

India: Working class determined to keep up challenge to Modi gov't's pro-corporate, anti-poor policies

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India seems to be heading toward turbulent industrial relations in 2022 with the working class planning more extensive and intensive agitations against Modi government's economic and industrial policy in general and labour policies in particular on the one hand and the Centre moving toward implementing the four controversial labour codes on the other.

Greater solidarity among the trade unions is now visible with their continued effort in this regard, and a two days' general strike on March 28 and 29 is on the cards.

What has been influencing the mind of the working class was visible in the general council meeting of AITUC held at Hyderabad from February 5 to 7, 2022. One can see in its document, which narrates the general sentiment prevailing among the workforce, a disturbing picture of the country, which is likely become even worse.

The nation has been witnessing Central Trade Unions' resistance to the Modi gov't's policies which are seen to be anti-worker. The coal sector unions had gone on three days' strike against commercial mining; defence sector federations organised a consistent campaign including strike; banks unions went on strike for three days and then for two days, insurance sector unions also organised strike, and so did the electricity federations. The steel sector also went on an agitation to save Vishakhapatnam steel plant from privatisation.

On the other side, construction unions, *beedi* workers, workers/ employees in hospitals, in municipalities and in Panchayati Raj institutions, domestic workers, hawkers and vendors, private transport workers, MGNREGA and other agricultural workers have been agitating for redressal of their grievances in various states despite restrictions due to COVID crises.

The historic farmers' agitation continued for over one year. The gov't's promises on the basis of which the agitation ended are yet to be fulfilled and the farmers unions' have alleged that the provisions of the withdrawn laws are being implemented indirectly. Farmers are reading themselves for another long battle.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) had even observed January 31 as the Day of Betrayal.

The CTUs are fully with them on this decision and the SKM has also promised to observe a rural strike on March 28 and 29.

The AITUC council has planned to make the agitation of the working class stronger than ever before

and expose the Modi government's policies against the working class.

The council has resolved to make the organization at the Centre, state, and union level ever more active by taking several steps including expansion in more areas hitherto absent in trade unionism, bringing in women and youth force, and running educational programmes to protect the rights of workers.

The portrayal of the prevailing sentiment among working class found in the recapitulation report of the AITUC council shows how restive the workers have become.

The report has said that the Modi government has pushed the working class into extreme uncertainties of life and inflicted pain to the common people. It remembered how millions of workers, men, women, children and elderly people walked for hundreds of miles to return home during the lockdown. More than 850 people died, in accidents on railway tracks, on roads, in buses, in trains, and also due to disease, dehydration and hunger during that period.

The AITUC council report mentions the Central government's shameless withdrawal of orders for providing wages for the lockdown period, no eviction from rented accommodations, and no retrenchment from jobs, after failing miserably in implementing the orders and some employers knocking the doors of the Supreme Court against the orders.

The demands of trade unions for giving universal coverage of ration without any documents, cash transfer of Rs 7,500 to non-tax paying families were ignored by the govt.

Not only that, the government brought in anti-farmer and anti-worker policies apart from disinvestment of public sector and their privatisation.

The council's report said that the COVID-19 relief packages announced by the govt only allowed business houses/ corporates to make huge profits, while the common people, vendors and small businesses kept suffering.

This was allowed to happen through further concessions by the govt, lowering corporate taxes and on procedures, no wealth tax on them, even as it reduced interest benefits on the savings of senior citizens, widows and pensioners who live on that money, increased indirect taxes and various cess on the already suffering poor, vulnerable masses, lower and middle classes.

The report also exposed the way the packages were made attractive and bigger by including even the Budget allocations already made for farmers, the workers' money in construction welfare boards disbursement and that of the mineral workers' welfare money, and many more as such.

The packages were in reality camouflaging exercises by the government to hoodwink people and to benefit its corporate friends.

AITUC General Council report said that the Modi regime has dragged India into more debt. Black money has also increased which stands at 62 per cent in Modi rule, while it was only 10 per cent from 1948-1980 and 18 per cent in the 1980s.

As for indebtedness, in seven years of Modi rule, India's debt increased by 142 per cent. In 67 years, the debt on India had reached from Rs 55,87,449 crore to Rs 79,99,526 crore. The interest will account for 52.4 per cent in 2022, the highest in 18 years.

Unemployment rate is at an unprecedented high of 8.1 per cent.

The price-rise situation is worsening and even the wholesale price index reached 14.25 per cent, highest in the last 30 years.

But the government of the day appears to be least concerned of the plight of workers, farmers and other vulnerable sections of the society, the AITUC council pointed out.

It said that the Modi government's plan to sell national public assets under the National Monetization Plan (NMP) is an attack on all sectors of the economy and on interests of the working class ultimately.

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