



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

CITU Demand Day; 14 May 2020 For Safety of Covid Worker-Warriors

(Report page - 2)



Andhra Pradesh



Assam



Gujarat



Kerala



Odisha



Punjab



Tamilnadu



West Bengal

CITU's Demands Day - 14 May 2020

For Safety of Covid Frontline Worker-Warriors

At the call of CITU, more than 4 lakh workers joined CITU-called All India Demands Day on 14 May on streets and at homes at about 10,000 places in about 400 districts across the country demanding adequate Safety gear, insurance coverage and compensation to all Frontline Workers fighting Covid-19 at their own personal risk. Organised sector workers in coal and steel and unorganised sector workers like village chowkidars, panchayat safai karamcharis, hospital employees and several schemes workers including Anganwadi and Asha participated in the programme.

As the Covid-19 cases in the country are increasing, the number of frontline workers including doctors, nurses, hospital employees as well as many other categories of workers in the NHM, most of the scheme workers is fighting Covid without proper safety gears. Many of them are not entitled to the declared 'Rs.50 lakh insurance package'. In addition, lakhs of workers providing essential services to the people - food, water, electricity, banking and transport services, panchayat /municipal sanitation workers, gramin chowkidars and police are exposed to the risk. These frontline Covid19 warriors are themselves becoming victims of Covid.

The absence of Safety to frontline workers is reflected in the anger displayed in the massive participation in 14 May programme. At many places, the sanitation workers gathered in large number and submitted memoranda to the authorities. ASHA workers, who are the worst hit, participated in large numbers in all the states. Anganwadi workers and helpers, other NHM workers, hospital employees etc participated in large scale. Municipal and panchayat sanitation workers also participated massively. In many hospitals where there is no CITU union, employees including doctors and nurses participated.

As per the CITU call, at many places, other unions have distributed food, masks, sanitisers, soaps etc to the frontline workers to extend solidarity. CITU federations in transport and BEFI also observed the demands day. In many states, workers from the industrial units joined the protest raising the demands of safety and withdrawal of anti worker labour law changes /suspension and introduction of 12 hour working day. Organisations AIKS, AIAWU, AIDWA, DYFI and SFI supported the call and organized solidarity actions at many places.

CITU Golden Jubilee Foundation Day Flag Hoisting and Human Chain

As the concluding ceremony of the Golden Jubilee of CITU Foundation Day, scheduled in Kolkata on 30 May 2020, had to be postponed due extraordinary Covid lockdown situation; CITU has given a call to observe the CITU Foundation Day on Saturday, the 30 May 2020 in countrywide and in dispersed demonstrative manner as below.

- Hoist CITU flags in maximum number of places at all unions offices, workplaces, centres of all rural / urban wards; street corners; atop houses etc;
- Form Human chain for some minutes, maintaining individual distance and following all lockdown protocols, at as many places as possible in urban, industrial and rural habitations aiming 8 lakh persons countrywide mobilisation involving the workers with their family members and neighbours; other toiling sections including peasants, agricultural workers, women, youths, students, professionals, cultural activists and others.

(Please send photos, news and reports at CITU Centre, Delhi through by electronic / IT immediately for further dissemination.)

Going against the Historical Process and the Constitution

WORKING CLASS

MAY 2020
(Second Supplementary)
EDITORIAL BOARD

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Taking advantage of Covid19 pandemic and countrywide lockdown; several BJP state governments, and also some Congress governments, have put the statutory labour rights under lockdown in variable degrees. These governments are going against the very historical process and Constitutional directives.

To suppress the growing tide of the workers strike along with freedom movement, the British government brought Trade Disputes Act, 1928 Bill before the Central Legislative Assembly empowering the administration to declare any labour strike as 'illegal.' Against this very Bill, Bhagat Singh and his associates threw bomb on the floor of the House, with harm to none; and gave the working class of India their war cry, "Inquilab Zindabad."

It was the only central trade union of Indian labour movement, formed in 1920 and whose centenary we are celebrating this year, that could keep the unity of the labour movement under one single umbrella till the eve of the Independence Day in 1947; that shaped the labour policy and in Independent India and which is enshrined in Constitution of the Indian Republic.

Under the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 43 of the Constitution states, "*The State shall endeavour to secure, by suitable legislation or economic organisation or in any other way, to all workers, agriculture, industrial or otherwise, work, a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities ...*"

Following years, since Independence, a process began with enactment of several legislations for labour including Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Factories Act, 1948, EPF Act, 1952, Bonus Act, 1965, Gratuity Act, 1972 etc.

All these are now under attack by both BJP-led Central and State Governments supported by some Congress

governments like Punjab and Rajasthan. They are going against the very historical process during British rule and in the post Independent India. They are going against the Constitutional direction.

Indian working class will not surrender to these historical non-entities but are the today's ruling dispensations. It is the working class which will defeat their designs and cause their downfall.

May Day 2020

An Overview of Participation

FOR the working class May Day signifies struggles, sacrifices and achievements. It is also a day when the working class reiterates its pledge to carry forward the struggle, to protect its achievements and also to achieve its ultimate objective of a society free from all exploitation. It is an occasion when colourful rallies, demonstrations, meetings etc are held with the participation of millions of workers across the world. In India too, all the trade unions observe May Day hoisting their own flags. Only the BMS, which does not believe in the class unity and class struggle of the working class, does not observe May Day.

BUT, this year it was not possible to organise such big gatherings on the occasion of May Day because of the lockdown due to the corona pandemic. But the working class in many countries found innovative methods to observe May Day, while following the safety guidelines.

In India also, the central trade unions have issued a joint statement on the occasion and appealing to the workers to observe May Day at their workplaces and union offices wherever possible and at their houses and neighbourhoods, strictly observing physical distancing and other lockdown guidelines. The BJP government's attempts to increase working hours to 12 a day, snatch away all the hard won rights and benefits of the working class through the labour codes which it wanted to reportedly implement through ordinance or executive order, its total apathy to the plight of the migrant workers, peasants and agricultural workers were highlighted.

CITU, which had already observed an all India protest day on 21 April in the midst of the lockdown involving more than 4 lakh workers decided to observe May Day in a similar manner, taking May Day up to the grass root level, to the villages and wards, not just workplaces and union offices.

Despite being busy with the relief activities, all CITU committees made preparations for May Day observation. May Day manifesto and Pledge were translated into local languages and sent up to the lowest level committees. Workers in groups hoisted flags and took pledge at their workplaces, wherever they have started functioning and in the union offices. CITU flags were hoisted by the Anganwadi employees near their centres in the presence of several beneficiaries; ASHAS hoisted CITU flags near the PHCs. For the first time, family members including children of workers carried CITU flags and placards with the demands and stood at the doorsteps of their homes, rooftops or balconies. Significantly, hundreds of IT employees observed May Day carrying CITU flags and placards. Social media was also widely used to carry the May Day message of the CITU national and state leadership.

WHILE detailed reports from several larger states including West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra etc, where it was enthusiastically observed all over the state, are still awaited, as per the available reports flags were hoisted in more than 20,500 workplaces and 23,000 houses with the participation of more than 4 lakh workers and their family members. These figures will definitely go quite higher when the remaining reports are received.

THE unrest and distress of the workers, not only migrant but even other sections, is being displayed in the way demonstrations and even strikes are taking place in different parts of the country. However, the BJP government is totally unconcerned about the plight of the workers and is fully implementing the demands of the employers whether it is increasing working hours, trampling workers' rights under foot to enable the capitalist class to protect their profits. The working class cannot meekly submit to such exploitation. It has to strengthen its unity, gather all support from its brethren among other sections of toiling masses and strike back at the earliest.

THE potential seen in the 21 April and May Day observance should be utilised for taking such initiatives.

- Hemalata

SIGNIFICANCE OF MAY DAY

J. S. Majumdar

May Day, the International Working Class Solidarity Day, is being observed on 1 May every year. There are different understandings about the celebration of May Day.

One understanding is to observe the May Day as remembrance of a historical incident that happened on 4 May, 1886 in the Haymarket in Chicago during workers' struggle demanding 8 hours legal limitation of a day's normal work. Such understanding confines to the rituals of celebration of a past incident of great significance, as if it was an 'accidental event' in the history. They also promote rest and recreation on May Day. Further, it limits the working class struggle only to 8 hours a day. This is a reformist understanding of Second International (The International Workingmen's Association).

Trade union movement, having Marxist view of class struggle, observe the May Day with the understanding which is much deeper, going beyond the Haymarket incident in history, and linking it with the ongoing economic, social and political struggle of the working class for 'improvement' and advancement for ultimate 'emancipation' of the working class.

On this, it is necessary to note – (1) that, the demand of 8 hours work a day in all countries was raised in 1966, much before the Chicago incident, articulated none other than Karl Marx; (2) that, it is the working class international day of action raising other demands for 'improvement' going beyond 8 hours work a day demand and (3) that, it is the part of the class struggle for advancement towards ultimate 'emancipation' of the working class. The two words 'improvement' and 'emancipation' have been borrowed from the Karl Marx drafted 1966 resolution in relation to demand of 8 hours work a day.

There is also a misconception that red flag came into being from cloth that was soaked in the blood of the martyred workers of Haymarket.

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The working class struggle in different countries for legal limitation of working hours in a normal day's work emerged out of their own experience much before the Haymarket struggle for it. From the extensive studies of such struggles in the then advanced capitalist countries, Karl Marx came to his conclusions and propounded the Theory of Surplus Value and the essence of class struggle in the capitalist mode of production.

Marx wrote about the 'Limitation of the Working Hours in a Normal Working Day of the Workers' thus, "the working day has a maximum limit... Within the 24 hours of the natural day a man can expend only a definite quantity of his vital force. A horse, in like manner, can only work from day to day, 8 hours. During part of the day this force must rest, sleep; during another part the man has to satisfy other physical needs, to feed, wash, and clothe himself. Besides these purely physical limitations, the extension of the working day encounters moral ones. The labourer needs time for satisfying his intellectual and social wants, the extent and number of which are conditioned by the general state of social advancement. The variation of the working day fluctuates, therefore, within physical and social bounds." (The Capital Vol.-I, Part-3, Chapter 10: 'The Working day', Section 1)

From this narrative of Karl Marx emerged out today's working class' May Day slogan "8 hours work, 8 hours rest and 8 hours recreation & cultural activities".

Marx then wrote about the “The Struggle for a Normal Working Day” in three consecutive Sections. (Sections 5, 6 and 7 in Chapter 10; The Capital Vol.-I)

In Section 5, examining the ‘Compulsory Laws for the Extension of the Working Day’ from middle of 14th Century to middle of 18th Century - the period of industrialization, the rise of capitalism and struggle between the labour and the capital; Marx concludes thus, “The establishment of a normal working-day is the result, of centuries of struggle between capitalist and labourer.” Marx then narrated about the ongoing working class struggles in different countries for legal limitation of working hours in Section 7 “The Struggle for a Normal Working Day; Reaction of the English Factory Acts on Other Countries.”

Being emphatic on Working Class Unity for Struggle, he writes, “In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.” (Underline added for emphasis).

Emphasising on the Significance of the International Working Class Movement on legal limitation of the working hours, Marx writes, “At the same time, the Congress of the International Working Men’s Association at Geneva, on the proposition of the London General Council, resolved that ‘the limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive... the Congress proposes eight hours as the legal limit of the working day.’” “Thus the movement of the working-class on both sides of the Atlantic, that had grown instinctively out of the conditions of production themselves.” (Underline added for emphasis)

Earlier, in the same year 1866, the National Labour Union of the United States, had taken decision for 8 hours work a day. Endorsing that decision, the Geneva Congress of the International Workingmen’s Association noted in the resolution, “As this limitation represents the general demand of the workers of the North-American United States, the Congress transforms this demand into the general platform of the workers of the whole world.”

It was the International Workingmen’s Association, of which Karl Marx was the prominent leader and a member of its 32-member ‘London General Council’, in its first Congress at Geneva on 3-8 September, 1866 had adopted the resolution on the struggle to achieve the demand on legal limitation of 8 hours work a day in all countries of the world.

Marx’ imprint in drafting the resolution was very much clear. The resolution noted, that achieving ‘limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition’ for the working class movement for advancing all further struggles for ‘improvement’ in other conditions of work in the capitalist system itself and for further advancement of struggle for ultimate ‘emancipation’ of the working class.

Hence, the essence of May Day celebration as the International Workers Day is for rededicating working class struggles for achieving 8 hours work-limitation, and not limiting to it, as a preliminary condition; for further advancement of the working class struggle within capitalist system for economic and social justice for all social partners and on political issues emerging out of these struggles; and preparing ground for onward march to Socialism.

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About two decades later, after the International Workingmen’s Association in its Geneva Congress adopted resolution on 8 hours work limitation and after the death of Karl Marx, the guide; the Federation of Organized Trades and Labour Unions in USA had unanimously set May 1, 1886 as the date of general strike for achieving eight-hour work limitation.

This common demand and strike decision have to be seen in the background of rapidly growing industrialization in USA and it emerging as the most important centre of capitalist world; severe exploitation of the workers associated with long hours of forced work; and police, big bosses, strikebreakers and media combine ruthlessly suppressing workers organisations and agitations.

On that day, on May 1, 1886, estimated about half a million workers were on strike and joined rallies across United States. The battle cry was – “Eight-hour day, with no cut in pay.”

On next May 3, striking workers in Chicago assembled near McCormick Harvesting Machine Company. Under protection of 400 police personnel, strikebreakers broke the picket line and entered the McCormick plant. When workers resisted the strike breakers, police fired on them killing six workers on the spot.

A protest rally was held next day, on May 4, at Haymarket. The rally was peaceful and was addressed by August Spies, Albert Parsons and Samuel Fielden standing in an open wagon. Large number of police was present. Addressing the rally Spies said, “There seems to prevail the opinion in some quarters that this meeting has been called for the purpose of inaugurating a riot, hence these warlike preparations on the part of so-called ‘law and order.’ ... The object of this meeting is to explain the general situation of the eight-hour movement and to throw light upon various incidents in connection with it.”

At about 10:30 PM, police arrived with big force and ordered to end the rally. At that time a home-made bomb was thrown into the path of the advancing police killing a policeman and wounding six others.

In all, seven policemen and at least four workers were killed. Historian Paul Avrich maintains that the police fired on the fleeing demonstrators, reloaded and then fired again, killing four and wounding as many as 70 people. An anonymous police official told the Chicago Tribune, “A very large number of the police were wounded by each other’s revolvers. ... It was every man for himself..”

Yet, the New York Times, dateline May 4, screamed with headline “Rioting and Bloodshed in the Streets of Chicago ... Twelve Policemen Dead or Dying”. It referred to the strikers as a “mob”.

A harsh anti-union clampdown followed. Without caring for warrants, Chicago police squads resorted to two-months-long physical attacks on the labour activists, ransacking their meeting halls and places.

No person could be arrested or identified as bomb-thrower. Many believe the hand of notorious Pinkerton agency, the private security and detective agency, behind the bomb throwing.

Yet, the workers leaders, who spoke and addressed the workers rallies in connection with 8 hours work limitation, were arrested and the trial began on 11 June, 1886. The trial was conducted in an atmosphere of extreme hostility created by the media toward the defendants. Judge Gary also displayed open hostility to the defendants. Selection of the jury lasted three weeks and nearly one thousand people were called; all union members and anyone who expressed sympathy toward socialism were dismissed; and, in the end, a jury of 12 was seated, most of whom confessed prejudice against the defendants.

On November 11, 1887 - Engel, Fischer, Parsons, and Spies were hanged to death. They sang the Marseillaise, then the anthem of the international revolutionary movement. Moments before they were hanged, Spies shouted, “The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today.”



At the time of Haymarket incident, Marx was no more, so also the International Workingmen’s

Association (First International). The International Workingmen's Association (Second International) was reorganized which held its first Congress in Paris on July 14, 1889.

After hearing from the American delegates about the workers struggle in America for 8-hour day and being inspired by the great struggle and martyrdom of the workers in Haymarket, the Congress adopted the historic resolution that "The Congress decides to organize a great international demonstration, so that in all countries and in all cities on one appointed day the toiling masses shall demand of the state authorities the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours, as well as the carrying out of other decisions of the Paris Congress. Since a similar demonstration has already been decided upon for May 1, 1890, by the American Federation of Labor at its Convention in St. Louis, December, 1888, this day is accepted for the international demonstration. The workers of the various countries must organize this demonstration according to conditions prevailing in each country."

Absence of Karl Marx and domination of reformists in International can be seen in the draft the resolution. It confines to worldwide demonstration on May Day every year for statutory limitation of working day to 8 hours without connecting it with 'improvement' and 'emancipation' as was in 1966 resolution.

And, yet, one international solidarity action on May Day by the working class of different nation-states is of great signification for the working class revolutionary movement. Engels writes on May 1, 1890, "As I write these lines, the European and American proletariat is reviewing its fighting forces, mobilized for the first time, mobilized as one army, under one flag, for one immediate aim: the standard eight-hour working day to be established by legal enactment, as proclaimed by the Geneva Congress of the International in 1866, and again by the Paris Workers' Congress of 1889."

However, in the next Congress in Brussels in 1891, May Day resolution of 1889 Congress was again revised restoring class perspective. Reiterating 1889 Congress decision to observe May Day for 8-hours day; it added that the demonstrations on May Day will also be to improve working conditions; to ensure peace among the nations and "deepening of the class struggle."

The class perspective of the May Day celebration was best explained by Lenin in the preface to a pamphlet, *May Days in Kharkov*, in November, 1900. Lenin wrote, "In another six months, the Russian workers will celebrate the first of May of the first year of the new century, and it is time we set to work to make the arrangements for organizing the celebrations in as large a number of centres as possible, and on as imposing a scale as possible, not only by the number that will take part in them, but also by their organized character, by the class-consciousness they will reveal, by the determination that will be shown to commence the irrepressible struggle for the political liberation of the Russian people, and, consequently, for a free opportunity for the class development of the proletariat and its open struggle for Socialism."

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The Red Flag

Jim Connell's song – 'The Red Flag', published in 1886, became popular for the revolutionary movement at that time which has reference of Chicago incident, in the third stanza, thus, - "Look round, the Frenchman loves its blaze, - The sturdy German chants its praise, - In Moscow's vaults its hymns are sung, - Chicago swells the surging throng."

Red was the colour symbolizing the French Revolution. However, now the flag in red colour is being used as revolutionary tradition since Paris Commune of 1871.

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[This article is the edited version of the article published in *The Working Class*, June 2019]

PM's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' Covid Relief Package; FM's Five Tranches of that Relief Package

- **Empowerment of the Corporates;**
- **Disentitlement of Toilers - Workers, Peasantry;**
- **Destruction & De-industrialisation:**
- CITU
- **Money for Agri Business, Tears for Kisan**
- AIKS

THE Union Finance Minister Sitharaman, in her five windy serial addresses to the nation, announced Five Tranches of the supposedly 20 Lakh Crore of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' Covid Relief Package, announced by the Prime Minister. CITU has called these as steps of Empowerment of the Corporates and others of the ruling classes; and Disentitlement of the Workers, Peasants, Agricultural Workers and other toilers who are the real producers of the national wealth. CITU also called it a Blue Print of Destruction and De-industrialisation. Following are CITU's response to five tranches of the Relief Package.

..... *food and shelter for the migrant workers*'. But, that claim nowhere matches with the reality. It is claimed that the Government has spent lakhs of crores of rupees on these. But nothing reached the intended beneficiaries – the jobless, hapless and shelter-less workers including migrant workers.

Over 14 crore workers lost their livelihood during lockdown, till announcement time. More than 80 per cent of them, including the migrant workers, were not paid their due wages and most of them are thrown out of employment. Yet, the Finance Minister did not utter a single word about the Home Ministry's and Labour Ministry's directives/advisories, under the National Disaster Management Act, not to terminate workers' employment and for full payment of their wages for the lock-down period.

Announcement by the FM was more in sound-byte, little in substance and more of untruth and distortions. The package is supposed to provide immediate relief to the hunger-stricken, jobless and shelter-less people. But the FM spoke more on future programme of housing, infrastructure etc.

This Part of the Package has also not delivered anything substantive from the Government's exchequer to the working people, the migrant workers in particular, to meet their immediate need of food and cash support. Some assurance has been given for the future that is portable ration card for the migrant workers to get their ration anywhere in the country effective only from 31 March 2021.

Announcement of granting 5kg / per person foodgrains and 1 kg *Channa* /per family per month for the migrant workers for two months is questionable owing to the lack of sincerity of

purpose and of appropriate instrument to identify them. Experience shows that previously announced food support did not reach to 90 percent of the entitled beneficiaries among migrant workers. That is why the trade unions demanded universal food support to all households, except the rich.

FM came on record stating “Rs.3 lakh crore Emergency Working Capital Facility to Businesses including MSMEs” (*not for the MSMEs only*). This “*including MSMEs*” tactics is aimed at benefiting the major corporates and not the MSMEs, who are in real need for support, having been suppressed, repressed and exploited by big corporates / big business. Such trickery speaks about the serious integrity-deficit of the Government.

Whatever so-called support announced for the farmers, street vendors, MSMEs etc are all in the form of loan not from Government exchequer. The landless agricultural workers even cannot access this loan. These marginalized sections of the people, require direct support and not loans.

There has been lot of untruth and distortion in the claims of the FM to divert and mislead the people from the Government's dubious intent. Following are some examples:

1. It is claimed that food and shelter have been arranged for the poor and migrant workers from the State Disaster Relief Fund with Central Government's contribution to the tune of Rs.11,002 Crore as on 3rd April in order to “provide hygienic meals three times a day.” This is a cruel joke. Available reports from various agencies say that such food and shelter did not reach to 90 per cent of the beneficiaries, the migrant workers in particular, which is vindicated by the desperation demonstrated by the migrant workers to reach to their native states at all cost, even by walk.
2. FM also claimed that 14.62 Crore person-days-work have been generated for the returning migrant workers through MNREGA till 13th May 2020. The lockdown started from 25th March 2020; the rush to return practically started after mid April; and till end April / early May, the return of migrant workers, many of whom are in quarantined, was marginal owing to strict restriction enforced by police in the inter-state borders throughout the country. Can anybody believe that in less than 14 days, 14.62 Crore person-days-work was generated for the returning migrant workers? Rs.10,000 crore was spent on that account till date. Money might have been spent in official records but that did not reach the beneficiaries.
3. Similar untruth is there on all the statements of the FM on Labour Codes, claiming to be benefitting the workers. FM claimed that Code on Wages has introduced statutory concept of “*National Floor Wage*”, “*will reduce regional disparity in minimum wages.*” But, Section 9(1) of the Code on Wages Act, 2019, stipulates, “*Central Government will fix floor wage taking into account minimum living standard of a worker in such manner as may be prescribed: Provided that different floor wage may be fixed for different geographical areas,*” making regional disparity in-built in the Code on Wages Act.
4. The Labour Code Bills and Act do not have any binding defined provision for “appointment letter” and the meaning of “formalization” of employment appears to have not been understood at all by the Minister promoting aggressive informalisation of work as part of its “ease of doing business programme”.
5. Coverage of ESI Scheme for all establishment employing 10 or more employees is in vogue since decades for which credit cannot be taken by Modi Government; and extension of pan-India coverage of ESI depends on establishment of ESI dispensaries and centres to all subdivisions of the country and the Government has actually been moving in just opposite direction and also by unilaterally curtailing even many of the existing benefits. Hence statements made in this regard still remains a sound-byte without substance.
6. Liberalization of definition of “migrant workers” to include the migrant workers directly

employed in the establishment, the claim of Finance Minister does not match with the provisions of the Occupation Safety Health and Working Conditions Code Bill 2019; rather the Government has proposed to do away with the Inter State Migrant Workmen Act 1979, through the OSHWC Code Bill and definition of migrant workers is proposed to be made restrictive through introduction of higher threshold limit of employment (20) and a wage limit to be prescribed by Central Government.

Such deceptive exercise in the name Relief Package is condemnable. It exposes the fraudulent modality of the governance as a whole.

CITU reiterated the demands, inter alia, of the entire trade union movement for direct cash support of Rs. 7500 per month to all non-income-tax paying households and direct food-support to them.

THIRD Part of announcement of the Package was on land-management; on liberal availability of land for industries through land-bank and by other means; promotion of SEZs etc making it amply clear that the most retrograde reforms programme is to appease the private capital, both foreign and domestic, taking away the lands of the farmers or forcing them for distress sale who are already distressed under continuing agrarian crisis. Moreover the existing regulation on land-use is being attempted to be done away with or liberalized in favour of corporates as per assertion by the Finance Minister, posing a palpable danger of erosion of food security of the entire nation.

It is also related to widespread promotion of SEZs divesting the workers of all rights at workplaces. Those who produce food for the country and those who produce value for the nation are targeted for exploitation and expropriation along with desperate auction of country's strategic industries, natural and national resources to the detriment of national interests.

AIKS in its statement said that the package on agriculture, announced FM, is another great betrayal of the peasantry; it is Money for Agri Business and Tears for the Kisan. The package totally ignored the immediate just demands of Rs.7500 / month to each peasant and agriculture worker household; comprehensive loan waiver to free the peasant households from indebtedness; assured procurement at MSP at C2+50% for all crops; 200 days of work under MGNREGS with Rs.300 as daily wage; free ration and essentials during lockdown period. Nothing has been done to compensate the losses in income of peasantry and agricultural workers due to crop losses and loss of employment.

The FM announced that the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 will be amended to allow more private investment in agriculture; deregulation of prices of onion, potato, oilseeds, edible oils and cereals as well as doing away with stock limit except in cases of national calamities and famine. This will make essential food inaccessible to majority of the people and not in any way benefit farmers. The food security of the country will also be compromised.

The BJP Government has announced barrier free interstate trade for agricultural commodities, to deregulate agri-business and announced Rs.1 lakh crore as agricultural infrastructure fund. Out of these reforms, not the peasantry and rural workers, but the agribusiness corporate houses and multinational corporations will take advantage. The Agriculture Produce Market Committees will be sidelined and the powers of the state governments will be eroded. The peasantry at large will be at the mercy of the Agri Business Corporations since there will not be any arrangements for price support and price stabilization for crops.

The package is aggressive neoliberal attack on the peasantry and the rural poor who are facing starvation, distress and total helplessness. The agriculture production will be severely affected. At a time of crisis when the peasantry is badly in need of compensation at the real cost for the losses suffered due to lockdown, when they lost their crops as they were unable to harvest

and unable to reach markets in the towns, the package is silent on these except claiming that it has spent on procurement. The fact that market arrivals of wheat and other rabi crops are very low is being concealed. The AIKS strongly condemns the pro-agribusiness anti-peasantry package and calls up on the peasantry and rural workers across the country to come out in protest against this great betrayal of the peasantry by the BJP Government.

FOURTH Tranche of the package, announced by FM, is big bonanza to the private corporates, more of foreign than domestic, through privatization of defence production, of vital mineral resources like coal etc, airports and PSU airlines, essential public utility service like the electricity, and even of space and atomic energy.

The privatization of defence production through corporatisation route and forcing PPP on the ordnance factory network together, and allowing 74% FDI through automatic route will finally lead to foreignisation of defence production, more dependence on foreign defence equipment companies, threatening the security-preparedness of the country; along with, technology transfer provisions in the major defence equipment procurement deals has been done away with, as has already been already indulged in infamous Rafael aircraft deal. Similar others for naval frigates, submarines, missiles etc being in pipelines – all with major foreign producers – is finally going to make the country's profit-making defence sector PSUs, shipyards etc absolutely redundant or make them the junior partner of foreign players. This will also severely erode the self-reliance and make the country dependent on imperialist powers.

The privatization drive in coal and bauxite along with banishing captive-mine concept and allowing 100% FDI through automatic route will have destructive impact on Coal India Ltd and PSU in Aluminum sector against national interests. Moreover, blanket commercialization including exports of these minerals, mined by private sector including the foreign players, is finally going to starve the vital industries in our country like power, steel, aluminum, fertilizers etc of their essential raw materials needs at affordable prices.

The Aviation sector has also been thrown in the process of privatization including the national carrier Air India and also country's profit-making airports some of which has already gone to the chosen favoured private players of the Modi-Raj.

The Electricity sector, the most vital sector delivering essential public utility, is being pushed to total privatization, creating a compulsion for the state governments to follow such disastrous route, through Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 and authoritarian centralization of regulatory power stipulated by it. On the other hand subsidy on household consumers and agriculture has been announced to be phased out meaning increasing burden on the common people and already suffering agrarian sector.

Privatization in Space Research and Atomic Energy through the so called PPP model will mean monetization of the fruits of research by our scientist by private players without bearing any cost of the research, nor contributing anything. This is synonymous to plunder on national assets, resources and intellectual property developed by the country with huge investment of public fund.

FIFTH and last Tranche of the Package, the FM imposed several conditionalities on the states borrowing. Most of these conditionalities were put as suggestion before the 15th Finance Commission. Taking advantage of the Covid, it is big attack on the Centre-State relation to impose Modi government's reform agenda on the state governments to follow. FM announced raising of additional borrowing limit by the states from 3% to 5% of GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) but every fraction of percentage increase is tied up with compulsion of Modi-dictated so called

The states have lost revenue and had to take the major burden of expenditure on the people suffering from Covid lockdown. At this juncture, the conditionalities have been put for borrowing in installments with conditions of accepting electricity reform and withdrawing free or subsidized electricity to farmers. Any subsidy has to be direct cash transfer, not cut in the rate. This will open rural areas for high cost electricity supplied by private players. On the other hands there will be more exclusion than inclusion in the cash transfer process as inbuilt mechanism of the system. The conditionalities also include criteria for 'ease of doing business' etc.

Highlights

- Out of total Rs 20 lakh crore, a very meagre percentage came as direct immediate cash and food support to the immensely suffering jobless, income-less, shelter-less crores of working people.
- Lakhs of migrants are either locked down in the huts haplessly or desperately walking along the highways, facing death due to exhaustion, hunger and accidents or police brutality.
- The BJP government led by Modi has shown its contempt to the basic entitlement for dignified survival of common people. The multi-facet measures the finance minister has announced about so called reforms embracing all the sectors of the economy are aimed at permanently empowering the handful of big foreign and domestic corporates and big business houses, to freely exploit workers and people to maximise profits.
- Direct cash and food support for the suffering millions, to be funded from Government exchequer all together in all five announcements is not more than even 10% of the total package. Whatever direct cash and food support has been announced in different tranches has not reached to 80% of the needy working people.
- Around half of the announced quantum of the Package comes from Reserve Bank of India and not from the Government exchequer. Overwhelming major parts of the announcements for industries, MSMEs, and agriculture are in the form of loans and advances from financial institutions that too in the days to come. It does not immediately reach them.
- The survival needs of the majority of the populace have been ignored totally. When direct support and loan waiver is the urgent need of the hour, liberalising loan provision in future cannot help in any manner.
- FM's claim on EPF withdrawal provisions or cash support to construction workers as a part of her relief package is nothing but an act of deception and fraud on people. All these provisions are funded not by the Government but by workers' own accumulation in their EPF account and the accumulation of cess account in the construction workers' welfare fund.
- The series of measures of aggressive neoliberal reforms announced by the Government, instead of strengthening the national economy, will put the country in the track of destruction. They will destroy our manufacturing capability and lead to gradual de-industrialisation. In the name of self-reliance, measures like liberalisation of FDI and FII, allowing Indian companies to freely list themselves in foreign jurisdictions, leading to increased foreign domination and in many cases foreign take-over, are being announced. This will threaten and erode our self reliance itself.
- This dangerous trend of erosion of self reliance is further aggravated by the policy of allowing minimum one to maximum four PSUs in each strategic sector to be notified by the Government in future. This Government has already been systematically destroying almost all PSUs in the much crucial pharmaceutical sector. In defence production sector, as many as 40 plus ordnance factories are being forced to convert themselves in PPP mode paving way for full privatisation, through corporatisation route, there being no ceiling on private equity participation in them as

per the new policy on defence production sector. Same design of virtual marginalisation of functional and profit-making PSUs in various strategic sectors like Coal, Airports, Central Power Utilities, Shipyards, Railway production units etc is being actively pursued through hostile policy interventions of the Government not to allow them to viably operate. As culmination to said systematically pursued destructive policy-hostility towards PSUs, obviously to benefit the private players and contractors in the same sectors, today's policy announcement on PSU is aimed at finally eliminating PSUs from the economic map of the country. And that is going to be biggest disservice and betrayal to the national interests, interests of the people at large only benefitting the international finance capital and the Indian corporates as its junior partner.

- The Finance Minister is liberal in empowering the big corporate not to comply the laws under which they function and operate as seen in decriminalising the offences under Companies Act, grossly relaxing compounding of offences owing to continued non-compliance, easing the bankruptcy resolution process in favour of the debt-defaulters and so on. These are being done in the name of helping MSMEs which is again a deceptive posture to befool the people. Very few MSMEs will be benefitted by such liberal concessions since MSMEs are generally compliant either to their debt obligation or other legal obligations. They actually require direct support and wage support like that given to them in many countries in the world, and did not get anything tangible from these packages.
- On the other hand, the Government shamelessly shut their eyes on the gross violation of its own directives regarding non-termination of employment and full payment of wages to workers by the same corporates.
- Selecting the Covid Pandemic and lockdown time, severely squeezing the space for democratic exercise of debate and dissent for all the above misdeeds involving national interests reflects authoritarian and anti-democratic attitude of the BJP government to mask its dubious and destructive intents.
- Covid and lockdown are being fully used by RSS-BJP led Modi government with aggressive neoliberal reforms dictated by international finance capital, in the present phase of deepening world economic crisis, for maximizing profit for the corporates at the cost of workers, peasantry and other toiling sections; and moving fast towards establishing a centralized authoritarian government with fascistic intent in the condition of suppressed real opposition and shrinking of democratic space.
- The situation demands conscious efforts of opposition and effective resistance by the united working class in close alliance with the peasantry and other toiling sections in defence of immediate class interest and creating and expanding democratic space of opposition to the ruling class dispensation now.

CITU condemns such desperate and destructive neoliberal reforms in favour of private and foreign players which are severely detrimental to national interests.

CITU calls upon the working people, all the trade unions irrespective of affiliations, as well as all patriotic and progressive sections of the society to raise their united voice in protest against these anti-people and anti-national deceptive measures.

CITU appeals to the entire nation to prepare itself for safeguarding the self-reliance of the country and the lives and livelihood of our working people.

Covid-19 Lockdown

CITU in Relief Work

[Apart from raising the issues and demands of the suffering crores of toiling people of the country due to unplanned imposition of Covid19 lockdown and fighting for them despite severe lockdown restrictions and limitations; CITU with Kisan Sabha, Agricultural workers union and other mass organisations together jumped in action across the country to provide some relief to the suffering millions in an almost catastrophic situation.

It is a saga of heroic struggle by the working class cadres to stand by the suffering humanity at the time of their distress.

Working Class, May 2020 e-publication gave an overview at the very initial stage of relief work. Beginning at the very first week of lockdown, the relief work has still been continuing and expanding in newer areas. We have very limited access to state-wise reports of their actual work at ground level. Yet, we have noted below some state-wise experiences to learn and draw inspiration.]

CITU's Clarion Call for Relief Work

On the very day countrywide Covid19 related lockdown was imposed on 25 March; CITU gave call to its all committees, federations, unions to –

“Mobilise funds, food and other daily essentials and reach them to the needy in the surroundings through our members, activists, sympathisers etc;”

In that call CITU said, *“This prolonged lockdown is bound to severely affect the livelihood and survival of a large section of working people, particularly the informal sector workers including those on daily wage, migrant workers, domestic workers, small vendors etc. Lockdown for them means the loss of the only means of living.”*

It, further said, *“It is not easy in the present atmosphere of extreme restrictions / prohibitions on mobility and normal activities, to organise such solidarity and support. But ... (we) must take the initiative and explore all avenues and do (our) best to extend support to these workers in their localities, using whatever communication networks that are available.”*

“This is the time when the organised trade union movement must take the initiative for expressing solidarity and supporting our working class sisters and brothers in these sectors in all possible ways. This includes the retired employees and old workers.”

“In this trying moment, it is important to demonstrate the sense of solidarity and brotherhood which is lifeline of our continuing initiative to widen and deepen the unity of the entire toiling class,” CITU underlined.

Joint Call of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU

On 30 March, in joint statement, CITU, AIKS and AIAWU said, "...large sections of the workers including migrant workers, agricultural workers and poor peasants have lost their livelihood, income and are compelled to starve ... Large numbers of migrant workers are being evicted by house owners. Frontline health workers are yet to have proper protection gear."

"... (We) have been intervening along with other mass organisations and like-minded organisations to help the needy. We find that in India's villages as well as in its towns and cities, there are a large number of poor, migrant workers, destitute people stranded without proper access to food. Unless this is addressed immediately an unfortunate scenario of hunger deaths is looming large."

Reports from States

Andhra Pradesh

Assistance and relief were extended to hapless migrant and unorganized sector workers. Relief was provided by A.P. state committee to 92,229 workers; of them 16,092 were migrant workers, 46,709 unorganised workers and 17,341 other workers.

In most of the cities our committees have adopted some divisions as per their capacities to provide relief to at the residential areas of workers in construction and transport, small vendors, head loaders etc.

Major relief activities were by the district committees providing daily necessities like rice, vegetables, cash and also directly arranging breakfast and readymade food to the unorganised and migrant workers.

Migrant workers were provided meals, daily necessities, accommodation and masks. District committees could establish new contacts with 8,182 of them. They are working in special economic zones, pharmaceutical, granite, spinning, construction industries and as railway contract workers. They are from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, and Jharkhand.

While providing relief, new contacts have been established among 6,088 unorganised sector workers. They are mostly in construction, small industries, transport etc.

Anganwadi employees in all districts, and in some districts other scheme workers, are stitching and distributing masks for the workers and general people. 59,567 masks have been distributed. In this relief work (*in quintals*) rice 1017, other daily necessities 403, vegetables 651, fruits 68 were distributed. Meals and breakfast was arranged to 80,905. Total cash assistance of Rs 9,98,500 was also extended. Total value of relief extended in the state was more about Rs.1.26 crore. (Rs. 1,25,89,520). Relief activity is continuing.

Assam

CITU state committee took up with the DGP of Assam about 60 migrant workers from Murshidabad district of West Bengal stranded due to lockdown at Ranigate in South Kamrup district. DGP told that going back to their own place is not possible at this moment, but alerted all concerned authorities for their safety and other necessities.

We reached out to other stranded migrant workers at Sagolia gate, Ranigate and Jalukbari arranging for their food and accommodation. CITU and SFI have been working through helpline number also. State CITU are in contact with the migrant workers of Assam working in Kerala and Tamilnadu and helping them in many ways. Comrades of CITU, SFI and DYFI in Kerala are extending great help to these migrant workers from Assam.

Bihar

Around 150 CITU workers were on the street getting involved in relief work during this lockdown. They distributed mineral water, biscuit, sanitizer, mask, food materials and meals amongst the workers, who are stranded and unable to move to their homes in different districts or to other states, and also to the health and municipal workers and the policemen.

The CITU committees extended relief to around 3,000 persons in Patna, Gaya, Dehri-on-Sone, Bhagalpur, Bettiah, Motihari, Darbhanga, Samastipur, Rosera, Saharsa, Supaul and Sitamarhi districts.

Financial assistance has been extended to the members of CITU by their respective unions. CITU unions of road transport, beedi, construction, Anganwadi and sales promotion workers also independently organised relief work. Katihar Zila Auto Rickshaw Chalak Sangh of CITU and of AIRTWF started visiting houses of auto drivers on 8 April onward distributing 21-items-pack of relief materials for one month including rice, masks and sanitizer. UCO bank employees also, since 1 April, started free distribution of day time meals in Patna.

Chhattisgarh

CITU workers along with CPI(M) activists have been distributing about 1,500 food packets daily in the slum areas of Raipur.

CITU activists at Durg have been extending all help to some stranded migrant workers of West Bengal and also to other distressed persons in the colonies and villages.

At Korba CITU functionaries and activists have been collecting funds; distributed food materials in a village to 35 families of mainly daily wage-earners; to 82 migrant workers. One of the supporter-farmer has donated one full truck-load of fruits which was distributed among more than 5000 poor and distressed people.

Delhi-NCR

The unplanned lockdown, announced on 24 March night by the Prime Minister, has left the lives and livelihood of lakhs of working class families in complete disarray; forced lakhs of migrant workers to risk their lives and limbs to walk all the way back to their villages. As a class conscious trade union, we in CITU Delhi-NCR committee has continuously been carrying out relief work among them as our class duty.

We got the first call for help on 26 March from around 60 construction workers from West Bengal. They were out of food. Under strict travel restrictions, we could manage to send them some food materials through our local contact. The distress calls started pouring in from CITU committees of different states and some directly.

CITU committee gave a call for fund on 27 March night. Showing the sensitivity and displaying solidarity, the people started pouring in contributions from early morning on 28 March. In one day, we received more than Rs.2.5 lakhs. As on 2 April, we have received around Rs.12 lakhs.

The biggest problem for us was getting travel passes from the Delhi police. Despite these, we are consistently carrying out the relief operation in the working class areas of Delhi, Noida and Ghaziabad in NCR.

So far we distributed free ration items and cooked food worth Rs.27 lakhs among more than 30,000 migrant workers from Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, UP, Kashmir and also of Delhi. These workers are mainly engaged in construction work, garbage collection, street vending, zari work, papad making; rickshaw pullers, auto drivers; in garment industry etc. We were able to distribute relief materials in many labour settlements. Our relief work is still continuing as the government's ration distribution system is in disarray.

Along with these, ration materials and cooked food from Delhi government worth Rs.8 lakh were also distributed by us. In Ghaziabad and Gautam Budh Nagar, a list of migrant labourers was provided to the district administration for free distribution of 5 ration items to each stranded worker.

CITU state committee appealed for donations on 28 March and again on 14 April after the lockdown was further extended.

We collected Rs.30 lakh in the relief fund so far in which 584 donors made substantial contribution. The help received from the comrades of AIDWA, DYFI, Bangla Manch is greatly appreciated. At some places, local people came forward to help us. In our work, several youths from the localities also came forward and helped the migrant workers in this hour of crisis.

One important achievement of CITU is that it could compel Delhi government to provide 8 extra ration items along with the rice and wheat to the stranded labourers. CITU also helped workers of Delhi in getting them e-coupons.

Similarly, we compelled the government to disburse Rs.5000 each directly to the account of 40,000 registered construction workers through the construction workers welfare board. We were also successful in getting the registration open for unregistered workers after 15 May. In Ghaziabad district we could compel the district administration to help 13,000 construction workers with relief amount of Rs.1000 each. A similar help could be organised in Gautam Buddha Nagar also.

Side by side, we continued unions' membership drive. Till now, 2,300 new members were enrolled which is expected to go up further.

CITU state and district leadership along with the comrades of other organisations worked hard to make the relief work successful. (20.05.2020)

Gujarat

In the very first week of the lockdown, we formed coordination groups for relief work in Ahmadabad with surrounding districts; Surat, Navsari, Valsad and Vapi; Rajkot with surrounding districts; Junagarh and in other districts. Immediately after declaration of lockdown, we started attending to all urgent communications mainly from West Bengal committees for the migrant workers from that state working in Gujarat.

Surat district committee did widespread relief work with the support of some NGOs, small industrial associations, municipal corporations and government departments. With their help, at one place in Surat we could run community kitchen for 700 / 800 workers per day for 15 days.

Food grain packs were provided to few groups of workers with the fund provided by CITU, CPI(M) and by some individual donors. Relief was provided among migrant workers even at distant places like Navasari, Valsad and Hajira.

It was difficult for CITU functionaries to function in Ahmadabad due to movement restriction as our office is situated at the Covid 'red zone'. Some foodgrains packs were distributed with the fund provided by CITU and active involvement of SFI cadres. Food to migrant workers from West Bengal was provided with the help of some NGOs and municipal corporation.

In Bhavnagar, we started supplying daily tiffins and also one week's foodgrain kits. With the help of NGOs and Gurdwaras, till date we could provide daily tiffins to 1053 persons and 767 food kits.

Food distribution and ration kit distribution is going on.

(... To continue in next issue of the Working Class)

COVID 19 Lockdown, Agrarian Distress and Resistance

Vijoo Krishnan

COVID 19 pandemic has brought India to the brink of probably the biggest challenge in recent times. Millions of toiling masses - the peasantry, agricultural workers, migrant workers and oppressed sections - are threatened not just by the virus alone but by loss of livelihoods, loss of incomes, unemployment, poverty and hunger. Millions of footloose workers are forced to flee their places of work to their villages in an exodus that has not been seen since the partition. Hundreds of fleeing workers have died in accidents, of hunger or committed suicide under distress.

In the wake of such an unprecedented human tragedy the ruling classes have left the vast majority to fend for themselves and have been rejoicing claiming that the crisis has provided the best opportunity for pursuing neoliberal reforms more aggressively. "Now or never", "we will never get this opportunity again, seize it" clamoured the Niti Ayog CEO Amitabh Kant calling for labour market reforms, freezing a vast number of Acts, giving unbridled flexibility to industries as well as market reforms and corporatisation of agriculture. The different tranches of the package being announced by the Finance Minister only follows this neoliberal exhortation religiously.

Peasant Agriculture Put under Lockdown

The threat of COVID-19 pandemic was known for about three months in advance before the lockdown. Warnings had been sent out by WHO, FAO and other agencies. However, this time was not used for any preparation or planning to deal with the imminent crises. Precious time was lost as the BJP government was busy in instigating communal divide in the country and violence in Delhi using CAA-NPR-NRC; for red carpet welcome to Brazilian President Bolsonaro; in organising mega-show Namaste Trump to welcome President of USA Donald Trump; resorting to horse-trading for toppling an elected government in Madhya Pradesh; etc.

The harvest season for many rabi crops, many vegetables and fruits fell within the first phase of the lockdown. The unplanned lockdown hampered harvesting as well as marketing operations and pushed the peasantry which already was facing a crisis into further acute distress.

Lockdown for them, in the strict sense, snatches away their livelihood, their year-long toil and investment, leads to loss of standing crops, loss of incomes and pushes large number of people into starvation. Entire investment, both as toil and capital, goes down the drain if the standing crops could not be saved. In this situation, the peasantry demanded that there should be a relaxation in lockdown with the Government pitching in for harvesters, provision of personal protection equipment etc. Kerala government came with the announcement that paddy harvesting is an essential service and that they would assist in the harvest. It also allowed use of labourers for irrigating certain crops that otherwise would be rendered unproductive. The BJP Government took a considerable time to come up with such relaxation and that too did not translate on field.

A harvesting and marketing crisis was created due to shortage of labour; absence of transportation facilities and restrictions on vehicles; high-handed manner of implementation of the lockdown, disruption in procurement of foodgrains, collection of harvest by traders, restricted access to Mandis or Markets. The lockdown came at a time when the farmers were expecting a bumper wheat harvest and good harvest of other rabi crops. Wheat acreage increased touching about 33 million hectares compared to 29.6 million hectare last year, which is about 11 percent higher. It has now been brought out with conclusive evidence by an important study by Prof. Vikas

Rawal and Ankur Verma that the COVID-19 lockdown has resulted in a complete breakdown of the agricultural marketing system. This comprehensive study, based on data from 1331 Mandis from across the country, shows that the market arrivals of key agricultural commodities during the first 21 days of the COVID-19 lockdown were substantially short of the arrivals during the same period in the previous year. In case of wheat, the total arrivals in the Mandis across the country were just about 6 percent of arrivals in the same period last year. The situation was equally dire for chana and mustard, both harvested in this season. Compared to same period last year, arrivals during the lockdown were only 41 percent for potato and 30 percent for onion. Reports from Uttar Pradesh suggest that since 15 April, 2020 the BJP Government opened 5,831 purchasing centres with the target of procuring 55 lakh tonnes of wheat. However, in 22 days one purchasing centre has purchased wheat only from 33 farmers, implying less than two farmers per day clearly pointing to the bitter truth that standing crops are not yet harvested fully and even what has been harvested has not reached the Mandis/Market.

Marketing of perishables like milk, fish, vegetables, fruits and flowers have all been adversely affected. Cattle feed and poultry feed is not reaching farmers. Poultry farmers have suffered huge losses. Milk prices have fallen 10-15 per litre. Tomatoes are fetching not even Rs.2/kg. Grape growers are estimated to have suffered losses of over 1000 crores in Maharashtra alone. Wheat prices in Madhya Pradesh saw fall in prices to Rs.1600/quintal. Chicken prices had fallen to Rs.25/kg from around Rs.80/kg. Mustard and chana, which used to fetch Rs.4800 per quintal, is fetching only Rs.1000 per quintal in Rajasthan.

Shortage of seeds and inputs for next season as well as unavailability of labour has almost brought to a standstill the sowing of pre-kharif rice, maize, rajma and other short duration crops. Farmers are forced to abandon their entire crop of cauliflower, cabbage, musk melon, flowers and grapes in many regions. Sericulture farmers are not finding buyers for cocoons. The crisis-ridden jute industry, workers and jute farmers, small tea-growers as well as plantation workers are all in acute distress. Absence of workers for harvesting of sugarcane, milling of pulses, rice and such activities also is hampering these operations. In the Tribal areas, there is problem of not being able to collect or market minor forest produce like Honey, Mahua, Tendu Leaves etc. Agricultural workers were deprived of work in harvesting operations as well as under the MGNREGA.

The BJP Government and the Prime Minister seemed oblivious of the existence of the millions of workers who make great contribution to build infrastructure, perform agricultural activities, provide services, keep urban spaces clean and perform numerous other tasks. A good number of them come from agrarian families. They come far away from their homes in search of livelihood and are forced to live deprived of basic necessities. The abandonment of this large section and absence of any plan for them led to an unprecedented situation wherein they had to flee on foot like refugees in their own land. Many were stranded in different States and left to fend for themselves without job or food. The killing of 16 workers on the railway tracks in Aurangabad, Maharashtra as well as 26 workers in road accident at Auraiya in Uttar Pradesh add to the more than 400 others who have died due to starvation, walking long distances and distress suicides due to the punitive lockdown. The Prime Minister and the BJP Government are culpable of homicide in the death of these workers.

Demands of the Peasants and Agricultural Workers

In times of an economic recession and a persistent agrarian crisis, the prolonged lockdown has undoubtedly increased the hardship of the peasantry, the agricultural workers and toiling masses. Poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and hunger are widespread. Ironically while we have more than three times the required buffer stocks at present with 50 million tonnes of rice and 27.5 million tonnes of wheat, we are witnessing a situation of hunger amidst plenty. The insensitive

Government meanwhile is talking of diverting food grains for making bio-fuels and alcohol for hand sanitisers.

Crop and income losses due to the lockdown must be compensated. Loss of incomes of the peasantry and toiling masses has to be addressed by income support of at least Rs.7,500 per month (AIKSCC has decided to revise this to Rs.10,000/month) to all non-tax paying, poor people in India. Peasantry including landless, small, middle peasantry, tenant farmers and agricultural workers must be immediately given debt relief and a full loan waiver. Crops including perishable crops and livestock products such as milk, eggs and meat must be assured of remunerative prices as per C2+50% formula and procurement must be ensured. Free seeds, affordable inputs and interest free loans for the next season must be ensured. The PM-KISAN amount must be increased to Rs.18,000 per year bringing all tenant farmers and Adivasi farmers also under its purview. Unemployment wages clause under MGNREGA should be used to give all agricultural workers Rs.300 per day or the minimum wage in the State, whichever is higher. Following the Kerala example other than food grains all essentials like cooking oil, sugar, pulses, tea, salt, spices etc., have to be given to all. The demand was for at least 10 kg of rice/wheat per head and 5 kg of pulses per family. Along with these demands infrastructure development in terms of cold storages and promotion of processing, value addition and marketing through cooperatives with public investment was stressed upon. Protection of traditional agro-based industry and addressing the safety of workers involved in procurement and market operations by ensuring access to adequate safety equipment and gear were the main demands.

Criminal Denial, Lies and Deceit Unfolds Sinister Agenda

The BJP Government for a considerable period of time was in a denial mode and its criminal negligence only accentuated the crisis. A package should have been announced before the lockdown in a more inclusive manner with special financial assistance to States for coping with the crisis and clear assurance of protection of standing crops with procurement at remunerative prices, income support as well as measures to ensure food security.

Before the elections there was lot of propaganda that 14.5 crore farmers would be benefitted from the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi. Now when the time comes to pay back, the numbers given is 8.7 crores only. Where have about 6 crore farmers vanished with a sleight of hand? What about the landless peasants, tenants, share-croppers who do not feature in these lists? The announced Rs.2000 was in any case due to the farmers now and is not any special allocation to meet the lockdown scenario. More than 20 crore ration card holders have not yet received any ration under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. The 1 Kg of pulses promised has reached only 20 percent of the beneficiaries. Only a paltry increase of Rs.20 in MGNREGA wages was made even as job opportunities drastically dwindled under lockdown. No loan waiver for indebted peasantry has been announced though thousands of crores of wilful defaulters like Mehul Choksi, Vijay Mallya and others have been waived off. While globally petroleum prices are at the lowest, the BJP Government increased excise duty by Rs.10 and Rs.13 per litre for petrol and diesel respectively. Subsidies on fertilisers were cut and electricity prices hiked when costs of cultivation are rising. Extreme apathy in the wake of a crisis of such a magnitude was the hallmark of Narendra Modi led BJP regime.

Without much delay the neoliberal road-map outlined by the CEO of NITI Ayog was being unfolded. States are being pushed to scuttle the hard-won labour rights, to increase working hours from 8 hours to 12 hours a day, to take the Ordinance route to dilute Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee Act (APMC Act) to allow private-owned markets and remove all control over farm-produce markets, implement Model Contract Farming Act, 2018, Model Tenancy Act or Agricultural Land Leasing Act, overturn land reform laws to allow corporate take-over of farmlands as well as

for electricity sector privatisation. States ruled by the BJP, Congress and allied regional parties vied with one another to implement what has been called “big, bold, structural reforms” with great urgency for fear they will never get this opportunity again.

The Finance Minister’s agricultural package has nothing substantial and is in no way contingency measures to address the crisis created by the COVID-19 lockdown. Led to acute agrarian crisis, increasing costs of cultivation, unremunerative prices, indebtedness and distress have driven more than 4 lakh farmers to commit suicides. The package did not heed the demands for immediate provision of income support of at least Rs.7500 month to peasantry, agriculture workers and non-tax paying poor, comprehensive loan waiver to free the peasant households from indebtedness, assured procurement at MSP at C2+50 % for all crops and 200 days of work under MGNREGS with Rs.300/daily wage as well as free ration and essentials till the lockdown is over. Nothing has been done to compensate the losses in income of peasantry and agricultural workers due to crop losses and loss of employment.

The package announced eight measures including ‘financing facility’ of Rs.1 lakh crore fund to boost agricultural infrastructure, Rs.10,000 crore Scheme for formalisation of Micro Food Enterprises, Rs.20,000 crores for Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, Rs.15,000 crores for Animal Husbandry Infra Development Fund, Rs.13,343 crores for National Animal Disease Control Programme, Rs.4000 crores for promotion of Herbal cultivation and Rs.500 crore for bee-keeping development are all existing schemes rehashed with no substantial increase in allocation. The lockdown has only been used to cover-up steps to promote corporate loot of resources and profiteering at the expense of the peasantry.

Even as there are concrete reports of poor arrivals of harvested crops in the market, the Finance Minister claimed that Rs.74,300 crores was spent during lockdown period for purchases at Minimum Support Price is a blatant lie. Claims of extra purchase of milk to the tune of 110 crore litres even as demand fell drastically are also not true. Claims that farmers have been benefited by the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana to the tune of more than Rs.6,400 crores could give an impression that losses incurred during lockdown have been compensated. Actually these are payment of earlier dues and are far below claims by the farmers. There has been no commitment of full compensation for losses incurred due to lockdown. The instalment under PM-KISAN for which the Government claims Rs.18,700 crores has been transferred was also a routine transfer due around this time, but about 6 crore beneficiaries were denied the amount. Neither was the amount increased nor were tenant farmers, landless and Adivasi farmers given any benefit.

Tall claim of 14.62 crore person days work created for returned migrant worker under MGNREGA up to 13 May, purportedly 40% to 50% more enrolled compared to last May, is contrary to the reality. Studies show that April, 2020 with 3.08 crore person days work was worst in the last 10 years in terms of employment creation (*Manish Kumar, Choking the Lifeline of the Rural Economy, SSER Monograph 20/2*). Clearly, the Finance Minister is playing with numbers and resorting to lies to cover up the lies of the Prime Minister when he pitched for Atmanirbhar Bharat.

The Finance Minister announced that the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 will be amended to enable better price realisation. This is a hoax and will only allow more private investment in agriculture by removing food stock limits for traders. This will only promote hoarding and price control by Government will not be possible. Deregulation of prices of onion, potato, oilseeds, edible oils and cereals as well as doing away with stock limit except in cases like national calamities and famine will only increase prices in the open market, making essential food inaccessible to majority and not in any way benefit farmers. The food security of the country will also be compromised. Barrier free inter-state trade of agricultural commodities, promotion of e-trading and dilution of APMC Act to deregulate agri-business and facilitate corporate profiteering by infringing on the rights of States is the thrust. Clearly, the move is to promote corporatisation under the slogan of

one nation one market. Agribusinesses will take advantage at the expense of the peasantry. The Agriculture Produce Market Committees will be side-lined and the powers of the state governments will be eroded. Land and tenancy laws are being amended and contract farming is being promoted. The ruling classes are seizing the opportunity to dispossess the peasantry and permanently lockdown peasant agriculture. The peasantry will be at the mercy of the agribusiness corporations since there will not be any arrangements for price support and price stabilization for crops. The package is an aggressive neoliberal attack on the peasantry and the rural poor who are facing starvation, distress and total helplessness.

Build United Resistance against the Neoliberal Onslaught

On the basis of the solidarities built, strengthening the unity of workers and peasants and of all oppressed sections, we should be able to concentrate our energies to form a united front around a pro-people alternative that is resolutely against neoliberal policies, patriarchal, communal and casteist forces. Universal education, health, social security as well as universal public distribution system accessible to all needy, redistribution of land, cooperative agriculture as opposed to corporate agriculture, equal opportunities, removal of inequalities, redistribution of land, democratisation of society, sustainable development and creation of a Community Support System should feature prominently in such an alternative.

The peasantry and the working class have had massive protests on 21 April, 2020. More than 10 lakh people across India stood with placards at their doorsteps maintaining physical distance and shouted slogans. On 16 May, more than 250 organisations of the peasantry under the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) had protests across all states in which lakhs participated. All trade unions are calling for a militant protest on 22 May followed by protest on 27 May by AIKSCC.

The aggressive attack by the ruling classes will be resolutely resisted by building broadest unity of the workers and peasantry as well as all oppressed. The path ahead will also witness united struggles with never-before kind of solidarity and people ready for sacrifice to protect their rights.

(Vijoo Krishnan is the Joint Secretary of AIKS. - The author expresses gratitude to Prof. Vikas Rawal, Prof. R. Ramakumar, Manish Kumar and Kabir Aggarwal for their inputs).

Condolence

Homage to Comrade K. Varadarajan

In a condolence statement on 16 May on the passing away of the forefront Kisan leader Comrade K. Varadarajan same afternoon at the age of 74, CITU paid respectful homage to the departed leader and send condolences to his family members and comrades.



Being attracted to Left ideology, Comrade K. Varadarajan resigned from government's job and started organising the peasantry in Trichy district of Tamil Nadu. He was elected as the District Secretary of the Tamilnadu Vivasayigal Sangham (Kisan Sabha) in 1974 and its State Secretary in 1986. He was the General Secretary of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) from 1998 to 2013. He played a crucial role in building the struggles for land rights, wages and against caste oppression of the peasants and agricultural workers. He contributed much to

the worker-peasant alliance and joint struggles of CITU and AIKS. He was Vice President of AIKS till date. He also played a crucial role in organising the Dalits in Dalit Soshan Mukti Manch.

He was a member of Polit Bureau of the CPI(M).

INTERNATIONAL

The King is Naked

George Mavrikos

General Secretary, WFTU

The entire planet is deeply immersed in the coronavirus pandemic. To this day, there are 921,002 infected and 46,153 dead, according to official data.

The situation is tragic on all continents. Thousands of families mourn their dead, hundreds of thousands suffer from the disease and millions of people live with anxiety and fear. We express to all of them our solidarity.

Monopoly and transnational groups are making use of the pandemic, laying off workers or limiting their rights. Many governments, taking advantage of the coronavirus, prohibit democratic and trade union rights. Their objective is to track the movements and activities of citizens by electronic means. It has been proven at a global level that freedoms have been jeopardized in the wake of the pandemic.

This situation has once again exposed the barbarism of the exploitative social system in which we live, as well as its inability to face the crises in favor of the peoples.

No matter how hard the capitalist governments, the bourgeois class and the leaders of the reformist unionism try to obscure the truth and hide the responsibilities of the capitalist system, they will not succeed.

They will not be able to put the people's minds in quarantine. They will not make it to prohibit the minds of simple people from thinking and judging, from drawing conclusions according to their own experience.

The conditions in which we live during this period demonstrate that:

FIRST; The moral superiority of the working class against the parasitism of the ruling class is confirmed once again. While parasites speculate, workers risk their lives in the front line of the pandemic fire, producing all the essentials for life. While powerful industrialists, kings, cardinals are hiding in their palaces, the manual and intellectual workers are struggling on the front line to produce food, medicine, transport, cleaning, communications, energy and everything necessary to make life possible. The poor peasantry, along with the popular strata, contributes to the effort to continue the production of goods.

On the other side, one can see the ruling class which is speculating. Ruthless and inhuman, it is taking advantage of the pandemic, increasing prices, stealing from the pockets of simple people, hiding products in order to generate artificial shortages. As in wars, in crises too, they only believe in one god: profit.

On the one hand, then, one can see the working class with its allies and, on the other, the bourgeoisie with its instruments - Two worlds; Two ethics.

SECOND; who bears the full burden of treatment and healing - The private or public sector? In many European countries, simple people, in their despair, came out on their balconies to applaud the heroes of public health, public hospitals, scientists of public health structures. This slandered public system, these slandered doctors and nurses as well as the entire staff are waging an unequal fight.

They are waging an unequal fight because all those who have been barking for years asking for “less state and privatizations”, both social democratic and neo-conservative governments, with their policies have deprived the public sector of human resources and equipment.

Even so, this public health sector, this abandoned sector, fights today like an invincible army; many times without weapons, without individual protection, but with courage. Until today, 61 doctors in Italy got sick and lost their lives, they died in the first line of this unequal struggle. The same happens in Spain, France, Greece and the USA ...

On the other side one can see speculators from private monopoly groups who steal from the public sector, who sell their hospital beds and virus tests at over-expensive prices, exploit the suffering of ordinary people and stain their profits with blood, in collusion with the governments.

THIRD; This crisis highlighted the truth once more; that is to say that only between workers and peoples can authentic, sincere solidarity and support develop. The example of the heroic Cuba that sent 60 doctors to the north of Italy, in the heat of the battle, is an opportunity for the peoples to seriously think and evaluate. On the day that Cuban doctors arrived in Italy, Germany refused to send medical machines to Italy, Italy prohibited exports to Greece, Spain did the same, the US state of California refused to sell masks to New York, other US states had been hiding medical ventilators etc.

During the summit of the European Union leaders on March 26, 2020, a group of countries (Germany, the Netherlands) said no to measures requested by countries with a large death toll such as Spain, Italy and France.

Capitalism is a jungle, with predatory alliances and dogfights...A dog-eat-dog world...

On the other side one can see the humanity and solidarity that only workers and socialist society can display.

FOURTH; The pandemic, with the data available to date, strips the USA policy bare; the policies of a country that is at the top of the imperialist pyramid. USA admirers worldwide now see their admiration turn to disappointment. This country has endless missiles, fighter jets, submarines and mercenaries.

But what do they have when it comes to-

- Masks?
- Medical ventilators?
- Public hospitals?
- Social Security?
- Hospital beds available for poor people?

There are huge shortages in all of this. Now they are requesting medical supplies from the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

The United States is the country with the worst healthcare system for the poor, the unemployed, and the economically weak. The worst in the world!

- Nothing is free in their hospitals. One must pay for everything and, in fact, at very high prices for everyone, without exceptions.
- There are 28 million uninsured people
- 33 million people are underinsured.
- There are 8 million people who, although they pay their taxes, do not have legal documents.
- Unemployed, elderly, and low-income people receive basic assistance only if the application they must submit is approved.

And, while the popular strata in the USA suffer the pandemic and the policies of their government, President Trump announced a package of measures of 500 billion dollars for the strengthening of monopoly groups. In addition, packages of \$29 billion were announced for airlines, \$17 billion for security companies etc. At the same time, the gun lobby in the USA has filed a lawsuit so that gun stores continue their operation; in a country where, according to official data, in 2019, 40,100 people have lost their lives to guns, of which 24,100 have been suicides.

In this regard, capitalists in the USA, Brazil, the United Kingdom and other countries of northern Europe increase their pressure in order to make all companies work, arguing that no protection measures are necessary. The economy is everything, the life and health of workers is nothing. It is this strategy that statements like those of Trump, Bolsonaro and Boris Johnson serve, who affirmed that in a few days they would get rid of the pandemic.

FIFTH; The inter-imperialist antagonisms for the production of the vaccine and effective medicines against the coronavirus are showing the true face of the transnational corporations. When it comes to jointly deciding on anti-labor measures and anti-worker policies they unite against their common enemy, the workers and their struggles. But when it comes to speculation, they are killing each other. Each one tries to steal the other's secrets. They know that whoever discovers the vaccine first will skyrocket his/her profits. It is a dogfight for profit, not for the protection of public health.

Therefore, according to the above, it is confirmed that not all of us are equal in the face of the pandemic, nor does the slogan "all united to get out of the crisis" have any pro-worker content. If the rich become infected with the disease, they have the possibility of receiving a different treatment than the unemployed. Furthermore, in the crisis it is the simple people who will suffer the consequences at the labor, salary and economic levels.

So, it is certain that the bourgeois class and its mechanisms are going to take advantage of the pandemic to drastically limit the democratic rights and freedoms of workers and peoples.

In these circumstances it is important for workers to understand that capitalism only generates and reproduces disease, torment and exploitation. Capitalism is anachronistic, it is barbaric. It cannot be humanized. The reformists who present the modernization of the exploitative system as a solution become servants of social exploitation. **There is no vaccine, nor will it be found, to humanize capitalism. It contains social inequality from its "womb".**

The pandemic stripped capitalism naked, removing its mask and fancy clothes.

So today, the duty of all militants is more necessary, more urgent. We must unite the workers and the peoples for a society without capitalists and capitalist exploitation. All the workers, together, we can do it. **Our struggle against daily problems is just. Our struggle for the social liberation of the working class is necessary.**

During Covid Lockdown
Celebrating May Day 2020



Chhattisgarh



Jharkhand



Karnataka



Maharashtra



Odisha



Telangana



Punjab



Kerala

More of 21 April Protest

[The Working Class, May 2020, First Supplementary; extensively covered CITU's 21 April 2020 All India Protest programme inclusive of reports from the states. Photos of Tamilnadu and report of Gujarat are now added as below.]

Tamilnadu



Gujarat

More than 500 workers participated in the CITU's 21 April protest in Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Upleta, Junagadh, Ahmedabad, and Arravali districts including workers of port and street vendors in Bhavnagar and mainly migrant workers of U.P and Bihar in Rajkot; near CITU office in Junagadh; and protests at homes in Ahmadabad.

In addition, more than 300 Anganwadi employees protested at Anganwadi centres and at their homes in 6 districts. 42 ASHA workers joined protest in 2 districts. Around 800 Anganwadi and ASHA worker in 9 districts campaign through social media reaching about 5,000 persons. Being a new form of protest, CITU state committee could not communicate the programme down the line properly.