

## Beware! Our Rulers in Collusion with the Big Capital are intending to do-away with the Minimum Wages Act!

**Even** after 69 years of the rule of our independent country by our Indian rulers, even after a quarter of a century with the implementation of neo-liberal capitalist economic policies and reforms that are supposed to have brought out considerable development of our economy, making our country to stand in line along with the super powers, paying minimum wages to the work-force in our country has remained to be a mirage.

The rulers as well as the captains of the big-industry and enterprise are haggling to accept and agree the concept of minimum wages and the justification in paying minimum wages; which was statutorily mandated.

In fact in this 21<sup>st</sup> century of modern times and boasted global economic and social development, the work-force in our country are entitled for living wages. But leave alone the living wages, not even the fair wages are being claimed for by the workers of this country. The workers' movement has been in the stage of demanding only the minimum wages to the workers and the industrialists have been denying even this least demand under various pretexts.

While there are around 40 crores of workers in our country, 90% of them are working in informal and unorganised sectors without any statutory welfare benefits and security and not even with the minimum wages that are needed to maintain the worker and his family members to keep their body and soul together by satisfying the bare minimum needs.

In the wake of the Sept 2, one day protest strike call given by the leadership of established trade unions and traditional trade unions with a charter of 16 demands, out of which is a demand for Rs 15,000 per month as minimum wages throughout the country, in the corporate media so many arguments and discussions were put-forward on the subject of minimum wages by many economists, specialists, experts, H.R. managers and the editors, showing their academic knowledge and neo-liberal capitalist economic out-look a majority of them arguing that payment of universal minimum wages in our country is not pragmatic, feasible and ill-advised. They fully undermining the fact that a worker is a living human being on whom his family members are dependent for sustenance health care, education, clothing and for bare minimum necessities, and he also was to procreate children that would supply labourers for the future labour market necessities; are treating the worker on par with marketable goods whose prices are to be decided on market economy and on vagaries of market.

In fact after a prolonged struggle by the working-class of our country in the 15<sup>th</sup> Indian Labour conference in 1957, a principle for calculating minimum wages on the following factors was evolved and making it mandatory: 1) The wage must support three consumption units (individuals). 2) Food requirement of 2,700 calories a day. 3) Clothing requirement of 72 yards per workers' family 4) Rent for housing area similar to that provided under the subsidised housing 5) Fuel, lighting and miscellaneous items of expenditure to constitute 20% of the minimum wage. In 1991 the supreme court called for adding another 25% to the wage yielded by the above calculation in order to take in to account children's education, medical requirements etc. But in view of present days changed minimum needs of the advanced, developed and more civilized atmosphere the minimum wages have to be further increased; and if accurately calculated that comes to Rs 22,000 per month. Such has been the basic and scientific concept of minimum wages calculation treating a worker as essentially a human being but not as a commercial good.

But the rulers are systematically attempting to scrap this concept and are intending to do away the very system of fixing minimum wages. Since they are implementing the neo-liberal economic policies and reforms which dictate that the market, but not the government, should determine prices so as to preserve the efficiency and competitiveness of free trade global wise our rulers are intending to scrap minimum wages act. The industry has been objecting to pay even the minimum wages (statutory!) and the government is heeding and concurring with the wishes of the industry. The government to pursue its flag ship 'Make India' initiative has decided to provide cheaper labour to foreign capital in India than the cheap labour available in China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

The NDA government has come forward only to fix minimum wage @ 10,000 P.M as a bait to calling off the Sept. 2 strike.

But since many strong objections are received from industrial groups and industrial associations like FICCI etc, the labour ministry had put on hold its plan to fix minimum wages to contract workers at Rs 10,000 P.M and had “opted” for “international consultation” as if the fixation of wages is an international matter and an unsolvable problem to be dealt only by international experts! One has to wonder whether ours is a sovereign country and our rulers are running at all a sovereign governments or not?

Our rulers and especially the N.D.A government which talks ‘reverently’ about international wisdom’ and depends on it has not yet ratified the United Nation’s convention No 131 (adopted in 1970) on minimum wage fixing, though it clamours to be a permanent member in UNO. But it eagers to scrap the very minimum wages act itself.

An editorial of Business Standard dt 17/18 Sept 2016, says to raise the national minimum wages to Rs 15,000 is an ill-advised step and it warns that if such a decision is taken that the following ill consequences will ensure:

a) That the stipulation (raise in minimum wages) will remain in the statute book, ignored in the market place;

b) Most employers will look to see how they can automate and reduce the need for hiring workers;

c) Many activities become unviable – like paddy cultivation and coir products did in Kerala; and

d) either minimum wage of Rs 15,000 remains or there would be no jobs.

This wise advise of the editor of Business Standard propagates an illusion that the industries and enterprises are being run only with the sole objective to provide jobs to workers and not for earning “super profits”. While the industrialists pay whatever the raised prices for other components of their production they begrudge pay minimum wages to workers and thus intend to exploit the labour power cheaply, in the name of reducing production cost coercing the workers for lesser wage. Again only to reduce the cost on production and to increase their production and earn profits they turn to automisation; which proves that they do not at all out of kindness or generosity hire workers. When profitable automation is available without any compunction or pity for workers they go for automation. So both the above stipulations made by the advice are mere imaginary notions to divert attention from the reality. The main and fundamental cause for non-viability of paddy and coir sectors was not due to the raised minimum wages, but other factors that have to be dealt specifically and that specific experience cannot be generalised to the entire industry sector in India to negate the concept and principle of minimum wages to the workers.

The essential factors to be taken in to consideration are the basic minimum needs concept in fixing minimum wages and that despite of much un-equalness and unevenness and differences between various states of our country- the price of necessary food items, house rents, educational and medical charges being almost the same there is no justification whatever to do away with the parameters of statutorily mandated concept and principle to fix the minimum wage. The conditions and vagaries of market economy have nothing to do with the fixing of minimum wages on par with the present day level of commodity and service prices to the workers. Even the argument by some ‘experts’, that ‘labour’ is the subject of state governments shall not be an objection in fixing a national minimum wage and to be paid to workers.

Already the labour reforms being proposed by the rulers and governments are weakening the legal protections to the workers, and any attempt to scrap the very statutory basis and concept of minimum wages will ruin the lives of work force of our land.

This is how the workers are not treated as human beings, but as goods to be controlled by market economy. That is why they refuse even to fix a statutory mandated and justified minimum wages; and the governance of market shall not be agreed to.

The workers and the workers’ movement of our country shall unitedly oppose and conduct persistent struggles, immediately to defeat the attempts of our rulers to scrap the minimum wages as well has to resolutely fight for living wages in the long-run!

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