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**Strikes in India**

The Indian working class has once again flexed its muscle and organised a general strike of more than 250 million workers against the anti-workers, anti- people and anti-farmers policies of the rightwing Modi government.

All efforts to intimidate and repress the workers failed to stop this general strike from taking place. Despite repression, this joint general strike by workers and farmers has almost shut down India. This massive day of action was called by 10 trade unions and over 250 farmers’ organisations, and was accompanied by massive protests and a near total shutdown of some Indian states.

Workers in nearly all of India’s major industries – including steel, coal, telecommunications, engineering, transportation, ports, and banking – joined the strike. Students, domestic workers, taxi drivers, and other sectors also participated in the nationwide day of action. These historic protests illustrate the power of workers and farmers to bring a nation’s economy to a complete standstill when united in defence of their rights.

This was the second massive general strike of Indian workers and farmers in 2020. The first general strike took place in January 2020 in which more than 250 million workers participated. Hundreds of thousands of farmers are still in Delhi to press their demands. The All India Kissan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) extended support to the trade union strike and the unions extended their support to the farmers’ ‘Chalo Delhi’ mobilisation.

Farmers are protesting against the recent anti-farmer laws which would withdraw the government’s minimum support price for farm products, with serious implications for farmers’ income and livelihoods.

Using Covid-19 as an excuse, the Modi government has unleashed wide-scale repression in the country. The police used violent means to stop hundreds of the farmers who have marched to Delhi to demonstrate peacefully.

The Modi government is using the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis to unleash the most vicious attacks on working class people in India. Modi has used this as an opportunity to further erode the economic, democratic and labour rights of India’s working people. In the newly introduced labour codes, most of the protections and rights of workers have been taken away.

No capitalist government in the history of India ever went this far to protect the interests of the Indian capitalist class and big business and to attack the rights and conditions of working-class people as has been done by the Modi government.

Modi is trying everything to facilitate the capitalist elite while super exploiting workers, small farmers and poor peasants. Along with these measures, the National Education Policy (NEP) imposed on the nation during the pandemic will further cause irreparable harm to the equity of and access to education.

India has more than 9.2 million people infected with Covid-19, the second highest numbers in the world. According to official data, nearly 135,000 have died since the pandemic began. It is likely the numbers are much higher. Added to this are the millions of people who have lost income and who now face increased poverty and hunger, in a country where even before the pandemic 50 percent of all children suffered malnourishment.

The Indian economy is in serious crisis. The real GDP for the September quarter contracted 7.5 percent year-on-year, on the back of the steep contraction in manufacturing, construction and services, as per data released by India’s National Statistical Office on November 27.

The real GDP for April-June 2020 had contracted 23.9 percent, the steepest fall ever (and the first contraction in 40 years). The July-September 2019 quarter had witnessed a GDP growth of 4.4 percent.

The IMF has meanwhile predicted that India's economy would contract by 10.3 percent this year, the biggest slump for any major emerging economy and the worst since independence. A report by Oxford Economics released earlier this month said that India would be the worst-affected economy even after the pandemic eases, stating that annual output would be 12 percent below pre-virus levels through 2025.

The Modi government has handled the pandemic by prioritizing the profits of big business and protecting the fortunes of billionaires over protecting the lives and livelihoods of workers and poor people. To stand up against these attacks – many of which began even before the pandemic – farmers and rural workers have been protesting for several months.

The one-day strike demonstrated the anger of the working class and the unity of farmers, workers and students. However, a one-day general strike is not enough for the demands put forward by workers and farmers. One-day actions are not enough to defeat the neoliberal agenda. Privatisation, anti- worker and anti-farmer laws are part of a larger neoliberal capitalist onslaught to increase the profits and to lower the wages, legal protections and conditions of the working-class people.

The Indian working class has sent a clear message to the Indian ruling elite and the capitalist class – that it is sick and tired of privatisation, liberalisation, outsourcing and pro-rich economic policies.

The strike shows that the mood among workers and the youth is changing. The brewing economic crisis in the Indian economy is already starting to hit them hard. The anger and radicalisation among layers of the youth and workers has increased as a result of the economic crisis and the Modi government’s response.

Unemployment is already on a record high. Inflation is rising. On top of it, wages are stagnant and working and living conditions are worsening.

The working class has shown its resilience, courage and determination but unfortunately Left parties and trade union leadership in India failed to take decisive steps to defeat the Hindutva and neoliberal economic agenda of the BJP and RSS. The Left failed to take the initiative to form and lead a united front of trade unions, social movements, political parties, intellectuals and student organisations on a common economic, political and social agenda.

The Left and trade union leadership made the mistake of relying too heavily on the Congress and other capitalist parties to stop the march of Modi and reactionary forces. The BJP took full advantage of a weak and feeble Congress. And the Indian Left failed to come up with an alternate progressive narrative and agenda against the neoliberal free market agenda and policies. Despite the massive struggles in the industrial field, the Left failed to translate it into political action.

The historic general strike in India has shown that there is widespread anger and discontent in India. But a unified political movement with a clear alternate agenda is needed to defeat the fascist government of PM Modi and its reactionary Hindutva agenda and anti-working class and poor policies.

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