

“Save the People - Save the Nation” – March 28th, 29th General Strike

The Modi government has been making ruthless attacks on the rights and livelihoods of the peasantry and working class of the country. The working class are bravely facing attacks by these policies with decisive resistance. The historic farmers' struggle, which lasted for a year, forced the Modi government to repeal three farm laws designed to destroy agriculture by handing over the entire agricultural sector to corporates. Last year (2021) the Modi government had to postpone the introduction of the Bank Privatization Bill in the winter session of Parliament owing to the strike of 10 lakh bank employees on December 16th, 17th against the privatization of banks. The Indian working class, which has been working in the industrial and service sectors for the past few years is agitating and demanding rise in minimum wage and regularisation of contract and outsourcing employees; end to the sale of profiteering state-owned enterprises such as Railways, Oil Corporation, LBC, Coal, Steel and defence sector to private and multinational companies. In this context, the trade unions in the country called for an “All India General Strike” on March 28th and 29th with the slogan “Save People – Save Nation”. About 25 crore workers, employees, farmers and farm laborers across the country are participating in the strike.

While every government that came to power has always given free hand to Employers to violate labour laws, the present Modi government is ready to scrap the existing 44 labour laws and bring in four labour codes in their place and enforce them. The Modi government has also sought to reduce the number of laws to make all the labour laws more pro-corporate and more flexible as desired by the corporate sector. This is during the Opposition's boycott of Parliament last September (2020) in protest to the passing of the Agricultural Bills in Parliament ... The 44 labour laws that the Indian working class gained with many struggles over the years were distorted and four Labour Codes were brought in. The first of which is the “**Wage Code Bill**”. This code allows the employer to increase the working hours of the worker as required. Overtime and limit on working hours per week is removed and the wage determination is left to the discretion of the employer. The second is the “**Code of Industrial Relations**”. In this the worker loses his right to strike. Through the Fixed Term Employment mode the employer

can hire a worker on the job for specific period of time and remove the worker if felt needless. And now it will be difficult to form trade unions to protect labour rights. The third is the **“Social Security Code”**. According to the code, employer share in the Provident Fund is reduced to 10%. ESI and other social security schemes have been weakened. There is no security for unorganized sector workers. The fourth is the **“Occupational Security, Health and Working Conditions Code”**. Nearly 40,000 workers die in the workplace due to non-compliance with safety standards, but no decision was made and allowing women workers to work before 6 am and after 7 pm ignoring their safety. The code did not clarify the penalty to be imposed on the management for lack of safety standards. Considering the four Labour Codes, it is clear that the government aims to maximize the profits of corporates by chanting the corporate mantra of ‘Ease of Doing Business’ by exploiting workers to the core.

Modi’s slogans and promises like ‘Achche Din’, ‘Sab Ka Saat – Sab Ka Vikas’ have already been ridiculed. Under Modi’s rule, crores of working masses are living in poverty and starvation, while a handful of rich increased their wealth by billions. 1% individuals own 77% of the country’s property. While Mukesh Ambani, India’s richest man, made 90 crores an hour even during the lockdown period, millions of migrant workers, on the other hand, lost their livelihoods due to the sudden imposed lockdown during the first wave of Covid-19 and have yet to recover from devastated lives. Frontline workers who played a key role in curbing the virus during Corona period were betrayed by the central and state governments. The Modi government did nothing to financially support the distressed people during the Corona pandemic. Did not even try to fulfill the promises made. During the Covid second wave, the government was irresponsible in taking appropriate action when lakhs of people were dying mainly due to lack of oxygen and medical facilities. The government used the corona crisis as an opportunity for the ‘Vikas’ (development) of its corporate allies and pushed the people into slavery.

Contrary to the promise of creating 2 crore jobs for the youth every year, the Modi government’s policies have led to the loss of over 20 crore jobs in the last few years. With Modi working towards disinvestment and closure of public sector utilities, lakhs of vacant posts in government departments are not being filled. The development mantra of ‘Make in India’ was largely confined to propaganda. Crores of unorganized sector workers are starving and living with job insecurity. Rubbing salt into the wounds of distressed people, the government is deliberately skyrocketing the prices of diesel, petrol, gas, etc. to make profits for corporates.

Also the 2022-23 Union Budget provided nothing but “poison” to the people of the country and “elixir” to the corporates.

Under the Modi government, all PSUs, government departments are getting privatised and on the other hand sale of public assets and natural resources to corporates like Ambani, Adani and Tata are made almost free. The National Monetization Pipeline Policy not only leads to the destruction of the infrastructure built by the people of the country through decades of hardship, but also destroys the lives and livelihoods of the people. Dalits, tribals and other oppressed sections of the society will lose reservations in government jobs. These policies make all essential services such as education, health, transportation, electricity, etc. more expensive and inaccessible to the people.

In this context the key demands of the strike on March 28th, 29th of the agitating working class are as follows.

The minimum salary for workers should be 26000/-, four Labour Codes should be scrapped, privatisation of any public sector including the Visakhapatnam steel plant should be stopped, scrap the National Monetization Pipeline; implement minimum wages, pension and retirement benefits for scheme workers, accept 6-point charter of Sanyukth Kisan Morcha (After Modi announced the repeal of the three farm laws, the other pending demands are - MSP + 50% with comprehensive cost; Withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill; Withdrawal of all false cases against farmers; Removal from cabinet and arrest of Ajay Mishra, a minister in the Modi Government and the mastermind behind the killing of Lakhimpur farmers, compensation and rehabilitation for the families of 700 farmers who lost their lives during the struggle). Food and income support of Rs 7,500 per month to non-income tax paying households. Substantial reduction in central Excise duty on petrol and diesel, control price rise of essential commodities, increase government allocations in agriculture, education, health and other public sector utilities, and impose wealth tax on the rich in order to revive and revamp the national economy. These are the key demands of the agitating working class and people.

Today the Trade union movements are able to take up agitation and campaigning with specific economic and political demands. Every year, the All India Trade Unions give Call for a general strike. All the affiliates of various political parties participate in the strike. All these unions are affiliated to various opposing political parties. However they were able to form joint demands. Though there was no demand for the abolition of the imperialist, big bourgeoisie and feudal system, their Central slogan is to protect the people and the country. However, it is the duty of the political parties to clarify from whom the people should be protected

and from whom the country should be protected. The slogan “workers’ and peasants unity” must come to the fore. The nationwide strike, waged by several trade unions jointly with economic and political demands, must create slogans against the exploitation of big corporates, imperialism, feudal classes and against the exploitation of the oppressed Dalits and the oppression of women. The working class must emerge as a force and perform a leadership role to unite all the oppressed classes.