**The Indian general strike**

[Khalid Bhatti](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/khalid-bhatti)

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The Indian working class made history on January 8, 2020 when they organised the largest ever general strike in the history of their country.

Nearly 250 million workers across India went on a 24-hour long general strike. And so the Indian working class once again flexed its industrial muscle and showed its power and strength. This organised Indian working class has once again showed its willingness to fight back against the anti-working class policies of the Modi government.

In some sectors, strike participation was between 90 and 100 percent. The streets in India were flooded with protesting workers. The strike engaged the whole population, including large numbers of informal sector workers, peasants and small farmers.

The striking workers also displayed, in signs and chants, widespread opposition to Prime Minister Modi’s Citizenship Amendment Act, which effectively denies citizenship to Muslim asylum-seekers. The workers also expressed solidarity with the protesting students of JNU and other institutions.

The gigantic size of this strike can be judged from these two simple facts. One, India has more than 928 million people of working age. These 928 million people are eligible to work. The legal working age in India is between 15 and 64 years. Every fourth Indian of working age participated in the strike. Millions took part in the protest rallies, marches and demonstrations across India.

Two, nearly 229 million people voted for the extreme right-wing BJP led by neo-fascist Modi in the last general election of 2019. The size of this strike was much bigger than the total electoral support of the Modi government. More people have expressed their anger and discontent against the Modi government than the total number of people who put him in power. It was clearly a referendum against the neoliberal economic policies of the Modi government.

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. They want a change in the country’s 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 impact their lives. And it will hit them hard. There will be more anger and radicalisation among layers of the youth and workers as a result of the economic crisis.

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

The January 8 strike was one of the greatest shows of strength, power and solidarity by Indian workers. The 24-hour strike shut down banking, transport, retail, public services, construction and industry in many parts of the country. Workers blocked highways and railroad tracks -- with their bodies, barricades, and burning tires.

The January 8 strike was not just for economic and labour rights and for higher wages and better working conditions of workers. It was not just against the economic policies of the Modi government. It was also for the democratic rights of the Indian people and against the Modi government’s divisive agenda. It was for class unity, brotherhood and solidarity against the politics of hatred and division.

Workers and farmers demanded that the government drop the CAA and NRC, stop attacks on religious minorities, stop criminalising and repressing the right of protest and dissent, and end the attacks on the constitutional and democratic rights of the people.

The anger against the Modi government among the working people has increased in the last six years. Every time a trade union movement gave a strike call, more workers joined it. Only 80 million joined the first nationwide strike on September 2, 2015. Around 150 million participated in the second strike on September 2, 2016. Then 170 million joined the third strike on January 8, 2019 a few months before the general election. And now 250 million took part in the fourth general strike.

In every general strike, the Indian working class has proved that it ready to face the Modi government. The working class has shown its resilience, courage and determination but unfortunately Left parties and trade union leadership failed to take decisive steps and actions to defeat the Hindutva and neoliberal economic agenda of the BJP and RSS.

The Left failed to take 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 to oppose the extreme rightwing reactionary agenda of Modi and the BJP.

The Left and trade union leadership made the mistake to rely 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 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, strategy and movement to stop Modi and its reactionary agenda.

The historic general strike has once again showed that there is widespread anger and discontent among workers, students and young people. 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.

The workers are angry because the Modi government has unleashed vicious attacks on their democratic, legal and economic rights. The historic general strike was a strong response to the Modi government’s attempts to divide people to implement its anti-people agenda. The strike has demonstrated the unity and strength of workers, peasants, and students to push Modi back and build a lasting alliance to direct the spontaneous anger of the people towards the defeat of extreme rightwing reactionary bigotry.

The writer is a freelance journalist.