

India: The farmers' fight is our fight!

Worker-Peasant Unity long live!

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The New Trade Union Initiative supports and stands in solidarity with the on-going farmer's struggle, including the call for Bharat Bandh by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee and other platforms of farmers' unions. The lack of willingness to find a fair and just solution to the demands of the farmers by the government is symptomatic of the tone deaf government that we have come to be used to under the BJP.

What do the Farm Laws say?

The three farm laws: the Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, The Farmer (Empowerment and Protection), the Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 were legislated in September, despite the strongest possible opposition both within and outside parliament. These had been unilaterally brought in as ordinances in June amidst the unplanned and unprepared draconian lockdown.

The three central laws read together in effect disband local markets created through state laws, allow corporates to enter the market for agricultural produce and above all remove regulations against hoarding and storage limits that allow restrictive market practices for essential food products especially cereals opening the way for price fixing. Read together the laws would undermine the autonomy of the farming community and reducing them to dependent producers within the structure of corporate farming. Under the banner of the 'One Nation, one Market' dominated by large corporations the laws would render the long standing protection of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) redundant, which was critical in regulating agricultural produce and ensuring food security in the country.

Aggravating the Crisis, Deepening Inequality

The agrarian economy has been in crisis over the six-and-a-half years of BJP rule as the increases to the MSP have been deliberately suppressed, credit to rural areas shrunk along with a year on year reduction in government expenditure. While the existing agricultural produce markets for and the MSP mechanism are not without flaws and require change, turning agriculture over to corporates is not the solution.

Recommendations for reform made by the M. S. Swaminathan chaired National Commission for Farmers have been completely ignored by the BJP while promising 'doubling farming incomes by 2022'. The new laws will not just affect large farmers they will impoverish small and marginal peasants and render unemployed millions of landless agricultural workers, changing the very structure of the agrarian economy including along its supply chain.

In an economy in which manufacturing, industry and services fail to create jobs, the agrarian economy forms the backbone for the livelihood for nearly half the country's people. Changing this

structure without addressing the jobs crisis will throw the entire economy into disarray more than it already is.

The farm laws and the four Labour Codes legislated, without debate, form the twin poles of the BJP's efforts to transform both the economy and society by creating an institutional mechanism to transfer incomes and assets from the working class and the peasantry to corporates and the super rich. It is the BJP's understanding that control by corporates and consumption by the super rich will drive economic growth in the country. While this is gravely erroneous it will cause greater inequality and deepen the divisions in society.

Attack against One is Attack against All

The protesting farmers have been viciously attacked by the BJP government and not allowed to enter the country's capital but kept out like pariahs on the border. On the way here the protesters were tear gassed and had water cannons turned on them in cold weather. A government that has in the past year sought to penalise and make financial recoveries from peaceful protesters had its police force gorge out sections of the highway so that the tractors and trollys of the protestors could not make their way to Delhi.

The protesters have been variously termed as representatives of the parties of opposition, agents of traders, 'Khalistan supporters' and of course anti-nationals. The BJP has given itself the sole right to decide what is good and not good for the country. The farmer's movement, like the protests that have preceded it since the 2019 general election, marks an important advance in the resistance against an authoritarian government that is determined to subordinate all the country's working people to corporates.

The resilience of the farmer's movement remains a source of inspiration and political education for the working class movement. The efforts for strengthening the alliance between the working class movement and the peasantry must sustain. And hence we enjoin our energies with the struggling farmers and peasants of our land.

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