

The September.2. General Strike and the Immediate Necessity for Reorienting the Workers' Movement on Working Class Lines!

To the one day token protest strike call given by the convention of the central trade unions and industrial federations held in New Delhi on May 26, 2015, the workers all over the country have overwhelmingly responded on Sept.2, 2015, expressing their desire to fight against the exploiting ruling-classes, their hench-men rulers, ruling-parties and the governments. They have expressed their willingness to fight against the anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national and pro-big capital policies pursued by the ruling-classes and the rulers of our country for all these 68 years after of the so-called independence. They have fervently expressed their will to fight against the control and management of the affairs of the rule in India by the foreign capital through the transnational corporations. In order to express their will to fight against their class enemies the workers have faced many hurdles and braved various types police oppression. By participating in the one day protest strike the workers of our country have made it clear that they are willing to wage struggles against the ruthless exploitation and attacks of the big capital which has been playing havoc with the lives and living conditions of the toiling people of this country. This valiant spirit of the workers shown through their magnificent response shown for the one day token strike call is laudable and has to be hailed and applauded.

It is estimate that around 15 crores of workers from organized and unorganized and from formal and informal sectors have participated in this country-wide token protest strike. It is reported that the transport, insurance, banking and mines sectors have greatly affected by the strike. A large number of women workers have participated in the strike.

In various industrial belts such as Gurgaon, Manesar, Delhi, Ghaziabad, Noida, Hosur, Sriperambadur in Tamilnadu the industrial workers working in the plants of multinational corporations like Maruti, Honda, Toyota, Volvo, Bosh, Kirloskar have participated in the strike.

Workers of some state road corporations too have participated in the strike. More than 20 lacs of Anganvadi employees, mid-day meal workers and Asha workers have also participated in the strike. Workers of various small industries and factories throughout the country have participated in the strike.

Teaching staff of NCLP schools, Para teachers under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan etc participated in the strike. In some cities like Delhi auto rikshaw and taxi drivers have also participated in the strike. In some cities and towns the Hamalis (loading and unloading workers) also have participated in the strike.

All this has become possible only with the support and participation of thousands of independent, trade-unions, not affiliated to the traditional central unions, and the staunch support of different toiling sections of the society and common people, the peasants, the agricultural workers, the artisans all over the country through their solidarity by participating in massive demonstrations, rallies, rasta-rokos etc.

Though the government had used all sorts of tactics to scuttle the strike like making the B.M.S. (the RSS affiliate) to withdraw from the strike, threatening the employees of public sector units to use ESMA or with break of service besides loss of wages and approaching highcourt (BPCL management in Kerala) by obtaining a direction that no strike should be called pending the disposal of the petition to be taken up on Sept.4, conducting police flag march in Noida industrial area on the eve of the strike, resorting to police Lathi-charges and arrests in different

parts of the country and physical attacks on striking workers by hooligans and police in West Bengal the workers have bravely faced these impediments and valiantly participated in the one day token strike.

On Aug. 29 itself the urban development minister Firad Hakim of West Bengal announced that the state government (West Bengal) will go allout to foil the nationwide strike of Sept.2 and warned that the trade-unions will see what the government can do to foil the strike and boasted that the W.B.government will ensure that Sept.2 will be like any other working day.

The business daily papers like 'Business Standard' have 'wisely' sermonized that 'Disruption in service for the narrow benefit of a limited set of workers in the organized sector will not just discredit the trade union movement but harm the larger interests of Indias' workers and its economy' (Editorial comment of B.S. on Sept.1, 2015). The HANS INDIA on Sept.2 in its editorial, commented that 'yet another all India strike is to adversely hit the nations economy. Thus the corporate media too played its role in dissuading the workers against the strike and spreading dis-information among public.

The NDA government at the last minute enacted the drama of conducting multiple rounds of discussions with the trade unions by putting forth empty assurances and vague guarantees without any concrete measures.

The industry body CII termed the strike as "disruptive and uncalled for" and 'sagely' appealed the trade unions to resolve all pending issues through a dialogue and discussion". It warned that resorting to such means like strike/bandh "will be detrimental for the growth of country...".

The ASSOCHAM another industrial body lamented that the financial impact due to strike might lead to an estimated loss of over 25,000 crore to the economy.

Though the governmental authorities and industrial bodies claimed that the impact of strike is nominal, they had to admit that the protest strike had a considerable financial affect on the economy.

Whatever might be the impact caused by this one day token protest strike on the big capital, ruling classes and the rulers of the governments, the credit for causing such an impact belongs only to the valiant millions of workers of this country that have participated in the strike with boldness, unselfishness and undeterred determination.

The traditional trade unions leadership that has given this strike call is jubilant of the success of its call by depicting it as "unprecedented", "out-standing" and "historic" and with this success of this strike, the leaders of INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AITUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, UTC and LPF in a statement issued on Sept.2 stated that they are "expecting the government to take a lesson and take steps to ameliorate the grievances of the working masses. It must re-start discussions with central trade unions for concrete solution to the demands...". Such has been the reveling mood of the leadership of the traditional trade unions with quixotic sentiments.

However though we must hail the determination of the millions of workers that have participated valiantly in this one day token strike, one cannot be passive to review and understand the limitations and drawbacks of this "successful and historic" strike nor underestimate the stubborn attitude and anti-working class policies of the big capital, ruling-classes and rulers, that have been consistently and adamantly pursuing these policies of denying and attacking the rights of the workers duly undermining the might(power) of the workers' movement of this country. It is unwarranted and unwise to endeavor to accommodate the workers movement in to the existing circumstances and system that are totally detrimental to the interests of the working masses; and to the objectives of the working-class.

An impassionate and a realistic approach towards the question and cause of workers of this country, with a sincere and honest class out-look and understandings are the present day requirements and necessity to develop the workers movement of our country, in to a really mighty movement that can successfully and effectively rebuff and resist the onslaughts and attacks of the

big-capital on the rights and entitlements of the workers and its ruthless exploitation of the labour power and plunder of our nation.

In the light of the above understanding, the Sept.2 token protest strike has to be examined to arrive at a correct assessment with regards to the real state of the workers' movement in our country.

Mainly the traditional trade unions viz the central trade unions have been representing the workers movement of our country, since they are recognized by the government, though there are thousands of unions, federations, associations of workers and employees, beyond the pale of those central unions in this country. Some of these independent federations/unions have been conducting militant struggles against the big-capital and its attacks on the workers and their rights; such as the struggles conducted by Maruti-Suzuki workers and employees of the Neyeli Lignite Corporation. But the traditional trade unions have been disregarding these militant struggles of the workers, but are pursuing the line of formalistic and ritualistic approach towards the struggles to be conducted against the incessant onslaughts of big-capital on the workers and their rights, in connivance with the governments in power.

In fact from the introduction of the neo-liberal economic policies of capitalism in our country in 1991, the big-capital has been playing havoc with the lives of the workers, with the willfull cooperation of the rulers, ruling-classes and governments in power. The neo-liberal economic reforms have been dictating labour reforms to be implemented, to the advantage of big-capital and to the detriment of the interests of the workers and working-class of this country. For all these 2 ½ decades the labour reforms are being implemented by the governments in power with an avowed ferocity, basing upon their strength of representation in the parliament or state assemblies. All most all the ruling political parties (either in the centre or in the states) aspiring for governmental power either in the governments rule or in the opposition are the supporters of the neo-liberal economic reforms and labour reforms and when they are in governmental power, they have been implementing the labour reforms with much enthusiasm besides inviting and wooing foreign direct investment with umpteen concessions and sops. Only when these parties are not in governmental power-but in opposition status, aspiring for power they have been pretending as if they are against the implementation of labour reforms; with a clear-cut view to improve their electoral prospects in the next elections, by catching much more votes of the suffering workers. The left parties CPI and CPM are not any exemption from such electoral policies and practices that are harmful to the interests of the workers and the working-class or from their parliamentary maneuvers along with the other ruling-class parties. That is why the affiliate central trade unions to these parliamentary political parties, instead of directing the workers to fight against the class enemy-the ruling classes-and its policies, direct the workers dis-satisfaction and anger against the government and the ruling party in power. With such a direction they dampen and deviate the natural class-consciousness of workers to a secondary enemy but not against the real culprit, their class enemy, the ruling classes and their exploiting system.

All most all the central trade unions-the official representatives of the workers movement in India are the affiliates of one of the above characterized parliamentary parties.

By virtue of such a political inclination with the very and only objective of ascent to governmental power through parliamentary means, these central trade unions cannot and do not represent the real class aspirations of the workers and working-class of our country nor work for the cause and the interests of the workers but only will take up the issues of the workers within the sphere of benefit and advantage of their political objective and power aspirations. So only with the orientation suitable to the defined and decided political stances of their mother political party organizations, the central trade unions (traditional trade unions) have been conducting their trade union activities to suit the purpose.

That is why these central trade-unions conducting the workers movement, have chosen to bring about a 'trade union unity' as a substitute for the 'class unity of workers' and working-class unity.

When the Congress led U.P.A. government was in power they have boasted that they achieved 'unity of workers' since they were able to rope in the INTUC-the affiliate trade union of Congress party. Again during this time of BJP's, NDA government showing the R.S.S. affiliate B.M.S. union among their group of central trade unions that have given the call for Sept.2, one day token strike, they have boasted as if they have achieved the 'unity' in the workers movement. They have also hailed the participation of ShivaSena union in to their group, treating it to be an achievement for the unity of workers movement.

With such a trade union unity sans class orientation, forming an unity among pro-ruling class, conservative and reactionary trade union leadership with the leadership of a so called left inclined reformist trade union leadership, the central trade unions have set out on the course of leading the workers movement showing it as a power to threaten the rulers in power in to bargaining with them on the workers' demands for all these 25 years. That is why they are only able to conduct 16 one day (save two day-general strike in 2013) protest general strikes, including this September 2 strike from 1991 onwards. But these protest strikes have not delivered the goods and that these periodical token strikes are being conducted as a ritual.

Now the central trade unions claim that, the 'successful and historic' strike of Sept 2. Is- a miracle that has been achieved by the broadest unity of the trade unions and demand the government must restart discussions with the central trade unions.

A recent government survey had ranked BMS as India's largest trade union body with a membership of 62 lakhs, Congress affiliated INTUC came second with 39 lakh members, while the CPI labour wing AITUC was third with 34 lakhs. We can assess the strength of the other central trade unions that are partners in the 'broadest unity of trade unions' that called for the strike; and the total strength of these united central trade unions.

However the leadership of these central trade unions is clear enough, of their objective in giving this protest strike call.

While the RSS affiliate BMS has withdrawn at the last moment from the intended protest strike, with an advice to review the strike call of Sept.2, and to give time to the government to implement its assurances and thus played its role of reneging the strike call in favor of the BJP's, NDA government, the INTUC chief Sanjeeva Reddy too shown his true nature, by announcing on Aug.29 that "if the government can at the earliest accede to at least two of our demands-relating to the revision of the minimum wage and doing away with cap on bonus- we are willing to rethink our stand". The General Secretary of AITUC, Gurudas Gupta announced that one of their key demand is raising the minimum wage cap and ending the wage partiality between regular and contract labour and Amarjeet Kaur, another top leader of AITUC had more explicitly announced that "the purpose of this strike is to bring the government to the negotiating table". Thus the orientation of the central trade union leadership is purely based on economism and in the accommodating mode with the government, ruling classes and the big-capital on behalf of the workers of the country who are aspiring to protect their legal rights, and who are obstinately refusing to be moulded in to a new type of bonded labour in the hands of the big-capital.

That is why, the workers movement that is being led with the orientation of economism, adjustment with the ruling-classes and big capital and reformism was unable to draw the working masses of the country in their majority in to the Sept 2 strike. It is noteworthy that while there are more than 40 crores of workers, only one third of them had participated in the strike.

The railway workers- a big chunk of industrial workers have stayed away from this protest strike, despite the fact, they are the workers to be mostly affected adversely due to the intended

labour law reforms, that too in the wake of Bibek Debroy's recommendations for the entry of FDI in to the Indian Railways.

50% of the workers in mining sector-again a great chunk of industrial workers-stayed away from the Sep.2 strike.

Teachers and central and state government employees, in many states who will be effected by the labour-law reforms too stood away from this strike.

State transport workers in some states like West Bengal, and a considerable numbers of transport workers in other states have not participated in the strike. Private road transport workers in many states have not participated in this strike.

No doubt in the name of supporting the Sept.2 protest strike some trade unions in Railways and NGO unions like A.P. NGO's association and some 'joint action committees' of teachers in some states-the most vocal trade unions- have conducted some 'protest' demonstrations, rallies in the lunch hour rest time, without participating in the strike. But these exhibitionist 'protest agitations' devised by the escapist and economist trade unionism can not be treated as a genuine form of protest or support for the Sept 2. strike in its true sense.

Employees of SBI, IOB, ICICI Bank, H.D.F.C bank and Axis Bank have also not participated in the strike. The employees of I.T. industry in Bangalore have worked on Sept 2, from their homes.

Such has been the draw-back of the workers movement in India even in conducting a one day protest strike by failing to obtain the participation of majority of the workers in the Sept 2. strike. This draw back is the result of the failure of the central trade union (traditional) leadership, is preparing the workers of the country on the basis of class unity of the workers but on the basis of unity of trade unions with diverse interests.

Lack of class orientation and denial of class-orientation by the leaders of the central trade union leadership is the root cause for the drawbacks and weaknesses in the Indian workers movement, that made it incapable of resisting effectively the attacks of big-capital, ruling-classes and their representative governments on the workers rights and their living conditions.

In fact the workers' movement and the working-class of our country have to be reoriented on the class lines and organized accordingly. Working-class has to be organized and mobilised as an independent political force basing on working-class politics. Its objective must be to protect their rights, interests at all costs, and to challenge the very capitalist system that continuously attacks on the working-class to break it in to submissiveness and to overthrow that system by replacing it with the socialist system under the total rule of working-class.

The central trade-unions will not take-up such a task to re-orient them-selves as well the workers movement and reorganize on such lines.

So it is imperative on the part of those forces that are sincerely working for the cause of workers and working-class interests to take up the task of re-orientating and organizing the workers movement of this country on the lines of working class orientation and politics that will lead to the establishment of a socialist system of no exploitation and inequity, duly overthrowing the present-day semi feudal and semi-colonial system that is ruling our country.

Such is the lesson that has to be drawn out from the Sept 2. one day token protest general strike on its practical impact.
