

Farmers Protests all over Europe

- In November 2023, French Farmers dumped a bale of hay with garbage in front of the administration office in Toulouse, France and sprayed liquid manure.
- In some towns, farmers turned signboards upside down claiming that the national and European Union agricultural policies are upside down.
- In Germany where protests entered third week by January 2024, farmers protested similarly by dumping manure at the Brandenburg Gate near their parliament.
- In the Netherlands, farmers' movements, started in 2019, against nitrogen emission policies that require farmers to close their farms and reduce the cattle on them, changed the government by 2023.
- In countries like Poland, Romania and Bulgaria which border Ukraine, farmers are protesting against European Union policies of flooding their agricultural markets with cheap Ukrainian agri products. In February, they even set fire to trucks carrying Ukrainian products.
- In some other towns of Europe, farmers dumped manure in the parking lots of large supermarkets as they are not giving fair price for their produce. [This is the consequence of leaving the determination of prices to the mercy of big markets. In our country the black farm laws are legally implemented by the NDA Govt. Earlier it was through back door but now, it permanently gave the power to determine the prices into the hands of the market forces.]
- Last year, in the protests against farmer suicides in France, dolls were hung on the trees outside the Parliament.
- Thus in many European countries thousands of farmers are protesting with thousands of tractors against government and EU policies.

For the last 3-4 decades, developing countries such as India and Argentina are experiencing frequent protests by farmers and working class due to implementation of anti-people, anti-farmer policies enforced by the imperialist organizations, the IMF and the World Bank. Now, over the past few years, we are witnessing this phenomenon in the countries of Europe, the so called 'developed' world. The only difference, the role of imperialism being played by the European Union. The opposition to capitalist exploitation is gradually increases among the people of Europe. But Imperialism is also using this to its advantage by organizing reactionary forces against the international ideology of Marxism. That is why this opposition is taking the shape of nationalism. Yet from UK to Spain, railways,

postal workers, teachers, tuckers, students, farmers and people from almost all walks of life are protesting against the destruction of their livelihoods.

The imperialist media is trying to hide these protests. It is no surprise that almost no one knows about the 'dung' protests of French farmers, and information about them is not even available on the Internet. But the news of a 'car accident' where a farmer was killed, was breaking news, not the protest in which the farmer participated when the accident happened. Imperialist US social media such as Facebook and X have made the small protests in the Arab countries into wild fires. Infact they 'manufactured consent' and helped regime changes. But the news of these European protests are almost non existent to them.

Climate Change in Europe:

In the recent years, the European Union is showing increasing concern for climate. The reason for this could be the natural calamities that have been happening for the past few years. Since the 1980s, Europe has warmed at a rate of **0.5°C per decade**, more than twice the global average and is the fastest warming region. A perennial river in Spain dried up. It is experiencing record drought, heatwaves and floods. So, the EU mandated net-zero emissions to restrict the global temperature rise to 1.5°C by 2050. When imperialism sheds crocodile tears and lectures about climate change, we must see whose profits are hidden behind it and know where the investments are heading.

Green Deal-European Union Policies to 'Improve' Climate:

Green Deal is a policy plan to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It laid down the following policies to achieve this.

1. **Four Percent Fallow Land:** EU gives 40% of its budget as farm subsidies every year through the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) to help its member countries compete with outsiders (India's agricultural subsidies are not even 10%). For this, a certain percent of land (4%) should be left fallow without sowing for restoring fertility or controlling over production. However, Covid and the war in Ukraine forced EU to be lenient towards this rule to prevent food shortages. But now EU has mandated the rule while atleast 11 countries are still trying to extend this concession.

2. **Prevention of Phytosanitary Products and Reduction of Nitrogen Emissions:** EU wants to reduce insecticides and pesticides by penalizing with taxes, those who uses them, thereby it wants to move towards organic farming.

Agriculture (largely livestock farming) is responsible for 80% of ammonia emissions. In the name of reducing them, governments made policies to close some of the farms and reduce livestock on the remaining.

3. **Net Zero Emissions:** Abolition of tax exemptions for agricultural vehicles and their diesel in the name of reducing carbon emissions. Due to this, farmers will lose 10% to 12% of income annually.

4. Trade Liberalization with Ukraine: Europe imports most of its fertilizers from Russia. But due to the war in Ukraine, sanctions were imposed on Russia. This increased the cost of fertilizers and this burden fell on the farmers. The advocates of globalization are now lecturing on self-sufficiency. So until the countries manufacture fertilizers on their own, farmers have to bear the burden.

Conditions of Farmers in Europe :

About ten Lakh people work in the agricultural sector in Germany. Farmers' incomes had stagnated for 10 years. In 2020/21, the average annual salary was € 32,900, €1,700 below the level of 2012/13, which corresponds to an average gross monthly wage of €2,740. This is achieved after working for 60-70 hours per week and hardly any holiday. This is far less compared to the average German salary which is € 4,100. Due to the war in Ukraine, there is some increase in their wages. 86% of farms are smaller than 100 hectares. Fifty years ago there were over 900,000 farms in Germany, today there are just 250,000.

In Germany as many as 36,000 farms closed down in a decade, between 2010 and 2020, which comes to 10 farms per day. In neighbouring France almost one lakh closed down in a decade. 1500 farmers go bankrupt every year out of four lakh farmers. In Europe, 5.3 million farms disappeared in 15 years (2005-20). That means farms are going into big hands. An average of 1,000 people are leaving agriculture every day. While government policies are a barrier during cropping, big super markets control on the minimum support price is a guillotine after harvest.

In America, 30 billion dollars of agricultural subsidies are given annually through 150 programs. So American farmers are relatively better due to these subsidies.

EU Lobbies :

There are mainly three groups in the EU system namely the public representatives, investment lobbies and environmental lobbies. Although these environmental lobbies appear to be on the side of public, their main objective is to encourage investments - Investments in new environment friendly technologies. That means investments are the sole aim of two of the three groups. That's why these undemocratic lobbies have more weightage than the people's representatives in the European Union.

Agriculture is not the largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions. It is just 2/3rd of that of the manufacturing or energy sectors. But why the green deal has put so much pressure on the agriculture sector is because this sector's lobby could not stand up to the €53 billion German auto lobby, the €41 billion French nuclear lobby, and the defense sector lobby. There is no public interest here.

Two Questions :

The E.U. environmental policy raises two questions.

1. Which sectors should reduce pollution?

2. Where should the investments come from for new technologies?

No matter how many types of harmful emissions are there, all the lobbies decided to curb only two types, CO₂ and ammonia emissions. This they termed 'net-zero emissions' as if they are preventing all emissions. This definition saves the transport sector which is moving towards battery vehicles, the French nuclear lobby, which has a problem with radiation but not with CO₂, the power sector which has already shelved coal power. So because of this policy, the biggest loser is the agriculture sector. But how can the agri-lobby which controls 70 percent of the agricultural sector be silent? Even though it is strongly opposing these policies it couldn't stand against the other lobbies. So, as a compensation it is pushing to get approval to their new technology GM crop seeds as natural products. Another important thing, the defense sector, which is the largest destroyer of the environment and climate, has no place in any discussion because all its affairs are secret, that is why there is no discussion about it in the CoP of Kyoto, Paris and not even in the recent Delhi's CoP on Climate Change. It means that ultimately the farmers have to bear this environmental burden. This is the sincerity and dedication of the most developed countries and NGOs towards climate change!

EU is worried about being left behind in a green technology shift and also about China's advances in solar power industry, electric vehicles and in wind power. It needs upfront investments to switch energy, industry and transport to clean tech. This requires investments of €80 to €140 billion every year. So it wanted to divert the **Common Agriculture Policy** (40% of EU budget) subsidies to 'green' investments. As a part of this, tax exemptions on agricultural vehicles and their diesel have been lifted. In Germany, the government tried to divert €60 billion unspent debt, taken for handling Covid-19, towards green investments. But the court refused to do this. Had it been diverted, €60 billion which should be used for public needs would have gone into the hands of corporates. The German government now has to adjust this \$60 billion in its budget which is very difficult. That's why its growth forecast is very low at around 0.2%.

The EU created a €17.5 billion **Just Transition Fund** for transition from coal to non-polluting technologies. But most of these funds will end up with Germany because it has the highest number of coal-based industries in EU. That means this policy is skewed towards Germany.

Agriculture - Investment

Green Revolution tied everything in agriculture to money. Fertilizers, pesticides, seeds all have to be bought for each crop. In Europe, Mechanization is also high in agriculture. Thus, agriculture has become the most investment-intensive among all sectors. In agriculture each individual needs investment of €7,94,300 (excluding land), whereas in the industry sector €4,11,000, in trade €1,93,300 and in construction sector €59,500. Such high investments in machinery, stables and other facilities can only pay off if they are planned over decades.

Until yesterday, the governments, which sang paeans for green revolution and asked farmers to go on increasing their production, are now asking the farmers to trim their farms, to avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides. So without naming green revolution, the EU is telling that its results are disastrous and farmers have to move to age old practises in a new package- Organic farming. But farmers have already made long term investments.

Organic farming is labor intensive. Surplus value can be accumulated only by exploiting labor and not through employing machines. As most of the farms went into big corporates now, they are bringing back labour intensive methods like organic farming to exploit labour and accumulate more capital. EU not only created an imperialist system it also united the farmers across europe. The working class must ensure that these united struggles bring in a complete change of the system paving way to a just society.