

People's Protests in France – the Continuing Global Financial Crisis (2008) of Capitalism

The inherent crisis of Capitalism that once again unfolded in 2008 as the Global financial Crisis in USA is continuing to haunt the world. The imperialist countries who have hegemony over the world and are pushing their crisis on to developing countries, but they are unable to escape from its impact due to its inherent class contradictions within the capitalist system. Europe is divided into North and South. Ireland and southern European countries such as Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain are drowned in the debt given by northern European countries such as France, Britain and Germany through ECB and IMF. Greece defaulted. The burden of helping their fellow European Union members made the Northern European countries so despise the South that their media started addressing them as PIIGS (pigs).

Southern European countries are forced to implement Austerity Rules (2008-2010), first and then 'Adjustment Programmes' for their survival. These include:

Increase in individual income tax rates, Cuts in public pensions, special tax on pensions, freezing of nearly all social insurance benefits and pension reform of the pension system, raising the retirement age, deep cuts in welfare spending at national and local level, increase in VAT taxes.

The experiences of the third world made the people of the south aware of the exploitation and oppression that would befall if these neoliberal measures are implemented. They protested vehemently. These lead to frequent political crises and governments in these countries fell frequently. Yet the Adjustment programs went ahead. No matter how fierce the protests are, unless people topple this capitalist system they have no alternative within. These neoliberal policies gradually increased poverty in those countries.

By October 2012, the IMF said that its forecasts for countries which implemented austerity programs have been consistently overoptimistic. This means that the neoliberal policies have been doing more damage than 'expected' and countries which implemented fiscal stimulus, such as Germany and Austria, did better than expected. Austerity programs for the South, Fiscal Stimulus for the North!

Even after these reviews, the programs of persecuting those people did not stop.

In 2016, Britain felt that it was not profitable to stay in the European Union due to the crisis in Europe. It held a referendum (BREXIT) to leave the EU and people leaned towards it. The BREXIT process saw many political upheavals, took 4 years and finally concluded in 2020. Britain's escape from the capitalist crisis led to internal political crises; it saw five Prime

Ministers in the past six years. This is the fate of Britain which along with USA used to change the heads of weaker countries as per its will!

Reforms in France:

France has been struggling with unemployment since the 2008 capitalist crisis, as have other EU countries. Since 2012, France has been seriously implementing neoliberal policies in the name of reforms in their country. These include minimizing regulatory barriers to competition; improving the labor market- reducing the difference between what companies spend on labor and what the worker receives (i.e. lowering taxes for company owners); unemployment insurance reforms; and tax reforms.

It should not be forgotten that all these neoliberal reforms were previously applied to Latin American countries as part of World Bank and IMF mandates. After 30 years of reforms under right wing US puppet governments, many countries including Argentina, went bankrupt. As a result, people in Latin America are leaning towards parties claiming to be left-wing parties since a decade. After Latin America, neoliberalism spread to Asian countries. Today Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and other countries are either bankrupt or on the brink of bankruptcy because of the neoliberal reforms that mask the capitalist exploitation. Now that capitalism is turning towards its own people, they are often taking to the streets to fight against these neoliberal policies.

Protests in France:

Since 5-6 years, every year at least two lakh people are coming on to streets to protest against the deteriorating living standards.

In September **2017**, the French government introduced labor reforms that would reduce damages for fired workers and favor companies in negotiations with workers. (In our country, in September 2020, 29 labor laws were undemocratically reduced to four labor codes. Such things started three years earlier in France)

In March **2018**, railway unions staged large-scale protests against cuts in retirement benefits, unemployment insurance reforms and against permitting competition in the railways (privatization).

In November **2018**, the Yellow Vests movement brought over three lakh French public to the streets. It then spread to other countries. The trigger for the Yellow Vest uprising was a fuel tax, ostensibly designed to finance France's transition to a green economy – though it soon became apparent that its proceeds would mostly be used to plug a budget deficit widened by the government's tax cuts for businesses. The levy infuriated motorists in rural and suburban areas where public transport and other services are almost non-existent and so households are heavily reliant on their cars. As a result they started protesting against this fuel tax and the rising cost of living by wearing Yellow Vests kept in every vehicle. Soon they are joined by people from other sectors and the protests went on for weeks.

In November **2020** there were large protests against the Police Security Bill. This bill not only reduces the accountability of the police but also curtails the rights of the media .

Teachers Protests:

Since 2009, teachers have been participating in almost every protest in France as a result of reduction in real incomes due to the reforms, work burden due to stoppage of new appointments, increase in cost of living, etc. In 2015, 50% of all teachers fought against the education bill. During Covid, 30% of teachers went on strike against the government's negligence and also due to 7% less pay for new teachers compared to that of developed (OECD) countries. Teachers are also participating in large numbers in the fight against the pension reforms.

Current Anti-Pension Reform Movements (2019-2023):

Pension reforms were proposed in 2010 itself but seeing the peoples anger they were scrapped for a long time. But in December 2019, the government brought the Pension Reforms Bill again and more than 8 lakh people protested against it, so again it was put aside temporarily but is being put forward at every occasion. In January 2023, the government announced that the retirement age will be increased from 62 to 64 along with the pension reforms. 12 lakh people came on the roads against these reforms; Surveys showed that 70 percent people opposed them. A no-confidence motion was introduced against the government in March. It is difficult to convince the people, but not MPs! Government managed some MPs from other parties and won the confidence motion. But it became clear that it will not win the vote on the reform in the parliament. So it used a special provision of the constitution, article 49.3, and brought an ordinance in April for implementing the pension reform. This is the state of democracy in developed countries! As more and more people become aware that this 'democracy' is a beautiful cover for the capitalist system of exploitation, the forces of exploitation are waking up. They are making consistent propaganda about the virtues of democracy around the world, and in the name of confronting dictatorships, people are being manipulated towards worshipping exploitative democracies.

Even in our country, many anti-people laws like amendments to the Forest Rights Act have been implemented undemocratically through ordinances without getting them passed through Parliament.

How severe the capitalist vice may be, advocates of democracy are making their voices heard.

After the pension reform is implemented in France millions of people participated in protests on May Day against the reform. Over 100 police men were injured and more than 300 people were arrested. The main unions declared that they will take up more protest programs on June 6 and voice the demands of the working class.

Established Unions in France:

In France, since 2007, people have been protesting against the reforms. However, reforms didn't stop. A major reason for this stand taken by the established unions there. They are watering down the militancy of the people, diverting them towards discussions, ending the protests by agreeing to small concessions, calling for 'monster' protest rallies instead of strikes and that too on weekends, asking people to convince M.P.s to get their demands fulfilled through parliament. If forces that can teach working class politics in a proper way start working it may not take long for the masses to realize that these unions are working among the people on behalf of the governments.

Pension Story:

Pension is deferred salary. It is that part of the salary received by the workers after retirement for the labor already performed. It is not alms given freely by the government at old age out of generosity. It is the hard earned money the working class generously kept with the government/employer to be returned at a later point of time. So it is completely the responsibility of the government/employer for the payment of pension. But for the past few years, the employers/governments are putting forward the narrative that pension is a generosity/alms given by the government/employer and that they cannot afford that anymore so workers themselves should contribute to the pension. It means that the workers will permanently lose a part of the salary while governments/employers will appropriate that same part.

France's pension reforms also include measures to divide the working class.

1. Some occupations are defined as "arduous" and so workers in these jobs can retire at the normal age. That means the workers in all other occupations have to toil till 64 years.
2. "Gift" of two quarters worth of contributions per child for women, with a maximum limit of 1 year. That means mothers of two children can retire at the age of 63. This means that decisions on women aspects like having children or not, and the number of children to be given birth are being controlled by the employers.

According to the difficulty of the work, according to the number of children, the workers are segregated and pitted against each other.

In our country, similar discussions are going on among public sector workers with the recent verdict of the Supreme Court on pension. Young workers have to contribute in order to pay the pensions to the old workers, and since there are no recruitments, if young workers opt for this and pay for the retiring employees who will pay for them? This type of contributory pension scheme is only creating a schism between younger and elder generation of workers. In some states, working class is leading protests to bring back the old pension scheme instead of this contributory pension scheme. As part of the power struggles among the ruling parties, the old pension has also been restored in one or two states.

McKinsey Gate- France's Shadow Government and the Rise of the Corporate State:

In 2022, a Parliamentary report revealed that French President Macron signed lucrative contracts worth at least €2.4 billion with consulting companies like McKinsey, Accenture and BCG. According to the French laws President cannot be tried while holding office, so he is saved for now.

It came out that McKinsey created the “Macron Entity” out of oblivion with the drafting of Macron Law No2. It also created his political party “En Marche” and made its ex-directors the torch bearers of the party. The french government paid consultancy firms billions of euros to advise governments on important policies ranging from the corona virus vaccine, to climate change, and vaccine roll-out, as well as digital transformation. While the financial sums are staggering, the real scandal is the level of influence on policy that these shadowy corporate actors wield deep inside the halls of government.

Can we still call this Democracy or is it Bourgeoisie democracy nakedly out in the open?

McKinsey company has already provided similar services that kill democracy in countries like South Africa and Australia. It is this consultancy that has also put forward Zelensky as a ‘servant of the people’ and ensured he became Prime Minister of Ukraine.

Also, McKinsey gained particular notoriety for its role in the privatization of the British National Health Service.

While the people of developed countries in the past few years are becoming aware of the exploitation of corporate companies like McKinsey because their governments are laying them red carpets now, the former Chief Minister of AP, Chandra Babu Naidu, laid red carpet for them 25 years ago to exploit the people. The Vision 20-20 document he loudly promoted was prepared by this McKinsey Company.

Conclusion:

Millions of people from all walks of life have taken to the streets and protested but the reforms have not stopped. This is because they are diverted from Strikes. Strike is a serious political and economic tool in the hands of the working class that can prevent the exploitations of employers and challenge the anti-people policies of the ruling class. The working class must strike, take the fight into workplaces and into every factory. With the working class theory in hand they must convince broader masses about the need for a exploitation-less, oppression-less society. They must not restrict themselves to few demands like pensions but must carry forward the militancy of proletarian politics to all industries not only in Europe but also in the entire world. They must realise their historic task of complete transformation of the society.