Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU) Vol. 38 No. 03 March 2018 ` 10/-

The Voice of the Working Woman

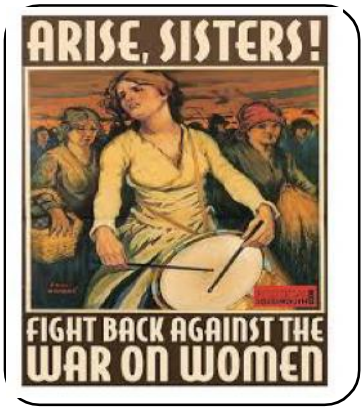
Long Live International Womens Day!

WE WOMEN
WILL STAND
SHOULDER TO SHOULDER
WITH OUR MEN

IN A
COMMON STRUGGLE
AGAINST
POVERTY, INEQUALITY,
GENDER, CASTE
AND
CLASS DISCRIMINATION

8
March

Comrade Md. Amin



The Centre of Indian Trade Unions is profoundly grieved on the passing away of its veteran leader as well as the leader of the working class movement of the country Comrade Md. Amin on 12 February 2018 in Kolkata at the age of 89. Comrade Md. Amin was a founder member of CITU, became its General Secretary in May 2007 and continued in that position till March 2010.

Born in a working class family Comrade Md Amin became a jute mill worker in West Bengal at the age of 14 and was initiated in trade union struggles at the shop floor. He held various responsibilities in West Bengal as well as at the national level.

He was elected as a secretary of CITU in 1987 and later became its vice president, apart from discharging his responsibility as its General Secretary during 2007-2010. He was associated with several industry-wise federations in jute, road transport etc. During these long years he had been playing a crucial role in leading the working class movement in the country.

Comrade Md. Amin was a member of Rajya Sabha during 1988-94 and 2007-13. He was the transport minister in the first Left Front government and was the labour minister in the sixth Left Front government of West Bengal.

Comrade Md. Amin joined the communist party in 1946 and was jailed for long periods. He rose to the highest level as a member of the Polit Bureau of CPI(M) and, as a veteran communist, continued to remain in its Central Committee as a special invitee till his demise.

Comrade Md. Amin was a poet in Urdu and was the author of several books. His life was an example of commitment, simplicity and courage.

CITU sends its heartfelt condolence to his comrades and members of his family.
CITU dips its flag and pays its respectful homage to the departed leader.

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

Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)

Editorial Board

Editor
K Hemalata

Working Editor
Ranjana Nirula

Members
A R Sindhu
Sunanda Bhattacharya

Inside

	Page		Page
IWD 2018	4	Wealth Inequality	21
Union Budget 2018-19	6	Fixed Term Employment	23
Women on the Move	10	India Today	24
PNB Scam	13	Breaking Barriers	25
Budget 2018-19	14	Budget Protest Pix	26

Total pages - 28
(including cover pages)

On International Women's Day

As we celebrate International Women's Day we take stock of our conditions at present and the host of challenges confronting us.
In India we are facing an all out attack on our rights , not only as women and citizens, but most crucially, on the Indian Constitution itself, by the ruling BJP and its mentor - the RSS. Our rights were won with the active participation of women, along with workers, peasants, students, toiling people and other sections in the anti –colonial struggle for freedom, in pre Independence times. The struggles have continued and have intensified, in the past twenty five years, during which period our rights have been eroded by the pursuit of neoliberal policies adopted by successive governments at the centre. During the past few years, this process has been accelerated by the forces of communalism, which seek to impose the Hindutva ideology on us and turn our country into a Hindu Rashtra.

Women are being recast in the traditional roles of wives and mothers, while their economic and social contribution is being suppressed by the right wing forces. Even as wives and mothers they are denied rights, domestic violence is on the increase and sex selective abortions continue unabated. Violence against women and children has been increasing steeply with scant regard for the right of women to a safe environment at work, in public spaces and in the domestic sphere.

Women cannot face these attacks, cannot gain equality without economic security. This is the cornerstone of our struggle for progress and emancipation. But it is this very crucial economic security which is under severe attack, by the corporates and their cronies in government, in a crisis ridden capitalist system. In India the changes in labour laws have reversed the gains made through decades of struggle by the working class and the rights of women workers have been curtailed , all in the name of "Ease of doing business". The Union Budget 2018-19 is another illustration of pandering to the corporates under a veil of populist slogans.

All over the world, in many countries, right wing forces and regimes are rearing their ugly heads, but at the same time the resistance to them from the working people is also growing apace. There are anti imperialist struggles taking place in different countries. We stand firmly in solidarity with the struggles of women and people for their democratic rights, the world over.
This past year has witnessed unprecedented, huge struggles of scheme workers, workers and employees, farmers and the peasantry, in our country, of which we have been a part. Some demands have been achieved but there are many more to be won.

We pledge to continue our efforts to unite the widest sections of women and the working people in our own country for even bigger and wider struggles.
We reiterate our commitment to continue our fight until we achieve our goal of emancipation and a society free from exploitation, carrying on the glorious traditions of International Women's Day.
Long Live International Womens Day!
Long Live Working Class Unity!

"Defend Women's Democratic Rights"

International Womens Day 2018

Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)

International Women's Day 2018

Marked by rising sexual crimes, unemployment, poor wages and by #MeToo, struggles for economic and democratic rights

Adira

International Women's Day is celebrated on March 8 every year not just as a day of solidarity among women across the world in their fight for equality and justice, but also to remind the larger society that women, who "hold up half the sky" still have a long, long way to go in being part of the political decision- and policy-making process that directly affects their lives.

There is no denying that over the years, women have made rapid strides and have broken the proverbial "glass ceiling", be it in the sphere of politics, space technology, science, medicine, finance, sports, art, culture and literature. What's more, women have started speaking up, as seen in the recent global #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment within families, communities and workplaces.

But, even though we now have more women presidents, prime ministers and MPs, the overall representation of women in the decision-making process is nowhere near their proportion in the population, which is a fundamental requirement for gender equality. In fact, in countries like India, the number of women in the labour force is also on the decline, with more and more of them being exploited as 'cheap labour' in the unorganised sector.

It is, therefore, quite ironic that International Women's Day, which started being observed across the world as a day to celebrate the struggle of women to win universal voting rights, the right to work and equal pay, still serves as a reminder of the grave inequalities that persist in society today, which have in fact worsened after the onslaught of globalisation that has widened inequalities, pushing women either out of jobs or into vulnerable jobs in the fast growing informal sector.

It is all the more necessary, therefore, to remember that the roots of International Women's Day lie in the 'socialist' struggles of women in the early 20th century. It was the German anti-fascist and communist leader, Clara Zetkin, who first proposed in 1910 that such a day be observed internationally. Zetkin was an active crusader for women's rights and universal suffrage and strongly believed that real emancipation of women could not be achieved without the participation of the "*great masses of proletarian women"* in the wider struggle for gender equality.

It is true that in India, women are making strides in various fields and visibly so, but only up to a limit, with a majority at the bottom of the workplace pyramid or stuck in the middle rungs, at the most. We may boast of a woman Prime Minister, President, Speaker, Defence Minister, CEO, Judge etc, but most women in India are still languishing in under-paid jobs, struggling to break the patriarchal and structural barriers coming in their way, due to discriminatory laws and mindsets.

It is a shame that even though India boasts about being one of the 'fastest growing economies" in the world, the country has slipped 21 places on the 2018 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap index to 108 among 144 countries, much behind its neighbours China and Bangladesh, primarily due to less participation of women in the economy and low wages.

The World Economic Forum, the corporate-sponsored extravaganza held each year in Davos, Switzerland, in its report has attributed much of India's decline in position on the overall Global Gender Gap Index to a widening of its gender gaps in political empowerment as well as healthy life expectancy and basic literacy.

"With more than 50 years having passed since the inauguration of the nation's first female prime minister in 1966, maintaining its global top 20 ranking on the political empowerment sub-index will require India to make progress on this dimension with a new generation of female political leadership," the report said.

The report noted that In India, the workplace gender gap is reinforced by extremely low participation of women in the economy (136 out of the total 144 countries covered) and low wages for those who work (136th ranking for estimated earned income), adding that **"on average, 66 per cent of women's work in India is unpaid, compared to 12 per cent of men's".**

According to a Labour Bureau report, the huge wage differentials between men and women doing the same work continue, maternity leave and other benefits are not available to the bulk of working women and special provisions like creches at workplaces are rarely found even in ultra-modern industries, forget about the smaller units.

As a result, women's unemployment was pegged at 8.7%, more than double that of men, said the report.

To add to the economic exploitation of women, the regressive RSS-backed BJP government at the Centre has been curtailing/not enhancing expenditure on schemes that employ women in large numbers, such as MGNREGA, ICDS etc, while hiding behind a vacuous slogan like '*beti bachao beti padhao'*. Despite having a clear majority in Parliament, the BJP government has passed so many Bills by voice vote amid Opposition protests, but when it comes to the long-pending Bill to ensure 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament, the BJP government's lack of political will is all too obvious.

To top it, there has been a spurt in crimes against women, especially in BJP-ruled states such as Haryana, which saw about 10 rapes and gang-rapes in just one week recently. In Uttar Pradesh, RSS-backed Hindutva organisations have been targeting women by letting loose anti-Romeo squads on young couples, hounding women for loving Muslim men.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, which has statistics of only reported crimes, 39 crimes against women are reported every hour in India.

As many as 2.5 million crimes against women have been reported in India over the last decade, said the report, adding that reported cases of crime against women increased 83% from 185,312 in 2007 to 338,954 in 2016.

BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh reported the most (15%) crimes against women in 2016 – 49,262, or six every hour, followed by Trinamool Congress-ruled West Bengal (32,513), according to NCRB. The year 2016 saw the lowest conviction rate (18.9%) – percentage of cases convicted to cases in which trials were completed by the courts – for crimes against women in a decade, it added.

While sexual violence against women outside homes has been rising, another cause for worry is the growing sexual violence against women on social media, which has forced even the government to take note and set up a portal for reporting cyber crimes against women.

So, while this year International Women's Day comes in the backdrop of many positives, such as global marches and campaigns on women's rights, equality, justice and against sexual discrimination and violence, such as #MeToo in the US, #YoTambien in Mexico, Spain, South America and beyond, #QuellaVoltaChe in Italy, #BalanceTonPorc in France and #Ana_kaman in the Arab States; "Ni Una Menos" ('not one less'), a campaign against femicid that originated in Argentina, women in India also need to rise unitedly against the deep-rooted patriarchal mindset that has been emboldened after the right-wing RSS-backed BJP government came to power in 2014.

We have witnessed in India this past year that women have conducted huge struggles for economic rights, against the attacks on their livelihood and life choices, against the increasing violence being wreaked on them and their children, and have participated in unprecedented numbers in trade union and peasant struggles.

Women must continue to unite in ever larger numbers to accelerate the struggle for equality and emancipation of all sections of women - workers, peasants, Dalits, minorities, employees and home-makers—to fight for their rightful place in this world.

ON UNION BUDGET 2018-19

Speech by CITU General Secretary Tapan Sen in the Rajya Sabha

I rise to give my observation on the Union Budget 2018-19. Let me submit at the outset, that words in budget speech by hon'ble finance minister did not get reflected in the deeds, i.e., the budgetary arithmetic. A rosy picture is being sought to be painted on the state of the economy, reflecting its advancement only since 2014 since the NDA government's coming to power along with showering of huge promises as well as schemes and programmes for the common people, the farmers, the workers, the womenfolk et al in this budget in particular, in view of the General Elections within one year's time frame. But as usual, all these schemes and promises can no way be substantiated or relied upon fully in view of its complete inconsistency and mismatch with the budgetary arithmetic. In that sense, this Union Budget turns out to be playing deception on the people. And what has become a casualty is the honesty and integrity of the entire exercise.

Extortion —Transfer from millions to top one percent

But the story does not end here. The Budget has done more than playing deception on people. It also reflected a dubious consistency right from its first budget under the NDA regime. It has been articulating a meticulous process of transferring, rather extorting resources and wealth from the millions of working people, who create these resources and wealth in factories, services and fields to the handful of big business/corporate houses and big landlords. And through that process the economic inequality which had already been quite prevalent under the neoliberal order of the economic management, has been pushed up to an obscene level impermissible in any civilized society, besides threatening the sustainability of the much touted model of so called development.

One may take note of: as per available studies and estimates by various acclaimed agencies, both national and international, the richest one per cent of the population were in possession of 48% of the national wealth in 2014 ; within two years of its so called "*Sab Ka Vikas*" model, it rose to 58% in 2016 and now the latest Oxfam Report published on the occasion of last Global G-20 Summit, confirmed that one percent richest Indian have successfully cornered 73% of the national wealth (generated). Is it "*Sab ka Vikas*" or "*Sab ka Vinash*" to facilitate the loot and plunder on the national economy and the people by a handful of big corporate and business houses/landlord community. In fact the entire economy management by the government of which the budget exercise is a part only is tuned in that direction of looting the people and the national economy to benefit a few, who donate to them liberally. And to facilitate that unholy process the law on electoral funding has already been restructured to suit the requirement of the governing polity.

Successive budgets have reflected the said exercise of transfer from the millions to a few. One of the methodologies of such transfer is enhancing the indirect tax burden on the people while showering concessions on the richer class in respect of direct tax. The 2015-16 budget accounted for Rs 8325 crore concession on direct tax combined with Rs 23,383 crore enhancement of indirect tax burden; the 2016-17 budget gave away to the corporate Rs 1060 crore direct tax relief while burdening the people with a much higher burden of Rs 20670 crore on account of indirect tax. In 2016-17 budget, indirect tax has not been tinkered upon as the final misdeed has been planned to be done while launching the GST on 1st July midnight, enhancing the post GST indirect tax burden way above the pre-GST level taking the central and state tax together, although commitment has been made in the floor of this house that the GST will be revenue-neutral.

The present budget also quite consistently, extended the facility of reduced corporate tax to the companies up to annual turnover of Rs 250 crore and sacrificed Rs 7000 crore. And in respect of indirect tax burden, whole matter has been taken out of the purview of Parliament to GST Council which already before the budget, imposed much enhanced load on the people against which resentment from all sections of the society is quite loudly audible and visible as well.

And along with burdening people so heavily, and cruelly through indirect tax burden via GST route, through hike in petrol/diesel prices, LPG, Kerosene et al, huge concessions are being given to those bandwagons of big-business and corporate houses, who after consuming all these concessions amounting to 3 to 4 lakh crore every year, do not even bother to pay their due taxes in complicity with your tax administration.

Tax Theft

Kindly recall, the finance Minister had to admit in his budget speech last year the reality of ongoing tax theft by corporate and business world. He stated that "*we can conclude that we are largely a non-compliant society*". But that continued to remain a lip service or *jumla,* courtesy the class loyalty of of his government to the corporate class. The government t did nothing to recover the unpaid legally due direct tax which has been consistently increasing every year from Rs 6.59 lakh crore in 2015-16 to Rs 7.31 lakh crore in 2016-17 and the figures are taken from your Receipt Budget document, I assure. And your budget document did record without any shame and explanation that out of these huge unpaid amount, the tax claim not under any dispute or litigation amount to Rs 81046 crore in the reporting year 2015-16 and Rs 1.20 lakh crore in the reporting year of 2016-17.

Therefore, while hon'ble finance minister deserves applause for his success of keeping the fiscal deficit somewhat contained, but that has been achieved despite increasing patronized pilferage from the national exchequer by corporate on direct tax account through much more vigorous and fiercer extortion from the mass of the people on indirect tax account. Yet these budgets under NDA regime are being tomtommed as pro-people budget.

Along with ongoing extortion on the people, widespread media-supported deception and misinformation is another instrument of fooling the people.

Schemes but No Money

Lots of so called new schemes in health, employment generation, rural welfare, social sector etc have been launched and also announced both before and also in the budget itself. But budgetary arithmetic does not support those schemes fully. In fact overall government expenditures, as percentage of GDP, have now reduced further from 13.2 per cent to 13 per cent. Last year, the levels of capital expenditure on central social schemes were below the budgeted targets, meaning a cut to meet the fiscal deficit target by reducing expenditures for people's welfare. That the tax revenue collection's growth indicating to be below the targets, the government has reduced its expenditures directly affecting adversely the people's livelihood. The expenditure on agriculture and rural development, as percentage of GDP, is reduced from 1.15 per cent to 1.08 per cent; the total health expenditure has fallen from 0.32 per cent of the GDP to 0.29 per cent; Central expenditure on education has fallen from 0.49 per cent of the GDP to 0.45 per cent; the gender budget has fallen from 0.68 per cent to 0.65 per cent of GDP; allocations for welfare of STs is below 1.6 per cent of the total budget and for SCs, it is 2.32 per cent. This is totally inadequate seen in proportion to the share in population. The allocation for MNREGA has remained unchanged and Rs. 4,800 crores are still owed to state governments from 2017-18.

The budgetary statement about putting in place under its flagship programme of National Health Protection Scheme to provide for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization at the rate of Rs 5 lakh per family per year to 10 crore poor and vulnerable families, if weighed in terms of actual budgetary allocations, turns out to be another hoax. The budgetary allocation on this account is merely Rs 1600 crore which can cover hardly 10 lakh families (and not 10 crore). And such discrepancy exposes the dubious intent.

Moreover, most of the welfare or social sector schemes are older ones, continuing from previous regimes, presented as repackaged with new names. And while claiming the total number of beneficiaries under those schemes, the government did not mention separately the new beneficiaries added during their regime, thereby claiming parenthood of some others' children. No doubt the articulation on deception has taken multidimensional routes.

Agriculture

The Budget speech has gone extremely lavish in pronouncing commitments for development of agriculture and rural development along with launching so many schemes, whereas budgetary allocation for 2018-19 both on account of Agriculture and Allied Services and Rural Development together marked a marginal increase of Rs 9793 crore in nominal terms, meaning actually a decline both in real terms and also as a percentage of GDP and total budgetary allocations.

The Budget gave a shockingly surprising news that the government has already implemented the Minimum Support Price (MSP) at the rate of one and half times of production cost for majority of the *Rabi* Crops and now the government is committed to extend the same to *Kharif* crops in the current year also which is totally untrue. Even government's deposition before the Apex Court in this matter is reportedly negative. As for example out of the Rabi crops, for wheat, cost plus (C 2) 50% works out to be Rs 1884 per quintal whereas the MSP announced is only Rs 1735/-. For Gram, the MSP has been announced as only Rs 4400 as against cost plus 50 per cent works out to be Rs 5289. And in the background of virtual collapse of the procurement system throughout the country, which is in fact engineered by the present policy regime, even the declared MSP is not reaching the small and marginal farmers who account for, according to finance minister himself, 86% of the farming population. Secondly, Budget has done absolutely nothing to bring the small and marginal farmers within the institutional credit through banks and cooperatives, thereby throwing them under the claw of private money lenders and thereby ensuring even the MSP to those private sharks having organic linkage with corporate agri-cartels.

Thirdly, the agricultural workers and rural poor who have seen falling incomes and increasing migration have nothing in the Budget. No increase in MGNREGA allocation has been made. Rs.55,000 crore allotted is equal to the revised estimate for 2017-18. Even by conservative estimates more than Rs.80,000 crores will be required for proper implementation of the programme. This callous attitude is despite the fact that over 56 percent of wages were pending and more than 15 percent of the wage seekers did not find any work in 2016-17. As of 25th January, eight states had a net negative balance of Rs.1,555 crores in terms of MGNREGA funds, i.e, they spent more than they received from Centre. As on date, the state governments' dues from the central government on MNREGA account is more than Rs 4800 crore. In 2016-17 while there were 89 million job seekers only 76 million found work. States have been witnessing drastic cut in allocations and the average work days under MGNREGA have been abysmally below what is stipulated in the Act. Without addressing these issues the Budget talks of providing maximum livelihood opportunities in rural areas and talks of creating employment of 321 crore person days, although there are no concrete proposals to generate employment.

Employment Generation or Degeneration

Lot of noise is being made on employment generation including the proactive steps claimed to have been taken by the government. What is the reality ? In fact, even as per official estimate, the net employment generation has turned negative in absolute term if job-losses owing to closure of factories/establishments during the period is taken into account. Added to this has been the recent move of abolishing all posts in central government establishment deliberately kept vacant for the last five years, killing lakhs of employment positions. And further add with this the observation made by various studies that in the current year itself, IT Firms laid off 1500 jobs and telecom sector contributed to 40000 job losses. And according to Team Lease Services, reduction in jobs in manufacturing in 2017-18 is going to be around 30% plus compared to previous years.

In this background the claim of creation of 70 lakh jobs in the formal sector said to be based on the increase in number of EPFO data as touted by a so called "independent study" and passionately pleaded by the Finance Minister in his budget speech is another hoax to confuse and misguide the people and a cruel joke on the several lakhs of unemployed. Rather every step of this Modi government is degenerating the employment situation in the country.

Let me quickly mention a few figures from the government's official compendium. As per latest Employment-Unemployment Survey by Labour Bureau in eight labour intensive sectors new employment generation has been only 3.46 lakhs during 2015-16 and 2016-17 in 30475 establishments. Compare this with the same government claim of 21 lakh jobs generated under Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana during 2016 till 2017 end, through government paying for the EPF contribution to new employees only in garment and apparel sector. Which one do we believe and rely upon? In fact in the name of PMRPY, envisaging payment of employers' contribution on EPF for new employment generation for three years launched during mid 2016, crores of public fund is being indirectly channelized to corporate community without generating any employment whatsoever. And this budget has proposed to extend the same scheme to all other sectors meaning thereby more bonanza from national exchequer for private gains. In fact all concessions being given to business houses by the government including bearing the burden of employers contribution in EPF, allowing liberal income tax rebate to employers on account of wages paid to the newly employed workers etc is actually an arrangement of organized pilferage from the national exchequer by the employers' class in complicity with the custodians of the said exchequer, without creating any employment whatsoever. If this is not loot then what else ?

Attack on Labour

Budget speech made no mistake in mentioning its resolve to extend the atrocious "fixed term employment" system to all the sectors consistent with its brazenly anti-worker pro-corporate drive for labour-law changes designed to impose slavery on the workers. While speaking lavishly about improving health, education and social welfare services toward universalisation, it remained totally negative in considering the long standing demands of about a crore workers working in its flagship scheme of NHM, Mid-day-Meal(MDM) and ICDS (Anganwadi) and other related central government schemes, of extending to them at least the right to statutory minimum wages and attendant social security benefits. In fact the allocation under National Health Mission (NHM) has been reduced and on ICDS and MDM there are marginal increase that too for other expenditures. Such an attitude is utterly condemnable.

Budget speech lavishly spoke about developing self reliance in defence production and what is actually being done is setting the process of destruction of the existing indigenous manufacturing capabilities in the Ordnance factories, the defence PSUs and country's shipyards by way of mass scale outsourcing in favour of private sector, both foreign and domestic turning around half of the Ordnance Factories redundant and starving the Defence PSUs and Shipyards of work-orders. In the same way, under the camouflage of expanding Railway network, the project of total privatization of Railways is being pursued in full swing. Are these in any manner serving national interests or sabotaging the same in favour of foreign players ?

The government has been moving fast in selling out the national assets through wholesale privatization. In the current year the target for disinvestment /privatization is kept at Rs 80000 crore to keep on the pace of its 'destroy India' programme under the camouflage of "Make in India".

The budget has been loudly touting its policy of *"ease of doing business*" and rejoicing over India's moving up in the rank on "Ease of doing business index". But it remained unscrupulously silent about its going down even below Bangladesh and Pakistan etc in its rank in "Global Hunger Index" and its pitiable performance in respect of basic human development parameters like 'maternal mortality rate', infant death while birth, underweight children etc. Probably those are not their priorities despite fraudulently chanting "*Sab ka Vikas*" .

Overall, behind the shrill fraudulent noise of all round development, the budget 'continued to remain a contractionary budget and focus of almost all government expenditures are designed to benefit only the rich and propertied business class and the common people and the workers in particular are being subjected to deeper exploitation and repression. It is no doubt a design for "*Sab ka Vinash*" and "Destroy India".

Significant Victory of Haryana ASHA Workers

Around 20,000 ASHA workers brought out colourful and robust rallies in 21 district headquarters of Haryana on 2 February to celebrate their victory after 16 days of continuous struggle and strike ended in an agreement between the government and their CITU-led union, with substantial rise in fixed pay and incentives.

About 28,000 scheme workers were on the streets in the 17 January countrywide joint trade unions strike, holding rallies and demonstrations in which the participation of ASHA workers was the highest, with 12,530 ASHA workers out of the total 19,855 ASHA workers in the state. It was the launching pad for an independent struggle ASHA workers in Haryana. Beginning with staging continuous relay dharnas in district headquarters from the very next day on 18 January, with an increasing number joining, the movement was lifted to a higher plane on 27 January with ASHA workers going on a complete indefinite statewide strike. On 27-28 January, the striking workers marched to the residences of ruling party BJP MLAs, MPs and state and central ministers and staged demonstrations there. This was followed by joining countrywide workers joint Satyagraha movement by courting arrest on 30 January.

Ultimately, on invitation, the union delegation held a 3 hour long discussion with the state health minister, concluding in an agreement on 1 February. Earlier rounds of discussion had been held with the officials. After the health minister's public announcement about the agreement through the media, the union called off the strike.

By this agreement, an ASHA worker's monthly fixed remuneration has been raised by Rs.3,000, thereby increasing from Rs.1000 to Rs.4,000. In addition, incentives in 4 categories were raised by Rs.100 each and in one category by Rs.50. On an average the total incentives have been raised by Rs.1200-1300 per month. 50% of these would be paid in addition as bonus by the state government which was introduced following the union's agitation in 2013. As such, the total average increase is Rs.4,500 per month.

On an average, pre-agreement monthly earning of a ASHA worker was Rs.4,500, mainly from incentives, including Rs.1000 as fixed pay. After agreement the average monthly earning of a ASHA worker would be around Rs.9000, including Rs.4,000 as fixed pay and the rest as incentives; equivalent to the notified minimum wage in the state, which was the basic demand of the union. Many ASHA workers are earning more as the remuneration is incentive based.

In the agreement, there are some other benefits also like Rs.3 lakh compensation in case of accidental death and all medical expenses to injured workers; coverage of all under an insurance scheme; providing each with mobile phone; withdrawal of court cases on government agreeing to reinstate all removed facilitators; weightage in recruitment as ANM and staff nurse, etc.

During the struggle period state leaders of CITU and Sarv Karamchari Sangh moved in the districts, helping in organising the struggle; the CITU state committee met twice to review, coordinate and guide the struggle; state units of AIDWA, AIAWU, DYFI and SFI also extended support and solidarity.

Despite attempts of the BJP government and BMS to break the agitation and strike, the ASHA workers remained firm. Due to this struggle the union's organisational base has widened and membership increased. The workers confidence in CITU has also increased. During the victory celebration on 2 February at Rohtak, around 400 ASHA workers made an on the spot collection and donated it to the CITU Rohtak district committee.

(Report from Jai Bhagwan, General Secretary, CITU Haryana State Committee)

Karnataka Midday Meal Workers Struggle and Win Demands

More than 12,000 mid day meal workers from 28 districts gathered in Freedom Park in Bengaluru on 8 February 2018 on an indefinite sit in demanding an increase in remuneration and social security benefits. They organised a march to the Primary and Secondary Education Minister Tanveer Sait's residence. The minister was forced to come and meet the protesters and assure them that their demands would be considered.

Braving the cold, all of them stayed back at night, putting the administration under pressure. The Karnataka Akshara Dasoha Noukarara Santha leaders declared that they will intensify the struggle and start a hunger strike. Next day, 9th February, the Chief Minister called the union for a meeting on their issues. He promised an increase in remuneration in the state budget which was to be presented on 16 February. Accordingly, the struggle was withdrawn.

The mid day meal workers got an increase in remuneration of Rs.500 per month with effect from 1 January 2018. Now the total remuneration of mid day meal workers in Karnataka will be Rs.2700 per month. The Government has in principle agreed to work out a pension scheme for the mid day meal workers in association with the LIC of India. It has also agreed to make proper guidelines for enquiry and procedures for taking action against mid day meal workers, thus putting an end to harassment and summary expulsion by the SMC committees.

The MDMWFI and Karnataka CITU have congratulated the union and the workers for their achievement.

ASHA Workers Padav in Bhopal

Hundreds of ASHA, USHA and ASHA facilitators assembled in Neelam Park in Bhopal in a Padav on their long pending demands for increase in wages, social security etc. The struggle was organised by the ASHA-USHA, ASHA Sahyogini Ekta Union (CITU). In addition, the union was demanding the clearance of all dues of payment to the workers which will amount to crores of rupees.

The meeting was addressed by Pramod Pradhan, General Secretary, MP state CITU. He explained the struggles of CITU and other central trade unions for the right to minimum wages and social security for all scheme workers and condemned the system of incentives payment in NHM.

The meeting was presided by A T Padmanabhan, president of the union. It was addressed by Kamlesh Sharma, state general secretary of the union among many others. The workers then marched to the state assembly. The march was stopped by the police. The district administration came to the venue to take the memorandum on behalf of the Chief Minister. The Joint director of the National Health Mission, Madhya Pradesh, also came to the venue to receive the memorandum on behalf of the NHM. The union submitted a 12 point charter of demands to the government through the officers. Both the officers assured the workers of a positive response to the demands..

The union has decided to go for one day strike on 17 March 2018 if their demands are not met.

Second Conference of Telengana Anganwadi Union

The Second Conference of the Telengana State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (CITU) started with a rally and public meeting in Nizamabad on 18 February 2018. The Public meeting was addressed by A R Sindhu, General Secretary, AIFAWH. She narrated how the Modi led NDA Government has continuously taken steps leading to dismantling of ICDS and how AIFAWH and CITU is resisting it. She called upon the anganwadi employees to mobilize in large numbers in the proposed padav by AIFAWH during the monsoon session of Parliament in Delhi on the demands of implementation of the recommendations of the 45th Indian Labour conference on Scheme Workers.

M Saibabu, General Secretary, CITU Telengana explained how the policies of the KCR led Telengana Government are the same as those of the BJP government at the centre. P Jayalakshmi, General Secretary, TSAWHU called upon the workers to resist the repressive GOs 14 and 19 by the TRS government for summary expulsion of the anganwadi workers and helpers from service. She urged them to intensify the fight for minimum wages and pension. The meeting was presided over by M Padma, President of the union and was addressed by Ramesh Babu, Secretary Nizamabad district CITU. Praja Natya Mandali presented revolutionary songs on the occasion.

The delegate session started in the evening with Jayalakshmi placing the report of the General Secretary. During the last three years the KCR government, bureaucracy and local TRS leaders were trying hard to disrupt this union, in order to form a puppet union of the ruling party. The increase in remuneration achieved through years of struggles by the employees are being projected as a gift from the state government. The union leaders were threatened by TRS MLAs leaders etc. and many were victimized. A few leaders joined the TRS union, but the rank and file stood behind the CITU and the union. This, in addition to the bifurcation of 13 districts into 32 had caused a fall in the membership in 2016, but it is being made up in 2017, the report said. The report stressed on the importance of cadre development and taking up local issues.

Now the TRS government is handing over the supplementary nutrition in one project to Akshayapatra. The struggle against the privatisation is going on. 26 delegates spoke on the General Secretary's report. A R Sindhu presented her observations in line of the tasks taken up by the 8th conference of AIFAWH. She emphasised the need to politically equip the cadres to counter the political attack by the ruling parties to achieve the policy change.

M Saibabu and K Subbaravamma, General Secretary, AP State anganwadi workers and helpers union, P Bhaskar, Secretary CITU also addressed the delegates. The conference felicitated K Jamuna , who was victimized for participating in the land struggle by Kisan Sabha in Nizamabad.

The report and accounts and resolutions were adopted unanimously. The conference elected a 69 member state committee and 31 Office Bearers with Ch.Bharati as Honourable President, M Padma as President , P Jayalakshmi as General Secretary, Narasamma as Treasurer and Triveni as Propaganda Secretary. Ramesh Babu proposed the vote of thanks.

JEJAA Demands Independent Probe on PNB Scam

Jan Ekta Jan Adhikar Andolan (JEJAA) strongly condemns the Narendra Modi led NDA Government for its utter failure and criminal omissions and commissions in preventing the Punjab National Bank (PNB) Scam despite advanced information and its role in helping the main accused to flee the country. Since the role of the Prime Minister in the scam is indicated because of his proximity to the main culprits Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi.

JEJAA demands that the Supreme Court must directly monitor the case and ensure that the CBI investigation team remains free from the influence of the PMO.JEJAA also demands that the Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley take moral responsibility for the scam and step down.

Both the central finance ministry and the Reserve Bank are equally responsible for the fraud in PNB. All the big advances made by the banks should be subjected to rigorous scrutiny by an independent agency under the direct monitoring of the Supreme Court.

This shocking story of fraud in the PNB is coming out when the banks are suffering massive losses on account of failed corporate debts. The instances of fraud will seriously undermine the very existence of the banking system, lead to loss of trust of the public in banks and can ultimately lead to its crash.

It was along with the implementation of LPG policies in our country during 1991 that banks were forced to oblige and extend big loans to corporates, without any tangible assets. Usually banks give such guarantee certificates only if they get 110% as security amount. But now it has been revealed that since 2011, PNB has been giving such certificates without any security. Doing away with necessary controls and namesake inspections and investigations are examples of policies aiming to help the rich. Loans extended to big corporates yielding to the pressures from the higher authorities have become a big curse on the Indian Banking system. Fraud of crores of rupees being unearthed now from PNB is a result of this policy.

The economic policies of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization are directly responsible for such huge appropriation of public assets by the corporate forces. Blind support to Neo-Liberal policies by the ruling classes and their parties have only accentuated the crisis.

The evidences show that the period of the PNB scam is 2011-17 and happened both under the UPA and NDA rule. After Narendra Modi become Prime Minister the scam gained momentum and the accused have been enjoying the direct patronage of the PMO. Though the PMO received complaints way back in 2015 and again in 2016 about the PNB scam, Narendra Modi did not take any action to unearth the facts, expose the culprits and arrest them. The BJP-led NDA Government is culpable of deliberately allowing a situation for intensification of the crime and allowing the biggest banking fraud in the country's history.

We cannot consider this as something confined to PNB. By making some lower level officials scapegoats, the authorities are trying to evade the discussions on true facts. The government is now trying to adopt the FRDI Bill in the Parliament in a hurry to shift the loss to the banks on account of non-payment of loans taken by big corporates onto the shoulders of the common masses of this country. The disastrous consequences of crony capitalism are now being borne by the banking system.

JEJAA will mobilise the masses and build resistance to such disastrous policies.

A Budget that Hardly Acknowledges Women Workers

Kiran Moghe

Typically, the Annual Budget figures of the Modi Government reveal the huge gap between its political vote catching rhetoric and actual practice. After all the hype about the Economic Survey of 2018 that was published as a "Pink Document", supposedly in acknowledgment of women's issues, there is little in the Budget for the economic and social benefit of women! In particular, women workers seem to have been largely ignored in this process. That is not surprising considering that women's contribution to the economy is itself unacknowledged and undervalued. Jaitley's budget seems to underscore the point in a rather alarming way.

Lack of decent employment opportunities and social protection are the major problems faced by women workers today. In addition, they face discrimination and social oppression, both within the family and in society. The Budget is a policy instrument that if used wisely, can be used to redress social and economic imbalances in society. Budget 2018-19 fails miserably when it comes to women in general and women workers in particular.

Lets take employment. The only program worth mentioning is the MNREGA, a program that has the potential to provide crores of rural women with work at the local level especially when it is not so easy for women to migrate for work. The MNREGA also has some specifically women-friendly features such as provision of equal pay for equal work, independent job cards and crèche facilities at the worksite. However, the budget allocation for MNREGA in 2018-19 is stagnant at a level of Rs 55000 crores; of these Rs 5000 crores are unpaid wages, so the actual allocation after adjustment for inflation has actually declined.

Lets look at that large swathe of women workers employed in Government schemes, such as Anganwadi workers and helpers in the ICDS, ASHA workerss (and now some USHAs as well) in the NHM program, mid day meal workers, etc. Despite their staggering contribution to the reductions in malnutrition, improved immunization, decline in maternal and child mortality, etc in the country, the government has refused to accept the recommendation of the 45th Indian Labour Conference that they should be recognized as regular workers. There is no provision for increasing the wages of these women under their respective allocations. This is despite the fact that over 60 lakh workers participated in a historic national strike on 17th January, and registered a significant presence in the "Mahapadav" organized by the Central Trade Unions in November 2017. It is indeed a cruel joke when one notes that the Finance Minister has proposed an automatic revision in MPs salaries every five years in his Budget Speech. Similarly there is no mention of any particular allocation towards pensions or any other benefits for crores of women in the unorganized sector, who are slogging it out as domestic workers, casual construction labour, waste pickers, vendors and home based workers.

The only types of women workers this government seems to recognize is in the formal sector which is anyway a miniscule proportion of the working population. Apart from introducing a standard deduction of Rs 40000, they have been given a tax incentive by reducing their employees' PF contribution to 8% against the existing 12% with no change in the employer's contribution. Whether it is actually beneficial to women remains to be seen, since PF contributions constitute a kind of compulsory savings for working women particularly when 98% of their take home pay is utilized for the benefit of the entire household (unlike men who utilize use quite a decent part of their salaries for personal expenses).

Coming to benefits, the much touted "*Pradhan Mantri Matruvandana Yojana"* alias Maternity Benefit Scheme has actually seen a decline in the allocations from Rs 2595 to Rs 2400 crores. The National Food Security Act mandates the provision of Rs 6000 as maternity benefit to every woman, but this scheme has actually reduced the benefit amount to Rs 5000 and made it available only for the first child! It appears that exhortations by several BJP leaders (*to Hindu women!)* to have more children are not to be backed by any support mechanism! In any case it appears that only about 25% of beneficiaries are being covered, leaving the vast majority of women to fend for themselves.

It is well known that one of the major impediments for working women is the lack of affordable and reliable child care. The National Creche scheme sees a nominal increase of only Rs 3 crores over the 2016-17 allocation of Rs 125 crores; in any case only half of that appears to have been actually spent during the course of 2017-18.

However, the impact of the Budget on women workers should not be seen only in terms of the allocations or pronouncements for working women. The overall tone and tenor of the budget is equally important. A significantly detrimental policy statement is the announcement that "fixed term employment" will be extended to all sectors. "Fixed Term Employment" is actually a euphemism for contract workers. In neo-liberal economic regimes, women are in any case largely employed on contractual or piece rated terms, be it as teachers, nurses, factory workers, shop assistants, or IT professionals. All of them are looking for permanency of tenure and long term benefits from the employer, none of which are available in contract work. The Budget Speech actually endorses further informalisation of women's employment.

There is of course a plethora of announcements, which could have had a positive impact on women workers in general such as the Ayushyman scheme for providing secondary and tertiary health expenses upto 5 lakh rupees. But as other articles in this issue show, much of it is empty rhetoric, and not backed by solid financial allocations. Safety is a prime concern for working women, especially in the absence of safe, reliable and affordable public transport systems. The Nirbhaya Fund set up to deal with the issue of violence against women languishes for want of good project proposals to spend the allocations in a meaningful way.

The Finance Minister grandly announced in his Budget Speech that the Modi government has now moved from "Ease of Doing Business" to "Ease of Living" of the common people. But policies such as demonetization, GST, Aadhaar (which gets a commendation in the speech!) have actually played havoc in the lives of lakhs of women workers in our country. From their point of view, this is simply another pro-corporate, neoliberal budget that does nothing to 'ease' their existing burdens.

Who is Cheering for 'Modicare'?

Amit Sengupta

Hyperboles are the hallmark of the Modi government, especially empty hyperboles that are passed off as public policy. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's announcement during his budget speech, of the world's "*largest government funded health care programme",* outdid all previous records of the Modi government in making inflated claims. Quickly named 'Modicare' by the spin doctors of the BJP, the announcement was lapped up unquestioningly by sections of the corporate controlled media. The programme announced proposes to cover 10 crore families through an insurance programme that promises to reimburse expenses incurred on hospital care up to 5 lakhs per year for a family. It is further proposed that 40 per cent of the expenses will be borne by states.

Given the hype surrounding the announcement it is necessary that we try to make sense of what is being proposed. Public memory is short, and that is probably why few remember that a similar announcement was made in 2016! The difference only lies in that in 2016 the limit of reimbursement for a family of five was placed at 1.5 lakhs and the 2018 announcement has raised this to 5 lakhs. The raising of the ceiling is likely to benefit very few if the scheme is ever rolled out, as most reimbursements in current insurance schemes are below one lakh. The mere raising of the ceiling will not mean everyone will suddenly start receiving 5 lakhs, but it's a nice vision to dangle before the public.

So what happened between 2016 and 2018? Actually nothing happened, no new scheme was rolled out. So much so that of the meagre 1,000 crores allocated for the existing Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), only about half was actually spent in 2017-18. But such is the power of rhetoric that the new announcement is being hailed as a bold move and even as a 'game changer'. If and when the new insurance programme is rolled out, it will merely be a refurbished version of the RSBY and many other state level insurance programmes that have done little to address the growing crisis in healthcare in India.

Less finances for health in 2018-19 Budget

Forgotten is the fact that in real terms (that is after adjusting for inflation) the health budget for 2018-19 is lower than the revised estimates of the 2017-18 budget. Compared to Rs 53,198 crores in the revised estimates allocated to health in 2017-18, this year's allocation is Rs 54,667 crores – an increase that is lower than the inflation rate. Importantly the government's principal health programme – the National Health Mission – receives, even in real terms, less money. The allocation of Rs 30,634 crores in 2018-19 is lower than Rs 31,292 crores spent in 2017-18.

The ability of the Modi government to replace policy with empty promises is phenomenal. The 2017 National Health Policy, announced with much fanfare a few months back, claimed that spending on health would increase to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2025 as compared to around 1.2 per cent currently. This requires an increase in allocation by about 20 per cent every year. Yet, as we discussed earlier, there has been a compression in funds allocated to health in 2018-19. In fact, since the Modi government assumed office, there has been no significant increase in the allocation on health.

Financing the insurance scheme

So we are now being led to believe that the world's largest health programme will be magically financed in a situation where overall allocation to health has been reduced in the current budget, and which includes a mere Rs 2,000 crore allocation for the proposed insurance scheme that would cover 50 crore people. Realisation regarding the incongruity of this situation appeared to have dawned. Thus finance secretary, Hasmukh Adhia, in an interview with Bloomberg Quint

hastened to clarify: *"…the scheme has to be operationalised. The contours of this scheme have to be worked out by the health ministry along with the state governments*". He goes on to claim that real allocation for the scheme will commence in 2019-20 (it is of course anybody's guess who will be in government then!). Clearly it is easy to label something as the world's largest programme as long as it remains a figment of imagination. It is anybody's guess why this government believes that people will accept that the programme will actually be rolled out and not provided a silent burial soon. While different government sources claim that a per annum allocation of around 10,000 crores can fund the programme, more realistic estimates would place this figure at between 50,000 to 1.2 lakh crores per annum. This however shouldn't trouble the government as the primary intent behind the announcement of the insurance scheme (that is unlikely to ever see the light of day) was to take the spotlight away from what should have been read as the main feature of the 2018-19 budget – a decline in the health budget while the country is faced with a severe crisis in access to healthcare services.

Do insurance programmes benefit public health?

There are several other imponderables. How will states, especially poorer states find the money to co-fund the programme. But suppose a miracle does happen and the money is found to finance the scheme. What will it mean for the country's health system? What does our past experience with public funded health insurance schemes indicate?

In 2009, the Indian government launched the nationwide health insurance scheme called the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) designed to protect patients from the 'catastrophic' impact of out-of-pocket expenses incurred on hospital care, as modelled on Andhra Pradesh's Rajiv Arogyasri scheme. In addition to the national insurance scheme, there are several state-level health insurance schemes that are in operation. Currently they cover a third of the country's population. This coverage is, however, notional. Data from the NSSO (2014) shows that only 12-13 per cent of the potential beneficiaries are actually covered.

These insurance schemes, just like the present proposal, are meant for hospital care only and cover a specific list of procedures. Two fundamental pillars support these kinds of health insurance schemes. First, they operate on the logic of the '*split between financing and provisioning'*. While financing comes from public resources (central or state government funds), treatment can be provided by any accredited facility, public or private. In practice, when it comes to provisioning a large majority of accredited institutions are in the private sector. For example, in the case of the Arogyasri scheme in Andhra Pradesh, the total payments to facilities accredited under the scheme from 2007 to 2013 amounted to Rs 47.23 billion, of which Rs 10.71 billion was paid to public facilities and Rs 36.52 billion went to private facilities.

The second pillar of these schemes is that beneficiaries are insured against a set of ailments that require hospitalisation at secondary and tertiary levels of care. Excluded are almost all infectious diseases that are treated in out-patient settings, such as tuberculosis that requires prolonged treatment, most chronic diseases (diabetes, hypertension, and heart diseases) or cancer treatments that do not call for hospitalisation. To take the Arogyasri example again, studies indicate that the scheme draws 25 per cent of the state's health budget while covering

only 2 per cent of the burden of disease. Such skewed priorities end up distorting the entire structure of the health system and public money is squandered to strengthen the already dominant corporate health sector.

In theory, good health systems are like pyramids: the largest numbers can be treated at the primary level where people live and work, some would need to be referred to a secondary level such as a community health centre, and few would require specialised care in tertiary hospitals. Better primary and secondary level care ensures that fewer patients end up in more expensive specialty hospitals to undergo major procedures. Health insurance schemes invert this pyramid and starve primary care facilities.

What is even more worrying is that these social health insurance schemes, largely implemented through partnerships with private providers, have been indicted in several states for defrauding the system. There have been several reports of unscrupulous private facilities milking these insurance schemes by conducting unnecessary procedures. Horrific incidents have been reported, for example, of unnecessary hysterectomies conducted on women as young as twenty-two.

Neoliberal logic supports insurance schemes

So the moot question is why do governments in India (both the current and previous governments) like to promote insurance schemes that essentially involve partnerships with private providers? This preference for health insurance schemes is embedded in the neoliberal approach to public services. Insurance schemes channel public money into private facilities. Public facilities are further weakened in a situation where private providers are already dominant. On the other hand, private providers are assured of a steady clientele. The dominance of the private sector is particularly worrying in a situation where neither quality of care nor its costs are regulated.

If the government is truly interested in advancing public health it could have enhanced allocations to strengthen public services that are currently in shambles. Repeated episodes, such as the child deaths in Gorakhpur, cry for attention and point to the dire situation that public hospitals face because of gross under funding and decades of neglect. But the neoliberal logic argues that public services are, by definition, inefficient. Yet all the success stories of healthcare lie in countries that primarily depend on public services – UK and its NHS, Sri Lanka, Thailand, France, Cuba. After waxing eloquent on its 'flagship' programme of building 'Health and Wellness Centres' (a new name for what were called sub-centres earlier) Mr Jaitley chose to allocate a mere 1,200 crores for the programme, which is about 5 per cent of the requirement for building primary level centres across the country.

Vast tracts of the country have no recognisable primary care services. That is what requires immediate attention. Without access to primary care, patients in most parts of the country will never have the possibility of getting to hospitals and avail of Modicare in plush private hospitals.

Look who is celebrating!

Before we end, let us look at who is celebrating the announcement of Modicare. Naresh Trehan, perhaps the best known face of India's burgeoning private healthcare industry had this to say: "*Full marks should be given on coming up with a budget so focused on health and also covering the rest of the sector. The government was being questioned if it is addressing the needs of the poor but with budget focusing not only making the country healthy but also giving weaker sections the means to be part of the cycle, it already has addressed the issue."* No prizes for guessing why private industry is ecstatic. Till now the corporate chains – Max, Fortis, Apollo, Medanta, etc – had kept away from the public funded insurance schemes as they felt the picking were not enough. Remember the Fortis case where the hospital shamelessly extorted Rs18 lakhs for the treatment of a young girl who died of dengue fever. Or Max, who declared a live baby as dead because they couldn't extort more money from the patients. One can almost see them rubbing their hands in glee at the prospect of a bonanza when the enhanced 5 lakh limit allows them to access a new avenue for profiteering.

Budget 2018-19: Lies and Deceit to Betray Farmers

The Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, presenting his last full budget before the 2019 General Elections, has resorted to lies and deceit to betray farmers who have been reeling under acute agrarian crisis. After having promoted corporate loot and crony capitalism in the name of "Ease of Doing Business" he is seeking to hoodwink the peasantry, working class, poor and the middle class by claiming that the BJP-led NDA Government has moved to "Ease of Living" for them. The budget, which has come at a time when massive farmers' protests have demanded remunerative prices and liberation from debt, has failed to address these issues. A Kisan Sansad had also proposed two Bills to ensure Assured Remunerative Price and liberation from indebtedness.

No assured remunerative prices

First and foremost, the betrayal is on the demand of the peasantry for Assured Remunerative Prices. After having reneged on Narendra Modi's election time promise of providing MSP according to the recommendations of National Commission of Farmers which had recommended MSP at least 50 percent above the cost of production (C2) the Finance Minister now claims that they have already implemented the recommendations for the Rabi season and claims that for the next Kharif MSP will be given at the rate of 150 percent above cost of production. This is a blatant misrepresentation of facts as shown by the table below for the latest MSP announced for Rabi, 2018-19. Even if we take the Finance Minister's announcement at face value there are no allocations for meeting the expenses and for ensuring payment of deficit in price to farmers in the event of them receiving prices below MSP.

Rabi 2018-19 Projected Cost of Production C2, C2+50 and MSP Announced			
Crop	C2 (Cost of Production)	C2+50%	MSP Announced
Wheat	1256	1884	1735
Barley	1190	1785	1410
Gram	3526	5289	4400
Lentil	3727	5590.5	4250
Rapeseed and Mustard	3086	4629	4000
Safflower	3979	5968.5	4100

Also it is to be noted that the C2 calculations itself are disputed and farmers' organisations have been calling for correct cost calculations. The weighted average cost of production taken into consideration by the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices also disregards the State Government cost calculations. Over and above that the MSP announced for most crops is only notional as there is no procurement mechanism in most parts of the country. So without having a procurement mechanism in place there is no assurance of the announced MSP accruing to farmers. Nothing has been done in this direction.

No liberation from indebtedness

Secondly, the BJP led Government has betrayed the farming community and rural poor by refusing to announce any policy for liberation from indebtedness for the peasantry. It then goes on to claim that agricultural credit has been increased by 10 percent by Rs.1 lakh crore to Rs.11

lakh crore although it is not a budgetary provision. This would be disbursed through all three institutions of agricultural credit: commercial banks, credit cooperatives and Regional Rural Banks. This is a simple and mechanical 10 per cent increase without: (a) any attention to a far higher increase in the cost (including wage) pressures in agriculture (b) any directed efforts to make fresh agricultural loans to the non-loanee farmers and bringing them into the ambit of formal finance (c) correcting for the institutional imbalance in agricultural credit with a near-collapse of the cooperative system in most parts of India following demonetisation (d) addressing the regional and borrower-level disparity in the distribution of agricultural credit. Even as per the latest data for 2016, about one-fourth of the agricultural credit is given by urban branches India. Only about 41 per cent of the agricultural credit is given to small and marginal farmers (represented by loans of up to Rs. 2 lakh), while about 14 per cent of agricultural credit carries a loan size of more than Rs. 1 crore going to institutions and corporates engaged in agricultural production. The Finance Minister speaks about lessee farmers' inability to avail crop loans but has not made any concrete suggestion to overcome the problem.

Agricultural workers and rural poor

Thirdly, the agricultural workers and rural poor who have seen falling incomes and increasing migration have nothing in the Budget. No increase in MGNREGA allocation has been made. Rs.55,000 crore allotted is equal to the revised estimate for 2017-18. Even by conservative estimates more than Rs.80,000 crores will be required for proper implementation of the programme. This callous attitude is despite the fact that over 56 percent of wages were pending and more than 15 percent of the wage seekers did not find any work in 2016-17. As of 25th January, eight states had a net negative balance of Rs.1,555 crores in terms of MGNREGA funds, i.e, they spent more than they received from Centre. In 2016-17 while there were 89 million job seekers only 76 million found work. States have been witnessing drastic cut in allocations and the average work days under MGNREGA have been abysmally below what is stipulated in the Act. Without addressing these issues the Budget talks of providing maximum livelihood opportunities in rural areas and talks of creating employment of 321 crore person days, although there are no concrete proposals to generate employment.

The Budgetary proposals for agriculture are aimed to help the corporate agribusinesses and have no vision for promoting farmers' welfare. The Budget fails to deliver on the demands of the farmers, agricultural workers and the poor. AIKS calls upon all its units to rise in protest against the insensitive approach of the BJP led Government.

(All India Kisan Sabha Press Release)

Read and Subscribe to

The Voice of the Working Woman

Single Copy: Rs. 10/-, Annual Subscription: Rs. 100/-
Send **MO/DD** favouring **'Centre of Indian Trade Unions'**

to **The Manager, The Voice of the Working Woman,**
13-A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110002, Ph: 011-23221306, email: aiccww@yahoo.com

Send money **directly through the Bank**,
A/c Name – The Voice of the Working Woman,
a/c no. – 0158101019570, Canara Bank, Branch-DDU Marg, New Delhi-02
IFSC Code – CNRB0000158, MICR Code - 110015005
please inform us immediately through call or email.

The Dramatic Rise in Wealth Inequality

Prabhat Patnaik

OXFAM has just produced a report in which it highlights the dramatic increase in wealth inequality that is occurring in India. The basic data it uses are from Credit Suisse which regularly brings out a *Global Wealth Databook*; and according to Credit Suisse the top 1 per cent of the population in India cornered 73 per cent of the additional wealth generated in the year 2017.

This is an incredible figure in itself. What is more, this percentage, which refers to the latest year, is higher than the overall figure that had prevailed prior to this year, which was 58 per cent. The percentage at the margin being higher than the average percentage means that the average itself, already extremely high, is in the process of rising still further.

Growing wealth and income inequality, is not a phenomenon confined to India alone. It is a world-wide phenomenon which has now started worrying even the top leaders of the capitalist world who gather every year at Davos for the World Economic Forum. The threat of social instability that such growing economic inequality poses has placed it as a major item on the Davos agenda.

But where India stands out is that the growth of inequality here has been more rapid than elsewhere in the world, so much so that it now ranks among the most unequal societies anywhere. Compared for instance to the figure of 58 per cent of total wealth that the top 1 per cent owned in India prior to 2017, the corresponding figure for the world as a whole was 50 per cent. And even though for the world as a whole the top 1 per cent owned 82 per cent of the addition to wealth in 2017 compared to 73 per cent for India, the level of wealth inequality in the world will continue to remain below that in India in the foreseeable future.

What this suggests is that the underlying reason which is boosting wealth inequality everywhere is operating with even greater intensity in India. And this reason has primarily to do with the pursuit of neo-liberal economic policies. The growing wealth, and income inequality is a necessary feature of neo-liberal capitalism. The "spontaneous" tendency of capitalism to produce "wealth at one pole and poverty at another" which had been somewhat restrained in the post-war years through State intervention, in response to the socialist threat and to the growth in working class strength that capitalism faced at the end of the second world war, has been reintroduced with a vengeance now, under neo-liberal capitalism.

There are at least five obvious ways in which neo-liberal capitalism boosts wealth inequality. The first is through the increase in income inequality that it brings about. Since the ratio of income that is saved (and hence added to the stock of assets) is greater for higher income groups, a shift in income distribution in favour of the latter increases both the overall ratio of savings (and asset formation) in total income, and also the share of the top asset-owners in total assets.

An example will make the point clear. Suppose, to start with, that the top 10 per cent of the population owned assets worth 250 and earned an income of 50, while the bottom 90 per cent had an asset of 50 and earned an income of 50; and suppose the former habitually save half of their income while the latter habitually save 10 per cent of their income. Then the top 10 per cent would save 25 and the bottom 90 per cent 5, so that each group's asset grows by 10 per cent, and there is no rise in wealth inequality.

But now if income distribution becomes 60 for the top 10 per cent and 40 for the rest, then with the same savings ratios, the growth in assets is 34 or 11.3 per cent of the pre-existing level; the top group's asset growth is 12 per cent while the bottom group's asset growth is 8 per cent. The top group's share in total assets increases from 83 to 84 per cent. And if the increase in income inequality *continues* then the share of the top 10 per cent *would continue to rise.*

The tendency under neo-liberalism is to keep worsening income distribution. This is because the number of jobs created under it falls woefully short of the number of job-seekers, which increases the relative size of the reserve army of labour, so that wages remain tied to a subsistence level even as labour productivity increases. The share of surplus accruing to the rich therefore keeps increasing over time under neo-liberal capitalism, entailing an increase in income, and hence wealth, inequality.

In the above example, we assumed that the ratio of savings to income of each group remains unchanged when income distribution changes. In fact however consumption tends to be relatively sticky when income changes, in which case in the above example the savings of the top 10 per cent would increase to 35 when their income rises to 60 (since consumption remains fixed at 25), and the savings of the bottom 90 per cent would fall to *minus* 5 since their consumption remains 45 even as income falls to 40. In this new situation then, the share of the top 10 per cent in total wealth increases from 83 to 86 per cent.

This tendency for an increase in the share of wealth of the top percentiles becomes particularly pronounced when there is an *absolute decline* in the incomes of the bottom percentiles. And one reason among others why this happens in a neo-liberal regime is the privatisation of essential services like education and healthcare which also makes them more expensive, so that the poor have to deplete their meagre stock of assets even to be able to afford a particular level of access to these services. This therefore is the second way in which a neo-liberal regime contributes to an increase in wealth inequality.

The third way in which a neo-liberal regime accentuates wealth inequality is through an intensive process of primitive accumulation of capital which it unleashes upon the economy. Through a variety of means, ranging from an outright takeover of petty property, including peasant property, (or its purchase "for a song"); to encroachment on common property; to appropriation of State property (which is built up through taxes imposed on ordinary people); to the sheer filching of bank credit from the public sector banks (what is commonly referred to as a build-up of their "Non-Performing Assets"), the big capitalists increase their share in the total wealth of the economy.

In fact primitive accumulation increases wealth concentration in two ways: one has just been discussed; it supplements the effect of what Marx had called "centralisation of capital. The other way is that by squeezing peasants and petty producers it forces them out of their traditional occupations to migrate to cities where they join the ranks of the job seekers and hence swell the relative size of the reserve army of labour; this accentuates income inequality for reasons already discussed, and hence wealth inequality.

The fourth way that neo-liberalism promotes wealth inequality is by handing over tax concessions and tax breaks to the rich in the name of promoting higher economic growth. Such concessions directly increase wealth inequality. In addition since they are balanced by reducing government expenditure on education and healthcare, and thereby directly or indirectly privatising these essential services, they contribute to the impoverishment of large segments of the ordinary people, which as we saw earlier, also increases wealth inequality.

The fifth way in which wealth inequality increases under neo-liberalism is through the formation of asset price bubbles. Speculative booms on the stock market or on other asset markets give a boost to the value of assets, because of which the top percentiles which figure prominently among the asset-holders find the absolute value of their wealth, and hence their share in total wealth, increasing quite sharply within a very short period.

This however raises a moot point. To what extent can an increase in the absolute amount of wealth and its share in the total caused by such a speculative boom be considered genuine? After all, just as a speculative bubble can boost the wealth of the top percentiles, the collapse of the bubble can reduce their wealth overnight; why then should a bubble-based increase in wealth inequality be a cause for concern?

It does however become a cause for concern because, again under a neo-liberal regime, governments try to prevent a collapse of the bubble (which would have seriously adverse repercussions on the economy) by sustaining it through various means. These range from fiscal support (such as what Obama had pledged in the US to stem the effect on the financial system of the collapse of the housing bubble), to the commoditisation of elements of nature like water and air (so that new profitable assets are introduced to keep the boom going), to the privatisation of government assets such as "spectrum"(with the same objective). Hence the view that wealth acquired through an asset market bubble constitutes only fictitious wealth and should not therefore be a cause for concern, does not necessarily hold.

To be sure, wealth estimates, and hence estimates of wealth distribution, are fraught with a host of statistical difficulties. But, notwithstanding such difficulties, there is no gainsaying the fact that something extremely serious for our democracy and freedom is occurring through the extraordinary rise in wealth inequality.

Government Proposes Replacing Permanent Employment with 'Fixed Term Employment': CITU Opposes

J S Majumdar

The BJP government at the Centre has planned 'employment generation' by replacing each permanent employment by a number of fixed term employments in all sectors of industries and services. Consider this, a permanent employee remaining 30 years in service till retirement may be replaced by six or more fixed term employees each for every five years or less. The central government issued a draft notification on January 8, 2018 on the amendment to the Industrial Employment (Standing Order) Central Rules, proposing the **introduction of fixed term employment in all sectors**, and gave 30 days' public notice.

In response to the notification, CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, in a letter on January 10, accused the Labour and Employment Ministry of surreptitiously issuing the notification without caring for and contrary to the usual practice of holding discussions with central trade unions (CTUs) prior to the introduction of such amendments in labour laws and rules.

A similar amendment to the central rules was introduced on December 10, 2003 by the then BJP government despite united opposition by the CTUs. However, in the face of workers' countrywide opposition and protest actions, the government had to rescind it through a gazette notification in 2007. The BJP-led government again tried to introduce the fixed term employment in all sectors through a similar notification on 29 April, 2015. At that time too, the CITU and other central trade unions strongly protested. The government did not proceed further on the matter, after all central trade unions served a joint notice of countrywide workers general strike on September 2, 2015, in pursuance of their 12-point common charter of demands.

As a prelude to the present move, the government made amendment to the rules for **fixed term employment in the apparel manufacturing sector** by a notification on October 7, 2016, despite opposition from the CITU and other trade unions. The government at that time took the plea that "*the decision would facilitate employment of workers in apparel manufacturing on fixed term basis in the backdrop of seasonal nature of the sector"*. This is what the labour ministry stated to the leaders of the central trade unions and later in a press note.

However, the BJP government's real intention became clear later when it proposed replacing "fixed term employment in apparel manufacturing sector" with "fixed term employment" in the draft notification.

Existing rules, after the 2016 amendment, have classified workmen as "Permanent, Probationers, Badlis, Temporary, Casual, Apprentices and Fixed-Term Employment in Apparel Manufacturing Sector". With the proposed amendment now, the workmen would be classified as "Permanent, Probationers, Badlis, Temporary, Casual, Apprentices and Fixed Term Employment".

The proposed amendments have proviso that these fixed term employees' "hours of work, wages, allowances and other benefits shall not be less than that of a permanent workman". Fine, but this is proportionate to the period of service. That is, each fixed time employee shall begin at the entry point of the service with usual probation, confirmation and remuneration as a beginner.

In his letter, Tapan Sen gave the example of the employees of Alliance Air, the subsidiary of Air India, who were recruited in fixed term employment and are deprived of similar pay and facilities as those in Air India. Repeated letters of CITU to Air India management remain unanswered. That is an example of same wages and facilities of permanent and fixed time employees!

The very temporary character of employment makes job security fragile for fixed term employees and the present move of the government is only for ensuring 'ease of doing business' for the corporate sector. The CITU has strongly opposed the proposed amendments.

Woman's Caste Raises her Exposure to Mortality

Ashwaq Masoodi

The average Dalit woman in India dies 14.6 years younger than women from higher castes. While identities, perceived or real, can increase risks of discrimination for an individual or a group, a woman's caste in India increases her exposure to mortality because of poor sanitation and inadequate healthcare, says a UN report.

"*Those left furthest behind in society are often women and girls who experience multiple forms of disadvantage based on gender and other inequalities... This can lead to clustered deprivations where women and girls may be simultaneously disadvantaged in their access to quality education, decent work, health and well-being,"* states the report Turning promises into action: gender equality in the 2030 Agenda by UN Women.

Pointing to the "*interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination*"—a concept introduced in the 1980s to capture the interaction of gender and race in shaping black women's experiences in the US, the report says disadvantage is intensified for women and girls living at the intersection of inequalities.

Two years after the adoption of Agenda 2030, this report examines through a gender lens the progress and challenges in the implementation of all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, adopted by world leaders in 2015, from ending poverty and hunger to tackling climate change. The report highlights how women are affected by each of them and looks at both the ends (goals and targets) and the means (policies and processes) that are needed to make the achievement of the ambitious agenda for sustainable development a reality.The UN Women report also shows through data how progress for women is a pre-requisite if progress for all is to be achieved.

The report stresses on the commitment to make benefits and services available to all. This commitment, the report says, is complemented by the pledge to *"leave no one behind"* on the path to sustainable development. "*Grounded in the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, this commitment recognizes the multiple and intersecting inequalities that so often prevent the full and equal enjoyment of specific groups' rights in practice,*" it says.

The report also points to how in India a young woman aged 20–24 from a poor, rural household is 21.8 times less likely to ever attend school than one from a rich urban household, five times more likely to marry before the age of 18 and 5.8 times as likely to become an adolescent mother. "*The likelihood of being poor is greater if she is landless and from a scheduled caste. Her low level of education and status in the social hierarchy will almost guarantee that if she works for pay, it will be under exploitative working conditions,"* the report states.

There has been a significant increase in overall literacy rates and school participation rates across India since the early 1990s. However, gender and social disparities still exist. Scheduled castes (SC), who comprise 16.6% of the population, and scheduled tribes (ST), who make up 8.6% of the population, have lower literacy rates than the Indian average. The literacy rate for female STs is still under 50% and 57% for SC women, while the numbers are slightly higher for men.

The UN Women report shows how women who live in poor households spend as much as 24% of their work time collecting firewood and water, and foraging for edible and non-edible items to be used as food and housing materials, while women in non-poor households allocate about one half of that time, 12%, to such tasks.

Suggesting a way out, the report says strategies to leave no one behind should aim to create a sense of solidarity through risk-sharing, redistribution and universal services. *"Where all citizens reap clear benefits from such services, their willingness to contribute to funding them through progressive taxation is also likely to increase*," it says.

Most Dalit, Tribal and Muslim Girls are Still out of School

Millions of Indian children below 14 years of age remain out of the schooling system after eight years of the enactment of the Right to Education Act in 2009. This is a serious matter for state governments.

The UNESCO has calculated that India's out-of-school population is of only 1.4 million children. India has the fifth largest out-of-school population of 6-11 years of age. The Ministry of Human Resource Development did an independent survey and has estimated that "only" 6.6 million children are out of school (more than the total population of Denmark). The last 2011 Census put the figure at 34.47 million not in school, just short of the total population of Canada. The figures are probably even higher if one looks at the data produced by state governments based on the annual household survey to identify out-of-school children. For example the survey undertaken by the Government of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous State, shows that only 18,910 children aged between 6 and 14 years were out of school.

All the surveys undertaken by government and non-government organizations show that most of the out-of-school population consists of Dalits, tribals and Muslim minority community members; a large share of them are girls. The mission of ensuring universal education cannot be achieved without a focus on girls' education. Despite various education programmes, viz. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and NPEGEL were introduced by the Central Government with special focus on providing out-of-school girls with residential facilities to complete elementary education and various schemes by state governments to reduce the dropout rate, 8.15 million children were found to be out of school in the 6-13 age group. Again, the number produced by the government was challenged by several national and international .

After a struggle of more than 60 years, the Indian Government passed legislation in 2009 which guarantees the right of children of the 6-14 age group to free and compulsory equitable education in an environment which is safe and secure for learning. A key focus of the Act is children who missed the opportunity of going to school. It holds state governments and local authorities responsible for ensuring that all out-of-school children are supported until they are admitted to grades appropriate to their age. However, after eight years, very little has been done to bring out-of-school children into the school system. State governments must provide appropriate human resources from the state to the block/cluster level for these courses to run, must have special curricula which enable children to acquire age and grade appropriate competencies and should make efforts to ensure that teachers are sensitive, qualified and trained and understand the community context. The environment where children, especially girls, study, needs to be safe and they must receive requisite psycho-social support for learning. All this requires adequate budgetary allocations by the state and central governments.

A study in 2014 reveals that although the state governments have an overall vision and intention to address the education of out-of-school children through the development of guidelines and modules, adequate human and financial resources have not been allotted to ensure effective implementation on the necessary scale. Moreover, there were huge gaps in the understanding of the programme and good policy intentions were diluted at each step between the state, district, school and community levels. States have also not developed realistic strategies for the identification of out-of-school children. The processes and methodology must be holistic and address the cognitive and psycho-social needs of out-of-school children. A fear-free environment and the use of local language are essential to attract and keep girls in school.

If India is to make use of its demographic dividend, it cannot afford to ignore the millions of children currently out of school. Both systemic bottlenecks and specific pedagogical challenges of working with out-of-school children need to be overcome.

(Courtesy - Justice News)

A Journey of Grit and Determination

Kiran Moghe

When a thin wisp of a girl dressed in trousers and a shirt appeared one afternoon in early 1988 in the makeshift office of the fledgling unit of the Janwadi Mahila Sanghatana (JMS - AIDWA) in Pune, asking for support in her quest to be a professional autorickshaw driver, we were more than taken aback! Familiar as we were with the usual cases of domestic conflicts, we weren't quite sure what to make of her! It turned out that she had practically run away from home in the small town of Parbhani, in the face of stiff opposition from her family. It was bad enough that Sheela Dawre wore men's clothes, chewed tobacco and drove a motor cycle; but the idea of her driving an auto rickshaw for a living was preposterous to say the least! Rebelling against their efforts to persuade her to "settle down", Sheela came to Pune, known for the pioneering efforts of Savitri and Jotiba Phule to educate women as well as its tradition of social reform.

But she soon realized that it was easier said than done. When she approached auto owners to rent their vehicle to her on a shift (rental) basis, they would refuse for several reasons. One was their basic mistrust in the ability of a woman to drive an auto, hitherto a totally male preserve! Another was a fear that this could open the floodgates for more women to enter their domain and create competition for their business. There was also a more noble concern like lack of safety. Whatever the reasons, Sheela soon realized that the only way to get in was by getting her own rickshaw. But the situation was tight. The Regional Transport Authority had stopped issuing permits. Someone told her to approach JMS and see if they could help. And this is how Pune unit of the JMS has been part of the making of Pune's first professional woman auto driver! Now we realize that she was truly a pioneer, when the Government of India honoured her with a First Women Achiever award at the hands of the President of India in December 2017.

With JMS support, Sheela personally met the Maharashtra Minister of Transport, Vilasrao Deshmukh and he agreed to issue her a permit as a special case. Due to excess demand, the black market price of an auto was as high as Rs 40000. So JMS approached Rahul Bajaj, the CEO of Bajaj Auto and asked him to give it to us at cost price of Rs 30000. I do believe he was a bit taken aback, but agreed! But even that was a lot of money in those days, so Sheela needed a bank loan. It took a lot of persuasion with the bank asking questions like "*What if you suddenly decide to marry and leave this profession?*" (Would they ever ask a man such a question?) JMS appealed for funds to collect the seed money ("crowd funding" was not a word in vogue in those days!) and in December 1988 Sheela became the first woman to own and drive an auto rickshaw on the streets of Pune. It was a proud moment for all of us.

Of course it was never easy. She faced hostility and harassment from passengers, the police (in one incident she was cuffed by a traffic policeman and JMS had to strongly protest and take it up with the authorities), and even co-auto drivers. But she ploughed on with grit and determination, exhausted on some days, but exhilarated about the fact that she had indeed achieved her dream! It was during this period that she met her life partner, Shirish Kamble, also an auto driver. Her family disapproved of the inter caste marriage, but JMS stood by her and even organized the registration and reception! After a few years, they bought a van to ferry school children.

➔

Protest against Budget

➔

Thirty years on, they are partners in a travel company. They have two daughters, Michiko and Eco, young women who display the same sense of purpose as their mother. Sheela feels that unless the entire family takes on responsibilities, women will be unable to step out of the home and enter new professions.

Women have a tremendous unrealized potential" says Sheela. *"It's true that we face hurdles because we are women. But we must be also willing to dirty our hands and be ready to face the challenges thrown up when we go off the beaten path."*

Postal regd. No. DL(C)-01/1199/2018-20 Delhi, Licenced to post without prepayment under Licence No. U(C)-07/2018-20, Posted on 26-27 (Advance month) at NDPSO, ND-110001 RNI 37025/81.
(Date of Publication- 24th February 2018)

Successful Struggles of Scheme Workers

Karnataka Mid Day Meal Workers

Haryana ASHA Workers

Printed by K. Hemalata and published by K.Hemalata on behalf of the AICCWW(CITU), 13-A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110 002, Ph: 011-23221306, Fax: 011-23211284, Email: aiccww@yahoo.com, Website: www.citucentre.org and printed at Progressive Printers, A-21, Jhilmil Industrial Area, G T Road, Shahdara, Delhi-95. Editor: K.Hemalata