

REJECT
Anti-People, Anti-National GOVERNANCE

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MARCH TO PARLIAMENT
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Hemalata

Soni is a worker in a private company manufacturing electric fans in Delhi. When the workers demanded implementation of minimum wages, the employer threatened to close down the factory. Though workers' contribution to PF is deducted from their salaries, it is not deposited in their account. Most of the around 600 workers live in a slum adjacent to the factory. One fourth of Soni's wage is spent on rent for a single room house without a kitchen, where she lives with her husband, son, daughter in law and their two children. They share bath and toilet with several families around. The drains overflow with pools of sewage all around; pigs and stray dogs, along with other people are her cohabitants in the basti where she lives.

The workers are organised into a union. When we first met Soni, who is also an office bearer of the union, she was challenging the employer to close down the factory 'Today; now'. 'We will see wherefrom you will get your profits once you close down the factory'.

Somanna is a permanent employee in a private multinational company near Hyderabad. He earns around Rs 40000 a month, a decent salary compared to the vast majority of workers in the area. In addition to his two children, he has to take care of

his disabled sister. Life, for Somanna, was hard in the beginning. Wages were low. But things improved once they got organised into the union and fought for their demands. He had managed to get good education to both of his children. But now he is worried. His son, who has done his B Tech in a private engineering college, is not able to get a decent job. Campus recruitments have almost stopped. He read in the newspapers that over 50000 people have lost their jobs in IT companies alone. Many more thousands are afraid of losing their jobs. Since the last three to four years his son has been working on a meagre salary, less than half his father's, though he is better educated than him; a year in this job, then in another; on contract, either for a fixed term or otherwise, continuously shifting jobs, always in search of a decent paying job. Till now he could not find one. 'This is not something for my union to handle; what shall I do?' he wonders.

Kishen works in a big multinational automobile company's manufacturing unit in Gurgaon in Haryana. He is recruited by a contractor, not directly employed by the company but does the same job as the permanent workers. However he gets less than one third of the salary that a permanent worker gets. He came from Bihar in search of work and got the job in this factory five years ago. He cannot afford to bring his family to Gurgaon; in addition to the low wage, he is not sure how long this job would last. He lives in a small room which he shares with three of his co workers. Twenty five people living in six such rooms in the third floor share the common toilet and bath. They have to carry water from the ground floor. If the landlord, on his daily visits, notes an extra pair of shoes at the door for two successive days, they have to pay extra rent. There are hundreds of such apartments in the area, built by the local people who gave their land to the many industries that have come up there. Along with his friends, Kishen cooks his meals in the same room, communicates with his family every day on his mobile and watches videos on the same for entertainment. Whatever he could save he sends regularly to his family back home. Of late, he is not able to save much, he says, as the

prices have gone up and he has to spend more to meet his own expenses, though he keeps his needs to the bare minimum.

Maala cooks midday meals for children in a school in Kolar district in Karnataka. Yes, her remuneration is meagre; and she is paid for only 10 months in a year. She is not even recognised as a 'worker'; she is called a 'social worker' as are lakhs of her sisters working as anganwadi workers and helpers, ASHAs etc. But in addition to these, she feels so ashamed as well as angry at the way some parents and teachers treat her. The parents refuse to let their children eat the food cooked by her because she is a dalit. The teachers are supportive of these parents. The children belonging to the so called 'upper caste' bring their own food and sit separately to eat their lunch. She shudders to think about the manner in which she and her family were attacked by the upper caste people a couple of years back when they came to know that her son, who is well educated and working as a teacher in a neighbouring village, was in love with a girl belonging to their community. Luckily her union stood solidly behind her and saw to it that a case is registered against the culprits. The girl too was firm and married the boy. Now she faces another problem. The government announced that a big corporate NGO will be cooking meals in their mechanised kitchen and distribute them to the children. What will happen to her job? How will she and her husband who is without any regular work most of the time, survive?

Shobha Shinde is a poor peasant from the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Three years back her husband, unable to repay the debt of around Re 1 lakh taken from a local money lender, committed suicide. The entire burden of looking after the family, of her two children and an ailing mother in law, fell on Savitri Bai. In addition to working in her own small field, she has been working in other people's fields. But these days, there is no work for most of the days in the village. MGNREGS work has stopped. Besides, payment for the MGNREGS work is pending

for several months now. She is compelled to seek work as a construction worker in the neighbouring town. She gets up at four in the morning, cooks for the family and rushes to the town to stand at the town *naka*, along with some of her friends, hoping to get some work. If she does, she returns home in the evening with a little money. Otherwise she loses the thirty rupees she had to spend for travel from her village to the town. She doesn't want her children to live like her. She is determined to give them a good education, which she believes will help them get a decent job so they can lead a better life. Her daughter is intelligent and hard working. She helps her mother at home and in the fields. She is a topper in her class. But she is almost sure that she will not be able to make it to the college. All the advertisements of 'Beti Bachao; Beti Padhao' and about the scholarships for children of construction workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Act seem very distant to her. Despite making several rounds to the labour office her mother was not able even to get herself registered as a construction worker to avail of the welfare benefits. The family is not in a position to have two square meals a day. How can she pay college fees and buy books?

Dana Majhi is an adivasi, a poor farmer, living in Melghar village in Kalahandi district of Odisha. He is the same person whose pictures carrying the dead body of his wife Amangadei on his shoulders, with his sobbing daughter behind him, were flashed in the media a couple of years ago.

There is no hospital in Melghar. The nearest Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Nakrundi is 6 km away. Amangadei suffered from tuberculosis and was admitted in this hospital where there is no doctor. She was shifted to the district headquarter hospital 60 kms away when her condition worsened. She died due to lack of proper and timely treatment. The hospital did not provide an ambulance for him. He had no money to hire a private vehicle. He walked with his wife's body on his shoulders for 12 kms through the entire night before he got help.

Diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, common among the poor, can be prevented and cured with timely and effective treatment. But these diseases often prove fatal for the poor adivasis in the region.

These people are not alone. Their experiences, their stories are not isolated ones. Most of the workers, employees, and others, the peasants, agricultural workers, artisans, all sections of people who have to work in order to earn and live, have similar experiences, similar stories, similar sufferings.

But their issues are totally neglected by those in power. They do not find place in the discourse of the ruling class parties, not even when they compete with each other for the votes of the people in elections. The BJP or the Congress or the other regional bourgeois parties feel confident that they can push these real issues of the people under the carpet, divert their attention from their burning problems by talking about caste, religion, region etc, make some fake accusations against one another and get away with it.

It is to highlight the issues, of crores of such workers, peasants, agricultural workers, artisans and other toiling people, to emphatically voice their demands for better work, better working conditions, better lives and better future for their children, that CITU, AIKS and AIAWU have jointly called the 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' on 5th September 2018 before the Parliament. It is to create the confidence among these sections that it is not necessary for them to lead such miserable lives; the confidence that together they can fight and achieve better lives, decent and dignified working and living conditions. The country has the resources. It needs alternative policies. This 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' is to say: NO to the governments that work for the 0.1%. It is to demand Policies that benefit the 99.9%.

Around thirty years of neoliberal regime followed by the governments at the centre have worsened the conditions of the vast majority of workers and other sections of toiling people

in our country. Prices, particularly of food, medicines, health care, education, continue to soar; wages and incomes remain stagnant for most of them. Decent permanent employment is becoming increasingly scarce. Any incident like a serious illness in the family comes as a bolt from the blue; a sudden loss of job due to retrenchment, closure, accident or death, a flood or drought or even such government measures like demonetisation - shatter their lives.

People have been fighting to improve their conditions. Workers, almost all sections of them separately and jointly, have raised their demands through demonstrations all over the country and in the national capital; they have gone on protest fasts; they have courted arrest in lakhs; crores of workers joined together on strike actions across the country highlighting 12 of their major demands. Even a former Prime Minister of the country had to say that these demands were justified.

The poor peasants were giving expression to their distress, sadly, through suicides, for the last twenty years. Recently, the peasants too have started protesting through sit in demonstrations, long marches, courting of arrest and strikes and bandhs. Expressing their discontent and anger people have voted some parties out of power and elected others. Governments have been changing; parties heading the governments have been changing. But, for the majority of the toiling people, their conditions remained the same; if anything, they have further deteriorated. This is because, whatever the government at the centre, whether led by the BJP or the Congress or a coalition of different parties, the policies that have been causing such miseries for vast sections of our people, continued to be the same.

It is in this process that the present BJP government led by Prime Minister Modi came to power more than four years back. People were angry at the Congress led UPA II government, which failed to curb prices, to provide employment; they were angry at its persistence in pursuing the policies that benefited the corporates and the super rich at the cost of the common

people, at the huge corruption scams involving people at high offices. They voted it out of power. They believed the promises made by the BJP and its then Prime Ministerial candidate Modi. They believed that BJP and Modi would usher in '*achhe din*' as promised.

But the last four years of BJP government led by Prime Minister Modi proved to be even more disastrous for the working people. It has been like jumping from the pan directly into the fire. The government has not reversed but hastened the neoliberal process of loot and plunder on millions. It has taken no measure to effectively implement labour laws; it has fast tracked anti worker labour law amendments to benefit the employers. Prices continue to increase; unemployment has worsened. It is trying the hand over the land of the peasants to the corporates and real estate sharks in the name of 'development'. It is on a rapid spree of privatisation of our public sector, including those units in the key and strategic sectors like defence, railways, insurance, telecom etc as well as essential public services like healthcare, education, public transport, electricity etc.

As people now realise, '*achhe din*' have moved further far away. In fact, it has turned out that the BJP's promise of '*achhe din*' was not for the people. It was for the same big corporates, domestic and foreign, who did benefit during the Congress led UPA regime but were not satisfied. They thought that the Congress led government was not doing enough for them to tide over the impact of the global crisis, to safeguard their profits. They wanted more. They bet on BJP and Modi for doing this, and threw their weight behind him. They gave them money; their media was agog with the message- 'here comes the messiah'. Price rise? Modi will control; Employment? Modi will provide; Corruption? Modi will eradicate. After coming to power, the BJP government started paying back for this support. Its real motto has become '*janata se vote; corporate ke saath*' or will it be even more apt to say '*janatako lath-corporate ke saath*'?

In addition, the BJP led government is promoting the 'Hindutva' agenda of the RSS, the ideological mentor and guide of the BJP. It is seeking to polarise society on communal lines. The RSS and its various outfits want to impose their ideology and way of thinking on all. Those who resist, those who raise their voice of protest, are dubbed as 'anti national'. If they are Muslims, they are asked to 'go to Pakistan'. They seek to control all aspects of people's lives by dictating what they can eat, how they should dress, whom they can marry etc. RSS followers are posted as heads of most of the renowned cultural, historic, scientific and research institutions and universities in the country. The various outfits of the RSS seek to disrupt the unity of people, so essential for strengthening united struggles to defeat the neoliberal policies. They are threatening the peaceful and harmonious life that we so cherish. The BJP government is also increasingly demonstrating authoritative tendencies by passing Parliament, impinging on the democratic rights of the people and their organisations including the trade unions.

In this atmosphere, other religious fundamentalist and communal forces too are gaining influence. All these forces seek to divert our attention from our burning day to day livelihood issues by bringing non issues to the fore. Neighbours, co workers, hitherto living together peacefully, who had no personal enmity, are made to fight and kill one another in the name of 'love jihad', 'cow protection', 'ghar vapasi', inter religious, inter caste marriages etc. These are deliberate attempts to weaken our struggles to improve our lives, our fight against exploitation and oppression, against the neoliberal policies that attack our rights and working and living conditions.

What are the major issues that confront us today?

Jobs

We all are concerned with employment, our own employment and the employment of our children. If we are not worried about

retaining our own jobs, we are worried about our children's jobs. Will they get a decent job, a secure job?

India is said to be having a 'demographic dividend'. More than half of our population is below 25 and over 65% of it is below 35. By providing decent jobs to these young people, utilising their services for the development of the country in different fields, the country can make great advances. But are we effectively utilising this advantage?

According to Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), India's workforce participation rate has declined to the lowest ever, to just 40%. Two years back it was 43%. This means that 1.3 crore people who had jobs earlier have lost their jobs. According to the fifth annual employment unemployment survey of the Labour Bureau, around 40% of the workforce does not get work throughout the year. In 2015-16, more than 36% workers were working as casual or contract workers with very meagre wages. The total number of such workers comes to around 13 crores. Women's employment continues to be on a slide. At less than 22%, it is among the lowest in the world.

Around 1.15 crore out of all the new entrants to the labour force in the country actually seek work every year. According to a quarterly survey of eight labour intensive sectors by the Labour Bureau, only 5.56 lakh jobs were added in the 18 months ending October 2017. At the same time, a study by the Reserve Bank of India says that over 10 lakh jobs were lost in the first two years of the present BJP government! Thousands of workers are being retrenched in several sectors like telecom, IT, garments, gems and jewellery etc

The seriousness of the unemployment situation becomes glaring with the following reports in the media: around 2 crore people applied for less than 1 lakh vacancies advertised in the railways; around 23 lakh applied for 368 peon posts in Uttar Pradesh; more than 18000 people applied for 9 posts in a court in Haryana; more than 12000 people applied for 18 posts in the state government secretariat in Rajasthan. In all

these cases, there were many graduates, post graduates, research scholars, engineers, MBAs etc among the applicants!

On the other hand, lakhs of posts are lying vacant in the various departments of the government of India alone. Around ten lakh teachers' posts are vacant. Around 3 lakh posts are vacant in the railways including those related to safety like signalling, drivers etc. Around 70000 posts are vacant in the postal department. But the government is not taking any measures to fill up these posts. Instead, it has decided to abolish posts which have deliberately been kept vacant since the last five years.

The workload on the existing employees has increased over years. People with the necessary qualifications are available to do these jobs. But instead of recruiting permanent employees, the government is getting the work done by outsourcing the jobs, by contract workers. Despite the statutory direction reiterated again by the Supreme Court in 2016, to pay the same wages and extend the same benefits to contract workers doing the same job as the permanent employees, this is not being implemented. Why?

The government has made a false claim of generating 70 lakh jobs on the basis of 'pay roll reporting', manipulating data on EPF and ESI. Large numbers of these are already existing jobs where the employers have utilised the amnesty declared by the government for not registering the workers in the EPF. Similarly lakhs of already existing workers in the textile and garment sector have also been registered under the EPF scheme, as the government announced that it would be paying the employers' contribution to EPF under Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY). The reality is that there has been no increase in jobs during the last 4 years of *Modi sarkar*. In fact, the net employment generation has been negative. The claim of 70 lakh job creation is nothing but a fraud.

The BJP government is willing to spend money from the exchequer for the EPF contribution of the private employers.

But it is not ready to extend the EPF and ESI benefits to the around 1 crore workers working in its own departments, implementing its various welfare schemes like anganwadi, ASHA, mid-day-meal etc. It could have recognised them as workers, pay them minimum wages, cover them under EPF and ESI and then claim generation of decent employment. It could have recognised all the tens of lakhs of the 'outsourced' and 'contract' employees working in its various departments as its employees, pay them equal wages as permanent employees and counted this as 'job creation'! Even if not creation of new jobs in the true sense, these measures could have created decent and dignified working conditions for crores of people in our country. It would have improved the conditions of crores of workers.

Why doesn't the government do that?

It is because, drastic reduction in permanent posts, to cut down government expenditure, is one of the important aspects of neoliberal policies. The governments, under the neoliberal capitalist order, are compelled to cut down expenditure on wages and people's welfare because they have to serve their corporate big business masters and extend huge concessions to them, using public money. As per this policy, millions of toiling people who produce wealth for the nation through productive and service activities are made sacrificial goats; they are subjected to deprivation to benefit the handful of corporate/big business houses. Parties that receive huge funds from these corporates and business houses are compelled to gratify them in return by implementing policies that benefit them, at the cost of the people. So, posts are not filled up; lakhs of posts are abolished; work is outsourced or contracted out to cut down expenditure on salaries, social security and other benefits. The same situation prevails in almost all departments of central and state governments and in the public sector enterprises.

Huge majority of the 'scheme workers' and outsourced and contract workers are from poor and socially oppressed sections

like women, dalits, OBCs etc. The scheme workers provide basic services related to education, health, nutrition etc to crores of poor, particularly women and children in rural areas. They have been making immense contribution in lifting millions of women and children out of malnutrition and illiteracy and in improving the country's human resources indicators related to infant and maternal mortality. But despite working for decades, like our Maala, they are not even recognised as 'workers'. They are called 'social workers', 'volunteers', 'activists' etc. It is a shame that the government of India, which boasts of being the 'third fastest growing economy' in the world, pays these workers starvation wages in the name of 'honorarium'.

It has also to be noted that these basic and essential services related to nutrition, education, health are provided through 'schemes', not as entitlements for the poor children and women. These schemes, obviously, can be withdrawn any time. In fact, cutting down welfare expenditure, on subsidies etc is another important means for cutting down government expenditure. So we see the attempts to privatise these schemes, hand them over to NGOs, dilute them through different measures like cash transfers, targeting etc. The present BJP government has hastened this process. The recommendations of NITI Ayog set up by it after dismantling the Planning Commission, are aimed at this. The share of the government of India in implementing several of these schemes, which were initially fully sponsored by it, has now been drastically cut down.

Through their determined struggles, the scheme workers have been able to achieve some increase in their remuneration and some benefits in several states. But even after decades of working continuously, despite the consensus recommendation of the Indian Labour Conference, their basic demand of recognition as workers, minimum wages and social security benefits have not been conceded by the government. The Damocles' Sword of privatisation, dismantling and withdrawal of the schemes continue to hang on their heads.

The government has started the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) with much fanfare ostensibly to train the youth in 'industry relevant skills' so that youth get employment and employers workers with the required skills. Since its inception in 2015, 41.3 lakh people have reportedly been trained under this programme. But, only 6.15 lakh, just 15%, got jobs on record; these too are not decent well paying jobs. The Sharada Prasad committee which examined the scheme reported that 'an amount of Rs 2500 crore of public funds were spent to benefit the private sector without serving the twin purpose of meeting the exact skill needs of the industry and providing employment to the youth with decent wages'.

The argument of lack of financial resources put forward by the government of India whenever the demands of filling up of posts, ending outsourcing and contractorisation, regularising the scheme workers etc are placed before it, does not hold water. There is no resource crunch within the economy. The toiling people in the country both in industry, agriculture and services generate enough resources to meet the need of the people of the entire country. This deceptive argument is extended to cover up the loot of national exchequer by the corporate/ big business lobby, both foreign and domestic, being facilitated by the government under the neoliberal policy regime. According to the Budget papers, since 2008 and even prior to that, every year the government has been extending tax and other concessions to the big corporates to the extent of more than Rs 5 lakh crore on an average. In addition, the unpaid taxes by the big corporates have been accumulating every year amounting to around Rs 7 lakh crores as per last year's budget statements. The data from the Reserve Bank of India, presented in the Parliament, state that loans amounting to around Rs 2.42 lakh crore were written off by the public sector banks between 2014-15 and September 2017. The big corporates account for 77% of bad loans or Non Performing Assets (NPAs) which have reached a whopping Rs 9 lakh crore. Whose money is this? This Rs 9 lakh crore belongs to the common people of our country, who have managed to

save from their modest earnings to take care of them on a rainy day. It is their savings that comprise the major part of the working capital of the banks.

People like Nirav Mody, Vijay Mallya are allowed to loot the public sector banks and flee the country. Is the self proclaimed 'chowkidar' who has announced that 'nobody would be allowed to lay hands on the public treasury', sleeping? Nirav Modi, after fleeing the country, had even managed to sneak into the group photograph along with the Prime Minister at the World Economic Forum. How was that possible? Why should the government shower concessions on such corporate pilferers of public exchequer?

If the government does not have money, why should it treat the corporates with such generosity and shower so many concessions on them? Why can't the same money be used for the benefit of the people? The Rs 12 lakh crore, on account of direct tax concessions or non payment of taxes and the Rs 9 lakh crore of people's money deposited in banks and expropriated through deliberate default by the corporates – this Rs 21 lakh crore is more than enough to ensure universal food security, health care facilities and other welfare benefits to all our people.

So, it is not the question of lack of financial resources. The point is - the government is willing to use people's money to provide lavish concessions to the big corporates in the name of 'incentives'; at the same time it is totally opposed to use the same people's money to provide relief to the needy and the poor; these are derisively called 'subsidies', a drain on the public exchequer. For whose benefit, on whose behalf, is the government working?

Is this a just system? Around 50 big corporates who mostly account for the Rs 9 lakh crore NPAs are being allowed to hold the country's banking system to ransom. The same community of big corporates, which is looting people's money in the banks, is patronised by the government by giving huge

concessions worth lakhs of crores of rupees from national exchequer. And it is the same community of big corporates to whom even larger amounts of national wealth is being transferred by the government through the policy measures like privatisation, liberalisation of trade, speculative trade etc. This is being done even while the overwhelming majority of our people are being denied, being deprived of basic necessities like jobs, education, health, public transport, housing etc, which the government in a democracy is obliged to ensure; which is its duty as per the Directive Principles of our Constitution. Every aspect of policy intervention, under the neoliberal regime is intended to further enrich the big corporates, domestic and foreign, at the expense of the toiling people. This is clearly seen in the way the economic disparities have widened in our country, to obscene levels. 73% of wealth created in our country, by the toiling people, in 2017 was cornered by just 1% of these corporates. The wealth of Mukesh Ambani, the second richest man in Asia and the richest man in India for the last 11 years, alone has increased by 72.84% in 2017 to Rs 260622 crores!

The Prime Minister often advises the youth not to look for jobs but seek self employment, become entrepreneurs so they can become job providers, not mere job seekers. Today in our country, self employment is mostly distress employment. The Labour Bureau report states that 46.6% of workers in our country were self employed. How much do they earn? The same report says that 67.5% of them earn only up to Rs 7500. Only 0.1% of the self employed earn more than Rs 1 lakh a month. Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is touted as turning youth as entrepreneurs. How many youth have become entrepreneurs through this scheme? Since its inception in 2015, 9.9 core loans worth 4.68 lakh crore have been dispersed. This means the average loan amount per person is only Rs 47249. Is it possible to start and sustain any viable business with this amount, except selling pakodas on the pavements? Of course, for Prime Minister Modi, selling pakodas earning Rs 200 per day is also 'employment', a view strongly endorsed

by his party president. And the BJP chief minister in Tripura directed educated youth to open *paan* shops or tend cows for employment. Is this the BJP's idea of employment generation?

'Ease of Doing Business'

One promise that was made in its election manifesto for the 2014 elections, which the BJP led government has really taken up seriously is ensuring 'Ease of Doing Business'. It is doing this by snatching away the hard won rights of and imposing slave like conditions on the workers so the employers can further exploit the workers and increase their own profits.

Soon after coming to power, the Prime Minister started his world tours ostensibly to attract investment, promising foreign investors that his government would effectively carry forward the process of the so called 'labour law reforms' to improve 'Ease of Doing Business'. He tries to woo foreign capitalists with the attractive promise of cheap Indian labour to boost their profits. These are projected as efforts to generate employment for our youth. 'Make in India' is an attractive slogan, a veil to mask the real intention.

On the pretext of encouraging investors to 'Make in India', FDI has been allowed in almost every sector. FDI was allowed even in strategic sectors like defence, insurance etc. Rather than increasing employment generating new investment and really enabling 'Make in India', this has mostly resulted in foreign companies gaining greater control over Indian companies or acquiring them as in the Walmart Flipkart deal. Instead of generating new employment to any significant extent, the mergers and acquisitions have been actually resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs. The Walmart Flipkart deal too will result in lakhs of small kirana shop owners losing their income even though a few thousand people may get low paying jobs, as delivery boys etc. In fine, national economy will be further squeezed; people will lose employment and livelihood. The MNCs, patronised by the government will loot the people and the economy. 'Ease of doing Business' is nothing but

'Ease of looting' our people and our natural resources. Can we allow this to continue?

Labour Law 'Reforms'

The BJP government has hastened another component of neoliberalism, the so called 'labour law reforms', i.e. amending the labour laws to serve the interests of the employers. The main intention of these amendments is to drive out large sections of workers from any statutory protection.

According to the government's own figures, 93% of the workforce in our country is unorganised, i.e. not covered by labour laws. Only around 7% of the total workforce is covered by labour laws. The labour law amendments are meant to remove statutory protection to 90% of even this small section of workers in the organised sector.

We know, from our own experience, that large numbers of workers even in the organised sector do not get their due statutory protection because labour laws are blatantly violated by the employers, often with the connivance of the labour department. Minimum wages are not paid; even attendance registers are not maintained in many workplaces; workers are victimised for exercising their right to organisation; women workers are not allowed paid maternity leave; they are not given maternity benefits; often their services are terminated when they get pregnant. Contract workers like Kishen, doing the same work as the permanent workers are not paid the same wage; they are denied the same benefits. Workers are compelled to work for 10-12 hours without over time payment. Today, implementation of the existing labour laws is the major demand on which workers are compelled to go on struggles and strikes. But, the government is not ready to ensure effective implementation of labour laws.

Instead, the Prime Minister says that there is a 'jungle raj' of labour laws that is hampering 'Ease of Doing Business' and obstructing investment. So, the BJP led government has

decided to merge the 44 existing central labour laws into 4 Labour Codes.

Four existing labour laws – the Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act, Payment of Bonus Act and Equal Remuneration Act – have been merged into the Labour Code on Wages Bill which has been introduced in the Parliament.

The workers and their trade unions also believe that the present labour laws are not perfect. They have a lot of loopholes to enable the employers violate them with impunity with the enforcement machinery looking the other way. The workers and their trade unions too want that labour laws should be 'reformed', in the true sense, for the benefit of the workers, to remove all the loopholes and extend legal protection to all workers.

We want that any Act on minimum wages should include the formula for fixing minimum wages as recommended by the 15th Indian Labour Conference along with the direction of the Supreme Court in Raptakos & Brett case, which has been reiterated in several Indian Labour Conferences thereafter.

We want that the draconian provision for deducting eight days' wages for one day strike, if the government considers the strike as illegal, should be scrapped. If the Bill on Code on Industrial Relations is enacted, no strike can ever be legal.

We want that the enforcement machinery be strengthened.

We want that the law should strictly provide for ending discrimination in wages, service conditions and benefits between different sets of workers doing the same or equal value of work.

CITU, along with other central trade unions, specifically placed these demands before the government.

But the BJP led Modi government is not ready to do this. It did not incorporate any of these changes, the changes that the workers' want, in the Bill on Code on Wages. Instead, it seeks

to dilute the concept of inspection itself, thus making enforcement a casualty. Inspectors are replaced by 'facilitators'. The Act becomes toothless and entirely meaningless for the workers. Equal remuneration is restricted to gender discrimination in payment of wages only, doing away with other types of discrimination related to recruitment, promotion, training etc, of women workers, which existed in the earlier Act.

Similar is the case with formation of trade unions and industrial disputes related issues.

The BJP government has prepared the Labour Code on Industrial Relations Bill by merging three existing Acts – the Trade Union Act, Industrial Disputes Act and Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act.

We, the workers want that the basic right of the workers – the right to organisation and collective bargaining and their inalienable right to collective actions including strike - should be protected by law; that the employers should be effectively prevented from victimising workers for their trade union activities and loyalties. We want that the law should facilitate larger number of workers to join trade unions and protect their democratic right to choose their union leadership

We want the law to protect workers' jobs, wages and benefits.

But the 'labour law reforms' as a part of which the Code on Industrial Relations Bill is prepared, provides for none of these. In contrast, the code makes formation of trade unions much more difficult; it curtails the democratic right of the workers to elect their leaders as per their choice; it drastically curtails their right to collective action and makes it almost impossible for workers to go on strike. Almost all strikes will be termed 'illegal'. Then the workers and their unions will be punished for such 'illegal' strikes, through huge fines and imprisonment. On the other hand, this law seeks to give the employers the right to 'hire and fire' workers as per their will. Even before the law is introduced in the Parliament, the BJP government has,

through a notification, amended the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act extending Fixed Term Employment to all sectors. As already mentioned, permanent employment, job security will be things of the past. The hopes of people like of Somanna, of their children settling down with permanent jobs will almost be dashed. Workers like Soni can no more feel confident of united actions through their unions to safeguard their rights.

We, the workers, want laws to be so formulated to provide universal social security – covering old age, health, accidents etc for all workers – in the organised sector, unorganised sector, permanent workers, contract and casual workers, women and men – all.

The BJP government has formulated the Code on Social Security Bill by merging 15 existing labour laws relating to social security including the EPF Act, ESI Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Act, Beedi Workers' Welfare Act, Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, Employees' Compensation Act etc. As per this Code, the huge amount of funds with these schemes will be placed under the National — Council that will be headed by the Prime Minister. While the responsibility of implementing welfare schemes including gratuity, pension, maternity benefit etc will rest with the state welfare boards, the funds will be managed by the National Council. The workers' money will be invested in the share market on the pretext of 'better investment' and the welfare benefits for the workers will depend on the vagaries of the share market. The vast majority of workers in the unorganised sector, who do not have any employer, have to contribute 20% of their income. The workers belonging to SEC IV category need not contribute anything; but the government does not make any specific commitment of its contribution; the code simply says that the 'government is expected to contribute their share'.

The workers want safe workplaces. Thousands of workers die every year due to industrial accidents, most of which are

preventable, but happen because of the employers' negligence. The accidents in several places including the fire accident in Agra, in Delhi, in the coal mine in Jharkhand etc show that workers' safety, their lives are of the least concern for the employers or contractors. What matters to them is only their profit.

Several studies and reports including by ILO, categorically state that there is no evidence to show that curtailing labour rights and benefits of workers leads to economic growth and employment generation. But still the government argues that all these measures are meant to promote growth and generate employment. It insists on following this disastrous path of attacking labour rights to favour the employers. It is totally unresponsive to the demand of the trade unions for changes in labour laws in the interests of the entire working people in the country. At the same time it is in a haste to amend the labour laws according to the wishes of the employers' class. Why? Is it not clear in whose interest the government is working?

Price Rise

For most of the workers, stagnant wages and rising prices pose a big problem in balancing budgets. According to official price index data, prices in rural areas have risen almost by 21% and in rural areas by 17% since the present BJP government came to power in 2014. This is apart from the periodic spikes in the prices of food items of daily consumption, dal, onions, oil etc, which simply disappear from the plates of common people at those times. The pre poll promise of the BJP, of curtailing prices turned out to be another '*jumla*'.

Before the neoliberal regime set in, ration shops that sold rice/ wheat, sugar, kerosene etc at cheap rates, government schools, government hospitals etc provided some succour to the common people, particularly the poor from price rise. Neoliberalism frown upon such 'subsidies' aimed at providing relief.

The rise in the prices of food items does not benefit the poor and middle farmers either. The prices of agricultural inputs, of fertilisers, pesticides, electricity, diesel etc all have gone up. They do not get remunerative prices. In fact, most of them are compelled to sell their produce at cheap prices to the private money lenders and buy food themselves at high prices. It is only the middlemen, the hoarders, the speculators, the rich rural business people who benefit. Speculation is one of the major causes for price rise. But the government is not ready to ban speculative trading in essential commodities despite the persistent demand of the trade unions, because it would hurt the interests of the big corporates and traders.

The rise in the petrol and diesel prices has a cascading effect on the prices. But even when the price of crude oil in international market was low, the present BJP government refused to pass on the benefit to the people. Instead, the government kept the taxes high. Centres' share of taxes on petroleum crude and petroleum products increased from Rs 1.26 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 2.73 lakh crore in 2016-17.

Privatisation

Public Sector Enterprises

Privatisation is a well established part of the neoliberal regime. The drive for privatisation started with the advent of neoliberal policies under the Congress government in 1991. It is a means to transfer public property into private hands. The Modi government has taken this to new levels. The government led by the BJP, which claims sole proprietorship of 'nationalist' and 'patriotic' credentials, has established a record in the sale of public sector. Within four years of assuming office, it sold off public sector assets worth Rs 1.96 lakh crore, as per government statistics; more than what was sold during the preceding 10 years.

Privatisation of the public sector is not a problem of the public sector workers alone. Public sector enterprises were

established after our Independence to develop a self reliant economy; many were established in the remote places and contributed to the all round development of these areas; public sector in strategic sectors like defence help in protecting our national sovereignty; by implementing reservations for SC/ST they help in the uplift of these socially oppressed sections of population. The public sector does not evade taxes; the taxes and dividends they pay contribute to the national exchequer. The profits generated by the public sector are used for public benefit. The private sector is not concerned about all these. Privatisation of public sector enterprises has adverse implications on the country on all these aspects. But the 'nationalist' BJP government is not only determined to privatise the public sector enterprises; it is totally committed to handing over everything – everything- public to the private sector.

Our coal mines, oil and gas fields, land, rivers and lakes, forests are being handed over to private corporates, domestic and foreign, to reap profits. Key and strategic sectors like defence, railways, telecom, insurance, and banking are not spared either. Soon after coming to power, the BJP government led by Modi targeted almost all the public sector undertakings for strategic sale. But it could not achieve its objective during the last four years due to various reasons including the stiff resistance of the workers. It has now become so desperate that it has decided to bring down government share in all profit making PSUs to below 49% and transfer control and management to the big corporates. On the other hand it has decided to close all the sick PSUs.

This BJP government on the one hand boasts of rejuvenating the economy and making it the 'fastest' growing economy, outpacing China, though on the basis of fudged figures. On the other hand, it finds it difficult even to maintain our prestigious monuments like the Red Fort and Taj Mahal. It has decided to hand them over for 'maintenance and management' to private companies. The Red Fort, the symbol of our First War of Independence from where the Prime Minister hoists the

national flag every year on Independence Day, is already handed over to the Dalmins. So is the Golconda Fort in Hyderabad.

As continuation of the neoliberal project, the BJP government is fast withdrawing from its responsibility of providing essential public services like education, health, sanitation etc and is allowing private players to enter these sectors in a big way, to make huge profits.

Education

Education at all levels is being privatised in a big way, taking it away from the poor, making it accessible only to those who have money. It is 52 years since the Kothari commission recommended that public spending on education should be raised to 6% of GDP. But even now, as per 2017-18 budget estimates of public spending, central and state governments combined, is only 2.7% of our GDP.

The government schools are totally neglected. Most of the schools do not have basic infrastructure and amenities. Lakhs of teachers' posts are lying vacant. Lakhs of poor people like Shobha Shinde want their children to be educated so that they can lead a better life. But, they are compelled to send their children to private schools and colleges paying huge tuition fees because of the pathetic state of the government schools and colleges. On the pretext of low enrolment, the government is closing down government schools. Last year, the Human Resources Development ministry circulated a proposal for merging or relocating 2.6 lakh small government schools, because they were not 'viable' due to low enrolment. Most of these schools are in remote locations catering to tribal and other marginalised communities. The BJP government seems to compete with private educational institutions in 'investing' only in projects that are 'viable'. It has thrown its responsibility towards the people to the winds; and the Right to Education Act into the dustbin.

Many BJP ruled state governments are in the forefront in dismantling public education. The BJP government in Rajasthan decided to hand over 300 secondary and senior secondary government schools to the private sector under the PPP model from 2018 academic session. If implemented 15000 employees including mid day meal workers are estimated to lose their jobs. The state government has already closed down 20000 schools.

The BJP government in Maharashtra decided, in December 2017, to close down 4093 schools on the pretext of low enrolment. It has cleared a Bill allowing private companies to open schools in the state. Several other state governments, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha etc are also on the same path; they too are trying to close down large number of government schools.

In contrast, it is only the LDF government in Kerala that is focussing on improving the quality of education and infrastructure in the government schools. And this is proving beneficial to the common people. Parents in Kerala are shifting their children from private to government schools. If the government is really serious to provide quality education to all our children, it should follow the model of the LDF government in Kerala. If a state government with serious financial constraints like the LDF government in Kerala can allot the necessary funds for education, why can't the government at the centre? If the LDF government in Kerala can do this, why can't the other state governments? Is education for poor children a priority for the BJP led governments?

Health

'Swasthya Bharat' would be a 'Samridhha Bharat', proclaims the government. Yes, it is entirely true. All workers are concerned about their health and the health of their family members. That is why we want that the public expenditure on health to be raised to 5% of GDP. But today, more than 70 years after Independence, government expenditure on health

continues to remain around 1.4% of GDP; of this measly amount, the government of India spends only 0.3%; the rest comes from state governments. More than 70% of health expenditure is born by the people. This is one of the major reasons for people falling into debt trap from which they are unable to come out; for people on the threshold of poverty being pushed into the depths of poverty from which they are unable to climb up.

Neoliberalism demands that the government drastically cut down on welfare expenditure – on health, on education, on food security etc. The various governments at the centre and in many states have been obliging this demand. This BJP government led by Modi, with its strong commitment to neoliberalism has been more than obliging. It is dismantling of public health services to benefit the corporate health sector.

The BJP government made a high decibel announcement in its latest Union Budget of the 'National Health Protection Scheme' that is said to provide free insurance to more than 10 crore families. The government claims this to be the world's largest public funded health insurance scheme, providing insurance coverage worth Rs 5 lakh to each of the 50 crore people covered. Dubbed 'Modicare', and officially called 'Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission (NHPM)', this programme is expected to be fully functional from October 2018. The budget allocation, which was initially a meagre Rs 2000 crore and was later raised to Rs 10000 crore for 2018-19, is less than half of the minimum premium required for the scheme. But the major problem is that this insurance based scheme will cover only the patients who are admitted in a hospital, that is, those who are seriously ill. This does not cover out patients. More than two thirds of health expenditure of families in our country is on non hospitalised conditions, mostly on medicines. Thus the scheme, like the earlier Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) will benefit the big private hospitals and the insurance companies, more than the people. Like the RSBY, it will increase, rather than

decrease, the out of pocket expenditure on health by the common people.

The government is deliberately allowing the government hospitals to degenerate by curtailing funds. Thereby, it is compelling patients to go to the private hospitals who often fleece them. According to the Rural Health Statistics 2017, the shortfall in funds for sub centres, primary health centres (PHCs) and community health centres (CHCs) was to the extent of 19%, 22% and 30% respectively. Many of these centres do not have electricity or running water. Large numbers of them are running in dilapidated buildings. They do not have proper approach roads. It is impossible for ambulances to reach them.

There is a serious shortage of staff in many government hospitals. At the CHC level it is reported that there is 82% shortage of specialists including surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists, physicians and paediatricians. Around 6371 sub centres are functioning without ANMs.

It is this attitude towards public health that has made the BJP government led by Yogi Adityanath to drastically cut down the budget for the encephalitis programme in the state from Rs 10.19 crore to Rs 5.78 crore despite worsening of the disease in 2017-18. As a result 3-4 extremely sick infants were packed in one ICU bed in the Gorakhpur hospital. It is because of this that oxygen was not available; oxygen supply was cut down as dues were not paid. This has resulted in the death of 72 children in Gorakhpur in August 2017.

Is it surprising, then, that Dana Majhi could not get proper treatment for his wife when she was alive and was walking to his village with her body on his shoulders after she died? Many such stories came to light after this. Thousands more do not come to light.

At the same time the governments, under neoliberal regime, extend concessions including tax holidays, cheap land, exemption in custom duty for importing equipment etc to those

including the corporates who invest in private hospitals. The atrocious way these corporate hospitals swindle the patients was revealed in a report by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) which analysed their bills. The bills of four reputed private hospitals in Delhi and NCR (National Capital Region) revealed that these hospitals have been making profits of up to 1737% on drugs, consumables and diagnosis! How did the Modi government respond to this exposure? The chairperson of NPPA was removed! Surely, these hospitals would be among those that would benefit by 'Modicare'.

The prices of essential medicines have been rising. People are often confronted with a difficult question – buy food or medicines? But the government remains unfazed. The NITI Ayog, the most obedient agency of the BJP government in carrying out its neoliberal agenda has, in April 2017, recommended that Drug Price Control Order should be delinked from the National List of Essential Medicines. This means that the prices of all essential medicines will no longer be controlled. These medicines will become more expensive. Its suggestion, if implemented, will result in more than 350 essential medicines being removed from price control. The prices of many medicines have already gone up due to the imposition of 18% GST. We have been demanding that essential medicines be exempted from GST to provide some relief to the patients. But till now the BJP government has not responded.

Thus BJP government's brand of 'swasthya' is only for those who are 'samridh'. Health is only for the wealthy. Under BJP rule health is more and more going out of the reach of the common people. The government is eager to promote 'medical tourism' for the rich to come to our country for treatment to enable the corporate hospitals to gain more profits. We have the talent; we have the technology; we have the resources. But the government, committed to neoliberalism, is not willing to allot funds for improving the infrastructure and facilities in the government hospitals for the benefit of the common people.

Thousands of our people are allowed to die even due to easily preventable and curable diseases. Is it not cruel? How can this be justified?

Food security

While our country has climbed from 130 to 100 in the 'Ease of Doing Business' Index, it is slipping in World Hunger Index. In 2017 India's rank in the Global Hunger Index in 2017 was 100 out of 119. It was the third worst in Asia, with only Pakistan and Afghanistan behind it.

The BJP government is keen to further climb up the 'Ease of Doing Business' index to reach 50 and is contemplating many more 'reforms' to achieve this. But it feels no such compulsion to improve our rank in the Global Hunger Index. It is busy trying to dismantle the Public Distribution System and replace it with Direct Benefit Transfers of Food Stamps, as advised by the World Bank, the architect of neoliberal policies.

The National Food Security Act was enacted in 2013 after persistent demand and pressure from the Left parties and several other organisations. In March 2015, a year after it came to power, the BJP government issued a circular imposing a freeze of Antyodaya cards which provide 35 kg of food grains to the poorest of the poor. This circular also imposed a freeze on the number of families per state who are eligible to rations as priority households. In the last two years, lakhs of ration cards have been cancelled in the name of digitisation and later they were termed 'bogus'. Ration cards are being cancelled without any house to house survey and without giving any opportunity to the poor to raise their objections. The linkage with Aadhar is leading to the exclusion of lakhs of poor. The PoS machines do not work; finger prints do not match; often there are other technical failures. Aadhar linkage has also proved to be disastrous for lakhs of families.

11 year old Santoshi from Jharkhand died due to starvation on 28th September 2017, seven months after rations for her

family were stopped because they could not link their Aadhar to PDS. Later the card was removed from the list. 30 year old Lakhi Murmu and 58 year old Savitri Devi, from the same state also died recently for the same reason – hunger - as they were denied ration for several months; their ration cards were cancelled as they could not be verified with their Aadhar cards. It has been reported that in the last six months around half a dozen people across Jharkhand died due to hunger as they have been denied rations because they were unable to verify themselves with Aadhar.

The budgetary allocation for NFSA is Rs 1.14 lakh crore, which is less than 1% of India's GDP. But the union finance minister believes that this is too high. The union food minister is of the opinion that the exchequer can save Rs 17500 crore every year by just cutting down the number of ration cards. The BJP government is even mounting pressure on governments in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu which have a robust public distribution system by drastically cutting down their allocation of food grains and asking them to switch to direct benefit transfer or food stamps.

How many young children like Santoshis can we allow to die of hunger before these policies are reversed?

Agriculture

Agriculture in our country has been pushed into a crisis since the advent of neoliberal policies. Public investment in agriculture has been drastically cut under the neoliberal regime. Input costs have been rising. Minimum support prices do not even cover the cost of production. Public procurement has been dismantled. Private players have been allowed to exploit the farmers, particularly the poor farmers. Institutional credit is not available for most of the farmers. Only 41% of agricultural credit is given to small and marginal farmers, represented by loans of up to Rs 2 lakh; 14% of credit, with a loan size of more than Rs 1 crore goes to institutions and corporates engaged in agricultural production. Thus the poor farmers are

compelled to take loans from private money lenders at high rates of interest. They are harassed and humiliated when they are not able to repay the loans. It is estimated that more than three lakhs peasants have committed suicide during the last two decades, mainly because they could not repay their loans.

Agriculture is consciously being made unviable to compel small farmers to abandon agriculture and migrate to the urban areas to join the already huge mass of unorganised workers and provide cheap labour. Their land is being snatched away at throw away prices and handed over to real estate sharks or big corporates in the name of development.

The National Commission on Farmers headed by Swaminathan has recommended, in 2006, a minimum support price (MSP) of 50% profit above the cost of production. In its election manifesto of 2014, BJP promised the moon to the farmers including implementation of Swaminathan Commission recommendation. Soon after coming to power it reversed its stand. In February 2015, it filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court that it was not possible to fix MSP on the basis of cost of production plus 50% as it would 'distort the market'. Then in the latest budget, it made another flip flop and claimed that it was already paying MSP above cost of production plus 50%! This is nothing but a big hoax. The government is calculating at a lower cost of production. The fact is that in most cases farmers do not get even Rs 80 for every Rs 100 that they spend. With procurement cut down, the MSP itself is nothing more than notional. The small and marginal farmers, who account for 86% of all farmers do not actually benefit from MSP because they do not have a marketable surplus.

The agrarian crisis is leading to rural distress. The BJP government led by Modi totally neglected the agricultural workers. It has done nothing to raise their wages. Work days for agricultural workers, who comprise around 55% of people involved in agriculture, have drastically come down. In most of the states they do not get work even for 60 days in a year. The extent of rural distress is evident from the sharp rise in

the demand for MGNREGS work, which is low paid manual work. In most of the states wages under MGNREGS are lower than the minimum wage for agricultural workers in the state. In 2016-17 8.9 crore people sought work under the MGNREGS. But only 7.6 were provided work. And in 2017-18 1.62 crore job card holders were removed from the register. 56% of the wages were pending for work done in 2016-17. As a result, lakhs of agricultural workers and poor peasant are compelled to migrate to cities in search of work.

Attacks on dalits and adivasis

Dalits and adivasis are among the worst affected by the drastic cut down in welfare expenditure by the government under the neoliberal regime. The attitude of Hindutwa forces towards these sections has further increased their vulnerabilities and woes.

It is to be recalled that the RSS, the ideological mentor and guide of BJP demanded that Manusmriti be adopted as Indian Constitution and has rejected the Constitution drafted by Ambedkar. Manusmriti considers the dalits and adivasis as outsiders to the Chaturvarna system, as outcastes. However, for its Hindutva project of utilising religion for political purposes, for its electoral gains, the BJP is trying to woo the dalits and adivasis into its fold. It is trying to coopt Ambedkar.

But the statements of the various leaders of RSS and BJP including ministers, at the centre and in many states betray their true colours. They show that its approach to dalits continues to be within the framework of Manusmriti and Varnasrama system. The deeds of the BJP led government reinforce this.

Within one year of the BJP coming to power at the centre, Rohit Vemula, a dalit research scholar in Hyderabad University was targeted for his strong opposition to the ideology of the RSS and subjected to harassment and humiliation that led to his suicide.

The BJP government has cut down the funds for SC/ST sub plan and later virtually scrapped it. Scholarships to dalit students of institutions of higher learning are not being paid on time or are not being paid at all. Many students and research scholars are compelled to abandon their studies. Against the requirement of Rs 8000 crore for scholarships, the government has only allotted Rs 3348 crores in 2017-18. This has been further reduced to Rs 3000 crores in 2018-19, even though the number of students has increased. The new UGC rules of recruitment by Department will result in the drastic reduction in the recruitment of dalits as teachers in universities and colleges. In Benaras Hindu University alone it will be reduced by 59%.

On the other hand, dalits are also being deprived of their traditional work by the restrictions imposed on cattle trade and closure of slaughter houses by the 'gau rakshaks' and Hindutvavadis. This has also impacted the leather and tannery industry where lakhs of dalits work.

Under neoliberal policies, sanitation work in most of the municipalities and corporations, railways etc has been outsourced. Tens of thousands of dalits who work as sweepers, scavengers etc are denied minimum wages and decent working conditions. Hundreds of dalits are employed by contractors in the inhuman practice of manual scavenging. Many lose their lives in manholes and drains. Thousands of posts reserved for SC/ST categories are not filled up. There is a huge backlog. With large scale privatisation these posts are also shrinking. The government has not taken any initiative to extend reservations to the private sector.

Any government serious in improving the conditions of dalits has to do much more than erecting monuments for Ambedkar. It has to ensure the Constitutional and legal rights of equality are effectively implemented and all the citizens of the country are treated equally in all aspects. This BJP government even failed to effectively argue the case related to the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act in the Supreme Court. When there

was a big upsurge against the dilution of the Act by the Supreme Court, BJP governments in several states resorted to firing on the dalits killing 9 people. Four of them were killed in BJP ruled Madhya Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh, young dalit school children of 15 or so, totally unconnected with the protests are reportedly thrown into jail under false cases, where they are still languishing.

Tribals are being evacuated from their dwelling places in the name of development. Their traditional forest rights are being denied using the loopholes in the Forest Rights Act. The BJP government has slashed the Tribal sub plan and scrapped it along with SC sub plan. The BJP and the RSS are trying to impose their version of Hindutva on the adivasi communities. They are organising 'ghar vapsi' programmes and creating conflicts between the adivasis practicing different faiths. In several states adivasis are being targeted in the name of anti Maoist/ anti Naxalite operations.

These are only some of the serious problems of only some of the sections of the toiling people. There are many more; many many more. The fishers, the handloom workers, other sections of artisans, small traders, street vendors and many others also find their earnings dwindling; their conditions deteriorating.

The government's responsibility

Any government elected by the people is expected to address these concerns of the people – prices, employment, decent income and wages, decent working conditions, labour and trade union rights, education, health, equality, democratic rights, etc. It is expected to protect their Constitutional and legal rights. But we find that the governments, at the centre and in many states, are increasingly reneging on this basic duty and responsibility.

It is more than seventy years since our country has attained Independence from the British. Our previous generations, our forefathers - our parents, our grandparents and our great

grandparents – have made immense sacrifices in the Independence struggle. They sacrificed their youth; they sacrificed their wealth, their families and their lives. Why? Because, they believed that our people will be able to achieve decent and dignified lives, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, gender etc in Independent India.

The Directive Principles of our Constitution laid down certain principles that are supposed to be 'fundamental in the governance of the country'. They stipulate that 'it shall be the duty of the State to apply these principles in making laws'. These relate to social justice, elimination of inequalities, right to adequate means of livelihood, preventing concentration of wealth, right to work, living wage etc. But scant attention is paid by the rulers to these aspects.

Even while swearing by the Constitution, successive rulers of the country never paid attention to implement the pro people directions in it.

The country has advanced in many fields after Independence. But at the same time many of the promises remained neglected. The aspirations and demands of the common people in different parts of the country have not been addressed. Land reforms were not seriously taken up except in a few states, particularly with Left led governments as in Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura. While a small section of people who had access to education could improve their conditions, vast sections of our people continue to be mired in poverty. The wealth created by the toiling people was cornered by a few big industrialists and landlords who increasingly controlled the government and its policies.

The trend towards whatever advance in the living conditions of the common people and whatever little rights the workers have achieved through their struggles has been reversed with the advent of neoliberal policies initiated by the Congress government led by Narasimha Rao in which Manmohan Singh was the finance minister.

While the Congress led government introduced these policies, all the successive governments at the centre have continued these, with the BJP governments whether led by Atal Behari Vajpayee earlier or Narendra Modi at present, implementing them with even more passion and commitment. The Modi government's passion to implement the neoliberal policies has reached the level of cruelty towards people. Under the present BJP government led by Modi, the disastrous neoliberal regime is combined with the disruptive Hindutva communal agenda of the RSS. The BJP government is increasingly showing authoritarian tendencies and indulging in repressive measures to ensure that this combination is carried forward.

The serious challenge ahead

This – the attacks on our livelihood and rights, the attacks on our unity and the attacks on our constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms - is the most serious challenge that confronts us, the working people, today. We have to squarely face this challenge and defeat it. Defeat the government, we have to. But as our experience indicates, this is not enough. If we want to achieve our demands, want to improve our working and living conditions and those of our children, we have to defeat the anti worker anti people neoliberal policies as well. Because our demands can never be fulfilled, as long as these policies are in place. We have to ensure that these policies are reversed.

Is it possible? Yes, it is. It is possible if we join all our forces; if we combine all our strength - the united strength of workers, agricultural workers and the peasants, the toiling masses of the country who actually produce everything the country needs, who produce the wealth of the country; without whose toil, the country cannot move ahead. Unity is our strength. Struggle is our only weapon. The working class and the toiling people cannot afford to disrupt their unity and weaken their struggles on whatever pretext – religion, caste, region, gender etc. We cannot allow any force to disarm us by weakening our unity.

Is there an alternative? Yes, there is. Our country has the resources, natural, financial and human, to improve the conditions of all our toiling people. These need to be utilised for the welfare of the 99%, the toiling people who are being deprived, denied, excluded. But as we have seen, those who have been in power and are in power at the centre are more loyal to the big corporates, domestic and foreign, than to the common people with whose votes they come to power. They are not ready to utilise our country's vast resources for the benefit of its toiling people. Our united struggles must be so strong to force the governments to change this attitude. We have to lead our struggles in the direction of establishing governments whose priority is people's welfare, not corporates' profits. Workers and other toiling people have to prepare themselves for such struggles. The massive 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally' on 5th September and the intensive and extensive campaign and other programmes preceding it are efforts being made by CITU towards this end.

The Alternative

Is there an alternative? Yes, there is. The 12 demands jointly formulated by the central trade unions indicate this alternative. Along with the 10 points raised by CITU in its earlier campaigns, which pertain to the issues of not only the workers but also other sections of toiling people – the agricultural workers and farmers and other sections of people – women, students and youth, these summarise the alternative.

These include – comprehensive land reforms, minimum support price for agricultural produce for all farmers and effective procurement system, cheap institutional credit for the poor and marginal farmers, loan waiver, agricultural minimum wage of Rs 18000 per month linked to consumer price index, public investment in irrigation and other agricultural infrastructure, 200 days' work in a year under MGNREGS, universal social security including health care and pension for all – as put forth by the organisations of farmers and agricultural workers.

If these demands, of the joint trade union movement and of the kisan and agricultural workers' movement are effectively met, the purchasing power of the people and their ability to consume industrial goods and services will substantially increase. The effective demand for industrial goods and services will substantially increase. There will be huge expansion of the domestic market, which has been severely squeezed because of people's purchasing power has been drastically curtailed by the assault of the neoliberal regime on their livelihood and rights.

The country has no dearth of resources to meet these demands. What is required is rescue these resources from theft by the big corporate/ big business nexus under the patronage of the governments committed to neoliberalism.

What needs to be done is:

- Stop the direct tax and other concessions to the big corporate/ big business houses
- Stop pilferage of people's money in the banks by the big corporate/ big business community. Recover all loans; take strict action against wilful defaulter
- Recover the huge amounts of accumulated unpaid taxes
- Recover the black money including that stashed in foreign countries by these big corporate/ business community

These measures, if effectively carried out, will alone give the country and its people lakhs of crores of rupees.

In addition, what is equally important –

- Impose progressive taxation on the corporates and the rich
- Proportionately decrease indirect tax burden on the people; reduce taxes on essential commodities including medicines

In sum - Stop patronising the 1% who have cornered 73% of national wealth

- through government patronage including in the form of policies in their favour
- by depriving workers of their rights, violating labour laws and increasing workers' exploitation
- by looting farmers of their legitimate dues
- by fleecing people through price rise and speculative trade
- by plundering national wealth through privatisation – of our PSUs and natural resources including mines, lands, forests, water bodies etc -

Utilise the resources for the welfare of the 99%, the toiling people who create this wealth.

This is not an unjust demand, not an unjust expectation from a government in a democracy, from a government elected by the people.

The huge resources mobilised through the above measures will not only be able to meet the demands of the people. They will boost domestic demand and bring out the economy from the present gloom. This in turn will be an incentive for investors, generate employment and further expand markets. The 'trickle down' theory - that pampering big corporates and business houses by adopting policies that would increase their profits, will benefit the people as some part of this would 'trickle down' to the people – has proved to be wrong. It is now acknowledged that this theory, promoted by neoliberalism, does not work.

The only alternative is to reverse the neoliberal regime and adopt the above alternative. This alone is the route to get out of the present crisis of the economy as a whole.

Our experience shows that it is only the Left parties that have consistently supported the demands of the workers and

peasants, both within the legislative forums and outside them. They have been consistently opposing the neoliberal regime since its inception in our country and projecting the above alternatives. They have been supporting and directly participating in the struggles of the workers and peasants, even facing police repression along with them. And wherever they have been in power, in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala, they have been trying their best to implement pro worker, pro people policies, despite the serious constraints faced by the state governments within the present system. Left ruled states had always been a contrast to almost all non-left governments led by other parties including BJP and Congress in the pursuit of pro-people, pro-poor policies.

The Experience of two years' Left rule in Kerala

The two years of LDF government in Kerala provides the contrast to the BJP governments at the centre and in many states.

It shows the difference between a government committed to the interests of the nation and its people and that committed to the interests of the corporates.

The BJP president said that election promises were 'jumlas', not to be taken seriously. In contrast, the Left and Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala released a report card of its two years in office comparing with its election manifesto so that people can analyse its performance

As its promise made before the elections to the state assembly two years back, the LDF made efforts to revive the public sector. It has been able to turn 14 public sector enterprises into profitable units within these two years

It has promised to create employment for 25 lakh people – 10 lakh for educated youth in IT and tourism sector and 15 lakh in agriculture, commerce, small scale industries, construction etc. After coming to office, the state government has signed deals to increase office space for IT sector by 1 crore sq ft,

which will be able to provide 10 lakh jobs in this sector. 213745 jobs were created by the end of first year in various fields excluding tourism, electronics and IT related sectors. In addition 2 lakh jobs are confirmed in several other projects which will be completed this year.

The state government provided financial support for 125 start up projects including one that attracted international attention – for developing a robot, BANDICOOT to clean manholes and eliminate manual scavenging.

The state government has revised minimum wage for all sectors fixing it at Rs 600 per day, the highest in the country. It has paved the way for total elimination of child labour. It has decided to collect 'crèche cess' to provide crèches in all workplaces where women work. It has extended several benefits to migrant workers

In the field of education, the LDF government decided to develop 45000 hi tech class rooms in 4775 schools, providing laptops and projectors in schools. It aims to raise 1000 government schools to international standards. It has started the Education Rejuvenation Mission and within a month took over a government aided school, which the owner wanted to close down as it was 'uneconomical' and the former UDF government also decided to close. Under this Mission school libraries and laboratories are being modernised and campuses free of plastic, pesticides and intoxicants are being created. Due to these efforts, total number of students in government and government aided schools increased significantly in 2017-18.

The health policy of the LDF government in Kerala assures free treatment of any kind to all children below the age of 18 in government hospitals. Ardrum mission envisages locally available preventive care through early intervention by PHCs in case of lifestyle diseases. The policy aims to increase health expenditure from the present 0.6% to 5%, with 1% increase each year to reduce out of pocket expenditure of people. Kerala is well acknowledged for the lowest infant and maternal mortality

rate in the country. The LDF government aims to further bring it down by providing antenatal and neonatal services to the few communities in Waynad and Palakkad that still do not have access to them. It has become the first state to extend medical insurance scheme to all migrant workers in the state to the effect of Rs 15000 coverage in government hospitals and Rs 2 lakh to be claimed in case of accidental death at workplace

Significantly, the state cultural department organised around 6000 public meetings in celebration of the social reformist Sreenarayana Guru's proclamation 'I have no Caste'.

Unite and Fight!

The 5th September 2018 March to Parliament by the workers, peasants and agricultural workers is to demand the government to reverse its anti worker anti people policies. It is to warn the BJP government that the toiling people of the country will no longer tolerate the attacks on their working and living conditions, on their basic democratic and human rights; on their trade union rights; and the attempts to divide them and disrupt their unity. It is to strengthen the struggle for alternative policies; for an alternative path of development, a development that is for the people, not for the corporates.

Let us take this message to all nooks and corners of the country. Let us mobilise in lakhs from across the country. Let us raise our voice before the Parliament on 5th September 2018 – For the Defeat BJP led government! For the Defeat of Communal Divisive Forces! For Reversal of Neoliberal Regime! For Alternative Policies!

- Unite! Fight!
- No to governments that work for the 0.1%
- For policies that benefit the 99.9%
