

The Voice of the Working Woman



LONG MARCH
Punjab Angnawadi Employees
28-30 May 2018



5 September 2018

Worker – Peasant Sangharsh Rally



Joint meeting of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU decided to have intense campaign throughout the country and maximum mobilisation on the following demands

1. Curb price rise; universalise Public Distribution System; ban forward trading in essential commodities,
2. Concrete measures for generation of decent employment,
3. Minimum wage of not less than Rs 18000 per month for all workers,
4. Stop anti worker labour law amendments,
5. Remunerative price for the peasants as per Swaminathan Committee recommendations; ensure public procurement,
6. Debt waiver for poor peasants and agricultural workers,
7. Comprehensive legislation for agricultural workers,
8. Implementation of MGNREGA in all rural areas;

amendment to the Act to cover urban areas, **9.** Food security, health, education, housing for all, **10.** Universal social security, **11.** No contractorisation, **12.** Redistributive land reforms, **13.** Stop forcible land acquisition, **14.** Relief and rehabilitation for the victims of natural calamities, **15.** Reverse neoliberal policies

The objective of the campaign:

- ‘To Reach the Unreached’ - Workers at the grass root level in as many sectors as possible
- ‘To Link up Issues with Policies; Expose Politics Behind the Policies’ – Politicise the Workers

CITU

AIKS

AIAWU

The Voice
of the
Working Woman

Monthly Journal of the AICWW(CITU)

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Fight for Social Justice to Defend Unity of the Class

Not a day goes by without one or the other report appearing on the atrocities committed on dalits. A dalit boy was beaten for having a 'stylish' hair-cut; another for riding a horse; another for wearing new clothes; one for adding 'Sinh' to his name....and such frivolous reasons are very many. Such attacks on dalits have increased since the BJP led government has come to power at the centre.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2016 report, every day four dalit women are raped, two dalits are murdered, two dalit houses are burnt, and 11 dalits are beaten up. The number of cases of atrocities against dalits, registered under the Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) Act, rose from 38670 in 2015 to 40801 in 2016. Large numbers of cases remain unregistered. Besides, the conviction rate is very low, in 2016, it was as low as only 25.7%. This is in stark contrast to the conviction rate for all crimes under IPC in 2016, which was 46.8%. The same NCRB data also shows that nearly 90% of cases for dalits and over 87% cases for adivasis remained pending for trial by the end of 2016. Hardly any public servant has ever been convicted under the PoA Act, for wilful neglect of duty.

The PoA Act itself was seen as insufficient to achieve its goals; there was popular demand to strengthen it by necessary amendments.

It is in this situation that the Supreme Court delivered its verdict diluting the PoA Act. Since this judgement, attacks on dalits have further increased, particularly in the BJP ruled states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Despite all its 'jumlas' to attract dalit votes, the RSS led Hindutva forces continue to be committed to '*Manusmriti*' that destines dalits to dirtiest jobs in society and treats them as 'outcastes' of the '*Varna*' system. It is this upper caste chauvinism and the deep anti dalit bias of the BJP and the governments led by it that have strengthened the hands of the fanatics who are attacking dalits.

The BJP government was initially reluctant to challenge the verdict. The state governments ruled by BJP unleashed severe repression on dalits who had come out in large numbers against the verdict and demanding the government to file a review petition. 11 people died in the repression let loose on them, not only by the police but also by the RSS goons. Instead of punishing the real culprits, the BJP governments have registered false cases against thousands of dalits and threw them including into jails.

The BJP government in Maharashtra exhibited the same anti dalit attitude during the Bhima Koregaon incident. Instead of taking strong action against Sambhaji Bhide who incited the violence, the state government arrested large numbers of dalits on false charges. Recently, it went ahead another step and arrested five activists who were involved in the campaign for justice for those attacked, killed and injured in the Bhima Koregaon incident, accusing them of 'urban Maoists', planning seditious and antinational activities and plotting to assassinate the Prime Minister.

This is an ominous portent of the extent the BJP government under Modi could go to suppress any dissent. The working class of the country, which is in the midst of serious struggle against the anti worker, anti people policies of the BJP government led by Modi, has to take a serious note of these attempts to suppress and throttle opposition to the government policies and the way of thinking of the RSS and the BJP. It has to expose all such machinations to divide workers on the basis of caste, religion etc and protect its unity to strengthen the struggle against all kinds of exploitation and oppression. It has to stand in solidarity with the dalits fighting for their rights.

Communalism – A Dangerous Weapon in the Hands of Ruling Class

Savera

- *On February 1 2018, a young man Ankit Saxena was brutally killed in Delhi by family members of his girlfriend. He was Hindu, the girl was Muslim. They loved each other and had decided to get married. Religion didn't matter to them. It would have been yet another case of so-called 'honour' killing and BJP politicians tried to make it into a communal matter but the murdered boy's father turned the tables on everybody. He declared publicly, "I had one son. If I get justice, it's good. If not, even then I don't have hatred against any community. I have no such (communal) thinking".*
- *About two months later, on March 27, a class 10 boy Sibtulla was killed in communal riots that erupted in Asansol after BJP-RSS associated organisations took out an aggressive procession on Ramnavmi day. His father Maulana Imdadul Rashidi who is the imam of a local mosque declared after his son's body was found two days later: "I want peace. My boy has been taken away. I don't want any more families to lose their loved ones. I don't want any more houses to burn."*

In spite of losing their beloved sons to this senseless violence based on religion, the two fathers held up a mirror to the country. They displayed a flame of humanity that still burns inside most people of the country but is being stamped out by religious fundamentalists.

Since coming to power four years ago, in 2014, BJP and its associates of the Sangh Parivar have unleashed a wave of violence against minority communities fuelled by a poisonous campaign of lies and hatred carried out amongst the people, incendiary statements from leaders and shielding of criminals from legal action. Hindu festivals have been turned into armed celebrations that viciously target minority communities, as happened in Asansol. Hindu fanatic elements have used 'cow protection' as a pretext to attack Muslims and Dalits. All elections are vitiated by communal propaganda both overtly in public campaigning and covertly through hate-filled social media messaging. In many cases local police was reported to be complicit in the violence.

Incidents of communal violence have increased by 28% between 2014 and 2017. In these three years, nearly 3000 communal incidents have taken place taking a toll of about 400 lives and leaving nearly 9000 people injured. Officially registered cases of inciting communal violence have gone up by 41% in this period from 366 in 2014 to 475 in 2017. Another minority community in the country, the Christians, too are facing growing violence from the Sangh Parivar. An estimated 700 attacks have taken place on churches, clergy, carol singers, Christmas and Easter events and missionaries across the country in the past 4 years. In all of these, common people suffered the most: they lost livelihoods and wages, they were forced to stop any agitations for their rights, and their employers were happy that workers' unity was disrupted.

The communal poison that has been actively spread has led to 78 cases of mob attacks and lynchings in the name of cow protection, led mostly by Sangh Parivar associated persons. These horrific attacks caused deaths of 29 people and left 273 injured, including 148 seriously injured. Over two thirds of the victims were Muslims and the remaining mostly Dalits.

A barbaric incident in January this year symbolises the way this ideology works. An eight year old Bakarwal girl was abducted, kept in a place of worship and repeatedly raped before being murdered in Kathua, Jammu. The reasons motivating the criminals included their desire to get rid of the Bakarwal Muslims who had settled near their village. RSS-BJP and its associates openly sided with the accused. This incident was reminiscent of the rapes and molestations done by Hindu fanatic mobs in Gujarat and elsewhere.

Among the various “issues” that have been manufactured by the Sangh parivar to spread this poison against Muslims and Christians are “love jihad”, forcible conversion, beef, population growth, allegiance to Pakistan or international jihadists, etc. The govt. on its part, has mostly kept silent on all of these issues and the violence that has been perpetrated, barring some hypocritical and anodyne statements. Behind the scenes, however, it is clear that perpetrators of violence are shielded, while BJP leaders become hyper active in case a Muslim person is involved in a crime.

The discriminatory policy of the govt. is also visible in its Budget allocation for the Ministry of Minority Affairs which continues to be meagre, making up just 0.19% of the total expenditure budget for 2018-19. It has been kept at this low level throughout the Modi regime although minorities make up over 21% of India’s population. Funds utilisation of the ministry has declined from about 97% in 2015-16 to 74% last year. Although public sector lending for minorities has increased to 16%, Muslims accounted for about 45% of this although they make up 72% of the minority population. Many of the Sachar Commission recommendations remain unimplemented or are being hollowed out.

RSS-BJP’s communal propoganda and activities are also causing people from the minority communities to be pushed into the arms of fundamentalists of those religions. Under constant attack for following their faith, they are forced to accept fundamentalist preaching for this gives a sense of security. Hindu fanaticism is thus helping Muslim or Christian fundamentalism to grow. People of different religions in India have lived together for centuries. History shows that the root cause of conflicts and wars was always oppression of the rulers, whether they be local kings or emperors, or British colonial rulers. It was always the rulers who incited and fanned the flames of religious division because it was in their interest to keep people divided and fighting among themselves. But, despite all this, people of all faiths have lived in harmony, working together in fields and factories and facing poverty or distress – or joys - together. All this is now under threat. If RSS-BJP continues with its work, it will tear apart the country, plunging it into violence and bloodshed. Never before has India seen such openly partisan and communal governments as those run by the BJP at the Centre and in States. It exposes the slogan of sabka sath sabka vikas as a total lie, just like all the other lies this govt. and its leader Narendra Modi is fond of peddling.

RSS Ideology Is Behind This Violence

People in India, especially working men and women in industrial units, offices and shops, and those working in the fields, have suffered badly because of the policies of the present govt. led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Rising prices, unemployment, low farm prices, stagnant wages, high costs of education and health and many other effects of his economic policies have destroyed the hope of ‘achche din’. Angry with this betrayal, workers from all across the country have held two massive strikes in 2015 and 2016, followed by the historic Mahapadav in Delhi in 2017. There have been many agitations and strikes in various industrial sectors including coal, steel, port & dock, banks, plantations, govt. employees, etc. Farmers have come out on the roads and even faced police bullets in different states.

Fearful of facing the angry people and worried that they will throw out the govt., the BJP and its mentor the RSS, has been actively spreading the poison of communal hatred and division among people. It serves the rich ruling class – the industrialists and landlords – to divert the people’s attention from burning problems towards religious hatred, or other types of divisions like caste divisions or language differences. There are crores of people in the country today who are unemployed, especially youth. They are angry at Modi not fulfilling his promise of giving 1 crore

jobs. They can be diverted away from this by filling them with hatred towards followers of other faiths and giving them weapons.

But this is the immediate reason. In the long term too the RSS ideology is a weapon in the hands of the rulers to disarm the working people – men and women – and keep them away from fighting for economic and social justice. It is necessary to understand that the BJP-RSS thinking is inimical to the most basic interests of the working people. Some workers may think: how does it matter to us if there are communal riots somewhere or some Muslims or Christian workers are discriminated against? Such thinking would be a grave mistake.

What the BJP-RSS and its associated organisations like the BMS want is to ultimately establish a 'Hindu Rashtra' in India. This is clearly spelt out in the writings of M.S.Golwalkar, or Guruji as he is called, who was the RSS supremo for many years and is considered their premier ideologue. In his book 'We, Or Our Nationhood Defined' Golwalkar writes "All those not belonging to the national i.e. Hindu Race, Religion, Culture and Language, naturally fall out of the pale of real 'National' life" and also "Those only are nationalist patriots, who, with the aspiration to glorify the Hindu race and Nation next to their heart, are prompted into activity and strive to achieve that goal. All others are either traitors, and enemies to the National cause, or, to take a charitable view, idiots."

What kind of "nation" will this Hindu Rashtra be? Will it bring prosperity and peace for the people? As per Golwalkar, all the non-Hindus will be second class citizens, just like slaves with no rights. But even among Hindus, the rich industrialists and landowners will continue to rule while the labourers will continue to serve them. Golwalkar says this is the natural Hindu way of life.

Golwalkar ridicules the demand of the workers for their 'rights'. He says 'Today, we hear everywhere the clamour for 'rights'. Nowhere is there any stress on 'duties' and the spirit of selfless service.... That is why we are finding conflicts among the various component parts in our national life today, between ... the labourer and the industrialist.' So, in the Hindu Rashtra, workers will have to work selflessly for the Nation and not dare to dream about their well being or rights.

The only solution to workers' problems that the RSS has to offer is, according to Golwalkar, that the employers should '...build a temple in each estate or labour colony and arrange for weekly bhajan and worship, religious discourses and Harikathas'. There you have it: workers can devote themselves to increasing production and if troubled by low wages or high costs of medicine, they can visit the local temple and sing bhajans!

Golwalkar also clearly says that democracy and democratic rights are of no use - a few learned men can guide the whole country. So, in this Hindu Rashtra that the BJP-RSS dreams about there will be no need for elections, or for having trade unions and the right to go on strike.

This dangerous dark vision of India espoused by the RSS and its political arm, the BJP, is what the big business houses/corporates and landlords like. They think that their profits will have no limits if all working people are herded like sheep to work endlessly at the least wages possible, without any need for education or healthcare and without protest. That is why you see all big tycoons from Ambanis to Tatas and Birlas and others praising Modi day in and day out.

So, working people of India need to fight against and expose this dangerous ideology of the RSS-BJP along with every struggle they carry out for economic demands. The forthcoming historic rally of workers and kisans on 5th September 2018 will be an expression of this resolve.

Barbaric Killing of Anti-Sterlite Protesters

Hannan Mollah

On May 22, police opened fire without any warning on a peaceful rally of thousands of people seeking closure of the polluting Sterlite copper smelting unit in Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, killing 13 people and leaving hundreds injured. The barbaric murder of the people by the ruling classes in the recent times was widely protested.

There were demands of – immediate resignation of the inept chief minister, a judicial inquiry by a sitting high court judge, removal of officers responsible for the massacre and registration of murder case against them, Rs one crore relief each to the kin of those killed and Rs 20 lakh to each injured person, job to a family member of those killed, and immediate closure of the deadly polluting factory- from different quarters.

A fact finding team of All India Kisan Sabha visited Tuticorin. The team was led by AIKS general secretary Hannan Mollah. State Kisan Sabha secretary P Shanmugham, state president K P Perumal, joint secretary of Tuticorin K P Arumugham, treasurer Sami, CPI(M) town secretary D Raja were part of the team.

The team first visited the houses of those killed in the police firing. The team members first went to Sabenda Kullam, where a second-year B.Com student, Karthik (20), was shot dead. His father Muthupandi is a plastic factory worker and one brother works in a jewellery shop and sister studies in Class IX. They are all in great distress. Then we visited Lime Stone area, a former basti, where Snowlin, an 18-year-girl who just passed 12th exam was killed. She had joined the rally along with her father Jackson and mother Vanitha. The bullet passed through her head. She was a good student and mercilessly killed by the police. All the family members were injured due to brutal lathi-charge. Their family is engaged in fishing in the sea. They refused to accept the body of the girl from police as it was in bad shape and decomposed. Then the team visited another area called Theraspuram, a fishermen hamlet. After the main attack at collectorate office these people came back to their locality. Police raided their locality in the evening and attacked the basti, injured many people, damaged their houses. A 47-year-old woman was shot on her head and the skull was smashed. We saw the blood on the road side. She left behind her husband Jesubalan, three young daughters and elderly mother. Her family has also not accepted the body yet. The police were regularly coming to the basti and beating up people. Some more were injured and hospitalised a few days ago. All the people of the locality saw how she was killed. Police arrested many people from the basti area later on.

The next home we visited was at Peakulam, 15 km away from the city of Tuticorin. An agricultural worker, Selva Sekhar (40), was killed in the rally. He was a Kisan Sabha activist and used to join in all our struggles. His mother is very old and is not taking food – she is still in shock. The two sisters of the comrade are looking after her. He was beaten to death.

Then the team visited Tuticorin Medical College and Hospital. About 70 injured people were admitted to this hospital. Many injured people went to private hospitals due to fear of being arrested by police. Two full wards were occupied by the people injured in the protest. The police not only fired and killed people before the collectorate. After the main incident, they raided many localities and opened fire on unaware people at least at four places and injured many people. We met around 40 people with bullet injuries or broken limbs due to brutal lathi-charge. We talked to eight women also with bullet injuries.

The women were not only fired at, but they were beaten, assaulted and manhandled. Most of the injured were young below 25 years of age such as Manikanda-19 years, Clinton-21, Chamaraj-23, Vijay Kumar-25, Benston-21, Muthukumar-23, Raja Singh-18, Devi-16 and Finolin Priyanka, 19 years.

The bullet injuries were on the upper side of their bodies. All of them told us that they were peacefully moving towards the collectorate but suddenly the police started firing. There was no warning, no lathi-charge in the beginning. The injured people got bullet injuries on their heads or chests, as if they fired to kill. Some said that police made a pre-planned attack. Some vehicles were put to fire before the rally reached the collectorate, even some stones were pelted on the gathering and some cows were pushed into the gatherings as a provocation. The crowd was very huge and the police did not anticipate such huge gatherings.

After the incident, police actions were continuing. A large number of people were arrested. Many of them were released by the court order. It was reported that police registered cases against 16,500 people in three police stations. They arrested indiscriminately and booked them in false cases. There was terror among the people in anticipation of future police action. The team discussed with a cross-section of people about the background and incidents in Tuticorin.

The Tuticorin Sterlite Private Ltd is a copper manufacturing unit. It has been working since 1996. The factory was on 190 acres of land and another 234 acres of land was allotted to the company for further expansion. About 900 permanent employees work there and 2,500 casual workers were also engaged for different works. The factory is a hugely pollutant industry. The raw materials come from Australia and daily 1.2 crore litres of water is used, supplied from the nearby dam. The underground water of the vast area was contaminated due to this industry and about 2,000 cancer cases were recorded in the Medical College since the inception of the factory.

The people have been fighting against the Sterlite unit for the past 20 years. Environmentalists opined against it. The High Court gave several judgments against pollution. But the company and the government were reluctant to listen to these objections. A foreign company Vedanta based in London is the owner of the factory.

Recently, the people of Kumereddipur village started a fresh protest against the polluting Sterlite factory. 100 days' dharna was going on in the villages as police did not allow it near factory. Gradually people from nearby villages joined the dharna.

It was a spontaneous movement of the local people. The authorities neither paid any heed to them nor talked to hear them to find any solution. So, on the hundredth day on May 22, the people decided to march to the collectorate. They started the march two kilometres away from the collectorate. There was a huge gathering. The police tried to stop the march but they passed the police barricade and marched towards the collectorate. People came from villages and towns also. The government and the company blamed the agitators as anti-social elements whereas anti-social activities were committed by the police and their agents. The entire responsibility of the criminal acts goes to the government and the company.

The dastardly act of the police and administration caused serious anger among the people of Tuticorin and Tamil Nadu and even in the whole country. To cover up its own inept handling of the situation, the government is blaming different forces. But the government is also frightened by the popular reaction. They have transferred the superintendent of police and the collector and some other police officers. The government declared closure of the factory permanently.

The land lease of the additional land was cancelled. A judicial inquiry by a retired judge was ordered. After the visit, the team addressed a press conference and gave details of their findings to the media and reiterated their demands such as one job to each 13 families who lost their family members in police firing and action against police and civil officials responsible for the incident. After closure of the factory about 3,500 people would lose their jobs. The government should arrange for alternative jobs and livelihood without any delay.

The team at the end met the district collector and narrated their experiences before him and reiterated those demands. He assured to take necessary action. He promised to visit the victims' families and ensured a job to one member of the family, check on police action and consider the cases carefully and sympathetically and ensure peace in the entire areas.

How Modi Government Helped Vedanta's Sterlite Plant Bypass Environmental Norms

The controversial expansion of Vedanta's 1,200 tonnes per day copper smelter in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu has been stayed by the high court on May 23 after at least 13 people protesting against the plant were shot dead by state police. The court has ordered that the company consult people before building the plant – something the company claimed it was legally not required to do. Vedanta claims it had legally got an environmental clearance from the Union government to expand the smelter to double the capacity without consulting people.

The usual green clearance regulations

Almost all large-scale industrial projects require a mandatory environmental clearance from the Union environment ministry. The project developer first prepares a report laying out how the industry would impact the people and environment in the vicinity of the project site. It then presents this report to the public for consultations under the supervision of the state government. Experts of the Union environment ministry study the results of these consultations and the environmental impact assessment to decide if the project should be given a nod or not. People cannot veto the project during consultations, but their concerns have to be addressed by the company and the Union government before the project can take off.

The environment clearance regulations, dating back to 2006, make exceptions to the need for public hearing in select cases. If a small industry is set up inside designated industrial park, which itself has an environmental clearance, then the specific industry is allowed to bypass public consultations. During the United Progressive Alliance government's tenure in May 2014, questions were raised with the government about this exception.

On May 16, 2014 the environment ministry under the UPA government clarified. It said industries could bypass public consultations only if the industrial parks they were to be built inside had an environmental clearance.

But by May 26, the National Democratic Alliance government with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at helm had been sworn in promising 'Ease of Business' as one of its mantra.

On December 10, 2014, responding to the industries' plea, the Union environment ministry put out a 'clarification' in the form of an office memorandum approved by the then environment minister. The clarification said factories inside the designated industrial zones would not need to consult people even if the zones had never got an environment clearance.

Vedanta's original copper smelter was built inside the Tuticorin Industrial Complex of SIPCOT (State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamilnadu Ltd). The complex came up before the environmental clearance regulations of 2006 were put in place.

Vedanta first sought an approval of the Union environment ministry for expanding its copper smelter in 2009. The environment ministry, then under UPA gave a clearance, without requiring public hearings. The clearance was valid for five years. When it lapsed Vedanta went back to the Union ministry in 2013 to get an extension. The environment ministry in May 2014 (still under UPA) ordered that cases like Vedanta's expansion plans need to consult people.

In March 2015 the environment ministry under NDA extended Vedanta's environmental clearance till December 2018. In 2016, the National Green Tribunal found the December orders of the NDA government, which favoured Vedanta, to be illegal. It had to go to the point of threatening bailable orders against the environment ministry officials in the case to divulge information on the matter. Ministry officials said rescinding the government's December 2014 orders would adversely impact many projects. Eventually, the NGT quashed the December 2014 orders. But by then, Vedanta had secured an extension of the green clearance to its expansion project in Tuticorin without the need for a public hearing.

It is citing this 2016 ruling of the National Green Tribunal and other facts that came to light during the case, that the high court has ordered Vedanta to stop its expansion plans in track and go back to first consult the people.

Courtesy: The Wire and Business Standard.

3 Days' Padyatra of 5000 in Scorching Heat @44 by Anganwadi Mulazim Union Punjab

In Punjab where 32 percentage of the population belong to scheduled castes and contrary to the common perception, the malnutrition, anemia and wasting among people are increasing, the state government, instead of strengthening ICDS, paved way to the closing down of ICDS by different means. Whether it is the shifting of the children to pre-nursery schools or it is the poor quality nutrition in ICDS or it is the usage of water cannon on women anganwadi workers at midnight, the congress led government of Punjab has proved itself to be not less than the Akali-BJP government in its anti people policies.

Anganwadi Mulazim Union Punjab(CITU) has been in continuous agitation against the government policies. It had successfully conducted many struggles including the latest one in November 2017 where it could stop the government from closing down the preschool component of anganwadis in Punjab. But the government has been further going ahead with the policies of privatisation of ICDS and shows no intention to make any improvement in the working conditions of the anganwadi workers and helpers as per its election promise. With the long pending demand for increase in remuneration and no privatisation, AMU state committee decided to hold three days long protest March. Taking inspiration from the Kisan Long March in Maharashtra, the union decided to have the march on foot from historical city of Shri Fatehgarh Sahib to Chandigarh. Preparations were made by holding meetings of the union up to block level. The route of the Jatha of nearly 50 Kms was surveyed and the union approached all the Panchayats, Gurudwaras, various mass and class organisations etc on the route for support. On 28th May at 5:30 a.m. the jatha started with five thousand Anganwari Workers and Helpers in red uniforms wearing red caps and holding CITU flags in their hands. It was led by Com. Usha Rani, President AIFWAH, Harjit Kaur Panjola, State President, Subhash Rani General Secretary and Dharamjit Kaur Chairperson of the union. CITU State General Secretary, Raghunath Singh, Vice President Chander Shekhar, Jatinderpal and other office bearers of Punjab CITU had also participated in the March.

Jatha was welcomed at several places. At various places sweet water and food was served to the Jatha marchers by people of nearby towns and villages. The Jatha reached Chunni kalan on 28th May at night covering about 15 km distance. On 29th May the Jatha march began at 5:30 a.m. from village Chunni and reached village Sohana at 7 p.m. covering about 17 km distance and on 29th May too protest marchers were provided breakfast, lunch and dinner by various mass organizations and panchayats. On 30th May on CITU foundation day, the Jatha March started at 6 a.m. Before that the CITU foundation day pledge was taken by the participants, who's number has reached more than ten thousand by then. Covering about 9 km distance in the scorching sun the Jatha reached the border of Punjab and Chandigarh around noon.

The Jatha was stopped by the Police at border by erecting big barrigades and by deploying heavy police force. But the heavy police force could not frighten and discourage the protest marchers. Thousands protesting Anganwari workers and helpers sat on the road and staged dharna and when there was no response from government of Punjab, have laid down on the burning tar road for almost one and half hours! In scorching sun and about 45 anganwadi workers and helpers including the state president fell unconscious and had to be hospitalized. The workers were demanding that the ministers must give them appointment, the DGP told them "you have taken enough photographs, now stop the programme".

When the protesting anganwari workers and helpers started marching towards barricades the district administration immediately contacted the Cabinet Minister Mr. Balbir Sidhu who was compelled to have meeting with AMU. He also came to the venue of dharna and assured to fix meeting of union with CM of Punjab to discuss their demands. The cabinet constituted a committee to look into their demands and negotiate with them. Never before such protest march on foot was organized by any trade union.

Decisions of AIFAWH OB Meeting

A meeting of the Office Bearers of AIFAWH was held on 7-8 June 2018 at BTR Bhwan, New Delhi. The meeting seriously discussed the recent direction for implementation of Direct Benefit Transfers in ICDS.

The meeting took the following decisions.

1. Hindi state's TU school will be held from 27 June to 1 July 2018 at Chandigarh.
2. 10 July AIFAWH demands day will be observed as 'Save ICDS' Day, mobilizing at district headquarters/Parliamentary constituency/ in front of Central Minister's Offices in states
3. Mid Tern Review of AIFAWH will be held on 20-22 July 2018 in Kerala. (Separate circular is sent with quota)
4. CITU Scheme workers' state level joint conventions in July – August 2018.
5. Active participation in 9 August Jail Bharo of AIKS in which CITU is joining and the Samoohik Jagaran by CITU on 14 August 2018.
6.th September 2018 "Worker- Peasant Sangharsh Rally" by CITU, AIKS and AIAWU. Eight leaflets to be distributed on different issues during the campaign before September. Detailed Plan to be made in state committee meetings. (Quota for leaflet and mobilization given as annexure)
7. 200 Signatures per member to be collected as decided earlier during the campaign to be completed by August 2018 as per quota.
8. The campaign and distribution of leaflets to be continued to complete 20 leaflets by April 2019.
9. Membership 2018 to be enrolled as per quota reflecting our influence.
10. Central Fund @Rs.10 per member from states where there has been an increase in remuneration after 2015. All states which have completed the fund collection must pay the central fund as early as possible.

Joint struggle of Anganwadi Workers in Jharkhand

In Jharkhand, the Samyukta Morcha of Anganwadi Unions, the joint platform of four unions went on an indefinite strike in continuation to the all India Strike of scheme workers on 17 January 2018 on their demands of increase in remuneration and others. On 29 January 2018 the government had a written agreement with the unions on 14 demands including increase in remuneration. It was to be implemented within three months.

On 30 May, the Samyukta Morcha had a gherao of the CM's house for implementation of the written agreement. In the scorching heat, more than five thousand anganwadi workers and helpers marched in Ranchi. Sanjay Paswan, Prakash Viplav, Meera Devi from CITU addressed the gathering. A R Sindhu, General Secretary, AIFAWH also addressed the gathering. Later, in a meeting at CM's office, the Government assured immediate implementation of the agreement. The unions are preparing for indefinite struggle in case the government failed to implement the decisions within 15 July.

ASHA Workers Demonstration in Punjab

ASHA workers union Punjab staged dharnas in front of the MLAs and the ministers of Punjab Government in support of their demands and anti scheme workers and anti people policies of the Punjab Government. On 15th June state level dharna was also organised in front of the

Health Minister Punjab. In Patiala city Ranjeet Kaur general secretary of the union and state secretary of CITU Comrade Sucha Singh Ajnala addressed the protest rally and demanded that Asha workers and facilitators should be covered under minimum wages act and their services should be regularised. The agitating Asha workers and facilitators blocked road traffic and compelled the district administration to receive the memorandum.

Haryana ASHA Workers Strike again for the implementation of agreement

The ASHA workers of Haryana went on an indefinite strike on 7 June 2018 as the agreement between the ASHA Workers' Union (CITU) and the state government arrived on February 1, 2018 after 16 days' long strike has not been implemented. The ASHA workers were much agitated about the diversionary tactics of the government which had issued notification on the increase in remuneration of the Anganwadi workers and helpers whereas their agreement was reached one month after that of the ASHA workers. The government wanted to break the union and float BMS union.

Union tried different ways of persuasion with the government for the implementation of the agreement and issuance of the notification including meeting with the officials, local level submission of memorandum, demonstrations and one day strike. All methods of bipartism failed since the government was delaying it deliberately. The strike which started on 7 June was complete. In spite of the scorching heat of June, ASHA workers demonstrated at the district headquarters each day. The government without consulting the striking workers, had issued the notification on the 6th day, but put conditions on payment of increased remuneration in such a way that almost seventy percent of ASHA workers will be deprived of any increase in effect. This has created further anger among the workers. The union retaliated by intensifying the struggle, calling for a jail bhara on 15th June and a padav at CM's residence from 22nd June. In the meantime, the union has given call for innovative modes of struggles such as planting trees on roadside on one day.

The jail bhara on 15th was so powerful and the ASHA workers refused to disperse and insisted on going to jail. The government was forced to call the union for a meeting that day by 5.30pm. In the meeting, the government agreed to remove the conditions for payment and reissue the orders. The written minutes on the agreement was handed over to the union the same day with assurance of early notification. The union general body was held on 16th June and considering the inconvenience caused to the public, the union decided to temporarily withdraw the strike till 15th July. In case of the government failing to implement the agreement the union will start Mahapadav in Karnal on 16 July.

Three Day's Strike by Mid Day Meal Workers in Bihar

In Bihar, mid day meal workers went on strike for three days from 26 May 2018. The strike was a total success. On 28 May more than 25000 workers gathered in Patna in a mass dharna. The government was forced to talk to the unions. In the meeting the government assured an increase in their remuneration and agreed to other grievances of local issues like retrenchment and harassment.



Haryana Asha



Bihar Mid Day Meal



Punjab Asha



Jharkhand Anganwadi



Himachal Pradesh
Anganwadi



Uttarakhand
Anganwadi

MPASHA





Andhra Pradesh



Himachal Pradesh



Rajasthan



Assam



Delhi



Tamilnadu



Maharashtra



Tripura



UttarPradesh



Gujarat



Jharkhand



Punjab

Pol Khol Halla Bol Rallies Across the Country

The Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar Andolan (Peoples unity, peoples rights movement) platform of mass, class and social organisations, employees federations, teacher's organisations, unorganised sector unions, dalit and tribal organizations, progressive non-government organisations and individuals. In its general body meeting, it decided to organise massive protests all over the country against the misrule of the anti-peasant, anti-working class, anti-minority, anti-dalit NDA government and expose the utter failures in its four-year rule. Rallies were decided to be held on May 23 across the country with the slogan 'Modi sarkar ke char saal pol khol, halla bol' (Modi government's four years: raise your voice, expose and fight). It was also decided to hold a rally in Delhi.

State level meetings and conventions were organised in most of the states. Conventions in Guwahati, Bhopal, Ahmedabad, Ranchi, Patna, Jaipur and Delhi were impressive. It was decided to form 'JEJAA' at the state and district levels. The meetings were held in Mumbai, Hissar, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Lucknow and Kolkata. The JEJAA centre monitored the state level preparations closely and a model leaflet was sent to all states. Most of the states printed the hand bill in their regional languages and distributed amongst the people. The response to the activities was enthusiastic and the weaker states took it very seriously. Posters were printed in some states and social media campaign was organised. A favorable atmosphere was created in the country for exposing the false promises of Narendra Modi.

The programmes were successfully organised in 23 states with good participation of people. In the recent past on a single day such a widespread protest programme was not seen. Closer coordination among different organisations developed. The participation of women and youth was also notable in the event. The All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) played an important role in these efforts.

In New Delhi, on May 23, under scorching sun, people from all sections, from Delhi and NCR gathered at Mandi House Chowk. They marched to Parliament Street. In the states, JEJAA programme created a good impression. In Patna, nearly 20,000 people gathered with great enthusiasm. They held a huge rally and defying the police, gathered near assembly. In Vijayawada, more than 3,000 people rallied in a colorful programme. Rallies were held in several districts in Andhra Pradesh. In Guwahati, more than 2,000 people joined the rally whereas more than five thousand people gathered in 12 district protest meetings in Assam.

In Ahmadabad, a good convention was held and in the rally more than 2,000 people were mobilised. In Haryana, 2,500 people attended the protest meeting at Karnal where as good number of people from the state joined Delhi rally from adjoining districts. Another good rally was held in Bhopal where more than 2,500 participated. A good rally was held in Shimla along with protest meetings in ten districts of Himachal Pradesh.

In Ranchi, more than 3000 people attended the rally. In Maharashtra, district level rallies were held in 16 districts in which more than 20,000 people participated. In Imphal, a good protest was organised on that day. In Bhubaneswar, in spite of good preparations the gathering was about 1000. The cyclone in the state affected the mobilisation. In 22 districts of Punjab including Chandigarh, protests were organised in which more than 20,000 people participated. In Jaipur, 5000 strong rally was held. In Chennai more than 5000 people gathered in protest rallies at all districts; these were also converted into protest demonstrations against the killing of 13 people in the anti- Sterlite agitation in Thoothukudi.

In Lucknow, a protest meeting was successfully held. There were district level rallies in 30 districts as well. In Dehradun, 1000 people participated. In West Bengal, 5000 people attended a meeting in Kolkata jointly held by BPMO and JEJAA. In Jammu also a protest meeting was organised and addressed by Ghulam Nabi Malik. In Tripura, JEJAA held its first public programme after the BJP government came to power and unleashed barbaric atrocities against the democratic movement. More than 2,500 people participated in the Agartala protest meeting. In Telangana also, a meeting was held in Hyderabad and in twenty districts.

48 Hours' Bank Strike - Forced on the employees for the corporates

The 48 hour strike by the the bank workers and officers was a huge success. Employees of all public-sector banks and the majority of private-sector banks have joined the strike, which was called for by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) — an umbrella platform of nine major employees' unions and officers' associations. The participation in the strike rose to 92% on the second day from between 85-90% on the first day, according to UFBU. More than 80,000 branches of banks remained entirely shut, services were affected in more than 85,000 bank branches but the banks were open. According to a news report, transactions worth Rs 434 billion were affected. Bank employees across the country were protesting against a measly 2 per cent hike in their wages — which have been stagnant for almost 6 years — offered to them by the Indian Banks' Association (IBA), the governing body of banking management in India. Wage revision for bank employees in India has been due from 1 November 2017, after the last wage settlement took place in 2012.

On 5 May 2018, a meeting was held between the IBA and the UFBU to negotiate the wage revision, but the IBA offered an increase of a mere 2 per cent over the total wage bill of banks as on 31 March 2017. During the last (10th) Bipartite Wage Settlement that was made effective from 1 November 2012, the IBA had agreed to a hike of 15 per cent increase over the total wage bill. This initial offer of 2 per cent was rejected outright by the UFBU. On 8 and 9 May, bank unions held protest demonstrations in different parts of the country.

The reason stated by the IBA for the paltry 'offer' was that banks are not doing well and that the profits have come down, therefore banks cannot afford to increase the wage bill too much. In fact, for the past four years, public-sector banks have been making rising operational profits, but it is due to the provisions and concessions for bad loans — around 80% of which are corporate loans — that the banks had been making net losses.

For example, as of 31 March 2017, public banks registered an operating profit of around Rs 1.59 lakh crores, while the provisions for bad loans were more than Rs 1.70 lakh crore, so the net loss was more than Rs 11 thousand crore. Moreover, the wage expense of the public banks had been decreasing.

Total NPAs of all PSBs taken together that stood at Rs 2,29,278 crore at the end of 2013-14 fiscal, has more than trebled to Rs 7,70,280 crore (as on December 31, 2017) in less than four years. More than 85 per cent of these NPAs are accounted for by big corporates having unholy nexus with political bosses at the centre and top echelons of banks. The Reserve Bank of India has recently identified 12 such corporate accounts having outstanding loans, identified as NPAs, of Rs 2,53,733 crores. In 2012, the wage bill accounted for 14% of the total expenses of public-sector banks. But in 2017, the wage bill constituted only 11% of the total expenses of the banks. The wage bill was decreasing because the banks were not recruiting enough people, were outsourcing even some permanent jobs, etc. The gross profits are what are earned by the banks, that money has come to them through the work done by the employees. Net profits account for bad loans, and other contingencies, which have nothing to do with the work done by the employees. The banks must recover the bad loans from the corporates, not adjust it in the wages they pay the employees. Do not put the burden of bad loans on employees and the general public, which is also happening by way of increase in charges, etc. The employees must not be punished for the fault of the corporates.

Representatives of UFBU had met the Finance Minister in November 2017, and it was only after six months that the IBA resumed the wage revision negotiations in May 2018.

There are around 8.5 lakh employees in public-sector banks and another 1 lakh employees in private and foreign banks. While the wage revision is decided on the basis of the performance of the public-sector banks, the revision applies to all bank employees, even those of the private sector.

16 days glorious GDS All India Strike

M.Krishnan

In the Department of Posts, there are 1,55,000 Post Offices out of which 1,29,346 are Branch Post Offices functioning in rural villages. Out of five lakhs employees 3.07 lakhs employees are Gramin Dak Sevaks (GDS) mostly working in Branch Post Offices. These GDS are not treated as government employees but as 'extra departmental employees'. The service conditions of GDS are very bad. They are paid a meagre monthly allowance instead of regular salary. Depending upon the work hours it varies from Rs 2290 to Rs 4575 and DA per month. They are denied the other benefits available to the regular employees. The Branch Post Master has to pay the rent and electricity expenses of the Branch Post office, from his or her own pocket. 90% of them do not get any promotion during their entire service.

National Federation of P&T Employees (NFPTE) and later National Federation of Postal Employees (NFPE) conducted several agitational programmes including strikes in the past demanding regularisation and better service conditions for GDS, as a result of which some improvements in service conditions could be made.

Cause of the strike:

Government refused to include GDS under the purview of 7th Central Pay Commission stating that GDS are not civil servants. Instead, a separate Committee headed by Shri Kamalesh Chandra, Retired Postal Board Member, was appointed to examine the wages and service conditions of GDS. This committee submitted its report to Government on 24-11-2016. It made several positive recommendations including increase in allowances, composite allowance, education allowance, three time-bound promotions, paid maternity leave for six months, 35 days' leave etc.

But, even after a lapse of 18 months, the government was not ready to implement the report. The All India Conference of All India Postal Employees Union GDS (AIPEU-GDS) which is an affiliate of National Federation of Postal Employees (NFPE), held in February 2018, decided to go for indefinite strike in the month of May 2018 demanding immediate implementation of positive recommendations of Kamalesh Chandra Committee.

Total unity

Though other unions served the strike notice unilaterally, AIPEU – GDS took initiative for joint actions. Except the small BMS union having around 4% membership, all the other unions agreed on joint actions. Total unity of almost all the three lakh GDS was maintained throughout the strike, till the end.

Developments during the strike

Strike was near total in all states as all the four unions were on strike. Government's attempt to break the strike failed. Secretary, Department of Posts, issued two appeals to the unions and also individually to all striking GDS to withdraw the strike. A pre-condition was made that "strike should be withdrawn first" and then only Minister, Communications will discuss with Union leaders. All the four striking GDS Unions rejected the appeal and also "withdraw the strike first and then only discussion" stand of the Government and the strike continued for sixteen days. There was

no fall in percentage of the strike till end and there was no crack in the unity among the GDS anywhere. Victimisation threats also did not work.

All the Postal Federations (NFPE, FNPO, BPEF) also extended full support and solidarity. In states like Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and West Bengal entire departmental employees also went on solidarity strike from 4 days to 10 days. All the Central Trade Unions - (CITU, AITUC and INTUC), Confederation of Central Government Employees & Workers, World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and many other organisations - extended full support and solidarity to the strike. The central trade unions also wrote to the minister, communications demanding amicable settlement of the genuine demands of the GDS immediately. There was full public support and media support.

Sitaram Yechury, general secretary, CPI (M), Pinarayi Vijayan, chief minister of LDF government in Kerala wrote letters to Prime Minister demanding immediate settlement. These letters were widely appreciated by the GDS and other postal employees. The left MPs also intervened.

The government compelled to come to a settlement

Realising the fact that the government and BJP were totally isolated among the public, especially among the rural public who have very close personal relationship with the Branch Postmaster and Delivery Agent irrespective of political affiliation, the government was compelled to change its stand. The union cabinet, which met on 6th June 2018, approved some of the major recommendations regarding enhancement of wages of GDS. Though other recommendations are still pending, as the major demand is approved, all the GDS unions unanimously decided to call off the indefinite strike on the 16th day. They gave the call for conducting joint victory rallies at all places, which was implemented all over the country.

Lessons of the Strike

After the heroic struggle of the kisans of Maharashtra, which compelled the BJP Government of Maharashtra to come to settlement conceding the demands of farmers, the historic 16 days' strike of GDS also succeeded in compelling the most anti labour Modi government to come down and settle the major demand. This was made possible only because of the rock-like unity of the striking GDS. All attempts of the Modi government to break the strike miserably failed. Being rural postal employees, the public had a very deep attachment and personal contact with the Branch Postmaster and Delivery Agents. This unbreakable bond among the GDS and rural public contributed a lot in garnering full public support to the strike. When the strike went on, not only the GDS employees but the public, including those supporting the BJP, started turning against the government and the political leadership of BJP has understood that the strike has struck at the very root of their political base in the villages.

This realisation made them to come down from their authoritarian stand. Most significant part of the strike is that GDS belonging to different states, culture, language, religion and caste stood like one man and fought the battle unitedly as a class defeating the mechanisations of the communal elements to divide the working class in the name of caste, religion, language etc. This strike has its own implication among other sections of the toiling masses and a new thinking "If three lakhs GDS can, why can't we" is being seriously discussed.

M Krishnan is Secretary General,
Confederation of Central Government Employees & Workers

Successful strike by Municipal Workers in Haryana

The Nagarpalika Karamchari Sangh (NKS) an affiliate of the Sarv Karamchari Sangh (SKS) Haryana organized a successful 16-day strike of the urban local bodies workers of the state. The main demands that were achieved include ending the contract system of employment and putting them on the rolls of the municipalities.

The BJP had promised in its state election manifesto in 2014, to do away with the contract system, regularise the employees and give a minimum wage of Rs 15,000. Once elected, the BJP did nothing on these demands.

A Series of actions were held by NKS since 2016. The NKS was forced to organise two-day strike on October 26-27, 2016. From February 13 to 28, 2018, dharnas and demonstrations were held at the district headquarters and memorandums were submitted. On March 26, a notice was given for three-day strike on May 9-11, 2018. A broom protest demonstration was held on April 27-28 throughout the state.

NKS held a 24 hours chain hunger strike on May 2-3 and a torch light procession on May 8. More than 30 thousand employees representing 10 municipal corporations, 16 municipal councils and 61 municipalities participated in this strike on 9-11 May, the strike was further extended to three more days.

The RSS-BJP resorted to diversionary tactics by organising cleanliness campaign during the strike. However their tactics even of intimidating and terrorising the workers could not succeed. Since the safai karamcharis are mainly from Balmiki community, the government tried to reach out to them and allured young people for employment. However, the union leaders intervened and appealed asking them not to eat up the jobs of their brethren. This had a profound impact. Failing in their tactics, the government brought in nearly 10,000 village safai karamcharis to clean the cities. The CITU which is leading the rural (village) union intervened and failed the designs of the government. The CITU had also supported the strike by organizing local support throughout the state. The All India State Government Employees Union supported the strike and organised solidarity actions on May 22 in district headquarters in the country.

BMS has only nominal presence in the scheme. But on 16 May, BMS leaders were present in a meeting with the NKS and SKS by the Chief Minister. The SKS and NKS boycotted the meeting. The CM has to ask the BMS leaders to leave from the discussions. But this meeting with the CM failed as the government was holding it just to showcase it.

Kavita Jain, the urban development minister along with the BMS leadership gave public statement that the BMS has withdrawn the strike. This was immediately rebuffed by the NKS and the strike continued.

The government, after realising that the situation has gone out of control, called an emergency meeting of the cabinet and formed a four member sub-committee. On May 24, a meeting with striking workers was held and the government was forced to accept the following demands

- 1. To end the contract system of employment and the present contract workers to be brought in the rolls of the municipalities. Also a policy to be framed in this direction.*
- 2. Minimum wage to be enhanced to Rs 13,500 from Rs 11,500*
- 3. To fill in the vacant posts of 1,646 firemen and new criteria of incentivising the existing 1,360 firemen and drivers by 10 points for recruitment.*
- 4. A committee formed for equal pay for equal work. Ex gratia scheme be drafted after studying the models of Delhi and Punjab. Vigilance enquiry into non contribution towards EPF and ESI funds.*
- 5. Increase in allowances for cleanliness – from Rs 350 to 1000, washing from Rs 240 to 440, broom allowance from Rs 5 to 150, work on holidays allowance enhanced from Rs 600 to 1000.*
- 6. The striking terminated employees were re-instated with immediate effect.*

Dalit Anganwadi Worker Attacked For ‘Sitting on Chair’ in Ahmedabad

A Dalit anganwadi worker was attacked by upper caste men belonging to Darbar community on 6 June 2018 allegedly for sitting on a chair in the Panchayat Office in Valthara village, Dholka, Ahmedabad where she was entrusted with the job of distributing Aadhar cards.

According to the complaint filed by Ganpat Jadav, husband of Pallaviben, the anganwadi worker, a local resident Jayraj Vegad was irritated when he saw her sitting on a chair while working and kicked her chair and chided her for sitting on the chair as she was a Dalit. Vegad and 25 others then reached her house and allegedly attacked her, her husband and family with sticks and sharp weapons. A complaint was registered with the Koth police. DySP, SC-ST Cell, Ahmedabad, said, “A complaint has also been made that Pallaviben’s mangalsutra was snatched and that attempts were made to set her relative on fire.”

Gujarat Anganwadi Karmachari Samiti (CITU) organized a protest March on 9 June against this assault, held demonstration in Dholka and also submitted memorandum to the District Collector, the programme officer, ICDS.

Kailash and Bharti, office bearers of Gujarat Anganwadi Karmachari Samiti while condemning the attack also said that distributing Aadhar Cards is not the job of Anganwadi Workers and they reiterated their demand for assignment of only specific Anganwadi related work to them. The union has decided to boycott Aadhar related jobs.

Dalit activist Martin Macwan said, “Dalit atrocity is common in Gujarat and the situation in villages is worse.”

Jharkhand witnesses two starvation deaths in two days

A 45-year-old rag-picker, Meena Mushar (45), died in Chatra district on 4 June 2018. Two days before, Savitri Devi (65) from Giridih had also allegedly died of hunger.

Savitri Devi had nothing to eat for three days, reportedly because she didn’t have a ration card that helps the poorest access cheaper food. Savitri Devi’s daughter-in-law Saraswati Devi said even after repeated requests for a ration card no one in the administration bothered. “She had no food since last three days...it became worse because we could not contact her,” said Saraswati Devi. Her two sons somehow manage to earn their living doing odd jobs and they often had to beg for food from villagers said neighbours.

Claiming that Meena died of hunger, her son Gautam said: “*My mother and I would collect garbage and sell it. But we could not make any money for the past three to four days.*” Gautam added that his mother’s condition deteriorated on Monday and he had to carry her to hospital on his shoulders. The doctors declared her dead on arrival.

The state government, however, denied that starvation was the cause of the two deaths. Both Chatra and Giridih district officials conducted inquiries. The Chatra authorities said Meena was suffering from tuberculosis, which could be the reason of her death. Chatra deputy commissioner J K Singh said, “A medical board that conducted autopsy found patches of TB in Savitri’s lungs.”

May we ask the officials if the families where denied ration, they had not eaten anything for days and die due to TB, are they not starvation deaths? Attributing starvation deaths to some other causes may save their skin while compiling data, but the truth always looms larger.

Terming them bogus, the state cancelled over 11.6 lakh ration cards over the last year. Since then, there have been at least six *starvation related deaths reported before these two.*

Venezuela Elections – Overcoming Odds, Maduro Triumphs

R Arun Kumar

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro was re-elected as the president on May 20, with 6.2 million votes, beating out his closest rival Henri Falcon, who secured 1.9 million votes. Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) announced the result stating that Maduro had won with 67.79 per cent of all votes cast, ahead of Henri Falcon, who won 21.01 per cent. Due to a boycott announced by the main opposition parties of the right-wing Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) coalition, the turnout was 46 per cent, with only 9,085,629 of Venezuela's 20,527,571 registered voters casting ballots.

Voter turnout was extremely low in the wealthier areas of big cities – traditional strongholds of the right-wing opposition. Turnout, though was higher in the working-class and poor areas, which are the traditional base of support for the Bolivarian Revolution, it was lower than it usually was in earlier elections. Most of them voted to defend what remains of the gains of the Revolution. They were clear that if the opposition were to win the election, they would destroy everything and make the lives of workers and the poor that much harder by accepting an IMF-prescribed 'adjustment' programme.

Those who had voted for Maduro are the hardcore Chavistas, who turn out at every election in defence of the Bolivarian Revolution and the struggle for socialism that Chavez represented. But even they are finding it increasingly difficult to mobilise other layers of the society. Amongst the Left-wing of the Chavistas, there is an increasing criticism against the PSUV leadership and the bureaucracy, who are considered to have failed in dealing with the economic situation and are identified as an obstacle to the revolutionary initiative of the masses.

Another area of discontent among the the economically poor Chavista forces is the government's reaction to the land question. During the last few months there have been several instances, where groups of peasants organised in communes – on officially granted land – were evicted. These evictions took place at the behest of landowners and involved the local bureaucracy representing all the layers of the State, including police, judiciary and politicians. In the run-up to the election, Maduro promised that there would be no more such evictions. The mood among the Chavista peasants can be understood from the interview given by one of them: "We're going to give him (Maduro) a vote of confidence. If this does not work, that's the end of it. I'm going (to the polls) with hope, but if the country does not improve, people are going to take to the streets. I will vote for Maduro because he has given his word that things will improve, if he understands what giving one's word is, he should fulfill his promise". These words indeed express the feelings of many Chavistas.

Background to the Elections

Elections in Venezuela were held under extreme duress to the people. It should be remembered here that the country is facing an extreme form of 'economic war' and reeling under severe sanctions imposed by the US administration. The opposition parties tried to capitalise on the ensuring discontent by inciting people through violent demonstrations against the government. They repeatedly ignored the appeals of Maduro government to discuss and sort out the issues. With the urging of the Pope and under the auspices of the government of the Dominican Republic, Maduro government and sections of the opposition agreed to negotiate in order to end the cycle of violence and the deterioration of living conditions in Venezuela. It is through the course of these negotiations that they had come to a tentative agreement to hold elections and an agreement was drafted for the government and the opposition to sign on. At the last minute, under US' coercion, the opposition backed out from signing.

The US first accused Venezuela of not scheduling presidential elections. Then, when elections were scheduled, they objected to the dates and then ultimately to the entire election process itself. The US declared the elections to be a sham and fraudulent even before they were held, apprehending that the people might vote for the 'wrong candidate', that is Maduro. And this is what had in fact happened.

The opposition's decision to boycott the election was puzzling because many felt that this is their best opportunity since 1998 to defeat the Bolivarian Revolution. The economy is now in hyper-inflation, real wages have dropped dramatically, and shortages continue to cause problems. In spite of all this, they

called for boycott. As some commentators pointed out, the opposition does not want to win 'only' the presidency. It wants a 'radical break from the Bolivarian Revolution' by provoking a political and economic crisis that would lead to a coup or some other form of regime change.

Us' Intervention

In 2015, then US President Obama declared Venezuela as a threat to the security of the US and imposed sanctions. It should be noted here that the US has military bases to the west of Venezuela in Colombia and to the east in the Dutch colonial islands. The US Fourth Fleet regularly patrols Venezuela's Caribbean coast. In spite of all this, Venezuela was declared a 'security threat'. Each year Obama renewed and deepened sanctions against Venezuela under the National Emergencies Act.

Last August, the new US President Trump openly raised the "military option" to overthrow Venezuela's democratically elected government. David Smilde of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) disagreed with the president and argued for a regime change, not by military means, but by "deepening the current sanctions" to "save Venezuela".

Trump's first State of the Union address calling for regime change of Leftist governments in Latin America, boasting, "My government has imposed harsh sanctions on the communist and socialist dictatorships of Cuba and Venezuela", was applauded by both the Democrats and Republicans. These sanctions designed, in Richard Nixon's words, to "make the economy scream" so that the people will abandon their democratically elected government for one vetted by the US, have taken a punishing toll on the Venezuelan people.

Not satisfied with the economic sanctions, in early April, the US Southern Command conducted a series of military exercises, dubbed 'Fused Response', just 10 miles off the Venezuelan coast simulating an invasion. Juan Cruz, special assistant to President Trump and senior director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, defending these exercises, stated: "If you look at the history of Venezuela, there's never been a seminal movement in Venezuela's history, politics, that did not involve the military. And so it would be naïve for us to think that a solution in Venezuela wouldn't in some fashion include a very strong nod – at a minimum – strong nod from the military, a whisper in the ear, a coaxing or a nudging, or something a lot stronger than that."

US designs on Venezuela were exposed when its, (though an unverified document), '*Plan to Overthrow the Venezuelan Dictatorship – Masterstroke*', (February 23, 2018) saw light. According to reports: "The document signed by the head of the US Southern Command demands making the Maduro government unsustainable by forcing him to give up, negotiate or escape. This Plan to end in very short terms the so-called "dictatorship" of Venezuela calls for, 'Increase internal instability to critical levels, intensifying the decapitalization of the country, the escape of foreign capital and the deterioration of the national currency, through the application of new inflationary measures that increase this deterioration.'" *Masterstroke* calls for "Continuing to harden the condition within the (Venezuelan) Armed Forces to carry out a coup d'état, before the end of 2018, if this crisis does not cause the dictatorship to collapse or if the dictator (Maduro) does not decide to step aside."

The Road Ahead

The coming period will see an intensification of the imperialist campaign against the Venezuelan government with increased sanctions. Already new set of sanctions were announced and US Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan said that they are considering oil sanctions, which would have a crippling impact on the economy. These attempts by the US-led imperialist forces should be squarely resisted and defeated. If the right succeeds, it will be an imperialist backed brutal structural adjustment plan, accompanied by an attack on democratic rights and would be a complete disaster for Venezuela. Moreover, it will also impact the progressive movements throughout the world.

For the Bolivarian masses the main issue will be the deep economic crisis, which has resulted in hyperinflation, a collapse in the purchasing power of wages and a scarcity of basic products. Maduro promised to deal with these problems after the election and deliver "economic prosperity".

Maduro government should decisively deal with the ruling classes and move towards building a genuine, revolutionary alternative that benefits working people. This is vital for the future of Venezuela. If the government fails to fulfill its promise, it will be facing tough times, with the right-wing waiting in wings to gobble the country.

Ireland votes to repeal anti-abortion laws

Ireland has voted by a landslide to repeal its near-total ban on abortion, an extraordinary victory for women's rights that seals the country's transformation from bastion of religious conservatism to one of Europe's most tolerant democracies.

Abortion is currently only legal in Ireland in cases where the mother's life is at risk, and remains illegal in cases of rape, incest or fatal fetal abnormality. The Eighth Amendment which grants an equal right to life to the mother and unborn had prevented any further relaxation of the ban.

Nearly two in three Irish voters opted to repeal the eighth amendment to the constitution, defying opinion polls that suggested the election could come down to the wire.

Ireland has long been one of Europe's most socially conservative countries, and contraception was only fully legalized in 1985, while divorce was banned until 1995. The declining influence of the Catholic Church, which was instrumental in seeing the Eighth Amendment introduced via referendum in 1983, is one explanation for this result.

Campaigning by pro- and anti-abortion groups has ramped up in recent weeks, dominating the news cycle in Ireland. Throughout the campaign, supporters of the "Yes" side argued that the ban does not prevent abortions but forces women to travel to the U.K. – at an average rate of nine a day – to terminate unwanted pregnancies. They also pointed out that no one under the age of 50 had had the opportunity to vote on abortion law, despite it remaining a high profile issue in public debate for decades, particularly since the 2012 case of Savita Halappanavar. Savita, a 31-year-old dentist of Indian origin, died at University Hospital Galway in Ireland in 2012 following a septic miscarriage after the doctors refused to terminate her pregnancy when she was miscarrying despite asking for several times.

The referendum – in which 66.4% voted Yes, a majority of 706,349 – drew the highest turnout for a ballot on social issues, and the result shows a deep commitment to reform despite an often acrimonious campaign. Support appeared to cross almost every divide – old and young, urban and rural, rich and poor – defying some predictions that the liberal capital might force change on conservative countryside areas. The turnout was 64.1%, the third highest for a referendum in Ireland since the adoption of the constitution in 1937. The highest was the 1972 question on joining the European Economic Community, at 70.88%.

The scale of the victory makes it almost impossible for opponents to challenge the laws that the government must now pass, which are expected to allow abortion on request up to 12 weeks and under stricter conditions beyond that.

Reacting to the result, the taoiseach (prime minister) Leo Varadkar, who campaigned in favour of liberalisation, said it was "a historic day for Ireland," and that a "quiet revolution" had taken place. "We are actually a nation that is united, and we want to make this change," said Varadkar, who was mobbed by ecstatic Yes voters when he appeared at Dublin Castle to announce the final result. All but one of Ireland's 40 constituencies voted Yes with Donegal voting 51.9% in favour of No.

Mr Varadkar told crowds at Dublin Castle the result showed the Irish public "trust and respect women to make their own decision and choices."

He added: "It's also a day when we say no more. No more to doctors telling their patients there's nothing can be done for them in their own country, no more lonely journeys across the Irish Sea, no more stigma as the veil of secrecy is lifted and no more isolation as the burden of shame is gone."

Varadkar said he hoped legislation would be enacted by the end of the year.

A vote to repeal one of the world's most restrictive abortion laws in [Ireland](#) was met with quiet celebrations in [Savita Halappanavar's home in Belagavi in Karnataka](#).

CITU Condemns Police Firing in Tutikorin

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions vehemently condemns brutal and murderous police firing on peoples protesting against pollution by a copper smelter plant of M/s Sterlite at Tutikorin, Tamilnadu killing 12 persons and injuring hundreds.

The people of that region have been agitating since long demanding concrete action by the Govt to prevent the atmospheric pollution being generated by the Sterlite's Copper Smelter Plant creating menacing impact on the lives and health of the people in that region. People are also demanding stoppage of further expansion of the smelter plant which has been under process. The matter was also taken up with judiciary and cases are still reportedly pending for resolution in both High Court and Supreme Court.

The agitation by the people on 22nd May 2018 before the office of the District Magistrate was demanding strong regulatory intervention against the extreme unsafe production process in the copper smelter plant as well as disposal of copper waste and also a ban on the proposed expansion plant of the project by Sterlite. It is surprising that the Tamilnadu Administration adopted such easy going trigger-happy measure on the ongoing agitation on such a contentious issue. And the manner in which police opened fire on the people makes it clear that the protesters are being sought to be given a lesson through indiscriminate murderous firing on them, may be at the behest of the Corporate master. Many of those killed had bullet injuries on their head and face. The AIADMK Govt, a close ally of BJP led NDA Combine must explain as to what prompted them to approve the firing order on the protesting people on such a sensitive and vulnerable issue. CITU demands strong action against those responsible for such murderous brutal act of firing on the protesters. CITU also demands concrete action for preventing atmospheric pollution by the Copper Smelter plant of Sterlite at Tutikorin and not to allow further expansion of the project unless all the contentious issues on pollution are sorted out to the satisfaction of the affected people of that region.

CITU calls upon the working people and their unions to launch protest against such brutal murderous act of the Tamilnadu Administration at the behest of Sterlite/Vedanta group.

Homage to Comrade Satyaprakash



Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) expresses its deep sorrow at the demise of Com Satyaprakash, freedom fighter, veteran trade unionist and President of Uttarakhand state CITU, today, 14 June 2018. He was 94.

Comrade Satyaprakash who is popularly known as 'Babuji' is a father figure in the democratic society in the State. He had led many militant struggles of the workers, peasants and displaced people for land rights, labour rights and rehabilitation. His demise is an irreparable loss to the democratic movement in general and the trade union movement in particular.

CITU pays respectful homage to the departed leader and convey heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

A Communist Woman's Victory to Iraq's Parliament

Iraqis appear to have broken with the political establishment in response to what they see as rampant corruption and incompetence. Suhad al-Khateeb's victory to Iraq has raised hope of people all over the world.

Khateeb, who is a teacher, anti-poverty activist and women's rights activist, had not considered running in previous parliamentary elections.

"I didn't run in the [2014] election, but I was part of a group that visited people all over the Najaf," she told.

"We visited them to listen to their problems and help them, in the slums of Najaf and the poor neighbourhoods. I had not thought about running in elections."

However, she was motivated to run on the Sairoun Alliance ticket this time around after garnering support from her colleagues and students.

"People visited me at school. They looked up to me and saw me as a role model of how a politician should be," she explained. "My colleagues, who support various political parties, respect me and support me."

However, The biggest winner in the elections on May 12 was the boycott movement, which was evident after it emerged that only 44.5% of eligible voters went to the polls.

But those who did vote overwhelmingly cast their ballot for the Sairoun Alliance, a coalition of supporters of the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), as well as the smaller Iraqi Republican Party.

Not many could have predicted the formation of such an alliance a few years ago, much less anticipated that it would end up resonating with so many Iraqis.

The union between the religiously conservative Sadrist movement and the ultra-secular ICP seemed baffling to outside observers, but it appears to have created a successful synthesis.

One of those who appears to best typify the new politics is Suhad al-Khateeb, a communist who won a parliamentary seat for the religious city of Najaf – one of the most important hubs of Shia Islamic theology.

During the Cold War, communism and Islamism were, for the most part, existential enemies. In the Middle East, the two were in regular conflict, with the former accused of being "godless atheists" and the latter accused of "clerical fascism."

But political alliances between communists and Shia Islamists are not entirely unheard of. Najaf, much like the rest of Iraq, has seethed at the rampant unemployment, corruption and cronyism that has typified the current political class in the country.

The ICP's general secretary, Raid Jahid Fahmi, explained that in preparation for the elections, his party and the Sadrists had agreed to focus on a number of issues with shared goals – fighting unemployment and corruption and combatting external influence on Iraq – rather than emphasising ideological differences evident in issues like women's rights or secularism.

"Sairoun supports the people in many different ways. It represents Iraqis, and we the Iraqi Communist party have a long history of honesty – we were not agents for foreign occupations," said Khateeb.

"We want social justice, citizenship, and are against sectarianism, and this is also what Iraqis want" – said Khateeb.

(Courtesy – The Wire)



CITU Foundation 30th May 2018



Delhi



Kerala



Punjab



Rajasthan