

International Trade Unions Attacked the Anti-Workers Policies of Indian Government at the APRM of ILO

The 17th Asia and Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was held at Singapore for four days from 7th December.

The senior leader of the International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC) Mr. Felix Antony criticised the central governments labour policies including the four labour codes, pointing out that the labour codes violated the tripartite agreements – among workers, employees and the government and give a free hand to employers. He specifically pointed out that the power of inspection has been left with employers through the new labour codes and it will threaten the tripartite system in the country. He also pointed out that for a contract which is based on the availability of decent jobs for all, respect of rights for all, fair wages including minimum wage, adequate and easily available social protection, respect for equality, inclusiveness and no forms of any discrimination is being demanded by the workers of India.

But neither the governmental representative of India, Rameswar Teli, Minister of State for Labour, nor the BMS President Hiranmany Pandya the official representative of the workers of India, have chosen to cover up the plight of workers in India with their evasive statements during the discussions and diverting from the real issues faced by the workers of India.

While Rameswar Teli told that India had the largest youth population in the world and it was observing a technological, entrepreneurial boom with start-ups and small business mushrooming across the country and that 90% of the work force belonged to the unorganized sector and that there were persistent challenges of low-paid jobs and poor working conditions, the BMS National President Hiranmany Pandya said that giant industries and multi-national corporations did not observe uniform labour standards in the country and that during the pandemic, contractual workers in the organised and government sector too faced difficulties with wages and that the mass migration from one country to other and within the country was a key labour issue and that workers in the informal and formal sectors need to be provided with health protection.

In such a way both of them have conveniently avoided to discuss about the new labour codes and their impact on the conditions of the living and working conditions of the workers in India.

On the other hand the representative of the All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE) an allied body of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) Alok B.Shriram, representing employers chose to praise the governmental policies and actions. He said that by introducing four labour codes India had successfully completed the task of simplification, rationalization and codification of labour laws in the country. He also said that during pandemic, the Indian government came forward with stimulus packages to vulnerable sections of society by ensuring provision of food grains at the door step. With such praises he glossed over existing conditions in India to a better light.

However the leader of self employed women's association, tried to present the actual condition of workers to some extent. Sonia George the SEWA leader said that the informal economy was challenging the existing norms of employment relations. She pointed out that "in most cases, employers will be absent or invisible and there are no ways to locate the employment relations. She stressed that the role of the state is important in many livelihood mechanisms.

At the conclusion of the meeting APRM of ILO set ten point priorities of action for the member countries to deal with the issues of dwindling wages of workers, inflation and unemployment. It urged the governments to ensure labour protection for all through the promotion of freedom of association, and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining throughout regions including for the workers in vulnerable situations and workers in informal economy as enabling rights of decent work. It called to promote equal pay for work of equal value. It urged the governments to strengthen governance frame works and respect for freedom of association to protect the rights of migrant workers.

This meeting exposed the unashamed and hypocritical nature of the BJP government and its worker's union BMS, even at the international arena.