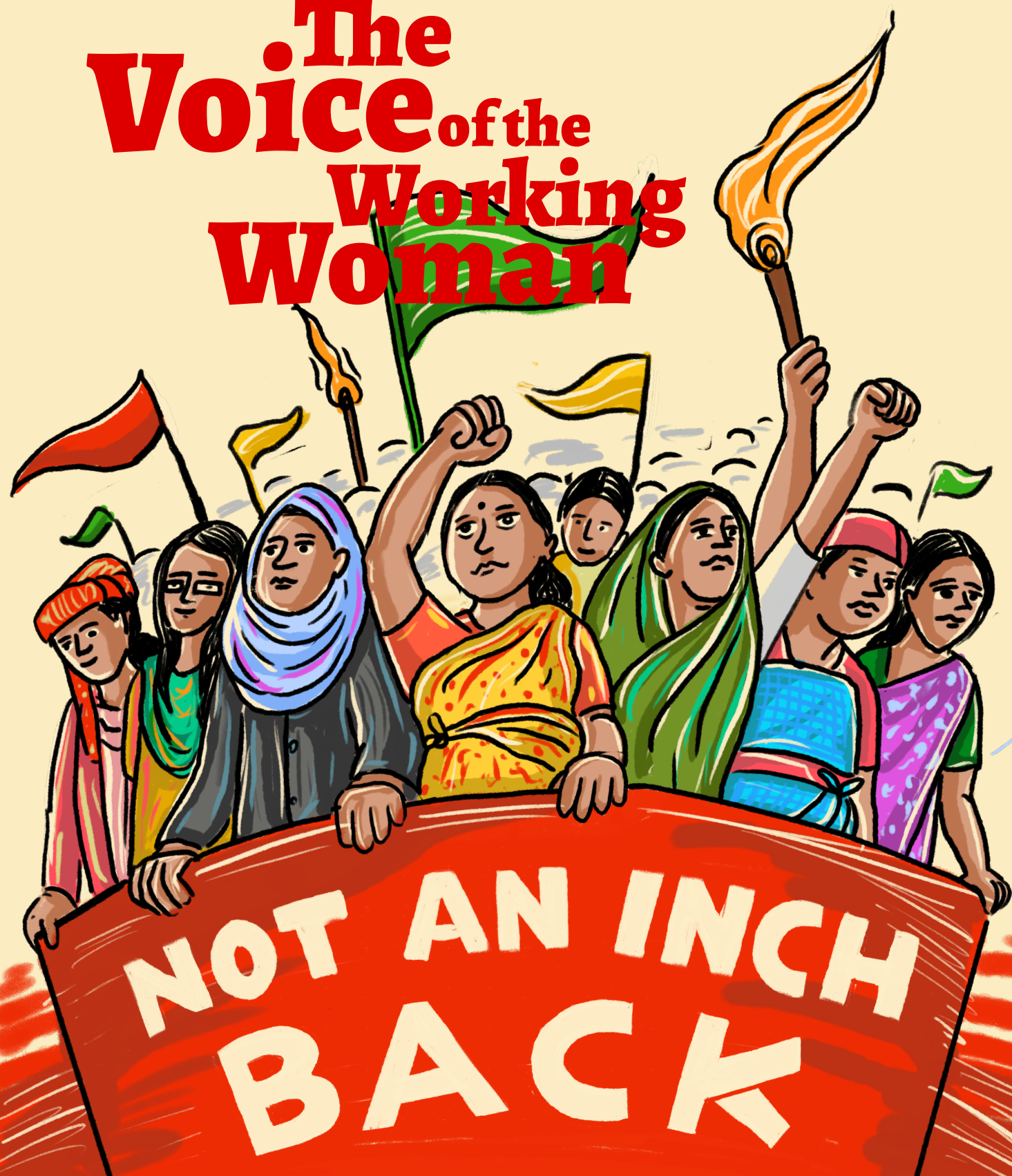


# **The Voice of the Working Woman**



## Future Tasks

CITU in Action on the Demands of the  
Peasantry and the Working Class

1. Workplace level demonstrations all over the country on 30th December 2020; Block-level demonstration by unorganised sector and Scheme workers.
2. District level militant demonstrations/ seize collectorate/ gherao/ picketing/ courting of arrest on 7-8 January 2021.
3. Intensive campaign through leaflets, pamphlets, posters, shop floor meetings, village/block level, general body meetings, meetings at residential areas etc should precede the district level protests
4. Regional jathas within all states to meet maximum numbers of workers from different sectors with the aim of reaching the unreached to explain the link between the issues and the government's policies and CITU's understanding of the present situation. Jathas should be held from 15th January onwards to be completed by 30th January.
5. Jathas to culminate in massive state level mobilisations with the participation of central leaders of CITU

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## The Voice of the Working Woman

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# EDITORIAL

The incident of workers' protest at the Wistron factory in the Narasapura industrial estate in Kolar district of Karnataka on 12th December is compared the incident to that at the Maruti plant in Manesar in 2012. Major concern expressed in the mainstream media was not for the conditions of the workers that led to the situation, but about its impact on attracting foreign investment.

## WHAT IS THE REALITY?

Wistron is a Taiwanese corporation which assembles the latest version of iPhone SE of Apple, world's most expensive mobile phone manufacturer. In addition Wistron also manufactures for Lenovo and Microsoft in India. The conditions of the around 10000 workers, nearly 8500 of whom are contract workers, are appalling. All these workers are very young boys and girls mostly from poor families. Many are Dalits. Large numbers are migrants. The workers include engineering graduates and ITI diploma holders.

The workers have to work for 12 hours; the company has only two shifts. While they are promised wages of Rs 22000 per month including overtime wages, the actual amount paid is less. Attendance is fudged; overtime is not recorded. Wages are not even paid regularly every month. Women have to work night shifts. But the company does not comply with any of the provisions specified in the notification related to night shift work for women.

There is no mechanism for grievance redressal. No inspections are carried out. The workers, either the permanent workers or the contract workers are not organised into trade unions. But they have been repeatedly raising their issues with the Wistron management, with the contractors and with the labour department.

But none responded. The workers raised the issue with the management on 12th December and were yet again turned away. It was then that things probably got out of hand. Wistron, as Maruti Manesar earlier, are only a couple of examples of how the big multinational corporations exploit workers for their profit maximisation.

It is to be recalled that Wistron is one of the international companies which was provided with huge incentives under the BJP government's production linked incentive schemes for large scale electronics manufacturing in the country. As the awful conditions of the workers in Wistron got exposed, the company had to admit of irregularities in payment of wages, talked of corrective actions and apologised to the workers. Apple also had to state that it would not give Wistron any new business till it took corrective measures. But before this, the BJP government in Karnataka arrested 150 workers and charged 7000 people with violence.

If these are the condition of workers in a MNC that manufactures for topmost global brands in electronics today, one can well imagine what they would be when the Labour Codes, which annul even the minimum benefits and rights, particularly the basic right to form unions and collective actions, come into force.

This cannot be allowed to happen. The demand of scrapping the labour codes along with the Farm Acts was a major demand of the working class in the 26th November general strike. The struggle with the demand to scrap the anti worker labour codes must continue with increased intensity, increased defiance and increased resistance. The working class cannot rest till this demand is achieved.

The Voice of the Working Woman wishes all its readers, subscribers, and the entire toiling people, men and women, revolutionary greetings for the New Year 2021!

# ***Nationwide Farmers Struggle Intensifies, Get Ready For Long Haul***

*Ashok Dhawale*

The historic nationwide farmers struggle that began on November 26 entered its fourth week on December 17. It was intensified and broadened even further after the unprecedented support that was expressed by the people of India through the Bharat Bandh on December 8.

For the first time since the neo-liberal policies began three decades ago, all sections of the peasantry have united as never before against the three Farm Acts, against the rapacious corporate lobby, both Indian and foreign, and against the BJP-RSS central government that is acting as their servile agent. This protracted struggle has united the poor, middle and even large sections of the rich peasantry. The working class, which has itself been hit by the four Labour Codes imposed by the centre, has rallied to the support of the peasantry in its struggle. Large sections of the middle classes are also backing the valiant fight of their 'annadatas'. Women, youth and students from all these classes are standing in solidarity.

Last week saw another series of massive peasant actions one after the other, as per the call of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) given on December 9, just after the Bharat Bandh and after the SKM had unanimously rejected the written proposals of the central government. Those developments were outlined in these columns last week.

## ***STRUGGLE INTENSIFIED***

First, there is a massive increase in the number of farmers gathering on the borders of the nation's capital. Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh are freshly joining the

mahapadavs at the Singhu, Tikri, Ghazipur and Palwal borders where four national highways coming to Delhi have been blocked.

Second, the last national highway from Jaipur to Delhi, which was still open, was blocked by thousands of farmers under the leadership of the AIKSCC on December 13. A large share of those who blocked this highway was AIKS-led farmers from Rajasthan and Haryana and CITU-led Anganwadi workers from Punjab. Red flags are flying here in abundance. They have now been joined by AIKS and CITU-led activists from Gujarat. Some other farmers' organizations have also contributed to the blockade.

Third, the AIKS Maharashtra state council which held its online meeting on December 14, has decided to mobilize peasants in large numbers from all over the state and join the mahapadav at the Rajasthan-Haryana border. They will begin their 1300 Km vehicle march with a huge rally at Nashik on December 21. Hectic preparations are on to make this march a great success.

Fourth, thousands of farmers in various parts of the country picketed hundreds of toll plazas and refused to pay the toll on December 12. This action elicited enthusiastic mass response.

Fifth, lakhs of farmers gathered around Delhi observed a one day fast on December 14. This fast came after the farmers faced and fought severe repression in the form of water cannons, tear gas shells, lathi charges and arrests at the hands of the BJP governments in Haryana and at the centre, and after braving the biting December cold for the last three weeks.

***“It is tragic that over 30 farmers have died while taking part in the struggle on the borders of Delhi. And yet the callous and cynical BJP central government refuses to respond to the one-point demand of farmers for the repeal of the three Farm Acts and the withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill.”***

Sixth, the nationwide call for demonstrations at all district and tehsil centres on December 14 got a massive response from lakhs of farmers in almost all states across the country. After the continuous mass actions on November 26, December 3, December 5 and the December 8 Bharat Bandh, this fifth countrywide action in three weeks blew to smithereens the government's motivated claim that this struggle is confined to only two or three states. On December 16, a massive West Bengal peasant rally has been organized by the AIKSCC in Kolkata and it will be addressed by AIKS general secretary Hannan Mollah and many others. On December 14, apart from the huge mass actions everywhere, MLAs and MLCs of the CPI(M), PWP, BVA, NCP and SP waved a large red banner in the premises of the Maharashtra Vidhan Bhawan on the opening day of the state assembly's winter session in Mumbai, demanding the immediate repeal of the three Farm Acts and supporting the countrywide farmers struggle. CPI(M) MLA Vinod Nikole addressed the media that was present there in strength.

Seventh, the countrywide call to boycott Ambani and Adani products and services has struck a chord and is being well responded to in several states. Farmers and other sections of the people have led large demonstrations outside Reliance and Adani outlets in many states. Social media channels are being used in a big way to popularize this campaign.

#### **CALL FOR HOMAGE MEETINGS ON DECEMBER 20**

It is tragic that over 30 farmers have died while taking part in the struggle on the borders of Delhi. And yet the callous and cynical BJP central government refuses to respond to the one-point demand of farmers for the repeal of the three Farm Acts and the withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill. The SKM which met on December 15 has given a nationwide call to hold public meetings between 11 am and 1 pm on December 20 to pay homage to the martyrs of the farmers struggle. There is no doubt that this call will get a massive response across the country.

#### **ARMY VETERANS PLAN TO RETURN GALLANTRY MEDALS**

In a very significant move, as reported by 'The Hindu' on December 13, Army veterans from Punjab and Haryana who are camping at the Singhu border have collected over 5,000 gallantry medals since November 26 to return to the central government. They plan to collect 25,000 such medals in the next few days. Some extracts from the above report are eye-openers.

80 year-old retired Havaladar Balwant Singh from Jhajjar in Haryana said, *“I come from a family of jawans and kisans, which have eight martyrs, either in war or at the border. I was proud of that fact, but because of what the government is doing now, it has begun feeling like this country is no longer worth living in, leave alone to die for. We have been here since the 26th November and the government, instead of listening to us cry, is busy finding ways to force upon us these black laws created by people in air-conditioned rooms.”*

***"..the peasants, the workers and the people of India will teach these modern Neros a lesson with this peaceful, democratic and united resistance that is unfolding before our eyes."***

Retired Subedar S P Singh from Gurdaspur in Punjab said some six farmers were detained when they had attempted to meet President Ram Nath Kovind to return a small batch of medals last week. Retired Havaladar Bartar Singh from Patiala alleged that the group of veterans was detained for two whole days and their phones and belongings were confiscated. He said, *"I was a soldier earlier but even before that, I was a labourer and a farmer. We are willing to sacrifice these medals in return for a repeal of the black laws... They kept us in detention for two whole days thinking that we will go back home, but the first thing we did after being released this morning was to come back here to join the protest."*

Retired Naik Kapil Dev from Haryana said, *"These medals were given not for entertainment but for valour, for coming face to face with death, through sweat, blood and tears, but the jawan is ready to let them go for a better future for the farmer."*

### **GOVERNMENT CALLOUSNESS CONTINUES**

Living in its own world far away from such voices from the ground, and cosying up to the corporates who help it win elections through money and media power, the callousness of the BJP-RSS central government continues unabated. Its leaders have tried, with no success whatsoever, to defame, discredit and divide the farmers movement for the last three weeks.

First they accused the farmers of being influenced by Khalistanis. Then they alleged that they were instigated by Pakistan and China. After that they accused them of being led by Maoists and Naxalites. In spite of the Godi media hurling such Goebbelsian charges ad nauseum, they have been rejected with

contempt by the people of India, whose support has kept growing. Realising that its defamatory campaign was becoming counter-productive in the face of massively mounting protests, the government tried a new tack. Propping up some of its own agents ('dalals' is a much better and more accurate word) as so-called farmers' organizations, it held negotiations with them. Like a command performance they duly supported all the three Farm Acts. The RSS-led Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) were also brought in to make noises opposing the farmers struggle. None of this is working one bit.

In a feeble attempt to draw attention away from the farmers' struggle, on December 10, Prime Minister Narendra Modi with much fanfare laid the foundation stone for the new Parliament building. He used all his usual empty phrases of our "democratic legacy", "reflecting India's aspirations" and "being always accountable to people and the Constitution".

It was the classic RSS-BJP fascistic habit of speaking one thing, while doing the exact opposite. Modi spoke of "atmanirbharta" on the one hand, while selling off the country to Indian and foreign corporates, on the other. Today he is speaking of "democracy", "aspirations" and "accountability to people" on the one hand, while letting millions of Indians shiver in the bitter cold for weeks on end on the borders of the nation's capital, on the other.

But the peasants, the workers and the people of India will teach these modern Neros a lesson with this peaceful, democratic and united resistance that is unfolding before our eyes.

# ***The Draft Rules Of Social Security Code Rules Out Universal Social Security For Mass Of Workers***

*R Karumalaiyan*

The Central Ministry of Labour and Employment has released the draft rules for the Code on Social Security, 2020 on 13th November-2020 “for information of all persons likely to be affected thereby”, unscrupulously avoiding route of tripartite consultation with the stakeholders (trade unions in particular). The Modi government has been working overtime to finish “labour reforms” at the earliest so as to show its hyper-loyalty to the corporates.

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*The draft rules on Social Security Code have therefore been designed and articulated in a manner so as to substantially reduce the obligations of the employers in the matter of social security to workers in the Code itself and make that arrangement perpetual and continuous by allowing the Government the discretion to decide, devise and alter the social security schemes through executive order.*

*That means long existing statutory rights to social security lose their legal teeth, their fate now dependent on the whims of the executive.*

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The draft rules have toed the same line and deliberately created hurdles for enforcement to the advantage of the employers. They do not provide any new social security benefits to the workers, nor do they expand coverage through any substantive enforceable provision (rather, they try to make provisions unenforceable at every possible opportunity), with workers likely to be subjected to immense sufferings. Simply put, they have further curtailed government-guaranteed social security so as to place the workers at the mercy of the market for every aspect of their life.

## ***ON EMPLOYEES’ PROVIDENT FUND (EPF)***

Our apprehensions were confirmed by the very first provision (Rule 3): Rule 3 starts lecturing about opting out of the EPF and ESI, instead of expanding coverage. It goes to the extent of granting deemed permission by the establishment for exiting out of EPF coverage if no decisions were taken by CPFC/DG, as the case may be, within 60 days of such applications for exit made by the employer in this regard.

Regarding the manner of administration of the funds vested with the Central Board of Trustees (CBT), the EPF Act u/s 5A (3) says that “the Central Board shall administer the Funds vested in it in such a manner as may be specified in the Scheme”. Now the authoritarian BJP government and its bureaucrats want to rule the roost of the EPF. That is why they drafted the rules so - “The Central Board shall administer the Funds vested in it within the ambit of the guidelines issued by the Central Government”. Thus, the draft Rules empower the Central government to interfere and even ignore the tripartite body CBT in the matter of administering the workers’ fund in EPF i.e. from the administration of about ten lakh crore rupees of workers’ hard earned money!

It is pertinent to note that the Employees’ Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, is, to quote from the preamble, “an Act to provide for the institution of provident funds, pension fund and deposit-linked insurance fund for employees in factories and other establishments”. So the EPFO’s main functions were to administer schemes such as Employees’ Provident Funds Scheme, 1952,

***"All Central governments post liberalisation have gradually been reducing the ESI contribution from 7.25% to 4% of wages. Now, the BJP wants to bring that ESI corpus down further by changing the definition of 'wage' on the plea of increasing the "take-home-salary" of the employees."***

the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme, 1976, the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 etc. Even on these core functions of EPFO neither the Code nor Draft Rules have mentioned anything at all except simply mentioning, in the repealing and saving section (section 164(3)) of the Code, that all the said schemes shall remain in force for a period of one year. That means the fate and future of these schemes still hangs in balance.

### **ON EMPLOYEES STATE INSURANCE (ESI)**

All Central governments post liberalisation have gradually been reducing the ESI contribution from 7.25% to 4% of wages. Now, the BJP wants to bring that ESI corpus down further by changing the definition of 'wage' on the plea of increasing the "take-home-salary" of the employees. It is nothing but an attempt to dismantle the workers' self-funded health assurance scheme which goes against the doctrines of Market Economy by being an alternative to corporate health insurance business. Hence, for Rule 20, which fixes the rate of contributions to ESI, the term "wage" must be defined as done in the parent Act.

To camouflage the neoliberal offensive on state-funded social security, when the Rajya Sabha passed the three Codes, Labour Minister Gangawar declared that ESI is going to be implemented in all 740 districts as the Code has also promised for extension of ESI facilities to unorganized along with the gig and platform workers. But the Draft Rules of the same Code remain absolutely silent about this obligation provided in the Code.

The ESI Corporation, in consultation and co-operation with State Governments, provides certain benefits to workers in case of sickness, maternity, and employment injuries. These medical expenses are being shared by the ESI and the State Governments in such proportion as may be agreed between them. This is being done through concerned ESI Directorates of the State Governments functioning either under Health or Labour Departments.

But draft rule 28, now, while defining the structure of such state level bodies constituted by the State governments for the purpose, stipulates creating Societies registered under the State specific Society Registration Act/ Trust Act. This is an extremely dangerous proposal. Whatever may be the structure, it should be created under the Code and must be a statutory body functioning under the State governments. It is all the more important to remember that ESI is giving Rs.3000/ per Insured Persons (IPs) towards these medical expenses to the state governments that runs into thousands of crores. The draft rules practically propose to demolish all control and superintendence of ESI as well as the State governments altogether through all this palaver of 'societies'. This must not be allowed to happen.

## **ON MATERNITY BENEFITS**

The rules related to crèche violate the Social Security Code, 2020 itself. Section 67(1) of the Code requires every establishment employing “fifty or such number of employees as may be prescribed” to establish crèches “within such distance as may be prescribed” either separately or along with common facilities. But draft Rule 39(1) has changed the eligibility condition from the wider term of “employees” (which include men, women and other employees) to fifty “women employees”, which violates the Code. It is straightforward to see that in most establishments, this condition will relieve many establishments employing women workers from the obligation to set up crèches.

Moreover, the Guidelines for setting up and running crèche facilities under the Maternity Benefit Act 2017 that was issued by the Ministry of Women and Child Development also stand violated by the draft rules. As per those guidelines, the use of crèche facilities should be extended to children of age group of 6 months to 6 years of all employees including temporary, daily wage, consultant and contractual personnel. Crèches should be located near/at the workplace site or in the beneficiaries’ neighborhood, within 500 metres. The draft Rules should have incorporated these provisions in concrete terms.

Similarly, the sections on nursing breaks smack of capitalist barbarity in the sense that they do not recognize the child’s right to food, let alone breastfeeding or a parent’s obligation to attend to their child’s needs. The Code says; “every woman delivered of a child who returns to duty after such delivery shall, in addition to the interval for rest allowed to her, be allowed in the course of her daily work two breaks”. The Rules have gone further in restrictively defining those two breaks as of 15 minutes’ duration only for nursing the child until the child attains the age of fifteen months”. This must be changed according to the International Child care standard and our WCD Ministry’s guidelines.

## **ON BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION WORKERS**

As per the Building and other Construction Workers Cess (BoCW) Act, all construction activities incurring a cost of above Rs 10 lakh are bound to deposit cess at 1% (in some states, 2%) of the cost of construction to the state BoCW board. The Cess so collected from the government/public and private sectors till March, 2020 is about Rs.52,000 crores. This is the only corpus fund for 3.5 crore registered workers. The BoCW Cess Act was enacted to augment this resource. But the Code, true to its original avatar, has already diluted the definition of “construction establishment”. The draft rules have further weakened other specifications with the dubious intention of allowing the employer to evade the payment of due cess with impunity. The provisions relating to the payment of cess have been watered down, and a new procedure for ‘self-assessment’ in respect of building and other construction works has been mooted. The thirty days time limit for payment of cess so levied has under the draft rules been further liberalized to sixty days.

The penal interest rate on delayed payment of cess has been reduced from 2% to 1% every month. The present existing rules give power to the Assessing Officer for directing that no machinery or material can be removed or disturbed from the construction site till he/she finishes the enquiries/inspection. This has been completely deleted from the rules. Further, under the draft rules, the Assessing Officer can visit construction sites only after obtaining the prior approval from the Secretary of the Building and Other Construction Workers Board contrary to the extant rules. In totality, in the Draft Rules the violations and evasions in employers’ obligation have been rewarded with more concessions for violations and evasions. The enforcement machinery to ensure payment of cess has been demolished through the Draft Rules in favour of the construction barons, resulting in the deprivation of the legitimate social security benefits enjoyed by construction workers hitherto.

***"The right to social security is an inalienable right of the workers, who are the real creator of the wealth of the nation. Thus, let us scale up the fight for universal social security by fundamentally linking the same with our ongoing fight for alternative policies."***

#### **ON UNORGANIZED SECTOR WORKERS**

The Indian economy still continues to be dominated by a burgeoning informal/unorganized sector. Naturally, our workforce is characterized by the low income without any social security. The National Commission for Enterprises in Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) estimated that only 6 per cent such workers have received some sort of social security and the rest 94% have been left without any such social protection. That was why the NCEUS had recommended earmarking at least 3% of GDP towards unorganized workers' social security, as this sector contributes around 63% of GDP. The Social Security Code as well as the draft rules has not addressed issues relating to this vast segment of our working populations.

Here, neither any institutional arrangements nor any state-funded schemes have been provided for. Rather the National Social Security Board (NSSB) for Unorganized Workers under the erstwhile Unorganised Workers Social Security Act has been restructured so as to demolish its tripartite character. Besides this, the Draft Rules remain absolutely silent about its terms of reference and system of functioning.

Section 6(2) (i) (ii) of the Code on Social Security, 2020 provides for the compulsory nomination of seven members of workers and employers of the unorganized sector to the National Social Security Board (NSSB). But Rule 9(1)(d)'s stipulation of "representatives" from workers' associations of unorganized sector is dubious one to empower the Govt to select the workers' representatives of their choice depriving the Central Trade Unions from their rights to nominate representatives in NSSB.

The Social Security Code has mentioned that the schemes notified for the unorganized workers may be funded by the Central Government or/and the State governments either independently or jointly. The draft Rules neither notify any schemes nor provide any clarification on funding, except for in u/s 59, sayinh that "Central Government shall identify the sources for initial funding/replenishing the Social Security Fund from time to time". Here, the draft rules seem to be elaborating the procedures for managing a fund without any concrete schemes!

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*Though the Indian Constitution and its Directive Policy contain all the ingredients on the obligations and responsibilities of the State towards the minimum realization of some socio-economic rights, the present Code and its draft rules have moved in the opposite direction, and have tried to relieve the State further of most of its obligations with respect ot social security.*

*At the same time, whatever social security rights were earned by the organized working class through struggles have been severely tampered with in order to pave the way for the dilution of the statutorily enforceable rights of the workers. This is the real face of our Prime Minister's vision of Universal Social Security.*

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The right to social security is an inalienable right of the workers, who are the real creator of the wealth of the nation. Thus, let us scale up the fight for universal social security by fundamentally linking the same with our ongoing fight for alternative policies.

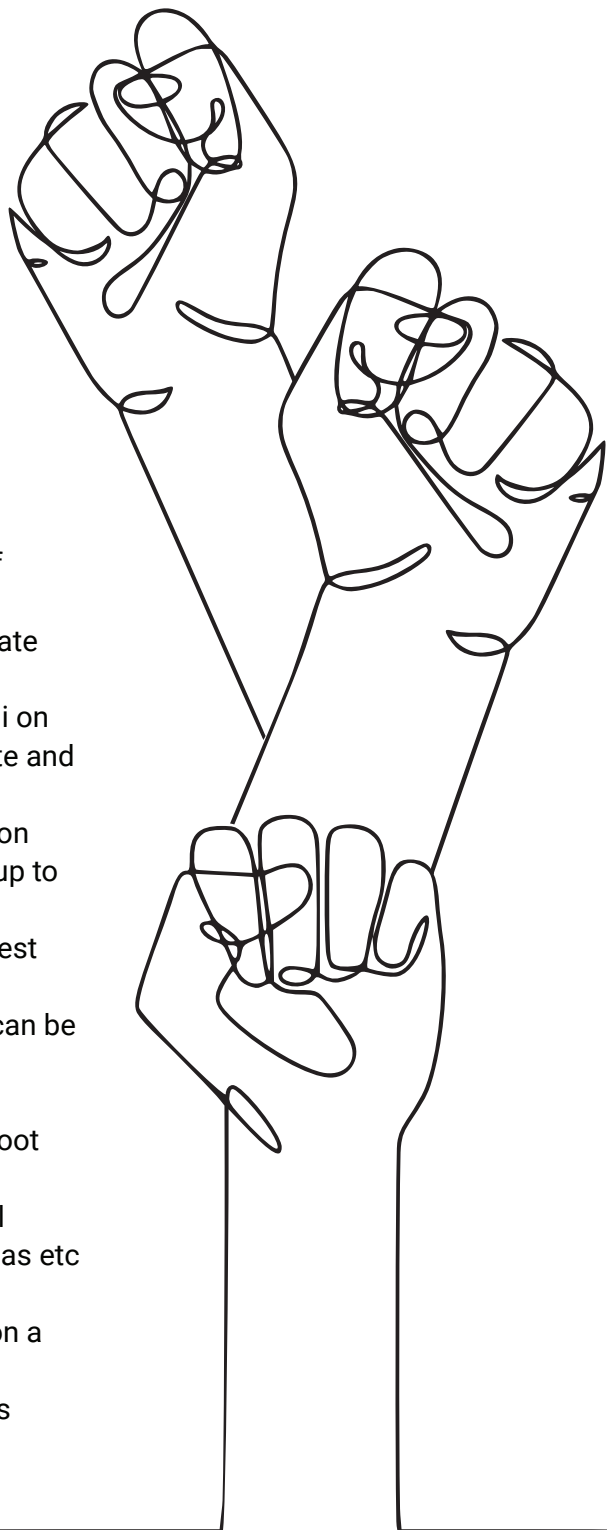
# ***On CITU-DYFI-SFI Joint Initiative On Unemployment Issue***

A joint meeting of leadership of CITU, DYFI and SFI decided to launch a countrywide campaign against unemployment, job loss and precarious jobs.

This is the first phase of a joint initiative of CITU-DYFI-SFI on the unemployment issue to prepare ground for joint countrywide struggles in the next round. The meeting decided the following programmes.

## ***Programmes***

1. Joint meetings of the state leadership of CITU, DYFI and SFI to develop common understanding on the campaign; CITU state leadership to take initiative.
2. Joint convention at national level at Delhi on 2nd February 2020, followed by joint state and district level conventions.
3. Extensive joint/independent campaigns on the charter of demands in all the states up to grass-root level.
4. Campaign should be aimed to reach widest sections of the youth, students, workers, unemployed and people in general, and can be in the form of:
  - a. Survey to understand the extent of unemployment/ its impact at the grass root level.
  - b. Wide distribution of campaign material
  - c. Jathas/ processions/ meetings/ dharnas etc jointly decided at the respective level.
5. State level demonstrations in all states on a date/ or within a week's period.
6. All India joint mobilisation, if possible, as jointly decided.



# ***Demands***

## ***CITU-DYFI-SFI Joint Initiative On Unemployment Issue***

1. Formulate policies that generate decent permanent employment.
2. Regularise all employees under contract, casual employment, and under the camouflage of voluntary work in government schemes in welfare, education including child-labour schools and other services.
3. Fill up all vacancies in different government departments and PSUs including all backlogs in reservations as per constitutional provisions for SC/ST etc.
4. Strictly enforce all statutory provisions for reservation in employment. Extend and enforce these reservations to employment of all kinds in the private sector.
5. Introduce 35 hours working per week and four-shift workdays through appropriate statutory enforceable measures.
6. Seriously address the issue of proliferation of child labour; strengthen the special child labour schools to prepare their enrolment into regular schools; rehabilitate the affected households with Govt. assistance.
7. Increase public investment/expenditure on infrastructure development, education, health etc and create decent permanent jobs.
8. Withdraw premature compulsory retirement of government/PSU employees.
9. Directly link incentives/concessions/rebates/exemptions provided from government exchequer to private corporate investment, in concrete verifiable terms, with decent and permanent job creation.
10. Withdraw/scrap all measures/policies that facilitate precarious employment, insecure employment, including fragility of employment relations.
11. Extend MGNREGA to every individual job seeker instead of one per household; Increase workdays under MGNREGA to 200 a year with minimum wage of Rs 600/- per day; formulate urban employment guarantee scheme with appropriate statutory measures.
12. Unemployment allowance of Rs 5000/- per month to be introduced and enforced through statutory measures.
13. Free compulsory education with appropriate enforceable statutory measures for all up to university level along with expanding the education infrastructure from entry-level onwards through public investment; this should include vocational education and skill development institutions.
14. Right to Work to be made a fundamental right through appropriate amendment in the Constitution.

# ***Working Women Strike! In Solidarity & Action***



Images From Tamil Nadu (Top) & New Delhi (Bottom)

# **Working Women Strike! In Solidarity & Action**



Images From Telangana (Top) & Bihar (Bottom)

Images From Madhya Pradesh (Top Left), Himachal Pradesh (Top Right) & J&K (Bottom)



## ***Working Women Strike! In Solidarity & Action***



Images From Andhra Pradesh (Top) & Gujarat (Bottom)

# ***Agriculture and the Free Market***

***Prabhat Patnaik***

In the context of the on-going country-wide kisan movement for repealing Modi's three agriculture bills, while an overwhelming majority of commentators have stood with the position taken by the kisans, a few, though not necessarily agreeing with Modi, have raised the question: why shouldn't agriculture operate within a free market? It is worth recapitulating here the answer to this question which is well-known but can bear repetition.

The free market solution is of course patently sub-optimal for the economy as a whole as Keynes had shown; but let us forget the Keynesian argument for the moment. Even so, the market solution is suboptimal in the case of agriculture for two distinct reasons. The prices that would rule for agricultural goods in a free market, far from being socially optimal, are likely to be socially disastrous; and the quantities that would be produced of various agricultural goods, or, what comes to the same thing, the land-use that would result if agriculture is left to the free market, is likely to be socially disastrous too.

To keep these two issues separate for analytical clarity, let us assume to start with, that agriculture produces only one good, foodgrains. Now, the demand for foodgrains is price-inelastic, while output is subject to large fluctuations due inter alia to weather-induced shocks. (These characteristics are true of agricultural goods in general). Hence there are wide price fluctuations around the level at which demand and supply would get equalised under normal circumstances. If prices fall to extremely low levels then the peasants get into debt which they are then saddled with for ever; and if prices rise too high then several consumers get edged out of the market, which in the case of a commodity like foodgrains can be quite disastrous.

Two examples of such extremes are the price-fall during the Great Depression which saddled peasants with enormous debts, and the Great Bengal famine of 1943 that left three million people dead. Neither of these events was caused by a supply-side shock,

a bumper harvest or a crop failure; but I cite them just to illustrate the disasters that sharp food price movements can cause. Incidentally, it is not as if food consumers benefited during the 1930s price drop or food producers benefited during the Bengal famine; they were simply and unambiguously social catastrophes.

The mainstream theory of the functioning of the free market does not even visualise such possibilities. The standard theory assumes for the existence of a meaningful free market equilibrium that all commodities are "gross substitutes", that is, if the price of any commodity rises while the prices of all other commodities remain unchanged, then the demand for all other commodities will rise or remain unchanged. This assumption rules out the very existence of a commodity like foodgrains, in whose case a rise in price will lower the demand for other commodities, as consumers economise on their other purchases to buy foodgrains. Other commodities in short cannot act as a substitute for foodgrains, as should be the case for a meaningful free market equilibrium.

It becomes essential therefore to ensure that foodgrain prices don't rise or fall too much, that government intervention does not allow the free market equilibrium to prevail. So, the argument advanced by some commentators that free markets should prevail over a regime of intervention is totally invalid.

Let us now move to the quantity aspect, namely the land-use that the free market will produce. For any scarce resource, the way it is used under the free market system depends upon the relative amounts of purchasing power in the hands of its various potential users.

An inevitable consequence of leaving agriculture to the operation of the free market will be a shift of land area away from foodgrain production towards the production of crops that are demanded in the West, or towards some other use of land to satisfy

the demand of more affluent sections of society. In other words, the superior purchasing power of the affluent consumers located abroad and at home will snatch land away from foodgrain production. Even if this does not raise foodgrain prices because of imports from the advanced countries, it will certainly do two things: one is to destroy such self-sufficiency that the country has developed over the years and make us food-import dependent; the second is to increase mass hunger.

Let us take the second issue first. If a plot of land used for foodgrain production earlier employed 10 persons, while the same plot now used for some other crop, say fruits, employs five persons, then the shift of land-use from foodgrains to fruits makes five persons unemployed. These five have no purchasing power in their hands to demand foodgrains, so that even if imports are available in unlimited quantities at the going international price, and even if the country has the foreign exchange to import foodgrains, there will still be an increase in hunger because people will not have the required purchasing power to buy food.

Of course this argument presumed that the shift of acreage was from foodgrains to some other crop with lesser employment per unit area. But the type of crops whose production will be encouraged by metropolitan demand, or the demand of the affluent sections within the country, will on average be less employment-intensive. And of course to the extent that land-use shifts completely away from crop production towards real estate or golf courses, the employment per unit area will be even less, which will create unemployment and mass hunger. Mainstream economics does not recognise this simple fact because it assumes that there is always full employment, and also that at this free market full employment equilibrium, everybody can survive.

Coming now to the first issue, namely the destruction of self-sufficiency in foodgrains, the fact that the country now would not produce the foodgrains it requires but has to depend on imports, creates two obvious problems. The first is that adequate foodgrains may not always be available in the world market when the country needs it; this is particularly important in the case of a large country whose import requirement can also be correspondingly large.

A variation of this problem is that the world price itself shoots up when a large country, the size of say India, approaches the world market for larger imports.

The second problem is that the real-life world market is vastly different from the text book picture of a market. In the textbook market, there are large numbers of buyers and sellers who have a totally impersonal relationship. In the world food market however whether a country gets the supplies it needs depends upon the goodwill of the American and the European governments. They may impose sanctions, they may arm-twist the importing country into toeing their line in foreign policy, or they may demand a quid pro quo by way of some concessions for their companies. So, even if the country has the required foreign exchange to buy foodgrains, and the world market has enough of it, the country may still have to pay an additional non-money price to be able to access it.

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***For all these reasons if a large country has to make sure that it is food-secure, then it will have to grow this food itself. The decision on what to grow, that is, the pattern of land-use, cannot be left to the free market. Social rationality demands that there must be government intervention to determine what is produced. And one obvious way to achieve this would be to have a set of government-determined prices ruling in the market as opposed to market-determined prices.***

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In India, after much effort, an entire arrangement had been put in place, involving minimum support prices, procurement prices, issue prices for foodgrains and subsidies, to achieve an outcome different from the market outcome and closer to something that is socially rational. This had been opposed tooth and nail by the advanced countries who wanted countries like India eating literally out of their hands. And it was also opposed by the domestic corporates whose rationality centres around their self-interest and who did not want the government preventing its fulfilment. What the Modi government is trying to do with its legislation is to destroy that arrangement at the behest of the corporates and imperialism.

## ***Para Teachers' Struggle in WB***



From 18th of December 2020 the para-teachers of West Bengal have once again started their movement with a sit-in demonstration opposite the Bikas Bhawan, Education Department of West Bengal. The movement has many demands but the most important demand is the demand of regularization of the para-teachers as elementary teachers in all schools across West Bengal.

It may be recalled that in 2019 the para-teachers of West Bengal started the same sit-in demonstration at the same place. The demonstration started on 11th November 2019 and continued for 32 days ending on 12th of December 2019. Along with the sit-in demonstration, teachers also went on a hunger strike for 28 days and boycotted their job. It was on 12th of December 2019, after 28 days of fasting and on the 32nd day of their struggle that the Education Minister sat with the leaders of the movement and promised to settle all job related problems of the para-teachers and try to fulfill their demand as regular teachers within one and half month. The union leaders showed a liberal attitude towards the government and gave them a time frame of three months, but all went in vain. The government

chose to close their eyes and took no steps for the fulfillment of the promises that they had made.

While the pandemic slowed the para-teachers from starting a new struggle against this fraud and the injustice committed by the West Bengal government, a movement began to reshape. The para-teachers started with a rally on 11th of November 2020 to commemorate the start of their struggles in 2019. Despite being granted permissions, the police stopped the rally. All leaders and 19 others were arrested and kept in jail for more than six to seven hours before being released on bail in late evening.

After their rally was stopped, the joint movement forum asked for permission to demonstrate near the Bikash Bhavan which was also rejected by the local police and local administration. The joint forum and Manab Sampad Unnayan Sahayok Kormi Union approached the High Court for permission. The case was moved by advocate Comrade Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya and High Court upheld the plea and allowed the para-teachers to hold their sit in demonstration until the government fulfils their demands. A permission to conduct a rally at Kolkata was also urged. It was on a late night of 17th December the permission was granted. It was only through social media that we could convey our message for the rally. Amazingly on the 18th of December around 3,000 para teachers turned up and a huge rally was held at Kolkata.

After a small demonstration at the Kolkata footpath the para-teachers moved to the footpath opposite to Bikash Bhavan. This movement has also, alongside with it, the participation of others mass movements of SSK, MSK, NCLP, vocational teachers and trainers and non-teaching staff under the SSA Scheme. Conducted by the Manab Sampad Unnayan Sahayak Kormi Union, they will participate in a long-term sit-in demonstration from 28th December 2020. The union has also decided to arrange a rally and will participate in a jail bharo activities on 7th of January 2021.

**Through this movement para-teachers, all other teachers and non-teaching staff are not only demanding for regularization or work but are also protesting against the NEP, labour codes and the agriculture laws.**

## **AIIMS Nurses Strike In Delhi**

Nurses of India's premier government hospital and medical college, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, went on strike. The strike notice, served on November 13, put forth a list of 23 demands. These include the payment wage arrears dating as far back as 2006, restructuring of promotions system and a more accessible healthcare scheme for employees. According to this notice, the indefinite strike was set to begin from December 16. However, on December 13, AIIMS issued a notification for walk-in-interview for recruiting nurses "on a contractual basis for a period of three months or till such time the alternative arrangements are made." This notice was perceived by the union as an attempt to break the strike. So, from the evening of 14 December 2020, nurses of the evening shift downed tools and did not report to work, thus the strike started.

They were forced to call off their indefinite strike on Tuesday, December 15, following a restraining order by the High Court, a day after the labor action started.

In a statement issued soon after the labor action began, Dr. Randeep Guleria, the director of AIIMS, said that "at this time when the country is going through a lot of hardships, when people are having to accept pay cuts and a loss of their jobs, the nurses union is asking for a pay hike." The union members feel such a claim is aimed at delegitimizing and misrepresenting their demands.

According to the 6th Central Pay Commission (CPC) recommendations made in 2006, he explained, the basic pay (excluding allowances) of central government employees whose grade pay is Rs. 4,600 was fixed at Rs. 17,140. However, for some categories of workers on the same grade pay, including nurses, the basic pay was to be fixed at Rs. 18,460. It is not a new pay hike but the payment of consequent arrears pending since 2006 that the nurses' union is demanding. Then, in 2016, the 7th CPC's recommendations came into force. Nurses, who were already angry that the 6th CPC's

recommendations were not yet implemented, were further infuriated upon learning that the hikes recommended in 7th CPC were very low. At the time, the AIIMS authorities called the union for a meeting and promised to send a fresh request to the Health Ministry seeking a higher wage hike for the nurses in AIIMS, on the grounds that it is a premiere health institution. But it was never met. In October 2019, the AIIMS nurses went on a hunger strike for three days. Finding no satisfactory response, the union decided to march to the Health Ministry, whereupon the health minister met with the union and agreed to clear the arrears.

The Director also claimed that most of the remaining 22 demands have already been fulfilled. The union contests this claim. For five to six years now, the union has also been demanding a restructuring to facilitate timely promotions. AIIMS has only one Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) for its roughly 5,000 nurses. This is a tenth of what is recommended by the Indian Nursing Council, which prescribes one CNO per 500 nurses. The union has suggested that restructuring of the promotion system should be in a way that realistically facilitates the maintenance of this ratio. Another crucial complaint that the nurses have been raising for at least two years is about the unequal access to on-campus facilities including canteen. Despite these unresolved long-standing grievances, the nurses had continued to serve on the frontline in the battle against this pandemic, facing challenges unprecedented in their service so far.

Under such circumstances, when the nurses' union served a strike notice, the administration and the government instead of solving the issue sought to recruit nurses on contract to break the strike, forcing the union to prepone. The Union health ministry also threatened the striking nurses that the strike will be treated as offense under the Disaster Management Act read with the Indian Penal Code and action will be taken against defaulting authorities/employees.

**On December 15, almost all of the clinical nurses refused to work. AIIMS authorities went to High court. The court on 15 December ordered the strike to be stopped and the union had to withdraw the strike. Hearing of the case is scheduled for January 18, 2021 and the Union hopes they will get justice.**

## ***Farm Crisis : "The New Laws Will Kill Us"***



*Image : Gurpreet Kaur (left) , Harpreet Kaur (middle) and Sharanjeet Kaur (right) came to Tikri border from Ludhiana, Punjab. (Image/ Story Source: Scroll.in)*

Gurpreet Kaur, a 48-year-old farmer came to Tikri on November 26 from Chakar village in Jagraon tehsil, in Ludhiana, Punjab. She was accompanied by her husband and two teenage children. In Chakar, she farms wheat, rice and vegetables on 11 acres of land. She said it takes an investment of approximately Rs 20,000 to farm one acre of land. This includes the cost of diesel, fertiliser, pesticide and daily wages of Rs 400 for 20 workers.

Once the harvest is done, Kaur said, the produce goes to a market 2 km away from the village where the wheat is sold through a middleman for Rs 1,880 per quintal. *"For us, our middlemen is good,"* she said. *"We are free of tension if we sell to him and he sells the wheat at a good rate."*

Kaur said that the Bihari workers employed on her fields had cautioned her about their experience after similar laws passed in their state in 2006. They *"told us that these laws were against farmers",*

she said. *"They said the [state] government turned them into daily wagers."*

This year, Kaur said the harvest was difficult because migrant workers had gone back to their home states as a consequence of the Covid-19 lockdown. *"The harvest spoilt because we did not have any workers,"* she said.

She said that after six months of work, her family had earned around Rs 1 lakh after paying off their Rs 5 lakh loan to the middleman. *"Some do not even have this much,"* she said. *"We would not be here protesting if we were rich farmers. These laws will make us poorer."*

Kaur said that farmers from her village have drawn up a rotational schedule to come to Delhi for the protests. She was set to go home on Wednesday.

But she noted that the protests had been underway in Punjab since July. Over the past months, Kaur has joined farmers across Punjab to sit on rail tracks tracks to block passenger trains. *"We would sit for the entire day...it is going on till today,"* Kaur said. *"We have shut all their [Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani] [petrol] pumps and stores in Punjab."*

## ***Uttar Pradesh : Over 35 Arrests, Dozen FIRs Under New Anti-Conversion Law in a Month***

Going full steam, the Uttar Pradesh police have made more than one arrest a day since the controversial anti-conversion ordinance came into effect, having apprehended about 35 people so far. Nearly a dozen FIRs have been lodged since the Ordinance was notified on November 27 2020. The first case was registered in Bareilly just a day after the legislation came into force.

- The police cracked the whip following a complaint of Tikaram Rathore, the father of a 20-year-girl and resident of Sharif Nagar village in Bareilly. He alleged that Uwaish Ahmad (22) had become friends with his daughter and was trying to "coax, coerce and lure" her to convert. An FIR was lodged at Deorania police station in Bareilly district and the accused was arrested on December 3. It is commonly believed that the police coaxed the Rathods to rake up a settled issue and lodge the complaint.
- Acting swiftly after being tipped off about interfaith marriages, the Lucknow Police stopped a ceremony in the state capital, asking the couple to meet the legal requirements first.
- In Muzaffarnagar district, one Nadeem and an accomplice were arrested on December 6 for allegedly trying to force a married Hindu woman to convert. Nadeem, however, got reprieve when the Allahabad High Court said that there was no evidence against him and directed the police not to take any coercive action against the accused.
- In Moradabad, two brothers, arrested earlier this month under the anti-conversion law, were released on an order of a CJM court. Rashid and Salim were arrested on December 4 after they visited the registrar's office in Moradabad to record Rashid's marriage to a Hindu woman whose family had filed the complaint. The FIR was lodged at Kanth police station in Moradabad district after the mother of the girl had alleged that Rashid Ali, a resident of Moradabad, was trying to convert her daughter, Pinky, and marry her. However, as per media reports, Pinky alleged that her mother leveled fake charges against her and her husband and she said that she married Rashid and converted to Islam of her free will.
- Shabab Khan aka Rahul was picked up in Mau district on December 3, and 13 of his accomplices booked for allegedly abducting a 27-year-old woman on the eve of her wedding on November 30 with an intent to change her religion.
- An FIR was lodged at Tambor police station in Sitapur district and 22-year-old Zubrail along with five of his family members and two locals was accused of kidnapping a 19 yr old girl and converting her. All, barring Zubrail, were arrested on December 5.
- In Bijnor, 22-year-old labourer Afzal was arrested on December 13 for allegedly kidnapping a girl from her home.
- A 19-year-old woman lodged an FIR with Shahabad police station in Hardoi district on December 11 alleging that she was raped on the pretext of marriage and also pressured to convert by one Mohammed Azad. She also alleged that she was being sold by Azad in Delhi. Azad was booked for rape, for flouting UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Law, 2020 and for human trafficking. He was arrested on December 16.
- A man was sent to jail in Bijnor on December 16 for 'love jihad', a term coined by BJP leaders and right-wing activists to describe the crime against which Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also spoken out. Addressing bypoll rallies in Jaunpur and Deoria, Adityanath had used the Hindu funeral chant of 'Ram Naam Satya Hai' to threaten those who do not respect daughters and sisters.

## ***The First & Only 100% Visually Impaired IFS Officer In India***



Time and again, we have come across many talented people, who inspired us with their `never say die` attitude while giving us an ultimate push to face the so-called impossible challenges in life. Here is one such extraordinary woman who never gave up till she achieved the ultimate goal of her life.

Beno Zephine N L, a 26 year old 100% visually impaired young woman, who, despite all odds, became India's first blind IFS officer in 2015. She had also been preparing for a PhD in English literature from Bharathiar University with the full time job as a probationary officer in SBI. "I learnt to balance both and understood how to use my time efficiently in the process," she said.

Born and brought up in Chennai, Beno's incredible journey to the world of diplomats is an inspirational story. A post-graduate in English from Madras University, It was a tough few years of work, but Beno, 24, enjoyed it and had secured an all-India rank of 343 in the UPSC exams in 2013. "Preparing for the civil services made it easy for me to clear other competitive exams," she said.

***“My choice was the Indian Foreign Service. I was told that the IFS did not accept anyone who was 100 percent blind. They had to make some changes in the rules to offer me a position in the IFS.”***

She got a few books ‘brailled’, but much of her preparation was done with the help of her father and friends. She would insist that her father read the newspaper to her every morning, and she was an exceptionally sharp observer.

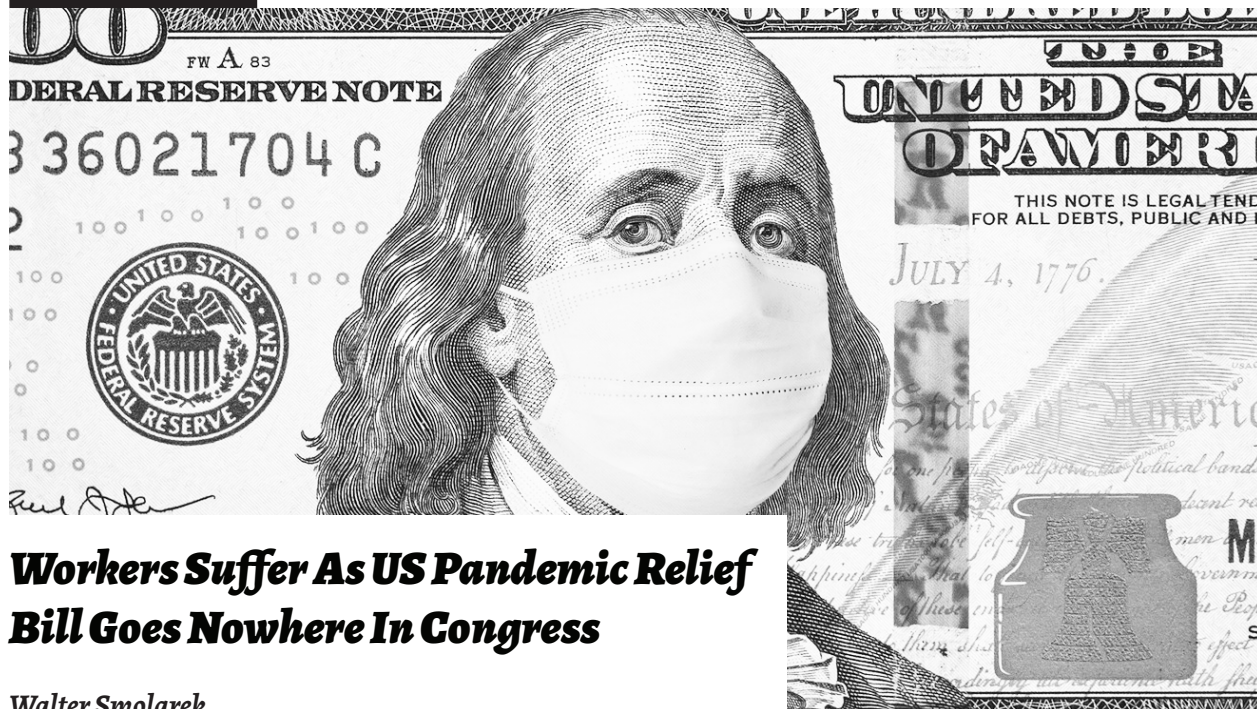
Before she decided to take the big plunge, she worked as a probationary officer for State Bank of India. After cracking the UPSC exam with flying colours, she said in an interview - *“My choice was the Indian Foreign Service. I was told that the IFS did not accept anyone who was 100 per cent blind. They had to make some changes in the rules to offer me a position in the IFS. I don’t know the technicalities, but that was why the procedural delay of one year happened.”*

It was her extremely supportive family, encouraging teachers and helpful friends who motivated her to go for her second UPSC attempt in 2013 after she failed to secure a good rank in the previous one.

Her family and friends not only supported her emotionally but also proved to be a much needed helping hand. While she was preparing for the big exam, she would scan the books to read them on computer using a software called Job Access With Speech (JAWS). Apart from that, her mother read books to her to lessen her burden of scanning the study material on computer.

From an active student in school and college to an IFS officer working for the Government of India, Beno Zephine N L has proved that it only takes strong determination and a pool of hard work to achieve your goals. Everything else is secondary.

*“Instead of moaning about what you do not have, use the resources you have. Then, those resources will create further resources. Challenges do come, but face them and devise your own strategies. Understand your strengths and weaknesses, only then will you be able to strengthen your strength and weaken your weakness,”* she said.



## Workers Suffer As US Pandemic Relief Bill Goes Nowhere In Congress

Walter Smolarek

As the COVID-19 pandemic spirals out of control in the United States, inaction and deadlock in the government have left workers to fend for themselves amid mounting unemployment.

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*Not only has the coronavirus pandemic taken a staggering toll in terms of loss of life in the United States but has also caused social and economic dislocation for the working class on a massive scale. The impact of this crisis is likely to last far beyond the distribution of a vaccine.*

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When the pandemic began to spiral out of control in March, Will Harris was one of the millions of retail workers who lost their income. Harris, who worked two part-time jobs, said that as the months of unemployment dragged on, "I couldn't afford all my groceries when I needed them... I felt bad for spending on anything even if it was absolutely essential," and he had to start rationing medical treatments like testosterone. Between his employers and the government, assistance was minimal or nonexistent. "I got the first stimulus check for \$1,200 but that only lasted me a week or two. I was asking

for money from friends and was fortunate enough to be able to find help, but not everyone has that luxury," recalled Harris. He was able to return to work at one of his jobs in August, but it was impossible for him to return to his other job with the multibillion-dollar department store chain Ross because of the company's lack of adequate communication over health precautions.

Ted Kelly, an organizer with the Philadelphia Unemployment Project (PUP), said, "Put simply, the US federal government has completely failed the working class during this crisis." In response, PUP "has formed an organizing group of unemployed workers that we're calling the unemployed organizing committee. These are people who have not necessarily been activists or organizers before they lost their jobs [during the pandemic] but who have been inspired to take action by the tremendous failure of the state to help take care of workers' needs," added Kelly.

The ultra-rich, on the other hand, are doing just fine. Between the beginning of the pandemic in March and the end of July, US billionaires managed to increase their total net worth by \$637 billion. Stock indexes hit record highs over the summer, and the

job market for higher-paid professionals had fully recovered by then, according to an August report by the Washington Post. And in a single day in July, Jeff Bezos—the richest person on the planet—made \$13 billion.

*"Inequality was already at historic levels before the pandemic," noted Karla Martin, a member of the board of directors of the pro-labor advocacy group Working Families Partnership, "but coronavirus has pushed the gap between the rich and the poor to unthinkable levels."*

#### **DEADLOCK IN WASHINGTON OVER RELIEF BILL**

One of the clearest examples of the US elite's complete indifference to the plight of tens of millions of unemployed workers is the inaction of the US Congress as *"Republicans and Democrats remain deadlocked on the new package all of them claim to want,"* stated a December 11 editorial in the Washington Post.

After passing emergency legislation in the spring, when the virus first hit—which included a bailout package for big banks and corporations about the size of the economy of Germany, which has a \$4 trillion GDP—the US Congress has done essentially nothing to relieve the immense suffering of the poor and working-class people.

For months, people have been anxiously awaiting new stimulus package measures being crafted by Congress. Perhaps the most closely watched element of the negotiations between legislators is the relief for the unemployed. A renewal or replacement is desperately needed for the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, a \$600 per week enhancement to existing unemployment benefits that was passed in March but expired in August. *"The enhanced payments to unemployed workers was an absolutely vital lifeline—in many cases [it was] the only thing allowing families to meet their most basic needs,"* explained Martin.

Kelly holds both major parties responsible for its demise. *"Instead of extending and expanding FPUC, both the Democrats and Republicans allowed that program to expire at the end of July and left Washington before implementing a new program."*

The Democratic Party controls the House of Representatives, one of two chambers of the US legislature. In May, they passed a bill that would enact a series of stimulus measures totaling \$3 trillion. A majority in the Senate, controlled by the right-wing Republican Party, passed their own bill in September that funds approximately \$500 billion worth of programs. The Republican bill would cut FPUC in half and give companies a large degree of legal immunity from lawsuits filed by their employees over unsafe working conditions. These measures have primarily been financed through the unique ability of the US treasury to print dollars, pushing the federal government's budget deficit for 2020 alone to \$3.3 trillion.

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*To come into force, a bill must be passed by both the House and the Senate, and then be signed by President Trump. The Democratic Party has taken a formal position in favor of an extension of enhanced unemployment benefits, but they have taken no serious steps to place the kind of pressure necessary on Republicans in the Senate to force the passage of a bill ensuring such benefits. And many of the programs that social movements have been demanding are not even under consideration by either party. "What workers really need are moratoria on rent, mortgage, and utility payments. Bills are stacking up and the cost of living was too high even before COVID," Kelly said.*

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As the political system grapples with even greater turmoil in the aftermath of the November presidential election, prospects for a major relief package addressing these urgent needs are becoming even dimmer. With the death toll in the United States climbing rapidly amid a new wave of COVID-19 infections, the pressure will be immense to act swiftly when a new Congress convenes in January 2021.

*(The writer Walter Smolarek is a Philadelphia-based journalist and activist, covering both political developments inside the US as well as the international activities of U.S. imperialism. This article was produced by Globetrotter.)*

# ***The Most Dangerous***

Most treacherous is not the robbery of hard earned wages,  
Most horrible is not the torture by the police.  
Most dangerous is not the graft for the treason and greed.

To be caught while asleep is surely bad  
surely bad is to be buried in silence

But it is not most dangerous.

To remain dumb and silent in the face of trickery  
Even when just, is definitely bad  
Surely bad is reading in the light of a firefly

But it is not most dangerous.  
Most dangerous is



To be filled with dead peace  
Not to feel agony and bear it all,  
Leaving home for work  
And from work return home  
Most dangerous is the death of our dreams.

Most dangerous is that watch  
Which run on your wrist  
But stand still for your eyes.  
Most dangerous is that eye  
Which sees all but remains frostlike,  
The eye that forgets to kiss the world with love,  
The eye lost in the blinding mist of the material world.  
That sinks the simple meaning of visible things  
And is lost in the meaning return of useless games.

Most dangerous is the moon  
Which rises in the numb yard  
After each murder,  
but does not pierce your eyes like hot chilies.

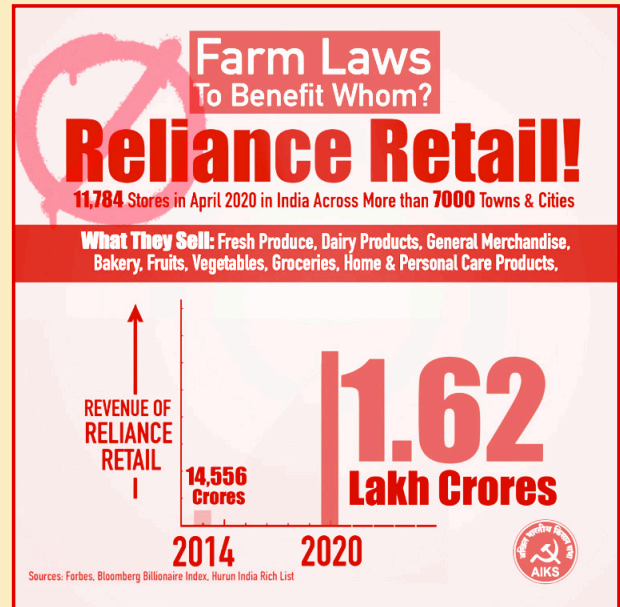
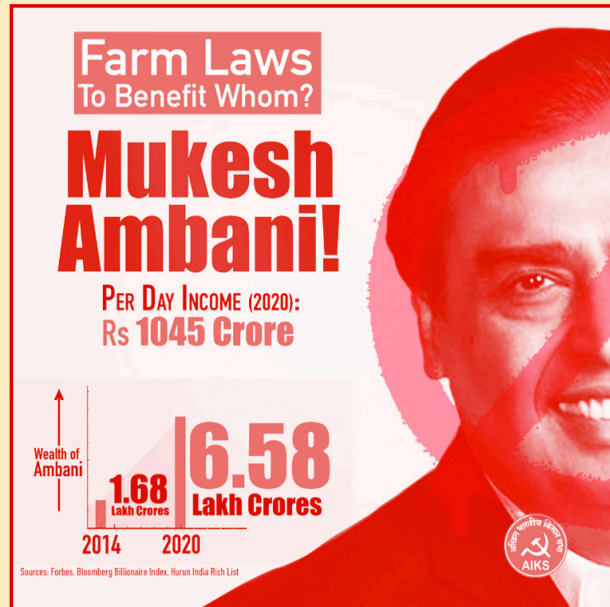
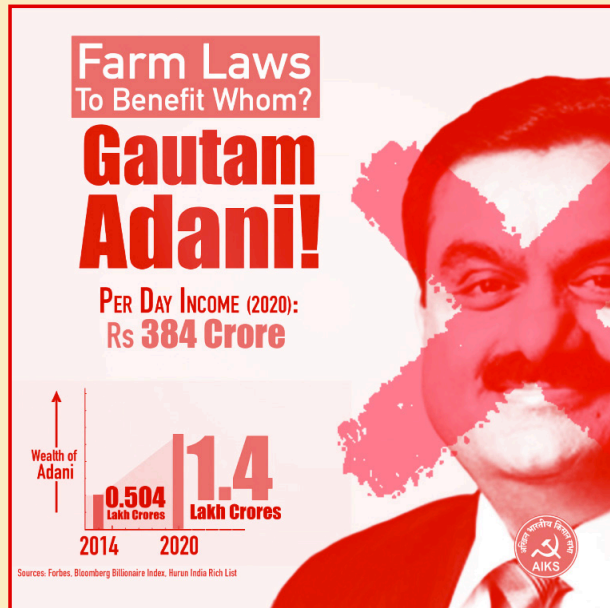
Most dangerous is the song  
which climbs the mourning wail  
In order to reach your ears  
And repeats the cough of an evil man  
At the door of the frightened people.

Most dangerous is the night  
Falling in the sky of living souls,  
Extinguishing them all  
In which only owls shriek and jackals growl,  
And eternal darkness covers all the windows.

Most heinous is the direction  
In which the sun of the soul light  
Pierces the east of your body.  
Most treacherous is not the robbery of hard earned wages.  
Most horrible is not the torture of police  
Most dangerous is not graft taken for greed and treason.

Poem By Avtar Singh Sandhu 'Pash'  
Translated from Punjabi by Dr. Satnam Singh Sandhu

## Whom Do the Farm Bills Really Benefit?



(Infographic by All India Kisan Sabha)

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