

We Are All In This Together

Let us strike in unity on 8 January 2020

The last six months have seen a marked intensification in the attack on the working class spearheaded by the passage of the Code on Wages and the tabling of the Code on Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions and the Code on Industrial Relations (IR) in parliament. The IR Bill introduced in the parliament on 28th November, apart from emasculating workers' rights on crucial issues, has incorporated Fixed Term Employment in the Code. The three codes along with the Code on Social Security are together aimed at diluting the existing rights of workers that have through long struggles come to be enshrined in law. Along with attacking the rights of workers, these codes attempt to also centralise control over decision-making on labour issues from the concurrent list - between the Union Labour Ministry and the state governments - to the office of the prime minister.

The BJP led government at the centre has since 2014 unambiguously declared that it is a government for big business and the rich. Its policies and actions have deepened the structural slowdown of the economy. The agrarian sector is reeling under severe distress while industry is marked by mass cut-backs in production, closures and lay-offs across sectors causing much harm to farmers and workers.

Prescriptions offered by the government at the centre to alleviate the economic downturn however are not intended to resolve the distress of working people caused by the economic crisis but is aimed at giving relief to big business, domestic and foreign by legislating a corporate tax cut to the tune of Rs.1.45 lakh crore and rolling back the surcharge it levied on foreign institutional investors not registered as companies. These measures have also drastically cut government revenues to an extent where the fiscal deficit in just six months of the financial year has reached 93% of the budgeted estimate. The only way that the BJP government plans to raise revenue is through privatization of PSUs. The government has been desperately attempting to sell Air India and the railways. While declaring financial bailout for private telephone companies like Airtel, Vodafone-Idea, it is axing the BSNL. It has permitted 100% FDI in key sectors like coal and strategic sectors like defence. No doubt, this will only fuel the government's propensity to cut social expenditure. The effort of the BJP government to stick to its fiscal conservatism will not allow for expansion of government spending. Consequently, the crisis of demand that country is experiencing will continue unchecked unless the government is forced to change its priorities.

To cover its complete mismanagement of the economy that has led to a decline in overall consumer spending in the country for the first time in more than four decades, the BJP government has played its communal card to divide working people across the country. From passing the Triple Talaq legislation, to the proposal for the Citizenship Amendment Bill, to the disastrous National Register of Citizens in Assam, to the proposal of extending the NRC to the rest of the country and finally to the abrogation of Article 370 without consulting the people of J&K or even their elected representatives and the bifurcation of the state into two union territories. These divisive moves have created an atmosphere of hate that is fundamentally directed against minorities and migrant workers leading in many cases to incidents of lynching. The recent amendment to the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act allows individuals to be declared as terrorists and their properties seized. This amendment has been introduced by the government more to act as a deterrent for any form of dissent in the country.

Only a militant and country wide strike of the working class can force this government to act in the interest of the people and not in the interest of corporations. Now is the time

for all trade unions across the country, whether recognised by government or not, to relay this understanding through their most powerful weapon, the general strike! We should put pressure on the state governments, particularly the non-BJP governments not to implement these anti-labour amendments.

We join the Central Trade Union Organisations in demanding an indexed National Minimum Wage of Rs. 21,000 per month, a government funded minimum pension of Rs. 10,000 per month, an effective employment guarantee covering all urban and rural households, implementation of MGNREGS with an increased number of days and increased budgetary allocations, increased public investment to mitigate rural distress, remunerative prices as per the Swaminathan Commission recommendations for agricultural produce with requisite procurement facilities and farm loan waivers, permanency of employment in decent work, worker status for all scheme workers as unanimously recommended by the ILC, abolition of contract system and regularisation of contract workers, and equal pay and benefits for equal work, security to women workers. We shall collectively also sustain our militant struggle demanding the ratification of ILO Convention 87 on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise and Convention 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, the repeal of the Essential Services Maintenance Act and other anti-worker legislation that violate the Right to Strike.

We call upon all sections of the working class, women and men, in formal and informal employments, in self-employment, the large number of unemployed, in urban and rural areas, to stand united and make this strike on 8 January 2020 one that the BJP government at the center will never forget!

RESIST the LABOUR CODES— DEFEND OUR RIGHTS

Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU)

New Trade Union Initiative (NTU)

Trade Union Centre of India (TUC)

New Democratic Labour Front (NDLF)

All-India Federation of Trade Unions (AIFTU-New)

Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra (IMK)

All ECL Thika Shramik Adhikar Union (AETSAU)
