

Kolkata (India) : A Rally of Unorganised Sector Workers

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November 2014 Rally of Unorganised Sector Workers in Kolkata— A Report

On November 11, 2014, unorganized and informal sector workers of different trades and occupations assembled at Kolkata to march at the rally and attend the public meeting organized by the Osongothito Khetra Sramik Sangrami Mancha (Struggle Forum for Unorganised Sector Workers), a platform of trade-unions organising unorganised sector workers. Nearly 20, 000 workers brought the city to life, demanding proper wages, social security, employment guarantee, communal harmony and class unity.

Vociferous in their protests against the governments installed at the Centre and the State, they demanded full liberties for the Right to unionize and the Right to strike which governments at all levels are keen to do away with.

The workers of the informal sector, or sectors that have been deliberately allowed to stay informal so that employers are relieved of responsibilities, form 93.7% of the country's workforce. They have no employment guarantee, are deprived of social security, compelled to work in very low wages and face various inhuman conditions in their daily lives. Confronted with abominable inflation that has been consistently eroding their wages, they know that they have no other option, but to struggle.

They also realize during their struggles at the work place and in neighborhoods that these unbearable conditions and its betterment depends on national and state level policies and consequently, the reframing of political, social and economic agenda. They marched to Kolkata from all corners of the state raising these slogans. It was an initiation of the long struggle that they have to engage in the days to come.

The participants as well as speakers resolved to intensify the struggle for the increase of wages vis-à-vis the owners' scheme of maximizing profit. A demand of Rs 15,000 as minimum wages was raised for all workers irrespective of industry. It is important to note that the government has been unable to force errant owners to pay minimum wages declared by it, while it works with notorious 'efficiency' to send police to break any movement demanding minimum wages. The wage of tea industry is a meager amount of Rs.90/95, but the government provides all excuses to procrastinate the notification of minimum wages for workers in this sector.

Thousands of bidi workers, construction workers, agricultural labourers, brick-kiln workers, workers of silk industry, tea workers, textile workers, civic volunteers police, hawkers, contract workers of industries and activists were seen marching in the streets of kolkata on 11th of November. Right from tea gardens of Dooaars to workers of Sundarbans, from Purulia to Mursidabad, workers from all districts and blocks of the state declared that they march to the secretariat if their demands were not met within three months.

Workers and the leadership of workers of different sectors/industries, the leadership of the Mancha, the vice-president of NTUI, fraternal trade unions and others addressed the rally.

The major demands of November are as follows :

- The rights achieved by the working people including the right to strike can't be tampered at any cost.
- Minimum wages of Rs 15 000 has to be ensured for all workers and workers of all sectors have to be brought under Minimum Wages.
- Establishment of democracy in all spheres of society. Ensure freedom of expression by putting an end to political violence and attack on the members of the opposition parties.
- All workers have to be ensured Provident Fund, ESI, pension and other social security. Everyone has to be ensured pension equivalent to 50% of their last drawn wages.
- All contract and casual workers, 'volunteers' must be regularized. No new employment of contract workers in permanent posts.
- Security for women must be ensured both inside and outside of their places and at their workplaces. Sufficient crèches and child-care facilities at workplaces.
- Social and economic security has to be guaranteed to all backwards sections of the society including dalits, adivasis, religious minorities and others.
- No curtailment of the 100 days work under NREGA. The act must be amended to provided employment all round the year.
- Immediately implement Food Security Act ; the act must be amended to ensure appropriate and genuine food security.
- Subsidized fertilizers, seeds, electricity, irrigation, etc has to be provided to all marginal and small farmers ; they have to be guaranteed favorable prices for their produce, as well.
- Housing facilities must be made for all workers so that they are able to reside near their places of work.
- All affected by Aila and other natural disasters must be provided reparations and proper rehabilitation.
- Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 and all judgements by the Supreme Court in the interest of the hawkers must be immediately implemented.

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