

India - Statement on May Day 2015: “Build a United Struggle for Safe and Secure Jobs and Freedom”

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Build a United Struggle for Safe and Secure Jobs and Freedom

If ever we thought that things couldn't get worse for the working class, we were wrong!

The last twelve months have seen an unparalleled attack on working people. The BJP, which came to government a year ago, has intensified its attack on all sections of the working class. The BJP has recognised that its principle failure during its last term in office (1998-2004) was that while it had moved policy in the direction of the free market it did not create the institutional framework for it. The journey from 'India Shining' to 'Make in India' is to translate the ideology of the free market into not just policy but also legislation. Hence, the BJP government has now set about to put in place, not just a stronger legislative framework for the right to property, but also to secure the right to profit and the right of companies to enjoy the same rights as if they are citizens.

Hindutva for Economic Restructuring

When the Prime Minister Narendra Modi talks about the need for 'trust in citizens' for an environment that is business friendly, he equates the rights of corporates with the rights enjoyed by citizens. This 'trust' can only be achieved if the right of the corporate displaces the rights of citizens. Hence the BJP government has set about a programme to attack the most marginalised and socially discriminated citizens, be they women, dalits, adivasis or religious minorities. Be it 'ghar wapsi' or the proposal for the Freedom of Religion Bill or the legislation on the slaughter of bulls, bullocks and buffalos, the aim of the BJP government is to polarise and divide society around their Hindutva agenda.

These actions are indeed aimed at communalising society along religious lines but are also a clear attack on the livelihood of those engaged and employed in the meat and leather industry and an attack on small and marginal farmers, a large number of whom are from historically oppressed communities. The BJP governments plan of advancing the 'Maharashtra model' on animal slaughter to a countrywide agenda will contribute both to destitution of those related to the industry but also add to the problem of food availability and security of the poorest section of the population.

Access to Land to Promote Low Wage Unsafe Jobs

Along with this is comes the promise to private capital to easy and unlimited access to land and other natural resources, through the amendment to the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act 2013. When the BJP government has failed to obtain legislative sanction, it has forced it, not once but twice, through Presidential ordinances. The ordinance has diluted the principle of informed and democratic consent by removing social impact assessment (SIA) for a range of industrial and infrastructure projects. SIA was a critical component of the 2013 political compromise that led to the legislation and addressed the effect and therefore relief and resettlement issues of not just land owners but also landless workers who are dependent on land for their livelihood.

Furthermore the restriction the ordinance places on the Gram Sabha takes away key gains made through the Forest Rights Act. Added to this the BJP has legislated the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act and the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act to delink mineral resources from their final use. In effect what the BJP government seeks to do is to create a framework that allows for the transfer of property rights from peasants to corporates and create a 'market' for both land and minerals. And yet in the knowledge that such a 'market' may in many cases not assure profits, the BJP government is willing to extend state support to this profit model through government guarantees. This, the BJP government says will bring the 'poor, dalits, tribals, backwards, those who are landless... 300 million would get employment'.

Race to the Bottom

Clearing land of the 'poor, dalits, tribals, backwards' will however not be enough to create the 300 million jobs. For this, 'labour law reform' is the government's solution. In the first instance through amendments moved in the Lok Sabha to the Apprentices' Act 1961, the Factories Act 1948 and the Self Certification and then through its state governments, led by Rajasthan, that also amended the Industrial Disputes Act 1948 and the Contract Labour Act 1971.

Since then the union government has circulated drafts of the Small Factories Bill, the Wage Code and the Industrial Relations Code. These drafts seek to alter the basic framework of labour law by curtailing basic workers' rights that are today protected amongst others by the Minimum Wages Act 1948, the Trade Union Act 1926 and the Industrial Disputes Act 1948. By amending the PF and ESI Acts, the BJP government is playing on the financial hardship of low income workers and pushing them to low contribution options of healthcare insurance and retiral benefits in the private sector in the name of 'choice'. The objective is to universalise, in every sphere of economic life, the principle of capacity to pay and ability to pay.

These proposals are a direct attack on the freedom of workers to form or join trade unions of their choice and shrink the right to strike and all forms of action by workers in order to agitate their demands including on wages and work place safety and security in what are today already very unequal and discriminatory workplaces.

While seeking to attract investment and compromising with imperialist powers, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently assured a global audience that he will 'Make in India' by placing 'the workforce to power global growth' at the disposal of capital. Let there be no doubt that by this the BJP government is assuring capital that it will lead from the front in the 'race to the bottom' by providing a workforce with low wages and unprotected conditions of work and employment. The BJP is assuring capital that it will clear the countryside of the 'poor, dalits, tribals, backwards'. The BJP

is assuring capital that it will place land and natural resources at the disposal of capital. The BJP is assuring capital that it will provide government guarantees against possible losses. The BJP is assuring capital that it will put down any resistance from the working class and the peasantry since any voice against 'Make in India' is a voice against the 'national interest'.

The NTUI has always recognised the critical importance of both working class unity and advancing the united front. We note the persistence of the 13 central trade union organisations' effort. We salute the unity of coal workers for their December 2014 strike as we salute the transport workers for their efforts at a one-day nationwide strike yesterday both of which were against privatisation of the sectors. And yet the NTUI has always recognised that if the working class movement has to succeed in breaching the onslaught of capital then we must prepare our movement for sustained struggle. We know that a sustained struggle cannot be built without an intensification of our political engagement.

Over these past months we have sought to work with others for a convergence between social movements and trade unions. We are willing to experiment with the widest possible alliance of progressive forces. We have worked to build strong relations between ourselves and other militant trade unions. And we know that we cannot fight our battles alone here and to this end we have committed ourselves with militant trade unions from across the world to build an alliance to fight against all forms of contract and irregular work and for safe and secure workplaces. Just as we put our energies in building strong unions we must also strengthen our efforts to build stronger alliances with other sections of the progressive movement learning at each stage from our experience so that we can together sharpen our political experience and take our movement forward to build a fair, just and equitable social order.

Let us Unite this May Day and

Fight Discrimination - Fight Communal Violence

Fight to Repeal the Land Ordinance:

No Land Acquisition without Consent of Affected People

Resist the Attack on Labour Rights - Fight for Safe, Secure Jobs and a Just Wage

NTUI

P.S.

* <http://www.sacw.net/article11145.html>