

NATIONAL OPEN MASS CONVENTION OF WORKERS

30th September 2019, Parliament Street, New Delhi

Declaration

The Modi-led BJP Government has completed its 100 days of its second term in Office. And the country and her people are facing a continuing economic slowdown, continuing job-losses, skyrocketing unemployment, widening and deepening impoverishment, faster decline in average level of earnings, reckless privatisation and foreignisation of national productive assets, destruction of indigenous manufacturing capabilities leading to deindustrialization and abnormal rise of economic inequality in the society to an obscene level- mocking at the slogan of “sabka sath sabka vikash”. Now, with a greater arrogance, the same destructive economic policies targeting the democratic rights and livelihood of the mass of the people are being pursued, setting in motion further worsening of the situation. And more undemocratically than ever before – be it the passing of Wage Code Bill, introduction of Code on Occupational Health, Safety and Working Conditions, amendment to the RTI Act to cripple it, amendment to Unlawful Activities Prevention Act to make it even more draconian and vindictive, abrogation of Article 370 without consulting people of J & K, in fact by gagging them, or rendering lakhs of people homeless/ stateless through the NRC process. Now many BJP ruled states have been advocating for NRC process to divide people on communal lines. This ongoing destructive process must be combated for the unity of the people.

Each and every demand in the 12-point charter, of the Central Trade Unions, independent federations and associations, supported by the Joint National Forums of Peasants’ Organizations and highlighted through various agitations with a continuity such as nation-wide strikes on 2nd September 2015 2nd September 2016, the three day Maha-padav, on 9--11th Nov, 2017 before the Parliament, the Nationwide strike by Scheme Workers on 17th January 2018, Satyagrah and protests in almost all the states on varying dates beginning from 23rd January to 23rd February 2018 and the two-days’ strike on 8-9 January, 2019, *adoption of ‘Workers’ Charter’ in a joint national convention of trade unions* on 5th March on the eve of the general elections, have simply been ignored by the BJP Government. The budget presented on 5th July was out and out pro-corporate and anti-common people. The Government has announced its intention to introduce the remaining two Codes: Code on Social Security and the Code on Industrial Relations, all together aiming at imposing conditions of extreme exploitation of the working people.

The Central Govt. not only failed to respond to the genuine demands of the working people, but continued its brazen aggression against the rights of workers, in the interest of their Corporate masters. Bipartism and tripartism is given a go-by. Labour laws are being sought to be overhauled in favour of the employers’ class. The BJP Govt. continues to vindictively deprive the biggest Central Trade Union in the country, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) from all representations. No Indian Labour Conference has been held after July, 2015. Pre-budget consultations have *become* a sham.

Continuing phenomenon of alarmingly increasing unemployment along with joblosses across the sectors, declining GDP rates, increasing gap between the rich and the poor- all revealing a terminal slowdown in the national economy are sought to be brushed under the carpet by fudging figures. The phenomenon of closure and shut-down of automobile industries and the ancillaries and the forecast of huge job-losses including in the IT sector is adding fuel to the fire. Price-rise of essential commodities including public transport, electricity, medicines etc is mounting miseries on daily lives of the people in general, both in urban and rural areas, leading to widening as well as deepening impoverishment. Drastic cut in Government expenditure in social sector and various welfare schemes has made the conditions of workers, particularly those in unorganized sector more precarious.

The anti-labour authoritarian character of the Government is all the more evident in their refusal to implement even the consensus recommendations (in which the Government was also a party) of the successive Indian Labour Conferences in respect of equal pay and benefits for equal work for the contract workers, formulation of minimum wage and workers status for the scheme workers viz., Anganwadi, Mid-Day-Meal and ASHA etc. have not been implemented. Shockingly, the Labour Minister in the Modi Government contradicted their own Committee's recommendation on National Minimum Wage (which in itself was in contravention of the recommendations of the 15th ILC) by declaring a ridiculous figure of Rs.4628/-pm instead ! Replacing gradually the workers by apprentices through NEEM, Fixed Term Employment etc, to grossly alter the employment-relations towards slavery, amendments in Prevention of Child Labour Act to allow employment of Child Labour, reduction in ESI contributions and the move for pro-employer Amendment of EPF&MP Act, including attempts to corporatize the EPFO and the ESIC-- all such anti-worker steps are justified as incentives to employers for ease of doing their business at the cost of workers. The Government stubbornly refuses to implement the recent Judgments of the Supreme Court on issue of "equal wage and benefits for same work" and on EPS, 1995 on contribution and calculation of pension on actual pay and dearness allowance. On the other hand, the Government is misusing the tax-payers money to incentivise the defaulting employers to implement laws such as the Maternity Benefit Act and the EPF Act.

Another assault has come through the move for amendment of the Trade Union Act 1926. The Government intends to change the definition of the Central Trade Unions and their recognition procedure as per discretion of the executive. The malafide intention is also to have Govt. interference into the functioning and internal matters of trade unions.

Aggressive move for Privatization of even all the strategic PSUs and government sector through different routes, including Defense Production, Public Sector Banks and Insurance and also Railways, public road transport, Ports, coal, power, steel, Petroleum etc through disinvestment, strategic sale, outsourcing in favour of private sector, promoting 100 per cent FDI in defense, railways, coal, and many vital, strategic sectors is increasing day by day. Deliberate and vindictive weakening of Air India, BSNL, MTNL, not allowing them level playing field, is being carried on with a destructive zeal in total disregard to the human sufferings (no salaries for months together). Plundering and looting the RBI reserves to contain budget deficit caused by tax concessions to the Corporates is going to destabilize our economy further. Defence Sector privatization move is actually designed to destroy the indigenous Research initiatives and manufacturing capability, -demonstrating a betrayal of national interests. The dubious game plan to outsource more than 50 per cent products including weapons and critical equipments, being produced by the Ordnance establishments is finally followed up by move to corporatizing the Ordnance Factories to facilitate complete privatization. Complete privatization of the Railways, step by step, is going on. Operating private trains on the existing tracks built by Railways and free access of railway yards/workshops/sheds for private players is being permitted. Railway Printing Presses are being closed. Railway production units are being corporatized to facilitate privatization. Besides the railway employees becoming the worst victims, mass of the common people will suffer more owing to inevitable hike of railway fares and increase in freight charges owing to elimination of subsidies in passenger fares and freight on essential commodities.

The Government has announced another round of merger of 10 Public Sector Banks into four despite negative impact of previous rounds of merger, on banking services and employment. The reasons being offered for merger are utterly false and deceptive. The lowering of interest rate on deposits of common people will make them suffer, particularly the senior citizens who depend on it in absence of any meaningful pension. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC) procedure legitimizes the loot of the bank money by the defaulting corporate besides neglecting the dues of the workers of the bankrupt companies. In addition to all these the Government is entering into free trade agreements with different countries and group of countries like Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which is detrimental to our economic sovereignty.

The plight of the unorganized sector workers is even worse, as they bear the brunt of the ongoing economic slowdown despite their sizable contribution to GDP. Their number will swell as the workers lose employment in formal sectors. Construction workers, beedi workers, street vendors, domestic workers, loading/unloading workers had separate laws/welfare boards. Instead of making them functional, they are sought to be abolished through social security code exercise. The Government has made a cruel joke on them promising first pension under PMSYPY of Rs.3000/-pm in the year 2039 ! It is even forcing this so-called voluntary scheme on the scheme workers. The government employees are demanding scrapping of NPS and restoration of the old Pension Scheme. Sections such as home based workers, waste recyclers, salt workers have no legal protection whatsoever.

But the workers have not accepted these measures meekly, as shown by the surge of struggles all around. Workers of 41 ordnance factories across the country, went on total strike from 20th August for a month against the corporatisation move forcing the Govt to step back for the time being just after five days of the complete historic strike. The Government's plan to corporatize seven Railway production units was immediately responded to by protest actions by the mass of the workers and their family members. The bank merger news was denounced by nation-wide protest demonstrations of bank employees and officers. Now, strike action is being planned in the banking sector. The coal workers have staged a massive strike action on 24th September, 2019 against allowing 100% FDI in coal sector. There have been agitations in various CPSUs, including the core and strategic sectors like Energy, Petroleum, Telecom, Metal, Steel, Mining, Machine Building, Road, Air and Water Transport, Port & Dock against the government plans to privatise them. The Convention extends full support to these struggles.

The Convention notes with dismay that this Government, spinelessly surrendered to threat and pressure of their private corporate masters, indigenous and foreign, by shamelessly withdrawing the measures for making the shortfall in CSR spending by private corporates a criminal offence and also withdrawing the surcharge on speculative profits of foreign portfolio investors. Shri Modi had to placate them in his 15th August speech, saying they are the "wealth creators" and cannot be viewed with suspicion. This is over and above the budget announcement of the huge sop of reducing the income tax rate by 5% for the 99.3% of the corporates. Now in the name of addressing the economic slowdown, the Finance Minister has further announced cutting back taxes on corporate from 30% to 22% whereas the workers and employees have to pay the same 30% income tax. The stimulus package to the tune of Rs.1.4 lakh crores, a bonanza to the corporates, does not increase the purchasing power of the working people, does not create any jobs or even does not ensure job security to the workers being retrenched every day, will further aggravate the recession.

Now the BJP Government is facing a backlash from the common people as the draconian measures of the newly passed Motor Vehicle Act are put in practice. The federations of transport workers had repeatedly warned against these measures during the last five years of BJP Government, through various mass actions.

Now that the euphoria of a phenomenal win in the elections is fading, jingoist claims on abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A recede, NRC turns out to be a hoax, the people are waking up to the bitter truth of a failing economy – caused entirely by the Pro-employer, anti-worker, anti-people and utterly destructive anti-national policies of this BJP Government. Relentless crisis in jobs and bread cannot be camouflaged by any amount of rhetoric.

This National Convention of Workers appeals to all the workers, irrespective of their affiliations, to join hands and co-ordinate their sectoral struggles into a mighty countrywide movement to force the government to reverse their anti-national policies. Let us send a clear message to the powers that be, that WE ARE THE WEALTH CREATORS. The wealth that we create is being looted by the corporates in connivance with the government, that has caused suppressing of effective demand and consequent economic slowdown. We demand equitable

redistribution of the wealth that we create. We want National Minimum Wage of Rs.21000/- pm (as per the current Cost of Living Index), Rs.10000/-pm minimum pension for all by Government funding, we want effective Employment Guarantee Act to cover all rural and urban households, implementation of MGNREGA with increased number of days and budget allocation, increased public investment to mitigate rural distress, remunerative price as per the Swaminathan Commission recommendations for the agriculture produce with procurement facilities and loan waiver of the peasantry, we want permanency of employment in decent work, we want Worker status for all Scheme Workers as unanimously recommended by the ILC, abolition of contract system and regularisation of contract workers, equal pay and benefits for equal work and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.





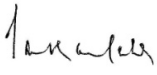
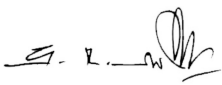
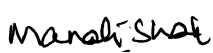
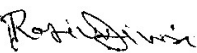
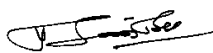

This National Convention of Workers records its strong denunciation of the Communal forces which are cultivating an atmosphere of conflicts within the society on non-issues, giving an opportunity to the government to deflect the attention of the masses from core issues of unemployment, run away price rise etc. They are seeking to disrupt the unity of the workers and the toiling people in general, so vital to carry forward the ongoing struggles based on our 12-point Charter of Demands. Working class must raise their strong voice of protest against these divisive forces which are threatening the very social fabric of our society and endangering the basic ethos and core values of Indian Constitution.

The task before the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and independent National Federations and Associations is to further intensify the surging struggles in various sectors through a concerted united agitation and mobilization for action. The National Mass Convention of Workers calls for a countrywide general strike action as a consolidation of all sectoral struggles. This Convention therefore adopts, inter alia, the following programmes for mobilisation of workers for the grand success of the strike:

Programme of Action over the next three months:

1. Joint Conventions of Workers at Sectoral Level, at State Level, at District Level during two months of October and November, 2019
2. Widest possible circulation of Declaration down to factory, establishment, institution and base level through the above activity during December, 2019
3. **Country-wide General Strike On 8th January, 2020**

The National Convention calls upon working people across the sectors and throughout the country irrespective of affiliations to make the strike action a grand success and further appeals to prepare for bigger actions if the government fails to pay heed to our demands. We call upon the people at large to support the strike action.

 INTUC	 AITUC	 HMS	 CITU	 AIUTUC
 TUCC	 SEWA	 AICCTU	 LPF	 UTUC

And Independent Federations, Associations and Unions of Workers and Employees