof or even a prima facie description of corruption. The BJP state governments across the country have been sunk in corruption, the list is endless. Some of the well known scams under present BJP state governments Madhya Pradesh (Vyapam); Gujarat (Adani coal scam, Adani land scam, GSPC scam, GUVN scam, Tata Nano land, (Rice scam, etc.); Bihar (srijan scam); Chhattisgarh (PDS scam); Rajasthan (Mining scam and SPML scam); Maharashtra (Chikki and Khadse land scam); Uttarakhand (NHAI land scam); and dozens of others.

Besides this, the Modi government has refused to appoint the Lokpal, an empowered ombudsman to monitor corruption at the highest levels.

■ *There is widespread unemployment in Tripura.*

Tripura has seen one of the better growth rates in employment than most other states despite being handicapped by limited natural resources, remote location and difficult terrain. After vanquishing the separatist insurgency in the state, the Left Front government rule saw a 12% increase in number of workers compared to an average all India increase of just 2% between 2001 and 2011 as per Census data. The number of workers in industry increased by 90% between 2004-05 and 2014-15, compared to an all India average increase of 60%. In fact Tripura had a higher rate of growth than much richer states like Gujarat and Haryana, and it was ahead of all its neighbours in the North East. Even in implementation of the rural job guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) Tripura has consistently led all states with average number of days work provided at 80 days in Tripura compared to 46 days at the India level average.

■ "*The health facilities here are inadequate."*

This is another wild lie, without any backing. In Tripura, all health indicators show that the state has expanded its healthcare system hugely and ensured delivery of essential services. Infant mortality rate (IMR) has declined steeply by nearly 50% in the past decade and stands at 20 per thousand live births. This is on par with many advanced states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Punjab, and way better than others like Gujarat (33), Haryana (36) and less than half of Madhya Pradesh (50) and Assam (47). Maternal mortality rate (MMR) for Tripura (as derived from HMIS, GOI) is 62 per lakh live births, compared to the all India average of 174. There has been a massive expansion of health infrastructure in the state, especially in the remote tribal areas. After taking a decision to have one Health Sub-Centre (HSC) for every village, their number has increased by 92% since 2005, the highest increase among all states. These HSCs provide primary healthcare services, free testing, transport, child and mother care and various other services. The number of primary health centres (PHCs) and community health centres (CHCs) has also increased similarly. At the tertiary level, there are 12 sub-divisional hospitals (with 6 more under construction), 6 District Hospitals and another 6 State hospitals.

■ "*The Communists have unleashed poverty and unemployment."*

Unemployment we have seen above, but poverty? Amit Shah is living in a parallel universe! According to Planning Commission figures, Tripura saw one of the biggest declines in poverty rates of 62% between 2004-05 and 2011-12 (the last year for which data is available). The national average decline for the same period was 34%. The share of population living below poverty line is 14% in Tripura compared to nearly 17% in Gujarat, considered by Shah and Modi as a model of development. These figures are, of course, pegged very low for all states because of the ridiculously low level of poverty line as defined by the government. But the same definition applies to all, so the comparison shows the relative status.

It is clear from the above that Amit Shah – and hence the BJP – are going to rely on just such falsehoods to run their election campaign in Tripura. This strategy is backed by two other notable components: money and alliance with tribal separatists. Already Tripura is seeing a flood of flags, banners, election vans, SUVs, with crores being pumped in by the BJP. It is a desperate attempt to dazzle the Tripuri citizens and perhaps to bribe them into voting for BJP. In the coming days, as in Gujarat, PM Modi will surely put in an appearance or two and announce some projects. The other component is a dangerous game BJP is playing of trying to win over tribal votes by espousing the cause of separatists. It is aligning with the well known separatist organisation IPFT.

Wearing Black Badges, Journos Defend the Right to Report

Sujata Madhok

Welcoming Delhi Union of Journalists members and guests to a meeting on "**The Right to Investigate – UIDAI vs The Tribune** at the Gandhi Peace Foundation on 10 January, DUJ President S.K. Pande said the union had felt impelled to call a protest meeting against the filing of an FIR by the UIDAI against the Tribune newspaper and its reporter Rachna Khaira for exposing leaks in the Aadhaar system. He called upon all journalists to unite to defend themselves from such attacks on the right to investigate, to report freely and fearlessly and to be on guard against increasing shadows of Emergency and unity busters, to demand withdrawal of FIR against the investigative journalist and for phased action on common issues

A remarkable speech defending the freedom of expression by Tribune Editor Harish Khare kicked off the DUJ meeting. Chandigarh based Khare's speech, read out by Delhi bureau chief Prasad to an appreciative audience, stated that The Tribune was only doing "*a spot of old honest, legitimate investigative reporting*". *"We need to be thankful to the authorities for throwing the harsh provisions of the law at us because suddenly it was evident to one and all – from the most pro-government to the most professionally detached media outlets – that the sub-inspector can come calling on anyone of us, whatever be the colour of our partisanship,"* .

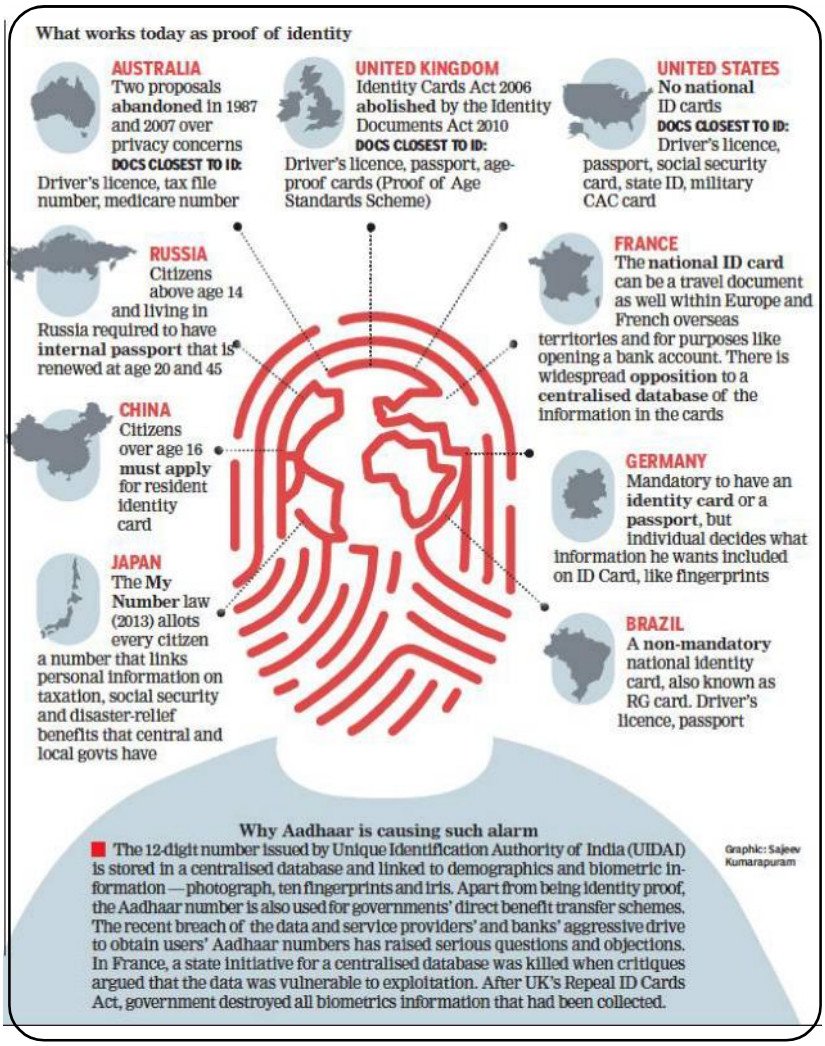
Siddharth Varadarajan, Editor of 'The Wire', observed that India is witnessing an all out assault on media freedom and the Constitution itself. He said as journalists are custodians of the citizens' right to know, it is their responsibility to defend this right. He cited the many recent attacks on journalists like Gauri Lankesh and Santanu Bhowmik among others, and the arrests and driving out of journalists from Chhattisgarh, particularly Dantewada. He said while governments are abusing various laws to target journalists, private corporations are misusing the civil defamation law to file frivolous cases. The use of SLAPP suits is becoming routine and he referred to the misuse of the CBI as in the raid on the home of the Roys of NDTV. He stated that while the Supreme Court rightly struck down S. 66 A of the IT Act to prevent arrest for social media posts, others sections of the Act such as S. 67 are being widely misused by the police. While calling the action against The Tribune vindictive, Varadarajan asked why numerous leaks of Aadhaar data by government websites have gone unpunished. He pointed out that a vast array of business persons is using this data but none of them have been investigated.

Advocate Mehmood Pracha said the Tribune reporter has done a commendable job in reporting the leaks and the charges against her cannot be sustained in any court of law. He said the way the Aadhaar scheme is being implemented is in direct contravention of the provisions of the Aadhaar Act itself, the preamble of which makes it clear that it is meant only for government's beneficial schemes. He cited sections of the Act including S.3 that says a citizen is '*entitled to obtain'* an identity card but does not make it mandatory, as the government insists. He said the Aadhaar process is illegal and a fraud on the people, a money spinning scheme with Rs one lakh crore of tax payers' money already milked through it and this process continuing. He said while today the government is insisting on biometric data, tomorrow it may demand more, even ask for our genome! The entire Aadhaar Act must go, he declared.

Paranjoy Guha Thakurta, former editor of the Economic & Political Weekly, put the issue in the global context saying that Aadhaar is a mass surveillance tool. Globally, technology is being

misused for such purposes as today there is enough server space in the world to record details of every individual on the planet as well as their activities. He pointed out that drones flying overhead have the capacity to snoop on all activity even in closed rooms! He said our dependence on technology is growing rapidly, with reports that soon Facebook alone may have 40 percent of the planet's people on it. Civil society has to find ways to protect itself, methods to protect our children and their children from such surveillance, he observed.

Veteran journalist Sukumar Muralidharan said we are witnessing an enormous crackdown on the public's right to know and on creative expression. He cited numerous examples of attacks on writers like M.M.Kalburgi and the censorship of many films as examples of the policing of public dialogue and discourse. He referred to a Supreme Court judgement in the Rangarajan vs Jagjivan Ram case which clearly says that there can only be reasonable restrictions on free speech and outlined what such reasonable restrictions could be. Despite these safeguards we are rapidly going into a zone of darkness, he warned. The optimism about the democratizing aspects of the social media may be unwarranted, he said, pointing out the rampant misuse of WhatsApp e.g. to incite lynchings in Jharkhand and 'showcase' the gruesome killing of a Muslim man in Rajasthan.



Commending the Tribune reporter's story, the Editor of *Hard News*, Sanjay Kapur said the sanctity of such reporting has to be protected, particularly as there is too much analysis and not enough reporting today. He regretted that in the current political climate every policy of the state has to be supported and those who question it are labeled anti-national. He called upon unions like the DUJ to rebuild solidarity among journalists and defend the right to write and report freely.

Veteran journalist Dr. Satish Mishra said the numerous attacks on the media, starting with the use of an abusive term like 'presstitute' by a minister, show that the government wants to completely control the media and crumble all resistance to its policies. He urged all to stand collectively and resist wherever we can.

Masoom Moradabadi, veteran Urdu journalist, echoing the need to dissent, read out a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz on the citizen and the poet's right to speak up against all oppression.

W. Chandrakant of the National Alliance of Journalists warned that there could be many more attacks on media in the future and said there is an urgent need to build solidarity among journalists. He said the NAJ has already organised several states and over 5000 journalists to come together and defend ourselves.

Sujata Madhok, General Secretary of the DUJ, making the concluding remarks, said that the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan" in its 'clean up' of the nation has included a crackdown on small newspapers and withdrawal of government advertising to them, forcing many to close down. This has rendered a large number of journalists unemployed. She warned that according to a recent speech by minister Rajyavardhan Rathore, the government's next focus is persons carrying press IDs, 'as many people are misusing such cards'. If this is done, she pointed out, many more journalists particularly freelancers and stringers and those working for websites, will lose access to their sources and to their work. She called for solidarity to oppose such measures that will add to the growing pool of unemployed media workers.

The meeting received solidarity messages from the president of All India Newspaper Employees Federation(AINEF) SD Thakur and called for withdrawal of FIR against The Tribune journalist. Solidarity action pledges were received from the National Alliance of Journalists units in Andhra, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh.

The Centre of Trade Union's general secretary Tapan Sen sent a press release of solidarity. He denounced the vindictive action on the journalist for bravely exposing systemic fault in Aadhaar. Similar messages were received from the All India Lawyers Union and a brief condemnation of the vindictive action against the Tribune reporter by senior Supreme Court advocate Rajeev Dhawan.

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Lal Bavta ASHA Gatpravartak Union Conference in Solapur

The first district level conference of the Lal Bavta ASHA Gatpravartak Union was held on 20th December in Solapur, Maharashtra and gave a call for participating in the 17th January strike, along with other scheme workers.

Around 500 ASHA workers and 50 Block facilitators participated in the conference, which began with flag hoisting , followed by floral tributes to the martyrs. The Conference was inaugurated by Dr. Mrs Bagade DHO. It was also addressed by CITU General Secretary, M H Shaikh, Narsayya Adam , Vice President CITU and ex MLA, and district ASHA Coordinator Mrs Shinde.

The report of activities was placed by Pushpa Patil and 14 delegates participated in the discussion on it. The conference passed four different resolutions on issues relating to women and resolved to double the union membership within one year, which is currently 1010 in 8 talukas.

The conference elected a 35 member district committee and a 13 member secretariat with Rajashri Nagargoje as President, Pushpa Patil as General Secretary and Saleem Patel as Treasurer.

After the conference a delegation met the District CEO and submitted a memorandum on the problems of ASHA workers.

ASHA Workers on the Move in Uttar Pradesh

ASHA workers, under the banner of the ASHA Workers Union, held a protest rally in Kabirnagar, UP to demand recognition as government employees and for a fixed monthly wage . In the meeting, held in Junior High School, Khalilabad, the ASHA workers resolved to sit on dharna at the Collectorate, on 17th January. The Demand Charter addressed to the Chief Minister will be handed over to the District Magistrate.

Saroj Yadav, district president of the union, said that before the elections to the state

assembly, the BJP had promised in its manifesto that ASHA workers would be recognized as government employees and be paid a fixed wage. After formation of the government during the last 9 months all they have received is only assurances. The dharnas being held at the Collectorates on 17 January are to warn the government. She said that if there are no positive provisions for the ASHA workers in the forthcoming Budget on 1st February, the union will burn copies of the budget in protest and decide on further intensified struggle.

Anganwadi Workers in Tamil Nadu: Movement on Wage Revision

In Tamilnadu, as the salaries and allowances of anganwadi workers and helpers have become the part and parcel of 7th Pay Commission reference, a joint forum of government employees and teachers was formed, called Jacto-geo, for a joint movement.

There were joint movements during the month of July and August –demonstrations at district and state level. Then an indefinite strike was called during the month of September. We participated in all these movements.

Meantime, the Madurai Bench of the Chennai High Court intervened and banned the strike. But the employees, along with teachers continued the strike. Then the High Court directed the government to respond to the demands. Accordingly , the Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary submitted the proposals for salaries revision.

Due to this struggle the anganwadi workers and helpers got a wage hike ranging from Rs.1800 to Rs.2500 per month corresponding to the 2.57 factor. Their pension was increased from Rs.1500 to Rs.2000 per month without the multiplication factor 2.57. The gratuity amount was also increased from Rs.60000 to Rs.one lakh.

But our basic demand of regularization was denied. Our salary structure continues to remain as Special Grade. the 2.57 factor used for salary alone, not for pension. So we decided to have a three phase independent struggle.

7 December 2017 Project level demonstrations

Demonstrations was held in about 206 out of 434 projects.

19,713 participated and around 14,000 leaflets were distributed.

20 December District level demonstrations

We had massive demonstrations in 28 districts out of the 32 districts in the state, in which around 30,000 participated

6,7,8 February Mahapadav in front of Tamil Nadu ICDS Directorate

Conventions of ASHA Workers in Haryana

In preparation for the Scheme Workers Strike on 17 January 2018, the ASHA Workers Union Haryana organised 4 zonal conventions. A total of around 400 district committee members and activists participated in these conventions, held in Rohtak, Kurukshetra, Fatehabad and Delhi. The unanimous decision taken in the conventions was that all the 22,000 ASHA workers in Haryana will go on strike on 17th January. They also decided to continue the struggle after the strike.

All India Strike of Scheme Workers -17 January 2018

Assam

Bihar

Delhi

Gujarat

Chattisgarh

All India Strike of Scheme Workers -17 January 2018

Himachal Pradesh

Jharkhand

Jammu

Kashmir

Haryana

All India Strike of Scheme Workers -17 January 2018

Maharshtra

Odisha

Punjab

Manipur

Karnataka

All India Strike of Scheme Workers -17 January 2018

Tamilnadu

Uttar Pradesh

West Bengal

Kerala

Telangana

Bhumi Adhikar Andolan
Fact Finding Team

Fact-Finding Team Visits Bharatpur, Alwar, Rajsamand and Udaipur in Rajasthan
Finds Increasing Attacks in the Name of Gau-Raksha
Campaign and Attacks in the Name of Love Jihad and on Communal Lines Grow
State Complicity in Protection to Gau-Rakshaks, Failure in Maintaining Law and Order

A Fact-Finding Team under the banner of Bhumi Adhikar Andolan visited Bharatpur, Alwar, ... th and 7th January, 2018 to look into the increasing incidents of lynching and attacks in the name of Gau-Raksha, encounter killings, deliberate communal polarisation and attacks on Muslims in the State.

The delegation included K.K Ragesh MP Rajya Sabha from Kerala and Joint Secretary AIKS, Badrudduzza Khan , MP Lok Sabha from Bengal, Mehaboob Alam, MLA from Bihar and leader of AIKMS, Amra Ram Ex MLA and Vice President AIKS, Dr. Vijoo Krishnan Joint Secretary, AIKS, P.Krishnaprasad Ex MLA and Finance Secretary AIKS, Thirunavukkarasu, President, AIAWU, Advocates from Supreme Court P.V.Surendra Nath, Senior Advocate, Adv. Resmitha R Chandran, Adv. K.R.Subhash Chandran, Bilal Khan, National Organiser, NAPM, Mujahid Nafees, leader of BAA from Gujarat, Devendra singh Chouhan, Vice President AIKMS, Dhirendra Bhadauria , EC member AIKMS, Rajasthan BAA leaders Chhagan Lal Choudhary (AIKS), Dr. Sanjay Madhav (AIKS), Sawai Singh (Samagra Sewa Sangh), Moulana Haneef, Virendrra Vidrohi (INSAF) among others. A group of media persons also accompanied the delegation.

Findings in Bharatpur and Alwar

The BAA delegation that visited Ghatmeeka Village in Bharatpur district met the family of Ummar Khan who was killed by Cow Terrorists. The village, about 120 kilometres from the National Capital, was a sign of utter neglect and people are denied of the basic facilities like proper roads, well-equipped schools, health-centres, water-supply and other basic amenities. The village, which falls within the Mewat region has witnessed no communal disturbances and people of Hindu as well as Muslim community have lived in harmony. The family of Ummar Khan lives in utter poverty and his mother, wife and children are in an inconsolable state with no support or compensation coming forward from the BJP led State Government. The team found that every household is engaged in dairying and all homesteads have cows, buffaloes or goats from which the people earn their livelihood.

In the interaction with the people of the village, community leaders and the elected representatives of the Panchayat the team found that there was a systematic attempt to brand the entire Muslim community in Mewat region as criminal. Certain elements in the Police department are working in connivance with the communal forces to brand villagers belonging to the minority community as criminals, reminiscent of the British colonial branding of certain tribes as Criminal Tribes. While interacting with the topmost Revenue and Police officers of Alwar, where the repeated incidents of killing of dairy farmers have taken place, the team found a high degree of prejudice against the minority community. This prejudice and clear bias and religious profiling have led to numerous false cases being filed against dairy farmers as cow smugglers and their systematic harassment. The approach of the Collector and Superintendent of Police in Alwar was insensitive and they were carrying forward the narrative of the Gaurakshaks. It was only a day before the

visit of the team that the remaining four of those accused in the killing of Ummar Khan were arrested. However, Tahir and Javed, who were arrested on the name of cow-smuggling in the same case, have been languishing in the jail without bail.

In Alwar the family of Talim, a 22 year old who was killed in what they alleged was a fake encounter met the team and explained how he had been shot point-blank and no FIR had been lodged even days after the incident. A series of Gau-Raksha Police Outposts in the region also act hand-in-glove with the vigilante groups.

Rajsamand and Udaipur

In Rajsamand where Afrazul was killed in a brutal manner and the whole act was videographed and made viral on social media, the team met with the Collector and the Superintendent of Police. The approach of the officials here was cooperative and they pointed out that the killer had conspired to kill and propagate a false story of Love-Jihad in a planned manner. He had also trained the 15 year old accomplice to shoot the gory incident. The authorities also informed that the region was known for communal harmony and the incident seems to have been a deliberate and motivated act to disturb peace in the region. They also informed the team that they had taken prompt action to freeze the account to which Hindutva fundamentalists had transferred amount for the killer's family. A compensation of Rs.5 Lakh had been offered to the family of Afrazul they informed. A meeting with people of Rajsamand also confirmed and corroborated some of the views expressed by them.

In Udaipur a Jan Sunvai was held where victims of communal attacks and police harassment met the team and apprised them of the volatile situation being deliberately created by the ruling BJP and Sangh Parivar. Rashida Bi, widow of Zafar Khan, who was killed in Pratapgarh for objecting to the photography of women defecating in the open met the team and explained that all the culprits are moving around scot-free and the BJP Government has also given no compensation for the family. Auto drivers, retired government personnel, traders and others from the minority community brought to the notice of the team that they were facing threats, attacks and intimidation on a day to day basis. They also pointed out that the police is entering homes without following due processes and also arresting people by falsely implicating them. The team assured them that their issues will be raised in the Parliament, with the National Human Rights Commission and other authorities and build resistance to the communal forces. A detailed report of the Fact-Finding team will be released later.

There is total loss of faith in the law and order mechanism and the BJP led State Government. It is a matter of grave concern that the main opposition party in the State, the Congress, has failed to address the issue and mobilise opinion against the communal attacks on citizens. Unfortunately they have made no efforts to reach out to the families of victims or those facing attacks or being arrested on false charges.

Triple Talaq Bill is Fundamentally Flawed

Brinda Karat

The Lok Sabha has adopted the bill on *talaq-e-biddat* moved by the Modi government. The CPI(M) members of parliament had moved amendments to the bill and also demanded that it be referred to the standing committee. The bill is fundamentally flawed. There are several issues involved.

The Background

The issue of *talaq-e-biddat* or instant arbitrary pronouncement of divorce has been a privilege enjoyed by Muslim men in India at the cost of the dignity and security of Muslim women. In most countries with a substantial Muslim population including in those countries governed by the *sharia*, this form of divorce is not recognised. In the experience of women's organisations in India who are working with women who are traumatised because of domestic disputes or domestic violence, the fear of abandonment or divorce is very real and this cuts across communities. For various reasons, including financial and cultural, women rarely move for divorce. Easy divorce procedures almost always favour men. There are no level playing fields between men and women in the domestic sphere in patriarchal societies like India. Therefore women who face divorce threats require mechanisms and procedures, whether through conciliation or counseling, which they believe can help to prevent arbitrary divorce and protect their rights and those of their children, if not their marriage. Arbitrary and instant triple talaq, a most cruel form of divorce was thus opposed by most women's organisations.

When all efforts at discussion by women's organisations with so-called leaders of the community such as the Muslim Personal Law Board failed because of their retrograde mindset regarding women's rights and their highly subjective and questionable interpretation of religious texts, Muslim women went to the Supreme Court for justice. In August 2016, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Muslim women's petitions although on differing grounds. The entire issue arose because of the struggle of Muslim women and women's organisations which approached it as an issue of women's equal rights within the framework of personal laws reform.

CPI(M) support

The CPI(M) has supported personal law reform within communities. The Party welcomed the Supreme Court judgement. The main concern is that in the name of tradition or patriarchal interpretations of religious texts women of any particular community governed within the present framework of personal law cannot be denied justice or face discrimination compared to women of other communities. Thus the approach is based on an approach of personal law reform while expanding the ambit of secular laws applicable to women of all communities. The law for example on protections given to women against domestic violence which also provides civil remedies such as right to residence is an important legislation which gives equal rights to women of all communities. This twin approach, namely personal law reform combined with expansion in secular pro-women laws, in the particular circumstances prevailing in India will benefit women of all communities

In contrast, the BJP-RSS framework is premised on diluting the constitutional provisions for religious freedom on the pretext of protecting Muslim women's rights. At the time of the court hearings, the Modi government made it abundantly clear through its various statements, that it saw the issue as an opportunity to score a political point against the community as a whole. The arguments of the then attorney general to expand the scope of the court intervention to other aspects of Muslim personal law and also for a uniform civil code were not accepted by the court. In fact, the then chief justice specifically referring to the AGs arguments warned against a "cascading effect." Justice Kurien held that the "power of the legislature has to be exercised

within the constitutional parameters without curbing religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution." The court thus cautioned the government against a sectarian approach.

Fundamentally flawed

But the Modi government has flouted the balanced and constitutionally guided approach of the Supreme Court and brought a bill which is fundamentally flawed on several grounds.

Firstly the bill was conceived, drafted and adopted without any discussion at all with those who are affected. The bill is titled The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, yet at no stage were Muslim women, their representatives or women's organisations consulted. It is a mockery and travesty of justice that the opinions of those in whose name a legislation is proposed, were ignored by this government. What then is the credibility of the claims made by government representatives that this was all done to help Muslim women?

In the past, all bills connected with women's rights have been discussed threadbare. For example, soon after independence, parliament considered the Hindu Code Bill which suggested radical reforms in personal laws applicable to Hindus. It took over ten years of discussions before it was finally adopted, although in a diluted form as far as women's rights are concerned.

The 2004 Bill on Amendments to the Hindu Succession Act to establish equal rights to Hindu women in ancestral property was referred to a standing committee which suggested certain amendments. Women's organisations had an opportunity to appear before the committee with their recommendations. It was adopted only after the report of the standing committee had been considered. The law on protection of women against domestic violence also went through the standing committee. The 2010 Bill to amend Marriage laws to include irretrievable breakdown as a ground for divorce was also sent to the standing committee. Ultimately the bill lapsed.

There are numerous such examples. The question is why was the same procedure not adopted for the present bill?

This bill has been pushed through with hardly a day's discussion. The ruling party misused its single party majority in the Lok Sabha bulldozing the demand of the opposition to refer it to a standing committee for further discussion. This authoritarian method undermines democracy and the parliamentary form of governance.

Secondly, on substantive grounds too, the bill raises questions which require further discussion. The bill by including a three year jail sentence for any Muslim man who divorces his wife through the practice of *talaq-e-biddat* or instant and arbitrary triple talaq, criminalises what is essentially a civil matter. It makes the "offence" "cognisable and non- bailable." This is in sharp contrast to what the government approach is to an existing criminal law against domestic violence under Sec 498a. Here the Modi government wants to dilute the law and make it non cognizable and bailable. In one case it wants to make a civil matter a criminal offense and at the same time in another matter of concern to women of all communities, it wants to eliminate punishment for a criminal offense of domestic violence or dowry demands. Women's organisations are fighting the government moves on this count.

While making it cognizable and non-bailable there is no mention in the bill as to who is recognised as the complainant and within which time framework the complaint would be valid? In the absence of such a definition it would mean that any third party could without any time restriction, complain that such a pronouncement has been made and this would lead to arrest of the "accused" with no possibility of getting bail. This is a draconian clause which cannot be accepted.

The right to divorce or the act of divorce itself is not a criminal offence. Personal laws of all communities give the right to divorce to both men and women. The issue is: what is the method of divorce accepted by law. The Supreme Court in its judgement held that the practice of instant and arbitrary triple talaq known as *talaq-e-biddat*, was invalid. Contrary to common public perception it did not strike down all forms of triple talaq as being invalid, but only one specific form, that of *talaq-e- biddat*. The 395-page judgement ends with a short order: *"In view of the*

different opinions recorded, by a majority of 3:2 the practice of talaq-e-biddat - triple talaq is set aside." It is signed by all the five judges involved, namely Jagdish Singh Khehar (chief justice), Kurian Joseph, Rohinton Fali Nariman, Uday Umesh Lalit and S Abdul Nazeer. Nowhere in the judgement or even in the differing opinions recorded by the judges, does even a single one of them refer to the practice as a criminal offence. The main argument put forward by the majority was that it was not an essential part of the Koran, it was not practiced in a majority of countries governed by the sharia or where there were large Muslim populations. The judgement actually went against the Modi government's arguments which were essentially against Muslim personal laws in favour of a uniform civil code.

The minority judgement of Chief Justice Khehar and Justice Nazeer argued against any legal intervention on grounds that it was not for the courts but for the legislature to decide.

However they made it very clear from their comments that while suggesting that a "suitable" law should be adopted, they upheld the validity of practices which in their opinion were an essential part of religion, including triple talaq. It is therefore completely misleading on the part of government to claim sanction of the Supreme Court to justify pushing through the bill. In fact what the minority judgement said is, "If the legislative process commences before the expiry of the period of six months, and a positive decision emerges towards redefining '*talaq-e-biddat'* (three pronouncements of 'talaq', at one and the same time) – as one, or alternatively, if it is decided that the practice of *'talaq-e-biddat'* be done away with altogether, the injunction would continue, till legislation is finally enacted. Failing which, the injunction shall cease to operate."

In several countries governed by the *sharia,* when the talaq is given three times at one and the same time, it is by law considered as only one talaq. This is the practice referred to by the then Chief Justice Khehar when he stated "that three talaq is redefined as one." In this method of divorce there has to be a minimum period of a month, or one menstrual cycle, before the second talaq is pronounced. And then another month before the third talaq. This also provides time and space for reconciliation procedures. This is far from the criminalisation approach which is the main thrust of the Modi government's bill.

In some countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh there are provisions for imprisonment of the husband for between three months to one year. But this sentencing is enforced if the husband seeking divorce violates any of the legal procedures for divorce which include mandatory counselling and reconciliation discussions by designated authorities and so on. Mechanisms are provided for these procedures. But the present bill provides for no such procedures or mechanisms. These are issues which require further discussion and consultation.

Thirdly, the bill is self contradictory. While the stated purpose is to invalidate *talaq-e-biddat,* it actually recognizes the *talaq-e-biddat* victim as being divorced as it speaks of custody of the children. Why should the issue of custody of children arise if the divorce is invalid and the woman is still married?

Further, the bill speaks of a subsistence allowance for the woman and her dependent children to be decided by a magistrate. If the man is in jail for three years, who will pay the allowance? Will Modi government do so? And when the man comes out of jail will the government guarantee that he will live with his wife? Obviously, not. Then in what way does the woman benefit? There are laws in existence which guarantee better rights for women including the civil law against domestic violence which guarantees a portion of the shared home. The bill does not mention anything about the right to residence.

It is precisely because there are many issues which require further discussion including the question as to whether such a bill is required at all, that the demand for reference to a standing committee should get wide public support.

The credentials of the Modi government in being concerned about women's rights are questionable. The haste with which it wants to push this bill has more to do with narrow sectarian agendas than with the rights of Muslim women.

The Rising of the Women

A sea change in the global workforce

Megan Cornish

Mumbai bank employee and union member participates in nationwide strike on Sept. 2, 2016. Photo: Reuters

In the early 1900s, women in most of the world were relatively new to wage work and a small minority in the labor force. But their dynamism was an inspiring thing to behold.

In 1912 in Lawrence, Mass., 30,000 textile employees struck, most of them teenaged and female. Their walkout became known as the Bread and Roses strike, named for the slogan they raised. Against daunting odds, they succeeded in winning increased pay, a victory that reverberated throughout New England factories and stoked the early labor movement. At the time, women were just 20 percent of wage earners in the U.S.

Then came the world-shaking walkout by women textile workers in St. Petersburg on International Women's Day in 1917. It sparked a general strike that within five days overthrew the czar and ignited the Russian Revolution.

Those battles are early chapters in the epic story of women workers. Today, women globally make up almost 40 percent of the labor force. Astonishingly, this fact — and what it means for society — has been widely ignored.

The surge

Over the past decades, the number of women workers has exploded both in the industrialized world and in underdeveloped countries. In the U.S., women grew from 33 percent of the workforce in 1960 to 46 percent in 2016. In Mexico, the change was from 25 percent in 1979 to 37 percent in 2016.

In most regions, women weigh in at well over 40 percent of the workforce. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are 46 percent in North America and 45 percent in Europe and Central Asia. But they are also 46 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 43 percent in East Asia and the Pacific. The smallest percentages are in the Middle East and North Africa, at 21 percent, and South Asia, at 26 percent.

Great leaps have been in Latin America and the Caribbean, where women went from 34 percent of workers in 1990 to 41 percent in 2016. Among other impacts, this increase has helped revitalize the feminist movement in Latin America, which has made new alliances with labor unions and the environmental cause.

A march at the end of this year's National Women's Encounter in Argentina attracted up to 70,000 people. Teachers' strikes are spreading across Latin America, while mass mobilizations demand abortion rights and fight against femicide and patriarchal culture.

Bad news for the powers-that-be

As Frederick Engels explained in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, women have been oppressed since the rise of private property. Because women bear the children, they have long had the role of caring for them and maintaining the household. In clan-based societies, this work was collective and socially valued. Now it is considered private and is not paid directly.

Before women entered the modern capitalist workforce, their survival depended on the wages of their husbands — and woe to the female on her own! Now it generally takes two paychecks to maintain a household. At the same time, the fact that domestic work inside the family is still not paid for explains why women's labor outside the home is so undervalued. The non-payment and underpayment of women's labor is an essential prop to capitalist profits.

But change is coming. Because some of the work women traditionally do in the home must now be undertaken by someone else who gets paid for it, the worth of domestic labor becomes more evident.

And when women work, their consciousness is hugely transformed. They come to recognize their value — and power. They also gain enormous might to transform society. This shows in everything from the feminist, race liberationist and gender-openness of U.S. youth to mass outrage against sexual violence in India and across Latin America.

Female employees experience the worst that capitalism offers on the job, from sexual abuse to squalid, dangerous conditions and unequal pay, which can force them to choose between buying food and paying the rent. This discrimination, violence and super-exploitation fuels their willingness to take risks and ferociousness in fighting back in all arenas.

A shot in the arm for labour

Collectively, women have the unique quality of being the doubly downtrodden half of every oppressed nation, race, and group.

This, in combination with their typical role as the mainspring of the family, tends to enlarge their social awareness. They bring into the labor movement their concerns about things like childcare, education, healthcare, discrimination, and global issues like war and its effects. They push organized labor to go beyond narrow "bread and butter" demands. This is especially true for women of color, immigrants, and queer and trans women.The fact that women are oppressed on multiple counts also gives them a great ability to unify struggles. In the labor movement, they are more likely to build coalitions and reach out to community groups, making union organizing more socially relevant and effective.

Women are making an impact both in the traditional labor movement and in the rising organizing among workers in the informal sector of the economy, where they are the majority.

As examples, UNITE HERE in the U.S. has campaigned to protect hotel workers from sexual harassment, and the International Domestic Workers Federation campaigns globally against gender-based violence. The organization of female marine workers in India, SNEHA, has fought for healthcare, sanitation and education as well as labor rights. Groups have formed for people who make their living in the informal economy, including home-based workers, street vendors, sex workers, and waste pickers who salvage materials. Ripped-off garment industry employees in Turkey are alerting customers with clothing tags that say, "*I made this item you are going to buy, but I didn't get paid for it."*

All of this is good news for the world labor movement, especially in this period of capitalism's ugly decline. Women's increasing participation in the workforce will be a motor force in building working-class struggle, giving it a militancy and breadth and depth of vision that is desperately needed.

(Courtesy: Freedom Socialist)

On Attack on Dalit Community People in Maharashtra and the Dangerous Caste Games of RSS led Hindutva Forces

The CITU strongly condemns the attack by Hindutva forces on people from the Dalit community who were observing the bicentenary of the battle of Bhima Koregaon near Pune in Maharashtra on 1st January 2018.

According to media reports, one person has been killed, 25 vehicles torched and over 50 vehicles damaged by the attackers. Every year thousands of people from the dalit community visit Koregaon Bhima to observe the anniversary of January 1, 1818, victory of British troops over Peshwa Bajirao II's army. The British troops were mostly from dalit community whereas the Peshwa's army was majority Marathas.

According to media reports and most video footage available shows people with saffron flags and shirts attacking people with blue flags and cars with blue signs. This clearly shows the well organised and planned attack by the hindutva forces .

CITU congratulates the people of Maharashtra for condemning the uncivilized barbaric act of the hindutva brigade by observing a very successful state-wide Maharashtra Bandh the next day. This incident is yet another incident of attack on minorities, particularly muslims, dalits and tribals, by the RSS led forces with the active support of the BJP led governments in states. It has to be noted that those who are victims of the violence belong to the working class, agricultural workers or small peasants and most deprived sections of the society.

The Hindutva ideology suits the strategy of the ruling classes of the day to divide the toiling classes who are fighting against the neoliberal policies. CITU calls upon the working class and other secular democratic sections of society to come out against the Hindutva forces and build the unity of the toiling masses on people's issues of lives and livelihood and isolate these communal forces.

On Limitless FDI in Air-India and Retail Trade

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) denounces the Government announcement of allowing 49 per cent FDI in the country's national carrier – Air India. The Modi Government had already decided to push Air India for wholesale privatization, and to expedite such a privatization move, it has now made this announcement of permitting 49 per cent FDI. Actually, this is nothing but complete foreignisation of the national carrier – a public sector company with its huge asset base and a high-revenue earning international service network.

The government of the day is making the plea of huge loss the Air India is being burdened with to justify privatisation. But it seeks to hide the fact that Air India has been pushed to this situation not because of its management's failure but owing to imposition of disastrous decisions on the company by successive governments at the Centre like hasty merger of Indian Airlines and Air India; forcible procurement of huge fleet of aircraft from foreign companies through direct purchase

at an inopportune time, thereby imposing on the company an unbearable burden of indebtedness leading to loss.

Despite such reckless and imprudent misadventure and subsequent hurdles imposed by successive governments, including the current one through the concerned Ministry, Air India struggled to come back to operating profit for last three years. Despite that, the present government decided to privatise the national carrier, and to hasten the process, the door is now opened wide for foreign companies to take over. Such a destructive decision is being pursued by the government despite the concerned Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, comprising of representatives of all the political parties including BJP, unanimously recommending not to privatise Air India, at least for three years more while helping it to speed up its improvement which has already set in. When privatization, rather foreignisation, of national assets becomes the main goal of the government, then such a destructive decision of foreignisation of the national carrier is being taken by the government, completely unconcerned about the national interests. CITU vehemently condemns such a destructive move.

Equally destructive is the decision of the government of allowing 100 per cent FDI in single brand retail trade which, in the background of fast corporatization of the retail trade sector, has already been putting the existing decentralized retail trade sector in severe difficulties and crisis. Allowing 100 per cent FDI in single brand retail trade will further increase the hardship of traditional retail trade sector which is the second biggest livelihood giver after agriculture and expedite the ruin of the traditional retail trade sector.

CITU condemns these destructive and reckless decisions on FDI, that are destined to damage the national economy and reduce employment. CITU calls upon the working class to build up determined resistance against such deliberate exercise towards degeneration of the national economy and peoples' livelihood, through both sectoral and united nationwide struggle.

On Vindictive Action on Journalist for Exposing Systemic Fault in AADHAR

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions denounces the government move in registering an FIR against the journalist of the Tribune, Rachna Khaira and her sources for exposing the leakage-prone systemic fault in AADHAR administration. In fact the journalist should have been rewarded for successfully investigating the faults in the UIDAI system in respect of protecting individual data for preventing intrusion on peoples' right to privacy, which has been upheld by the Supreme Court also.

Such a vindictive action is the reflection of an obnoxious, authoritarian arrogance of the government as if "the King can do no wrong". It is also an assault on the freedom of the Press. In fact such fragility and faults of the AADHAR biometric system in ensuring the personal data of individuals is secure and leakage-protected has been pointed out by numerous agencies/organizations/ institutions and was also raised in Parliament. But the arrogance of the government to not recognize the defects and faults in the system and its fall-outs even for corrective action, raises serious doubts about its complicity in maintaining the leakage-proneness of the system to serve various groups of vested interests.

CITU welcomes the rising protests against such vindictive action of the government from various organizations and agencies including the journalists and newspaper employees' unions and urges the government to take a call in initiating corrective action. CITU demands that the government withdraw the FIR against the journalist in the interest of fairness and propriety.

Legitimising Corporate Influence and Bribery

The details of the scheme of electoral bonds outlined by the finance minister in parliament have only confirmed what was apprehended when the proposal for electoral bonds was first announced in the January 2017-18 budget. The scheme is nothing but a way of harnessing corporate funding for the ruling party and facilitating the takeover of the political system by big money.

According to the finance minister, the electoral bond will be a bearer instrument in the nature of a promissory note. Selected branches of the State Bank of India would issue the electoral bonds purchased through a valid account. The bond would be in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1,00,000, Rs 10,00,000 and Rs 100,00,000. The bond would be available at the designated SBI branches for ten days each in the months of January, April, July and October.

The bond will have a life of 15 days during which it can be donated to a registered political party who can encash it through their party's bank account. The party does not have to disclose who it received the bond from.

The finance minister claims that this will bring in more transparency and cleanse political funding. Such a claim is hypocritical and far from the truth. If transparency is the goal, the identity of the donor and that of the recipient party should be publicly known.

The system of electoral bonds will only facilitate corporate funding to the ruling party and open the way for legitimising bribery and corruption. Companies will have the incentive to provide huge contributions to the ruling party to earn its favour. Already through the last Finance Bill, an amendment has been made to the Company Law. The cap on companies giving funds to political parties of 7.5 per cent of the average of net profits earned in the previous three years has been removed. Further, the amendment had done away with the requirement which provides for disclosure of the name of the political party to which the company makes the contribution.

Thus, a company can give unlimited amounts as donations to a political party. Moreover, it is not obliged by the electoral bond system to disclose to which party it has donated.

The quid quo pro for getting an offset contract for the Rafale deal, or the various pay-offs for legalising the regulatory violations of a leading business house can now take the form of electoral bonds.

The donations made through electoral bonds will be through the State Bank of India, the biggest nationalised bank as per the scheme. Though the identity of the company or donor will not be made public, the government will have the means to find out the identity of such donors from bank data which can be accessed through government agencies. No company or big donor will risk the ire of the ruling party and government by giving donations to the opposition parties.

The donations made through anonymous bonds will only facilitate and legitimise bribery. As of now a company which wins a contract would have to pay a bribe illegally under the table. The electoral bond scheme will make all such kickbacks legal. For instance, if a commission of 10 per cent has to be paid by a company for getting a contract worth Rs 1,000 crore, all it has to do is to

provide a electoral bond for the amount of Rs 100 crore to the ruling party. There is no way for the public to know about such a donation, nor can any investigating agency ask questions about it.

The other less noticed aspect of the electoral bond scheme is that it opens the way for foreign companies to fund political parties in India without it becoming public. In the Finance Bill of 2016, the government had amended the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to treat contributions by Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies as funding from Indian sources. With this amendment of the FCRA, foreign corporate funding to political parties was legalised.

It may be recalled that all the amendments made to the Representation of People Act, the Reserve Bank of India Act, the Income Tax Act and so on were smuggled in through the Finance Bill. Since the Finance Bill is a Money Bill, these amendments were thus put outside the purview of scrutiny and voting in the Rajya Sabha.

The Modi government's brazen effort to establish a nexus with the corporates for political funding must be resolutely opposed. The electoral bond scheme is not acceptable, and corporate funding to political parties must be opposed. An important aspect of electoral reforms would be to prohibit corporate funding to political parties. Instead, corporates should be allowed to donate to a State run trust which will utilise such money for State funding of elections.

All donations to political parties, as per the existing provisions of law, of Rs 20,000 and above, should be recorded with the identity, address and PAN card details of the donor. There should be no violation of this provision as provided in the electoral bond scheme.

"Why do some people have to go barefoot so that others can drive luxury cars? Why are some people able to live only 35 years in order that others can live 70 years? Why do some people have to be miserably poor in order that others can be extravagantly rich? I speak for all the children in the world who don't even have a piece of bread." – Fidel Castro

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Why these Marches, Demonstrations, Agitations?

People often ask "What is gained by
marches, demonstrations, agitations…?"

These prove that we are alive,
that we are firm in our commitment,
that we have not left the field.

We give proof of our determination
not to accept defeat.

We show that we cannot be made to retreat
from our goal, by bullets or oppression.

We reiterate that we will bring
to an end this system,
which is based on greed and blood.

-Munshi Premchand
(Translated from the original in Hindi)

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