

The Voice of the Working Woman



**Mid Day Meal Workers
March to Parliament**

**Demand
Immediate Increase
in Remuneration**



CITU: Campaign Week on Issues of Working Women 13-19 December 2018

The CITU Working Committee held on 1-3 November 2018 at Visakhapatnam, AP decided to conduct a week long campaign on the issues of working women. The campaign, as a part of the campaign for the General Strike on 8-9 January 2019, will be from 13 to 19 December 2018.

The main issues/demands that will be taken up in the campaign are:

1. Decent Employment for women
2. Equal Pay for Equal Work, End gender discrimination at work
3. Maternity benefit and child care facilities for all working women
4. Safety ,security and dignity for women at work (Women’s night work, separate toilets etc)
5. End Sexual harassment at the workplace
6. Cheap housing, accommodation and affordable and safe transport for women workers
7. Right to food, health and education of women and children. Make adequate allocation for government of India schemes that provide basic services
8. Curb Price rise; strengthen public distribution system

The state coordination committees of working women and the respective state committees of CITU will meet and plan the campaign.

A wide campaign will be conducted among women workers from various sectors highlighting these issues by conducting meetings, conventions, seminars, workshops, distributing leaflets, pamphlets, posters, stickers etc.

A survey on the implementation of the Prevention of Sexual harassment at Workplace Act will be conducted among both organized and unorganized sectors.

A memorandum will be submitted to the District Collectors on the issues of working women on 19 December 2018 (Birth anniversary of Com. B T Ranadive and death anniversary of Com. Susheela

<p>Gopalan)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Voice of the Working Woman</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Monthly Journal of the AICCWW(CITU)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Editorial Board</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Editor K Hemalata</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Working Editor Ranjana Nirula</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Members A R Sindhu Sunanda Bhattacharya Anju Maini</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Inside</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;"></th> <th style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"><i>Page</i></th> <th style="width: 10%;"></th> <th style="width: 10%;"></th> <th style="width: 10%; text-align: center;"><i>Page</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CITU Working Committee</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black;">Haryana Roadways Strike</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>AICCWW Meeting</td> <td style="text-align: center;">7</td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black;">International</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>National Convention</td> <td style="text-align: center;">9</td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black;">Sabrimala</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">21</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Women on the Move</td> <td style="text-align: center;">12</td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black;">Boasting Profits</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Health Insurance</td> <td style="text-align: center;">14</td> <td style="border-left: 1px solid black;">Breaking Barriers</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">25</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="5" style="text-align: center; padding-top: 10px;"> Total pages - 28 (including cover pages) </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<i>Page</i>			<i>Page</i>	CITU Working Committee	4	Haryana Roadways Strike		16	AICCWW Meeting	7	International		19	National Convention	9	Sabrimala		21	Women on the Move	12	Boasting Profits		23	Health Insurance	14	Breaking Barriers		25	Total pages - 28 (including cover pages)				
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Patronising Law Violators

If there is one thing for which the present BJP led government under Prime Minister Modi has to be complemented, it is for its ability to discover innovative methods aimed at transferring people's money to the employers' class in the name of employment generation.

Recently the Ministry of Labour and Employment proposed a scheme to provide 'incentives' to the entities that provide 26 weeks maternity benefits to their women employees as per the recently amended Maternity Benefit Act. As per the proposal of the government of India, an amount equal to seven weeks' wages of women earning less than Rs 15000 per month will be reimbursed to the employers providing 26 weeks' maternity benefit as per the Act. According to the government, this 'incentive' is meant to encourage women's employment.

Even before funds are approved for the proposed scheme, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has jumped in to claim credit. The Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development is reported to have said that *'funds lying in the Labour Welfare Cess'* would be utilised for this. He said this decision was taken *'after talks with the Labour Ministry'*. The Labour Ministry had to deny that such a decision has been taken.

But given past experience, it will not be surprising if the government eyes the unutilised amount in the cess collected under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act. This money meant for the welfare of the construction workers has not been spent for their benefit. In several states it is being diverted by the state governments and is being misused.

Already the BJP led government of Prime Minister Modi has been implementing a fraudulent scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana, in the name of employment generation, since 2016. The employers' contribution of provident fund is provided by the government for a period of three years, for new employment created in the concerned establishment.

It has made false claims that 21 lakh jobs were created over a period of around a year or so, based on the increased number of EPFO subscribers. But a section of these were already employed but not covered by the EPF despite being eligible because of the deliberate violation of law by the employers and the failure of the enforcement machinery. Instead of ensuring strict enforcement of law and taking action against those who violate it, the BJP government is spending people's and workers' money to subsidise them.

The ten central trade unions have strongly opposed such incentivising of statutory violations in the name of employment generation or encouraging women's employment and demanded that the laws should be strictly implemented.

This is yet another fraudulent measure of the BJP led government to fool women while patronising the employers violating law should be exposed. The entire trade union movement has to fight for the effective implementation of the Maternity Benefit Act, as also the other Acts.

This has to be a part of the campaign for the two days country wide general strike on 8-9 January 2019, as should be effective implementation of other existing laws related to the specific issues of women workers like equal wages, crèches, sexual harassment at work place etc.

CITU Working Committee Plans for 8-9 January General Strike

Hemalata

**Forward To the Two Day General Strike!
For the Reversal of Neoliberal Policies!
Defend Unity Of the People!
Defeat Communal Divisive Forces!**

The working committee of the CITU has called upon the working class of the country to get ready to strike down the neoliberal agenda of the ruling classes through powerful united actions. It has decided to unleash a countrywide extensive campaign to ensure success of the two day countrywide general strike on January 8-9, 2019, as per the call of the joint national convention of central trade unions and industrial federations. The working committee decided to seek the solidarity and support of all sections of toiling people and the progressive sections of society for the general strike. It also directed all the state committees of CITU to extend solidarity and help to the 'Long March' of the peasants to Delhi on November 29-30.

The CITU working committee met on November 1-3, 2018 in Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. Hemalata, president of CITU hoisted the CITU flag and chaired the meeting. Ch Narasinga Rao, chairman of the reception committee and president of the Andhra Pradesh state committee of CITU welcomed the members and invitees participating in the meeting. 122 working committee members and invitees from various affiliated and fraternal federations attended the meeting.

The working committee, in its inaugural session, passed a resolution extending solidarity to the road transport workers of Haryana who were on strike against privatisation and the Yamaha workers in Chennai, the workers of the Japanese company TRMN in Bengaluru and the Ford workers in Sanand in Gujarat, all of whom were fighting for their basic trade union rights. It applauded the news that through their struggle, the Haryana road transport workers were able to get the High Court to intervene and the state government has agreed to suspend all victimisation and to talk to the workers on their demands on November 12, upon which the strike was withdrawn for the time being.

The working committee also expressed solidarity with the people of Kerala who had to face serious floods. It congratulated the LDF government in the state for its prompt and effective rescue and relief operations which were appreciated by all. The working committee also congratulated the working class of the state, particularly the fishers, electricity employees, construction workers, head load workers, scheme workers, state government employees etc who demonstrated exemplary commitment and dedication in working to bring the state to normalcy. The unity and courage of the people of the state in facing the situation as well as the support from the working class and people of the entire country was also appreciated.

In her presidential address, Hemalata pointed out that the increasing attacks on the working class and the hard won rights of the workers in our country need to be understood in the overall context of the intensifying neoliberal onslaught on the toiling people across the world, at the behest of international finance. Today, the capitalist system finds it no longer possible to sustain itself without increasing attacks on the people. Despite the attempts to show that the world economy was growing, several reports and surveys including the latest World Economic Outlook Report of IMF show that in the majority of countries, the economy has not yet reached the pre-2008 crisis level. The capitalist class is using new technologies and particularly artificial intelligence to replace human labour. The 'Future of Jobs' report of the World Economic Forum estimates that in around four years, by 2022, around 42 per cent of task hours in 12 key sectors will be

performed by machines and algorithms against 29 per cent today. Wealth is being transferred from the people to the few big corporates and the rich through their cronies in governments and expropriation of public resources. The USA, which was the pioneer of globalization, has shown signs of growth but is now resorting to protectionist measures. It continues to maintain its hegemony through military and political interventions. The BJP government in our country, which talks so much of 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' and accuses all those opposing its policies as 'anti national', is kowtowing to US imperialism in almost all spheres.

The presidential address pointed out that in this situation of increased attacks on their living and working conditions and on their rights, the workers all over the world are coming into struggles in larger numbers. Discontent against the 'establishment' is growing. The Left has been gaining where it has been consistent in supporting these struggles, taking a firm stand against neoliberalism. But where the Left and social democratic forces have wavered and betrayed the interests of the workers, compromising with neoliberalism, the right reactionary forces have been gaining.

The same trends are visible in our country with the BJP led government facilitating transfer of people's wealth to a few big corporates. Unemployment, particularly among the higher educated young, is growing. The agrarian crisis and rural distress continue unabated. With elections approaching, RSS, its mentor, has raised the pitch on various divisive issues, trying to divert people's anger and attention from their burning livelihood issues and to polarise society. The working class must be made aware of these machinations. We must be in the forefront in protecting the unity of the working class and the people.

The working class has to ideologically fight the reactionary *Manuvadi* ideology of the RSS and BJP, while fighting against their divisive and disruptive agenda. It must be in the forefront in uniting the entire working class against not only economic exploitation but also social oppression. Tapan Sen, general secretary of CITU presented the report which mainly focussed on a review of the implementation of the decisions taken by the Kozhikode general council of CITU and proposed the future tasks including effective preparations for the two days' general strike on January 8-9, 2019.

Tapan Sen lambasted the BJP led government not only for its anti-worker and anti-people policies, but also for the anti-national policies that it was pursuing to destroy and decimate the country's manufacturing capacities, to facilitate loot of the country's resources by the big corporates, domestic and foreign. The BJP government has institutionalised measures to heighten the exploitation of workers and the loot of their savings and social security. It has introduced 'hire and fire' through notifications and programmes like fixed term employment, National Employability Enhancement Mission (NEEM), National Employment through Apprentice Programme (NEPAT) etc, which make it impossible for the workers to get organised and fight. Despite its claims of increased GDP, employment has declined. It is resorting to organised transfer of public funds to the corporates/business houses. It has found new methods for this like the Insolvency Bankruptcy Code to be presided over by the National Company Law Tribunal. Through this procedure, the public sector banks are compelled to undergo 'haircuts' of the NPAs instead of taking firm measures to recover the loans from the corporate defaulters.

While reviewing the implementation of earlier decisions, the general secretary's report appreciated the efforts made by the various committees of CITU, but at the same time self-critically noted that much more could have been done if all the committees internalised the understanding of the updated document on organisation and applied it while campaigning for the September 5 'Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally'. Tapan Sen emphasised the need to activate the lowest level union committees and to involve the largest number of cadres, activists and members in the campaigns of CITU. The shortcomings identified during that campaign must be overcome in the campaign for the two days' country wide general strike. The objective should be to create awareness among the mass of the workers about the need to defeat the neoliberal policies, protect unity and strengthen united struggles of the workers and also of all toiling sections including the

peasantry. Specific attention must be paid to reach all the workers irrespective of their trade union affiliations directly and through their specific issues.

Tapan Sen stressed that the entire campaign for the strike has to be understood as a political campaign against the neoliberal policies and the present ruling party, the BJP, which is implementing them most brutally. In addition, the divisive and disruptive agenda of the BJP and RSS also has to be explained. The working class must be made aware of the immediate need to defeat the anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national BJP and to continue to fight for the decisive defeat of the neoliberal policies. Whichever government assumes power must be given a strong message that the working class is no more ready to tolerate these policies.

The importance of solidarity actions with the 'Long March' of peasants, particularly by the committees of states around the national capital was highlighted in the report, in view of developing close relations between the workers and peasants, the two important classes of society who produce the wealth of the country. Such a close relationship and joint struggles are necessary to force a change in policies and to take the struggle to higher levels, aiming to end exploitation. The general secretary also emphasised the need to strengthen work among working women. He said that this was the responsibility of the entire CITU committees and should not be considered the task of working women cadres alone. The CITU state committees must ensure that the specific issues of working women including equal remuneration, maternity benefits, crèches, sexual harassment etc are addressed by the concerned unions from their own platforms. The campaign on working women's issues that was decided earlier must be taken up as part of the campaign for the two days' strike leading to the mobilisation of larger sections of women workers in the strike.

The future tasks related to the organisational preparations and campaign programmes were presented through a power point presentation by Hemalata. The importance of activating the lowest level union committees and involving all members of CITU in the campaign was emphasised. The credential report was placed by ML Malkotia, treasurer of CITU.

50 members participated in the discussion on the report, endorsed the formulations and the proposed tasks and also gave very rich inputs and suggestions. Tapan Sen summed up the discussion after which the general secretary's report including the future tasks were adopted unanimously. In her concluding address, the president thanked the Steel Plant Employees' Union, Visakhapatnam City committee and Andhra Pradesh state committees of CITU for the excellent arrangements.

A huge and attractive rally with thousands of industrial workers and workers from various other sectors was organised in Gajuwaka in the city on November 1. It was presided over by Ch Narasinga Rao and addressed by Hemalata, Tapan Sen and MA Gaffoor, general secretary of Andhra Pradesh state committee of CITU and one of its national secretaries.

Future Tasks

- **Two day meetings of all CITU state committees to plan campaign and preparation of campaign material – to be completed in November**
- **Meetings of district committees of CITU and of the state committees of state level unions to concretise the plan in the concerned areas and sectors – to be completed by end of November**
- **Meetings of lowest level committees of unions and general body meetings – to be completed by first week of December**
- **Solidarity actions with the 'Long March' of peasants – on November 30**
- **Survey among unorganised workers on the coverage of benefits under Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, to expose BJP government's false claims through concrete facts – November**
- **Week long campaign on the specific issues of working women – December 13-19**

Meeting of the AICCWW (CITU)

A meeting of the AICCWW (CITU) Working Committee Tier was held on 31 October 2018, one day prior to the CITU Working Committee meeting, at the CITU Office, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

Women members of the working committee from AP, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and centre attended the meeting. The meeting was presided over by K Hemalata, President CITU. Tapan Sen General Secretary, CITU attended the meeting. A R Sindhu, convenor AICCWW (CITU) placed the report.



The meeting noted that the emerging worker peasant unity at the initiative of CITU, AIKS and AIAWU at the grass root level will not only be the base of resistance against the economic onslaught but also has the potential to be the force against the social oppression and communal divisive politics in the countryside. This is crucial for the working women's movement in our country.

The meeting has also noted that today we are facing a situation where women are under the attack of neoliberal policies as well as of the retrograde ideology and religious revivalism under the BJP rule. Violence against women and children has reached alarming heights. Sexual harassment at the workplace continues to be prevalent.

At the same time women are increasingly asserting and fighting for their rights and coming out of inhibitions to expose the perpetrators of sexual offences and seek justice as is seen in the 'MeToo' movement. As a class oriented trade union, we have to take the lead in supporting their struggles and also raise specific issues of women at the workplace from the trade union platform. Particularly, the issues of sexual harassment at workplace and discrimination against women must be taken up by our unions. Our unions must be in the forefront in opposing the retrograde attitudes against women and consciously promote values of equal status and rights of women among the workers. The coordination committees of working women have to play a crucial role in this.

The participation of women especially scheme workers, in the Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally was notable. This, and their ongoing struggles, forced the Modi government to announce an increase in remuneration of the anganwadi and ASHA workers. The PM has also announced some measures for the peasantry for minimum support price. But we must understand that these announcements on the eve of the elections are aimed at the vote bank and also to utilize the scheme workers for propagating the governments' achievements.

The meeting reviewed the implementation of the proposals of the last meeting of the AICCWW (CITU) General council tier held on 22 March 2018 which were taken as decisions of the CITU General Council Meeting. The meeting noted that the entire focus of CITU after the General Council was on the joint action programmes up to 5th September 2018 and the campaign. Even during the campaign we were not able to focus on and popularise the demands of working women.

The meeting also noted that the attitude towards the issues of working women needs to be changed, at all levels of the organisation. In the recent incidents of assertion of women's rights, including the 'MeToo' campaign, the leading role of the trade union is absent and in many cases even the proper reaction or intervention is lacking. It is very important for the trade union movement to take this assertion to working class women at the grass root level so that this is not be limited to a media exercise. It was discussed seriously that after the 15th conference of CITU, in spite of repeated decisions, even the state level coordination committees are not formed in most of the states. Many members reported that there is reluctance to form women's sub committees in unions and make them functional. There is no conscious effort for training women cadres.

The meeting decided to conduct an extensive campaign for the success of the two day general strike called by the central trade union on 8-9 January 2018. The meeting took the following decisions which were later adopted by the CITU working committee held on 1-3 November 2018.

1. Constitute state coordination committees of working women as per the 15th conference guidelines wherever they are yet to be formed.
2. **Hold meetings of the state committee tier of ccwws in all states within the next two months.** All state CCWWs to discuss the tasks taken in the 11th convention of working women and make proposals for discussion and adoption by the CITU state committees
3. All unions affiliated to CITU and its federations having men and women members have to constitute women's sub committees.
4. All the State committees of CITU and state CCWWs must discuss the Commission paper "Working Women - A Class Perspective" to develop a clear understanding of the role of the Coordination Committees and our work among the working women
5. Class on the Commission paper "Working Women - A Class Perspective" for all women office bearers of the state committees and the in charges from 'Hindi speaking states'
6. All states (including those that had conducted the workshop once) must conduct state level workshops on sexual harassment at workplace, and implement the recommendations of the national workshop.
7. **One week campaign from 13-19 December 2018 on specific issues of working women,** especially on the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace and also exposing the BJP government's claims on 'Ujjwala scheme' and maternity benefits. Give a memorandum to the district administration on 19 December 2018, the birth anniversary of comrade BTR and death anniversary of Com. Susheela Gopalan.
8. Complete the quota for Circulation of 'The Voice of the Working Woman' and 'Kamkaji Mahila'. Depute one person from each state for sending reports

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National Convention in Defence of Public Sector Indian Financial Institutions

Anil Kumar Bhatnagar

Fifty years have passed since bank nationalisation, when 14 private sector banks in India were nationalised on 19th July 1969. In 1980 six more private sector banks were brought under state control. Subsequently Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and Developmental Financial Institutions like Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural development (NABARD) etc. were established in the public sector. The Government of India issued an ordinance on 19 January 1956 nationalizing the Life Insurance sector. The Life Insurance Corporation came into existence in the same year. In 1972 the General Insurance Business (Nationalization) Act was passed paving the way for nationalization of General Insurance business. One hundred and seven insurers were amalgamated and grouped into four companies, namely National Insurance Company Ltd., the New India Assurance Company Ltd., the Oriental Insurance Company Ltd and the United India Insurance Company Ltd. The General Insurance Corporation of India was incorporated as a company in 1971 and it commenced business on 1 January 1973. Thus public sector institutions were empowered to control the commanding heights of the Indian financial sector.

It is an uncontested fact that the network of public sector financial institutions has played a highly laudable role in the financial and economic development of modern India. These institutions have facilitated an unprecedentedly high, stable, sustainable and remarkably inclusive growth of the financial sector. They have also been a liberal and highly elastic source of funds for nation building activities. The excellent performance of the public financial institutions has been acknowledged even by the national committees which recommended liberalization and privatization of the sector. But at a time when we are taking forward the spirit of nationalization to new heights and making more efforts to further strengthen the public sector, neo-liberal forces are in the process of diluting and dismantling them.

The drive of privatization and introduction of unbridled market-based competition or even the international financial crisis of 2008 did not seriously affect or weaken the Indian public sector banking or insurance companies. But the situation changed when the burden of economic crisis and the consequent corporate deficits were treacherously shifted to the public institutions. The non-performing assets of the Indian banking sector as on 31st March 2018 are a whopping Rs.10.25 lakh crores. The NPAs are not due to advances extended to the farmers, small traders and petty producers. More than 85% of NPAs emanate from advances of more than Rs.5 crores. NPAs are reported mainly from sectors such as infrastructure which were funded earlier by specialized financial institutions but now transferred to the commercial banks. This is the fallout of the neoliberal policies that seek to reduce the role of the state, especially in infrastructure development.

In the insurance sector too private players are given a free hand along with permission for direct foreign investment. India allowed private companies in the insurance sector in 2000, setting a limit on FDI at 26%, which was increased to 49% in 2014. The Modi Government secured Parliamentary approval to divest the share of public sector General Insurance Companies through the Insurance Laws (Amendment) Bill. Taking advantage of this legislation, the government has already started a disinvestment process of Public Sector General Insurance Companies. There are more than 40 private insurance companies that been operating in the market. But Public Sector Insurance Companies in India have been dominating the market even today. LIC is having assets worth Rs. 28.5 lakh crores. LIC's investment amounts to Rs. 20.5 lakh crores in government securities and other approved securities. LIC has achieved a very high level of customer satisfaction with a record claim settlement of 99%. The pursuance of the neo-liberal policies by

the government and its utter disdain for the public sector poses the threat of privatization of Public Sector LIC and General Insurance Companies.

Keeping in view the valuable contributions in nation-building made by Public Sector Financial Institutions it is very clear that privatization of public sector financial institutions is not the solution for the present crisis. On the contrary, for tiding over the crisis it is imperative to protect and strengthen the public sector character of the financial institutions. Instead, what we are witnessing is a concerted effort to eliminate the public sector financial institutions. As institutions which command control over the nation's savings, public sector financial institutions are pillars of national sovereignty and freedom. Therefore, surrendering their control to global finance capital is nothing but an attempt to recolonize the nation. All those who are interested in the freedom of the country should join together to protect the Indian financial sector from the invasion of international finance capital. With this aim and objective an umbrella organisation – CITIZENS FORUM IN DEFENCE OF PUBLIC SECTOR INDIAN FINANCIAL SECTOR was formed in Delhi Com. Anil Kumar Bhatnagar, Vice President, All India Insurance Employees' Association as Convenor. The following organizations constitute this forum

All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC)

All India Insurance Employees' Association (AIIEA)

All India NABARD Employees' Association (AINEA)

All India Regional Rural Bank Employees' Association (AIRRBEA)

Bank Employees' Federation of India (BEFI)

Confederation of Central Government Employees

Society for Social & Economic Research, Delhi

Citizens Forum in Defence of Indian Financial Sector organized a National Convention in the Speakers Hall Annexe, Constitution Club, V.P. House, Rafi Marg, New Delhi on 27th October 2018. In this convention Prof. Prabhat Patnaik and Prof. Jayati Ghosh (economists); Sh. Harish Rawat (Congress) and Sh. Sanjay Singh (AAP) – political leaders and other prominent trade union leaders from the financial sector – Insurance, Banking and representatives from Central Govt. Employees placed their views on the subject.

Initiating the discussion on the draft resolution eminent economist Prof. Prabhat Patnaik categorically demanded that Indian Financial Institutions particularly Public Sector Banks and Insurance Companies must be controlled by the State. Prof. Patnaik explained that capital deployed for social development must be controlled socially. He also explained that Indian Financial Institutions have been doing a marvellous job in mobilising the savings of the people for the welfare of the people. Indian public sector banks, which will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of their nationalisation next year, are making more efforts to further strengthen this work. But the Govt. of India, under the pressure of the neo-liberal forces, particularly U.S. Administration which has been demanding privatisation of Indian public sector banks since long, and particularly the State Bank of India, is dancing to the tune of these forces and leaving no stone unturned to kill public sector financial institutions. He appealed to the public to understand the nefarious designs of the neo-liberal forces and launch an effective campaign throughout India to foil the attempts of these forces in the national interest.

Prof. Jayati Ghosh explained that the present danger is not limited to the financial sector but that all constitutional and democratic institutions are under attack by the present political dispensation. She asked the audience and leaders of the organizations to fan out amongst the general masses and common people and make them understand the real dangers before them, in language they can understand. She appealed to the participants in the convention to continue their campaign and struggle so as to save national economic sovereignty.

Sh. Harish Rawat (Congress), former Central Minister and former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand and Sh. Sanjay Singh, MP from Aam Admi Party also spoke in the convention. Both appreciated the efforts of organizers in mobilizing public opinion against the ill-effects of attack on financial

institutions, and extended their full support to the struggle launched by the Citizen Forum in order to save Indian Financial Institutions.

Other distinguished speakers were – Comrades V. Ramesh (General Secretary AIIEA), Krishna Prasad (AIKS), Thomas Franco (Ex- General Secretary AIBOC), Nand Kumar (President BEFI), K. Krishnan (General Secretary Confed. of Central Govt. Employees and Workers), Vijay Bhonsle (General Secretary, All India NABARD Association) and M L Malkotia (Treasurer CITU). All the speakers spoke about the specific challenges before their respective industries and stressed on the need to have a united struggle to defeat the policies of the Modi government, which is bent upon weakening democratic institutions and public sector units, at the dictate of corporate houses, both Indian and foreign.

At the end of the convention, the draft resolution placed before the house by Com. A K Bhatnagar was passed unanimously. The following demands emanated from the convention –

1. Maintain the public sector character of financial sector institutions to uphold the freedom and sovereignty of the nation. Government should unequivocally declare that it will protect the public sector.
2. Priority should be given to protect the freedom and independence of the country from the onslaughts of finance capital. Reasonable control should be brought on speculative capital.
3. The Financial sector to be reoriented so that the needs of the poor and the weaker sections are taken care of. Social banking to be brought back.
4. The names of big defaulters of bank loans are to be published and willful defaulters to be brought before law and punished.
5. The unreasonable and exorbitant service charges to be withdrawn.
6. The severe conditions being imposed for advances extended to the poor, weaker sections and petty farmers and producers to be dispensed with and required advances extended to them at concessional rate.
7. Security and safety of bank deposits to be ensured and reasonable interest to be given on deposits as majority of bank depositors are ordinary people and many of them are retirees.
8. All efforts should be made by the government to strengthen the public sector Life Insurance Corporation of India. Disinvestment process initiated by the Modi government in Public Sector General Insurance Companies should be stopped. Functional Autonomy should be given to public sector LIC and General Insurance Public Sector Association (GIPSA).

Com. Hira Lal, Member Planning Commission, Kerala Govt. explained in detail the significance of formation of such forums throughout India and proposed the following action programmes –

- A. Signature campaign through public meetings in defence of public sector financial institutions.
- B. Meeting of Citizen Forum delegation with the leaders of all political parties to make a demand to keep the financial sector protected.
- C. To organize meetings and conventions in defence of financial sector of India. at all the major centers.

The effort of this movement is to apprise and bring all the political parties and all concerned to a consensus on the above demands. As against Arvind Panagariya's demand that all political parties should commit for privatization, our demand is that all political parties should undertake to strengthen the public sector institutions so that the financial freedom of the nation is defended and the interest of the common man is taken care of by protecting the economic sovereignty of the country.

This National Convention of workers and officers working in Public Sector Financial Institutions and prominent economists called upon the citizens of the country to be a part of the campaign to protect and advance the interests of Public Sector Financial Institutions. This campaign is of national interest as its success will protect the economic sovereignty of the nation.

Kerala State Working Women's Convention



As per the decision of the CITU General Council meeting held at Kozhikode in March 2018, a State level convention of working women was organized by CITU Kerala state committee to form the state CCWW(CITU) as per the guidelines of the 15th conference of CITU. More than 150 women activists of CITU from over forty sectors/unions including palliative nurses, IT employees, Mid day meal workers, shops and establishment employees, RUBCO employees, artisans, cooperative employees, anganwadi, financial enterprise, ASHA workers, beedi workers, plantation, state transport, khadi, fisheries, electricity board, tourism corporation, beverages corporation, national savings, export processing zone, corporation, private hospital, shipyard, social welfare, water authority, beautician, street vendors, fisheries allied workers, handloom, new generation bank, coir, LIC agents, security and housekeeping, Kerala agricultural technical staff etc participated in the convention.

K P Mary, Vice president, Kerala CITU presided over the meeting. A R Sindhu, Convenor AICCWW(CITU) inaugurated the convention. She explained the importance of building a movement on the issues of women workers. In the Kerala situation, only by linking the class issues with the social movement, will it be possible to successfully counter the rightwing attack, she said. Anathalavattom Anadan, President Kerala CITU, addressed the convention. K P Mary made a brief presentation on the functioning of the CCWW and the purpose of the convention.

17 delegates spoke in the convention. They put forward suggestions to improve the functioning of the coordination committee. K N Gopinath, Secretary, CITU also addressed the convention. The convention elected a 45 member state CCWW(CITU) with Sunitha Kurien as convenor, P P Prema, Beemabeevi, K K Presennakumari, A K Narayani and Deepa K Rajan as co-convenors. V V Presennakumari proposed the vote of thanks.

Kerala state ccww(CITU) has been functioning since it is formed in 1979.

HP State Conference of Anganwadi Union

The 12th Conference of the Anganwadi Workers evam Helpers Union, Himachal Pradesh was held on 11-12 November 2018 at Com. Shibani Sen Gupta Hall (Kalibari Hall), Shimla.

The conference was presided over by Khimi Bhandar, Sumitra, Neelam, and Bimbo Devi.

A R Sindhu, General Secretary, AIFAWH inaugurated the conference. Narrating the government policies leading to dismantling of ICDS, she called for maximum participation in the general strike

called by the central trade unions on 8-9 January 2019. She said that the strike will mark the starting of an era of assertion of the working class and the peasantry in Indian politics by putting their demands on the national agenda.

Rajkumari, General Secretary of the union, placed the report. Prem Gautam, General Secretary, CITU state committee, addressed the conference. Kashmir Singh Thakur, Secretary CITU also addressed the conference.



After group discussions, 14 delegates participated in the discussion on the report. After the discussions, the conference adopted the report and accounts unanimously.

The conference adopted resolutions in support of the all India General Strike on 8-9 January, against the efforts of the state government to open pre-school in schools.

Himi placed the credential report. 155 delegates from 10 districts attended the conference.

The conference elected a 41 member state committee with Neelam as President, Rajkumari as General Secretary and Himi as the Treasurer. The newly elected President of the union, Neelam proposed the vote of thanks.

Paschimbanga Rajya I.C.D.S Karmi Samity

On 21st May 2018 the West Bengal Chief Minister had announced that the West Bengal Government will increase additional honorarium of the anganwadi workers and helpers by Rs. 1000 which will be effective from October 2018. Messages began coming on the mobile phone of the workers that Rs. 1000 has been credited to their account in October itself.

Most of the workers withdrew money along with their honorarium before 1st November 2018. On 1st November 2018 another order was circulated saying that the increase is not Rs. 1000 per month but it is Rs. 400 for the helpers and Rs. 700 for the Anganwadi workers.

Workers were agitated at this and instantly organized a deputation to the C.D.P.O in all the projects throughout the state at the call of the ICDS Karmi Samity (CITU) West Bengal.

The union state committee on 5th November 2018 decided to hold a protest meeting on 12 November 2018 in Dharamtalla. Accordingly all the district committees conducted an extensive campaign and within 7 days a huge gathering was organized. A procession of more than 10,000 workers and helpers assembled at Dharamtalla and walked towards the Governor's Palace.

Police put up barricades near Rani Rashmani Road so the whole gathering sat on Dharna. A delegation of 7 leaders went to the Governor's office and submitted a memorandum there. The union has sent letters to the Government, the Chief minister and Finance minister and the Minister for women and child welfare. The union has decided to intensify the struggle in case the government does not withdraw its order reducing the payment.

Abandon the AB-PMJAY Scheme Based on the Discredited Insurance Model

The recent announcement regarding the launch of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) scheme has raised expectations that the scheme will somehow address the extremely urgent needs regarding healthcare in the country. Expectations have also been raised because of the labeling of the scheme as the 'largest health protection scheme in the world' and the promise that beneficiaries - over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families - will receive Rs.5 lakhs as cost of hospitalization for secondary and tertiary healthcare.

The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan wishes to point out that the mere assertion that the AB-PMJAY is the largest health protection scheme in the world, does not make it so – in fact it is entirely misleading. The Government's own National Health Mission has an outlay of around Rs.35,000 crores, many times more than the Rs.2,000 crores allocated for the scheme in the 2018-19 budget.

The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan is deeply concerned about the haste with which the scheme has been conceived and announced, without regard for the negative experience with existing insurance schemes such as the RSBY. The AB-PMJAY is based on the discredited 'insurance model' despite massive evidence against the effectiveness of such insurance based schemes involving major participation of the private sector in service delivery. There are also serious doubts regarding the viability of the programme given that this year's budget provides only a token allocation for the scheme.

The AB-PMJAY, like its predecessor the RSBY scheme and several state level schemes, is to provide insurance cover for hospital based care. The enhancement of cover to Rs.5 lakhs has been continuously stressed while publicizing the scheme. However, past experience shows that an overwhelming majority of claims under insurance schemes are actually in the region of 10,000 to 50,000 rupees. Thus the raising of the limit to 5 lakhs will not translate into a windfall for patients, as we are being led to believe.

Public funded insurance schemes like the RSBY have failed to make even a small dent as regards access to healthcare services. Data about the RSBY shows that only a fraction of projected beneficiaries were actually enrolled. The even more important concern has been about the quality of services provided and clear evidence that the scheme was being milked by unscrupulous private providers to profiteer, often by doing unnecessary procedures and ignoring real needs. Horrendous reports of misuse involving the conduct of unnecessary hysterectomy (uterus removal) operations in women as young as 23 years old have emerged from different parts of the country. It needs to be underlined that the scheme is being rolled while both the Central and State Governments have shown no interest in implementing robust mechanisms for regulation of private medical facilities. The Clinical establishments Act, passed by Parliament several years ago, is yet to be implemented meaningfully in any part of the country. At the same time reports surface regularly of incidents of gross negligence, malpractice and overcharging in private facilities in different parts of the country.

A majority of facilities empanelled under the RSBY scheme were private (4,291 out of 7,226) and the same trend can be expected to continue in the new scheme. The Niti Ayog claims that the AB-PMJAY will be 17 times bigger than the RSBY scheme but the moot question is: how can we expect the same government to effectively run a much larger scheme when it failed entirely in case of the RSBY scheme and several state level schemes. The direction of the AB-PMJAY would thus be of, as earlier in the case of public funded insurance schemes, indiscriminately using public resources to strengthen an unregulated, and in several instances corrupt and negligent, private health care providers.

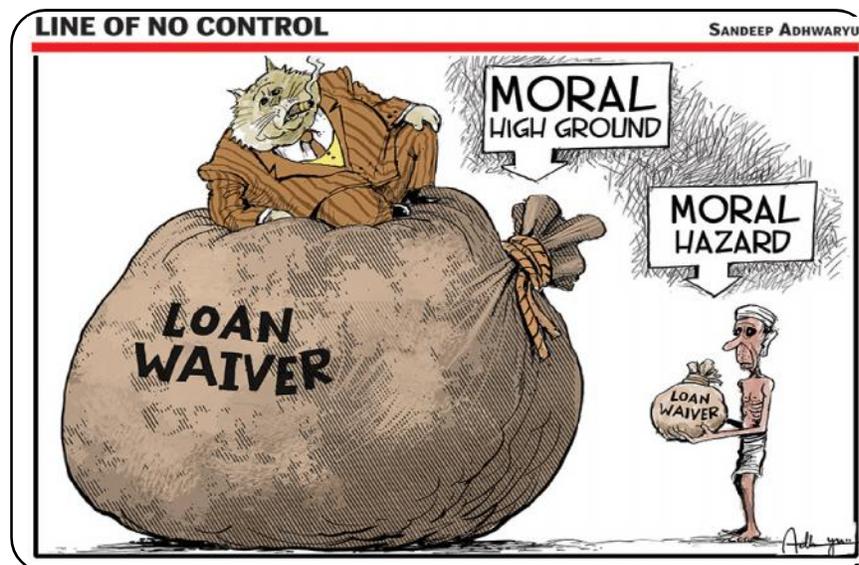
There are also serious doubts regarding the real intent behind the hasty announcement of the scheme at a juncture when several state level elections and the national elections are just a few months away. The scheme has been announced without an adequate provision for its funding in the 2018-19 budget. By the finance ministry's own admission an annual outlay of Rs.12,000 crores will be required to fund the programme, while independent estimates put the figure much higher – at around Rs.50,000 crores. What has however been allocated in the 2018-19 budget is a pittance in contrast – just Rs.2,000 crores. This raises the suspicion that the announcement regarding the scheme has more to do with attempts to score a political point rather than a real intent in addressing urgent healthcare needs of the Indian people.

Further the scheme will only cover hospital based care, while data shows that the bulk of expenditure that patients incur is on conditions when they are not admitted to hospitals – such as patients receiving care for TB, cancers, etc. An associated announcement has been of the plan to strengthen 1.5 lakh primary level centres, now to be named "Health and Wellness Centres". In itself this is welcome as it would strengthen public services. However the 2018-19 budget has allocated a meager Rs.1,200 crores for this purpose, which would possibly suffice to meet just 5% of the need. We are again concerned about the intent of this announcement – whether a mere ploy to garner electoral benefits or a real attempt at strengthening public services.

The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan urges the government not to view decisions regarding healthcare as opportunities for ensuring electoral success.

We note that successive budgets – especially over the last 4 years — have contributed to the serious underfunding of the National Health Mission, tasked essentially with strengthening public services. We demand that the government abandon plans for the AB-PMJAY. The projected annual outlay of Rs.12,000-50,000 crores, as per different estimates, would be much better utilized by investment in expansion of public facilities and creation of permanent public assets. Feeds by publicity agencies of the government, to news agencies, about a few hundred people who are benefiting from the new scheme are not a substitute for meeting the healthcare needs of crores of people across the country.

Over 3 lakh Farmers have Committed Suicide in our Country in the last 20 years



Courtesy: The Times of India

Haryana Roadways Employees Strike Ends Protest against Privatisation to Continue

Subhash Lamba



The 18-day long historic strike against the decision of the BJP government in Haryana of adding 720 private buses to the fleet under a kilometre scheme, has now ended after the intervention by the Haryana High Court.

The Haryana Roadways Coordination Committee (HRCC) agreed to follow the High Court instructions and start plying buses from November 3. The Coordination Committee though clarified that the protest of the roadways employees against the policies of privatisation will continue. It must be

mentioned that the roadways employees had called for a two-day strike against the kilometre scheme on October 16, 2018, but, on the second day, instead of curbing the privatisation policies, the government began large scale repression on the protesters, due to which the strike was extended by two days. When even this did not lead to any resolution, the strike was further extended by three days and then four more days. In the end, the strike had been extended up to November 4.

What the High Court said Regarding the Strike

Hearing the public interest litigation, the High Court called the leaders of the Coordination Committee to the court. The court of the chief justice said that a solution for the issue can be reached by negotiation, but first, the strike has to be withdrawn. The leaders of the Coordination Committee argued that even after due notice of a strike, the government did not take any initiative for a negotiation and only after the strike began, they terminated and suspended thousands of employees applying ESMA and leaders of the employees were arrested. The court said that it will ask the government to not have anyone arrested and to withdraw all cases filed under ESMA. It suggested that the Coordination Committee withdraw the strike if they trust the court. It said that it would not allow the government to take any actions that harm the roadways and will also ensure that no unjust action is taken against any employee by the government without the permission of the court. All the decisions regarding arrest, suspension and termination shall be made null and void as soon as the strike ends. The court said that it wanted everyone to celebrate Diwali cheerfully; hence in the interest of the employees and people, the strike must be withdrawn.

Decision to Withdraw Strike and Continue Protest Against Privatisation

The HRCC had an emergency meeting on November 2 after the high court hearing. In this meeting, it was decided that on November 3, at 10 am, following the instructions of the High Court, the buses would start to ply again. But the committee clarified that the kilometre scheme and addition of 720 private buses to the fleet along with other policies of privatisation will be constantly opposed and protested against. The roadways employees will continue to fight strongly on the ground and in the court. They thanked the support extended to this 18-day long strike by the general public.

Government Fails to Sabotage the Strike

Instead of giving up the policy of privatisation and ending the strike, the BJP government in Haryana had tried to weaken the strike by large scale repression and exploitation of the protesting employees. They filed 1,489 cases of ESMA under which 241 employees were arrested. Under the IPC section 107/151 also 418 employees were arrested. More than 400 employees were suspended including 350 employees who were on contract. Other than that, 406 employees were terminated. Hundreds of protesting employees, their sympathizers from other organisations, were arrested under the IPC acts 147, 148, 149, 186, 332, 353, 341, 427, 307 and 120B and other acts of obstructing national highways. In spite of all this, all protesting employees and other supporters did not let the strike weaken and helped it go forward.

Huge Support from Sarv Karamchari Sangh and Other Employees Unions

For the first time ever in the history of workers' protests in Haryana, it was seen that employees from other organisations also came forward to support the roadways employees in their protest. Sarv Karamchari Sangh (SKS) played a crucial and responsible role. The union took the initiative to get a decision along with the other organisations to agree for joint action during these ongoing protests. In this direction, a meeting was held on October 21 with all other employees organisations including those from educational institutions and a decision was taken for a mass leave action on October 26. The mass leave was successful and with the efforts from teachers associations, a lot of teachers participated in the mass leave. But despite all this, the government did not begin any negotiations and continued its repressive actions. To stop this, the SKS of Haryana and other organisations declared a two-day long strike on October 30-31. On these two days, according to government estimates only, 1.22 lakh employees were present whereas about 2.5 lakh of employees were absent. After this, the government felt the pressure and tried to find an informal way of negotiating a middle path of some sort. But the leaders insisted that without cancelling the privatisation policy, the strike cannot be called off. In this joint movement, the SKS played a significant role. The SKS in fact took upon itself to stay ahead in the movement and declared an indefinite strike, but this had partial influence in the electricity department. In other departments, there was no impact.

In consultation with the SKS, the HRCC decided to organise a 'privatisation bhagao, roadways bachao', state rally in Jind on November 4. For this rally, all people's groups, employees unions, trade unions, representatives of panchayats and common people were invited. The rally was supposed to be a huge success but after the decision of the high court on November 2, it was cancelled.

Immense Support from the Common People

The strike against the privatisation of the roadways got immense support from the common people. For the first time ever in the history of the workers movement in Haryana, people came out openly to support it. Members of elected panchayats, sarpanches, members of municipal corporations, councils, khap panchayats and peoples' representatives – all supported it. People reached in hordes in tractors and trollies from across the state to support the protesters at various places. The protesting employees of roadways, officials of the SKS Haryana, CITU and Kisan Sabha leaders were continuing a mass movement against privatisation because of which common people from villages and towns alike came out to support the movement. The BJP was aware of the political damage to it and wanted a resolution for the strike.

The employees of Haryana roadways ended the strike and went to their respective duties as per the orders of the Punjab and Haryana High Court on November 3. Before this, in all depots and sub-depots, meetings were held commemorating the success of the strike. They said that as per the orders of the court and keeping in view the ensuing festivals of Diwali and Bhai Dooj, buses are now being allowed to move, but till the decision of kilometre scheme and adding private buses to the fleet is cancelled, until government buses are added to transport fleet for providing better services to the passengers and jobs are created for the unemployed youth, the struggle will continue.

Central Trade Unions oppose Move to Incentivize Employers in the Name of Maternity Benefit

The Ministry of Labour and Employment had given a proposal to incentivize the employers who provide maternity benefits to their employees. The proposal is to launch a scheme to reimburse seven week's wages to the employers who provide 26 weeks' maternity benefit to their women employees, as per the Maternity Benefit Amendment Act 2017. The Ministry says that since the Maternity Benefit Act is amended to increase maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks, there is apprehension that the employers will not employ women. So the government will pay half of the additional amount to the employers. We must recall that the government has paid the employers share in the provident fund as 'incentive for employers to enroll their workers'. Instead of strictly enforcing implementation of the laws of the land, the government is paying the employers for implementing the law!

The central trade unions did not agree with this proposal and had boycotted the meeting called by the Ministry on 14 November 2018.

Joint letter by the Trade Unions on the proposal by the Ministry

12th November, 2018

To,
Secretary,
Ministry of Labour & Employment, GOI

Sir,

We acknowledge the receipt of the above communication and have noted the contents. To begin with, it is not clear which will be the entities, which are not covered by ESI act, 1948 and yet fall under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. Secondly, the idea of paying incentives to those who do not follow the laws enacted by the Government, so that they start following the law, is unacceptable. It is the duty of the Government to implement the laws it enacts. Thirdly, if your argument that because of liabilities under the Maternity Benefit Act, the employers are averse to employing females in their factories, is to be accepted, they would not have employed females ever since 1961, when the Act was first enacted! It is the duty of the Government to see that the women are not discriminated on gender bias, for which, the labour inspection machinery should be used and not tax-payers money.

We reiterate our stand by bluntly stating that the scheme proposed by you to incentivize entities providing maternity benefit to the concerned employees, is unacceptable and should not be put into practice on pilot basis or otherwise. In view of the foregoing, we will not attend the proposed "Stakeholders Consultation" on 14th November, 2018.

Yours Sincerely,

INTUC AITUC HMS CITU AIUTUC TUCC SEWA AICCTU LPF UTUC

The Election of Far Right Bolsonaro: Ominous Times in Brazil

R Arun Kumar

JAIR Bolsonaro, a far-right candidate, has won the Brazilian presidential elections with over 55 per cent of the vote, defeating the candidate of the Left, Fernando Haddad, who secured 44.3 per cent in the country's most polarised elections in decades. Though Haddad won an additional 13 million since the first-round elections earlier this month, they ultimately proved insufficient to defeat Bolsonaro. Nearly 21.17 per cent of Brazilians abstained from the elections, while another 7.43 per cent left their ballots unstamped. This is a reflection of the political lethargy that has crept among the Brazilians.

The elections to the Congress that were held simultaneously with the first round of presidential elections ensured the entry of a record thirty political parties into the Congress. Among these parties, the Worker's Party (PT) remains the largest party with 56 seats, while the party of Bolsonaro increased its strength considerably, winning 52 seats.

Brazilian commentators wrote on the elections, thus: *"Brazil now has a more extremist president than any democratic country in the world.... we don't know what is going to happen"*. Clóvis Saint-Clair, a journalist who has written an unauthorised Bolsonaro biography, expressed his great fears about the future of 'Brazil's young democracy'. *"This is a moment of great doubt and apprehension"*. Following in the footsteps of Donald Trump, Bolsonaro announced that henceforth, he will not be speaking to the press, but will be making all his public statements via social media.

Bolsonaro, a former army captain, was first elected to Congress in 1991. He is the leader of the Social Liberal Party (PSL), which calls itself an anti-establishment group. Its political philosophy espouses a combination of social conservatism and pro-market policies. Bolsonaro had pitched himself to voters as an anti-establishment maverick who will fight graft. His campaign was endorsed by the evangelicals and the powerful agribusiness industry. He was advised by Donald Trump's former senior counselor Steve Bannon. Bolsonaro is a well-known supporter of a liberal arms policy. In order to establish this point, his supporters attended to the polls with guns in the first round of presidential elections. Contrasting his poll campaign with that of Bolsonaro, Fernando Haddad, a university professor, has constantly repeated the phrase *"More books, fewer weapons"* as part of his campaign to show how divergent both candidates' policies are.

During his campaign Bolsonaro stated that if elected he would pull out Brazil from the United Nations because it's full of communists. *"If I am president, I will leave the UN. That institution is of no use as it's a meeting place for communists and people who have no commitment to South America"*. This shows his 'respect' for international institutions, treaties and conventions.

During most of his legislative career, Bolsonaro was a marginal figure known for speaking nostalgically about military dictatorship and for making incendiary comments about women, Afro-Americans and homosexuals.

His disgust against Afro-Americans is well-known. Visiting a traditional community of black Brazilians, a year ago, he called them fat and so lazy, and that *"Afro-descendants do nothing. I do not think they even serve as reproducers"*. His reactionary ideas were further exposed when he told a female lawmaker that she was *'too ugly to rape'* and questioned why women should earn the same salary as men. Further, *"I've got five kids. Four of them are men, but on the fifth I had a moment of weakness and it came out a woman."* In an interview given to a magazine in 2016, he voiced his opinion about the reasons for the increase in homosexuality as, *"liberal habits, drugs and because women began to work"*, and openly stated that he *"would be incapable of loving a homosexual son"*.

Bolsonaro is unabashedly nostalgic for Brazil's brutal military dictatorship (1964-1985). He has hailed dictators like Peru's Alberto Fujimori and Chile's Augusto Pinochet. *"Yes, I'm in favour of a dictatorship"*. He once said the dictatorship's 'mistake' was that it tortured, instead of killing, leftist dissidents and suspected sympathisers. He vowed to ease gun restrictions and make it easier for the police to kill suspects.

Bolsonaro could get away with all his pro-dictatorship comments because unlike some other South American dictatorships, Brazil never put its military officials responsible for atrocities committed during dictatorship period on trial. As a result, majority of the young people were completely unaware of this period of history and even if they were aware it was all through half-truths and misinformation. So Brazil's problem, as a member of the commission digging into the history of the dictatorship stated, is that *"there's no memory"*. Even some of the prisoners who had suffered torture during this period, now on seeing Bolsonaro elected, are lamenting the fact that they had never even told their own children about the hardships they had gone through. Some of the torture methods included forcing them to stand on cut-open tin cans of condensed milk for hours and applying electric shocks to the genitals and repeated near-drownings in kerosene-filled baths. Bolsonaro has openly stated that he is in favour of torture.

Lilia M Schwarcz, a professor of anthropology at the University of São Paulo, commenting after the first round of elections stated: *"People are very mad at politicians and Bolsonaro presented himself not as a politician, even if he is, (but as) a kind of Messiah. People like these kinds of promises"*.

One of the reasons for Bolsonaro's election is because he capitalised on the *"social frustrations that have...permeated society in Brazil, and in Latin America in general"*. His electoral victory cannot be viewed in isolation. It is a continuation of a chain of events that had started with the institutional coup d'etat which deposed the legitimate President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the arbitrary arrest of former president Lula da Silva who was banned from contesting elections. Also they are a reflection of the widespread anger prevalent among the people against the social problems affecting the Brazilian working class and other toiling sections and the deep rooted corruption prevalent among various State institutions, including the judiciary.

Moreover, the economy of Brazil was greatly affected by the global economic crisis. It shrank nearly seven per cent during its worst-ever recession, from 2015 to 2016. And there is widespread outrage over violent crime, with last year alone registering a record 63,880 murders. Popular disgruntlement was conveniently utilised by the right-wing forces in the country, ably assisted by the prejudiced media corporates. Their biased reporting of events and demonisation of the Left had an influence on the people's psyche. All these factors together led to the electoral debacle of the PT and the Left.

Bolsonaro is expected to fill his cabinet with military men and treat political opponents despotically and undermine democratic institutions. Just a week before the runoff vote, he told a rally in São Paulo that his Workers' Party rivals would have to leave the country or go to jail. *"Those red good-for-nothings will be banished from the homeland. It will be a cleanup the likes of which has never been seen in Brazilian history"*.

Haddad, immediately reacting after the election results, urged the 45 million voters who had backed him not to lose hope. *"We will continue with our heads held high, with determination and with courage,"* he said. *"We have a lifelong commitment to this country and we will not allow this country to go backwards"*. The Communist Party of Brazil, PCdoB, immediately called upon its rank and file and also the people of the country to brace up for the fight on their hands. In a statement they had issued on the night election results were declared, they stated that starting from 'now': *"Resistance, vigorous opposition, must be organised within the whole political and social life of the country, beginning with the National Congress and other legislative houses, extending to social movements, working class organisations, segments of the business community, the academia, intellectuals, artists, the judiciary, religious sectors, and even members of institutions of the Republic"*. It promised the people to stay with them in the 'trenches' and called upon them to erect *"barriers against the return of a regime of State of exception and in defense of democracy, Brazil and the rights of the people"*.

As the PCdoB rightly recognises, the future of Brazil is clearly at stake and it can only be saved by mobilising people in large numbers in defence of the gains that were made in the thirty odd years since the end of dictatorship. The PCdoB has a rich history of waging a consistent struggle against dictatorship, not cowed down by all the repression and torture inflicted upon it. Only such struggles can make the people identify and rally behind the real anti-establishment forces that can lead the country on the path for social transformation and a better future.

Sabarimala: BJP's Challenge to Democracy, Harmony and Women's Rights

Brinda Karat

Following the BJP president Amit Shah's open call to defy the Supreme Court judgement lifting the ban on entry of women into the temple, the BJP-RSS combine in Kerala has declared a six day rath yatra to the temple. This should not be seen as an issue that concerns Kerala alone. It is a test of the waters of river Sarayu where the Babri Masjid once stood. Amit Shah's comments that courts should pass only such judgements as can be implemented are equally directed to the Supreme Court on the Ayodhya matter. Already the RSS and top BJP leaders are making highly objectionable demands for an ordinance in the light of the Supreme Court's rejection of their plea to bring forward the hearings on petitions relating to the masjid/mandir issue. The link is clear enough. It is an ominous warning to the courts: do as we want or face the consequences of your orders being flouted.

A day later, the BJP in Kerala got another slap from the Kerala High Court. Its "intellectual cell", yes it has such a cell, had petitioned the court seeking a ban on the entry of non-Hindus into the temple. The bench said "*It will destroy the communal harmony in the state. It is a religious centre where people of all religions are allowed to visit and people go to the Vavar mosque as part of the Sabarimala pilgrimage.*" Vavara was a Muslim saint who became a devotee of Ayyappan. As many commentators have pointed out, there is a shrine dedicated to Vavara at Sabarimala. There is also a mosque in his name some 30 km from the temple and many Ayyappa bhakts pay obeisance to the mosque as part of their pilgrimage. In addition, as legend has it, a close friend of Ayyappa was a Christian priest called Arthunkal Veluthachan. That is why many Ayyappa bhakts also visit the Arthunkal Church at Chertala as part of their pilgrimage. This is the context in which the Kerala High Court called Sabarimala a symbol of secular values. The BJP-RSS, far from respecting this tradition, want to convert it into an upper caste centre like many of the temples in North and West India, where under BJP rule dalits are banned entry even today.

As far as the issue on ban on women's entry is concerned the BJP stand is equally untenable. Keeping women out is not "*an ancient practice*" since "*the deity is celibate*" as claimed by Amit Shah and the BJP. There was no blanket ban on women of fertile age going into the temple until 1991 when the Kerala High Court, acting on a complaint by an individual named S Mahendran, gave an order that henceforth, no woman aged between 10 and 50 can go to the temple. However, the judgement itself gave examples of how women, including the then Maharani of Travancore in 1940 and others had not only worshipped at the temple but participated in many temple ceremonies. The judgement said: "*There was thus no prohibition for women to enter the Sabarimala temple in olden days, but women in large number were not visiting the temple. That was not because of any prohibition imposed by Hindu religion but because of other non-religious factors. In recent years, many worshippers had gone to the temple with lady worshippers within the age group 10 to 50 for the first rice-feeding ceremony of their children (Chooronu). The Board used to issue receipts on such occasions on payment of the prescribed charges.*" Yet a ban was imposed.

A dalit may choose to worship in a temple or not, that is an individual choice. Similarly a woman believer may or may not want to go to the Ayyappa temple. A woman in her menstrual cycle may choose not to visit any temple at that time. Again these are personal choices. But to prevent dalits forcibly from worshipping at a temple or to ban women from entering a temple because she is of fertile age is, as noted by the Supreme Court, against the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.

Amit Shah says that women's entry into temples cannot be considered a question of equality. This is the similar upper caste reasoning which has kept dalits out of many temples even today and which has led to violence against all those dalits seeking to worship there. The understanding against women's entry is based on the *Manusmriti* concept of purity/impurity which holds menstruating women and untouchables equally impure. The truth is that the BJP-RSS is driven by Manuvadi ideologies which cannot tolerate

social reform. This is their history. Their gurus in the RSS have strongly opposed any reform in Hindu personal laws. They were against the right to divorce, they were against the equal right to property for women, while supporting sati they were against widow remarriage, the list of their retrograde positions is endless. They want to impose these ideologies in their current agitation against the Supreme Court judgement.

When the Supreme Court overturned this ban, the RSS spokespersons in Kerala had actually publicly welcomed it. This makes it clear that the subsequent opposition and u- turn has nothing to do with religious belief. Once the RSS-BJP combine saw the protests of one section of people against the judgement, it felt it could utilise this to hit several targets. The Supreme Court is one. The LDF government in Kerala which has stood firm against the combine's attempts to inject its communal poison into the polity, is another target. Progressive forces across political, caste and religious lines who stand for social reform and against Manuvadi ideologies are another clear target of this RSS-BJP's opposition.

Amit Shah likened the situation in Kerala to the emergency. He was reacting to the arrests of 2000 persons against whom the police have credible and direct evidence of being involved in the forcible prevention of women who wanted to go to the temple. Amit Shah himself has openly admitted that these are BJP workers. So there should be no misunderstanding that ordinary devotees are being arrested.

A sample of some of the highly provocative statements made by those who Amit Shah defends is from the leader of the so-called Ayyapa Dharma Sena, Rahul Easwaran. Out on bail, he announced at a press conference, *"There is provision to close the temple if there is a failure in rituals. We also need a Plan B and Plan C... I am saying this openly. If any one woman between the ages of 10 and 50 tried to enter the temple with the help of the police, about 20 people were ready to make a cut on their hand and shed blood. If that happens, the temple would have to be closed for three days (on account of desecration). There is no need to open it no matter who says so... If blood or urine falls on the temple, it has to be closed."* He is the nephew of the main tanthri (priest) of the temple and he declares that he is prepared to desecrate the temple with urine and blood to keep women out. Even the tanthri has had to at least publicly disown these statements. These are the criminal anti-temple activities being defended by Amit Shah. He is mistaken if he thinks the Kerala government is like the one he runs in Maharashtra. In Maharashtra after the violence connected with Bhima Koregaon events, the ring leaders belonging to right wing Sangh Parivar organisations were exonerated and hundreds of dalits were arrested, using draconian laws against them. In contrast, the Kerala government has identified the organised trouble makers, none of whom are ordinary devotees, and is taking action against them.

Since the BJP president is against the judgement of the Supreme Court why does he not go to the Supreme Court in a review? Instead, when the president of the ruling party incites violence against a court judgement and against a government led by an opposition party which upholds the court judgement, is this not the real face of authoritarianism? And these are not just words. The violence and hooliganism directly encouraged and supported by the BJP-RSS saw men attacking and burning the ashram of Swamy Sandeepananda Giri because he has differed from the BJP-RSS and taken a stand in support of the SC judgement. This attack on a widely respected Swamy also exposes the reality that for the BJP-RSS, it is only the RSS Hindutva which is to be promoted and other men and women of the Hindu faith who differ from them will be attacked.

The hypocrisy and double standards as far as respect for elected governments are concerned is equally evident. While Arun Jaitley makes a veiled criticism against the court intervention in the CBI matter saying that decisions of elected governments have to be respected on the principle of accountability, on the same day, his party president Amit Shah threatens the elected government in Kerala, that it will be thrown out because it is defending the Supreme Court judgement. In fact the present central regime has taken steps which undermine the rights of the states and elected non BJP governments which inflict serious damage to the constitutional framework of a federal structure. Amit Shah's threats in Kerala should be seen in that context.

The people of Kerala and indeed the people of India will surely help Amit Shah and the party he leads, to learn about constitutional values.

Modi's Rule Is Boosting Profits, Squeezing Wages

Subodh Varma



Share of profits of big industrialists has jumped from 31% to nearly 48% in four years propelled by brazen anti-worker policies.

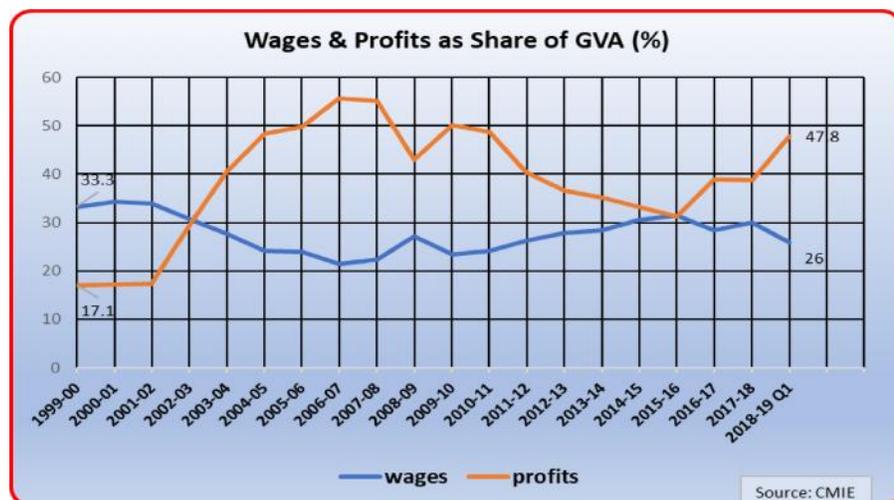
In a dramatic indictment of Modi government's policies, a CMIE analysis of corporate financial reports indicates that profit share in gross value added (GVA) has increased from around 31% in

2015-16 to 47.8% in the first quarter of 2018-19 while the share of wages has dipped from 31.4% to 26% in the same period. Gross value added is the sum of wages, profits, interest paid, rent and depreciation.

The figures are for listed manufacturing companies, that is, all the big corporate houses in the manufacturing sector traded in the stock exchange.

The imbalance represents an intensification of exploitation of labour on the back of which corporate profits are

being made. This is possible only because of government policies that are brazenly favouring corporate businesses while diluting and destroying protection for workers.



As the graph shows, the relative shares of wages and profits have an inverse relationship – when one side rises, the other side dips. Back at the turn of the century, the respective shares were the other way round – wages made up 33.3% while profits were 17.1% of GVA in 1999-2000. Interestingly, the coming to power of the first Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government also saw the inversion take place. By 2003-04, corporate profit share was 40.5% and wage share was down to 27.7%. This trend of rising profit share continued unabated under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance regime till about midway through UPA 2, barring a blip in 2008-09 caused by the international financial crisis.

Since 2009-10, but more decisively after 2010-11, corporate profits' share started declining and

wage share started rising as the Indian economy stumbled and faltered. Remember, these are shares of GVA not absolute amounts. That means, a decline in share of profits does not mean that profits were down. It only means that profit was less than before.

This slide was accompanied by a rise in wage share, so much so that by 2015-16, both were nearly the same at about 31.3%.

But the Modi effect became clear after that as profits share zoomed up and wage share declined steadily in the last three years.

These are numbers for the large corporates in the manufacturing sector. CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) estimates that their profits shares are about 6.5 percentage points higher than smaller companies. But even then, the trend of dipping wage shares – and hence

the economic condition of workers – is the same for smaller companies.



According to the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data put out by the government, wage share of net value added (NVA) has steadily declined from about 26% in 1990-91 to about 15% in 2015-16, the last year for which data is available. The ASI covers about 65,000 factories in its surveys and provides a deeper view of the

economics of industry. Of course, the small-scale sector is excluded from this.

What all this clearly establishes is that the rise of neo-liberal policies in India in the beginning of 1990s has had a severely damaging impact on the industrial working class. Wages have stagnated, as has employment. This has been achieved by the bourgeoisie through contractorisation of work, dilution of labour laws, destruction of labour law enforcement machinery and crushing of workers' organisations and protests. The agrarian crisis has helped by providing a steady flow of unemployed labour to take up industrial or service sector jobs, thus keeping wages low.

But don't forget Modi's own specialised contribution – something for which he is thought of as a darling by the corporate honchos. Under his rule, the gloves are off, government spending is being cut, labour laws are being made toothless and a wave of privatisation has handed over large assets to private corporate bodies, many of them his cronies like Adani or Ambani.

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Three Farmer Widows – with the Spirit to Live - Fight Back

Ten years ago, Vidya More's life went up in flames. Broken by years of crop failure and mounting debt, her husband Sahadev doused their tiny hut in kerosene and set it ablaze. But Vidya was not ready to give up. She threw her children out of the hut and jumped out. She wanted to live, and wanted her children to have a shot at life. She survived with injuries, and started rebuilding her life from the ashes.

Today, she has scripted a remarkable turnaround. She has paid off all the loans, and both her children - Ganesh and Vaishnavi - are doing well in school.



Vidya is one of thousands of widows left behind by distressed farmers in Maharashtra's Marathwada and Vidarbha regions who were driven to suicide by the extreme agrarian crisis. In the three years between 2014 and 2016, nearly 3,880 farmers ended their lives here.

The widows - illiterate, inexperienced and disadvantaged - have shown more resilience. *"Suicide is not the answer to anything. I had tried to convince my husband that we must work hard to repay the loans. But he chose death. I didn't want my kids to be burned alive. What is their fault? Why should they be punished?"* says Vidya.

Life is not easy for a farmer's widow. *"I had to start from scratch. There was no support from my family. My deceased husband had mortgaged our two acres for Rs 30,000. Those were difficult days. I started working as a farm worker... we had to survive, we had to eat. I worked day and night and learned all farming skills on my own. I also learned sewing, and worked as a seamstress to add to the earnings from the farm."*

In neighbouring Kherda village, Dhondabai Nimbule fought to prove her family wrong. After husband Baburao's suicide in 1999, her in-laws threw her out of the house. With her infant daughter, Dhondabai returned to her parents' village. Everyone thought she, too, would end her life. *"But I was determined to live for my daughter,"* she says. *"I started working as an anganwadi helper. Now, I have a goat and do some sewing work. My daughter is studying science in college. She will have a better life than I ever did,"* she says.

Manisha Jadhav, one of Dhondabai's neighbours, toils in a half-acre field and works in the anganwadi as well. She too was thrown out of the house by her in-laws after her husband Chandrasen hanged himself. With two young daughters, Manisha decided to set an example. *"I taught them how to live, not how to die,"* she says.

Living has its price. Many in Vidya's village, especially the men, were not pleased at her newfound independence. Once, the water supply to her field was cut off.

"Everyone wants to show sympathy to a widow. But when a widow wants to do something on her own, society doesn't like it," says Vidya. And the taunts - *"She is behaving like a man"* - have not stopped. *"I am behaving like a mother. What is wrong in working hard for your children?"* asks Vidya.

To her kids, she is a hero. *"She is mother, father and everything to us. I am going to study hard and become a police officer,"* says daughter Vaishnavi.

(Courtesy – The Times of India)

MDM Workers Protest Against Neglect by BJP government

More than fifteen thousand Mid Day Meal Workers assembled at Parliament Street on 19 November 2018 at the call of Mid Day Meal Workers' federations affiliated to the central trade unions. Workers from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, HP, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Manipur, MP, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, UP, Uttarakhand and West Bengal shouted anti BJP-NDA-Modi slogans and demanded immediate increase in their remuneration.

Poverty and the resultant hunger is one of the reasons for the school drop out of children, adding to illiteracy in our country. This is the biggest challenge we face that affects the future of our nation in which 39% of the population is children.

The Mid-day Meal Scheme was launched as a centrally sponsored scheme on 15th August 1995. Its objective was to boost universalization of education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance and improving the nutrition levels of students where half of India's children are malnourished. The Mid-Day Meal scheme is covered by the National Food Security Act, 2013. It is the largest such programme in the world serving 12 crore children in over 12.65 lakh schools of education guarantee scheme centers. Many studies have shown that MDMs has helped in preventing classroom hunger, promoting school participation and fostering social equality and enhancing gender equity. A recent study has found that as much as 15% of the calorie intake by the rural households is from this scheme.

All these achievements were possible only due to the hard labour of nearly 26 lakhs of mid day meal workers (cooks and helpers) at the grass root level, 98% of whom are women. These women belong to socially backward/marginalised sections of the society and are struggling hard to make ends meet. Working around 6-8 hours a day, including in the preparation, actual cooking and distribution of food and cleaning the vessels and the premises etc, they are not even recognised as workers, nor paid minimum wages. They do not get any social security benefits and are paid for only ten months in the year. It is a matter of national shame that the Mid Day Meal Workers are paid only Rs 1000 per month since 2009.

These poor workers, whose financial capacities are very limited, are expected to purchase all the ingredients, fire wood/gas etc., excepts the rice, in the local markets with their own funds and to submit the bills to higher officials through the school. The processing of the bills takes three to six months and only then do they get the reimbursement.

The 45th session of the Indian Labour Conference held in May 2013, recommended that mid day meal workers, along with the workers in the other 'schemes' of government of India, be recognised as workers, be paid minimum wages and be given social security benefits including pension. The representative of the Government assured in that ILC that the remuneration of the mid day meal workers would be enhanced in the financial year 2013 – 14 itself. In spite of repeated promises by the then ministers, the proposed increase of Rs.1000 per month has not yet materialized.

After the Modi government, which promised that "Mid-day meal scheme would be revitalized" came to power, it has been cutting down the budget for MDMS along with other social security schemes. The scheme is being privatized in many states by handing over it to corporate houses like Vedanta and corporate NGOs like ISKCON Akshayapatra and Naandi foundation.

In spite of continuous assurances, the Modi government continues to neglect the mid day meal workers. Even in the latest announcement by the Prime Minister, in which the government increased the remuneration of the anganwadi and ASHA workers, the mid day meal workers are ignored. The Mid day meal workers all over the country are highly agitated over this discrimination. It was in this background that the mid day meal unions affiliated to the central trade unions decided organise a March to Parliament.

The presidium of the meeting consisted of Dr.B V Vijayalakshmi (AITUC), Kanta Mahant (CITU) and Sohila Gupta (AICCTU). From the central trade unions Amarjeet Kaur (AITUC), A R Sindhu (CITU), Geeta Mandal (AICCTU), M Chaurasia (AIUTUC), Ujjaini (INTUC) and Ashok Ghosh (UTUC) addressed the gathering.

A R Sindhu said that the scheme workers are contributing labour worth one lakh crore rupees to the development of the nation and our fight is a struggle to get this accounted. She called upon the mid day meal workers to make the national general strike on 8-9 January 2019 a grand success. D Raja, MP and Sai Balaji, JNUSU president also addressed the gathering.

Jaibhagwan, General Secretary, MDMWFI (CITU) narrated the governments' efforts to privatise the scheme and described the resistance struggles against this. The central government is not even considering the promise made by the HRD Ministry in the 45th Indian Labour Conference to increase the remuneration to Rs.3000 per month. When the government increased the remuneration of anganwadi and ASHA workers they just ignored the 26 lakh mid day meal workers and discriminated against them, he said. He also narrated different struggles of the mid day meal workers in different states and the achievements of increased remuneration, uniform, and medical treatment in case of accidents etc.

The meeting was addressed by Vyas Prasad (Bihar), Ashok Thorat (Maharashtra), Jagatram (HP), Shanta (AP) from the MDMWFI (CITU).

A delegation consisting of B V Vijayalakshmi, Shyam Kale, Jaibhagwan, Kanta, Saroj Choube and Geeta Mandal along with D. Raja, MP met finance Minister Arun Jaitley and submitted a memorandum to him, demanding an immediate wage increase. He said that the MDM workers belong to the most backward section of workers in the society and his ministry had 'missed' the mid day meal workers when they increased the remuneration of other scheme workers, and will consider an increase in their remuneration soon.

The meeting resolved to conduct a nationwide campaign on the issues of MDM Workers and submit a memorandum to all the MPS on their demands and to participate in total in the general strike on 8-9 January 2019.

Demands:

- 1. Immediate increase of remuneration of MDM workers to minimum wages Rs.18000 per month**
- 2. Implement the recommendations of 45th and 46th ILC regarding scheme workers-**
 - recognize them as workers,
 - pay them minimum wages not less Rs.18,000 per month to all Mid Day Meal Workers for all the 12 months in a year
 - Social security benefits including pension Rs.3000 per month, gratuity, provident fund, medical facilities, ESI etc should be provided to all Mid Day Meal Workers.
- 3. Mid Day Meal workers should be recognised as Class IV school employees.**
- 4. There should be no retrenchment of the existing Mid Day Meal workers. Reinstate Retrenched workers. Issue appointment letters and identity cards to all MDM workers. Make and implement similar service conditions all over the country.**
- 5. Include children up to 12th standard in the Food Security Act and accordingly extend the Mid Day Meal Scheme to cover all schools. Appoint minimum two Mid Day Meal Workers in every School.**
- 6. Proper infrastructure including kitchen sheds, storage place and safe drinking water should be provided in all schools. Cooking gas must be made available for cooking food. The cost of cooking and vegetables should be increased to a minimum of Rs. 25 per child per day.**
- 7. Ensure safety of Mid Day Meal Workers and provide medical insurance. Provide compensation of Rs. 5 lakh in case of accident**
- 8. 180 days maternity leave with pay should be provided to the Mid Day Meal workers.**
- 9. For redressal of grievances constitute grievance redressal committees at state and district levels.**
- 10. Provide 2 dresses per year and washing allowance to MDM workers.**
- 11. Provide adequate budget allocation for MDM Scheme**
- 12. No Privatisation of the MDM Scheme in any form. No centralized kitchen in MDMS.**

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