

Mazdoor-Kisan Adhikar Mahadhiveshan

**National Convention on the Rights of Workers and Peasants
5th September 2022, Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi**

Declaration

We the workers, peasants and agricultural workers of India, gathered in this national convention at the call of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions(CITU), All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and All India Agricultural Workers' Union(AIAWU), on the fourth anniversary of the historic *Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally* held on 5th September 2018, declare our resolve to strengthen our united struggle to protect the interests of the workers, peasants and agricultural workers, who through their labour produce the wealth of our country.

Representing the toiling people across our country, which has just completed 75 years of Independence, we reiterate our commitment to continue the struggle to realise the vision cherished by our earlier generations who sacrificed their everything in the freedom struggle - for an India free from hunger, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy, a secular, democratic, socialist republic in which all our people will enjoy the fundamental rights and directive principles enshrined in our Constitution.

We note with anguish that the present Modi-led BJP regime controlled by the RSS is destroying whatever we, the people have built brick by brick through our labour and whatever we have achieved through our struggles and sacrifices, during the last 75 years. It is trampling underfoot the dream of our freedom fighters, of an India free, not only from British colonialism, but all forms of oppression and discrimination on the basis of their class, caste, creed, religion or gender, of a nation where its people can live with freedom and dignity. Its actual practice over the last eight years of its rule makes its blitzkrieg about 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' sounds hollow.

Our economy, our hard acquired food security and manufacturing capacities, our democratic, secular and federal political system, our Constitutional rights, Parliamentary norms and practices are all under serious attack.

The economy was in crisis and people were in distress even before Covid 19 struck. The manner, in which the Modi government handled the pandemic, worsened both. More than one lakh farmers committed suicide in the last 8 years. The increase in suicide by daily wagers, from 32000 in 2019 to 38000 in 2020 and more than 42000 in 2021, is the worst manifestation of the overall crisis. As per National Crime Records Bureau report that out of the total 164033 suicides in 2021, one in four, were that of daily wagers. The agrarian crisis and lack of employment in rural areas and the precarious work and low incomes in urban centres are creating such a dangerous situation.

Prices are increasing, wages are declining. The share of wages in the net value added is among the lowest levels. Peasants do not get remunerative prices. Agriculture is becoming unsustainable for small and middle peasants. Agricultural work is drastically reduced in the rural areas. No decent employment is generated in the urban areas. Unemployment and job losses are increasing by leaps and bounds. Working conditions are deteriorating. Violence against women, dalits, adivasis, and minorities has reached unprecedented levels.

Prices of essential commodities are continuously rising. Prices are made to rise by the Modi government's discriminatory taxation and other policies, only to benefit the big corporate and business houses and traders. Prices of petrol, diesel, cooking gas and other fuels are increased almost on daily basis by the present taxation regime which is having a cascading impact on the prices of all other commodities, public transport and other services.

On top of this comes the latest round of unprecedented burdens through the GST hikes on all essential commodities such as pre-packaged rice, wheat, milk and on a host of other items of

daily use. The range of items on which GST has been increased includes crematorium charges, hospital rooms, writing ink etc. People have to pay 18 per cent GST on bank cheques even to withdraw one's own savings from their bank. At the same time, GST on luxury items has been lowered.

According to a Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report, unemployment among youth in the 20-24 years age group is a staggering 42%. Labour Participation Rate has dropped to an all-time low of 38.8%. Rural women are the worst affected. Their work participation rate has fallen to a historic low of below 10%. Lakhs of micro, small and medium enterprises have closed, resulting in the loss of crores of jobs. Permanent jobs are vanishing. Precarious jobs are increasing. Casualisation and contractorisation of employment is getting legal sanctity under the Modi regime.

While the demand for work under MGNREGA increased, the government reduced allocations for it. Wages for work done to the tune of Rs 1498 crore are pending for several months in almost all the states. According to the official figures 1.47 crore job seekers (around 20% of the total) were refused work.

The four labour codes passed by the Modi Government are meant to do away with whatever has been achieved by the working class through over a century of struggles, including an eight hour workday, minimum wages, social security and most important of all, the right to organise and collective bargaining. Though the government could not notify the labour codes for implementation till now, it is determined to do so at the earliest.

Hunger in the country has reached shocking levels. India ranks 101 among the 116 countries in the Global Hunger Index of 2021. But the government is reducing expenditure on schemes like ICDS and Mid-day Meals and withdrawing from the basic survival entitlements of the people.

All productive assets, the nation's wealth – public sector undertakings, financial institutions, mines, defence production units, major ports, telecom towers, oil and natural gas pipelines, railways, highways, airports and airlines, electricity, steel, postal services - are being handed over to the big private corporates, domestic and foreign, through reckless privatisation. The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) is aimed at handing over our infrastructure built with public funds to the private corporates virtually free of cost, for making massive profits.

This will not only increase the burden on the people, but will also take away the constitutional right of reservation in government jobs for Dalits, tribals, OBCs and other downtrodden sections of society. Through mass scale contractorisation and outsourcing of work in most of the government departments and administration, the entire governance system is being planned to be privatized. The *Agnipath* scheme is meant to contractorise the defence services and also to get a private army for the communal forces.

At the same time this government has been extending bonanzas to the big monopoly companies, Ambani, Adani and the likes, by continuously lowering the corporate tax rates, abolishing wealth tax, declaring moratorium on payment of charges/taxes, on debt repayments etc. The Super Rich have amassed wealth even during the pandemic. In an obscene display of inequalities in our country, the richest 1% corner more than 70% of the GDP and lowest 50% of people have less than 10%. The central government has written off loans worth a whopping Rs 10.72 lakh crore to its crony corporates in the last seven years.

In the background of the growing world capitalist crisis and the imperialist wars, the situation is going to further worsen.

This convention salutes the lakhs of peasants of our country who heroically fought for over a year against the three pro-corporate, anti-farmer and anti-people farm laws and compelled the Modi government to repeal them. This convention appreciates the solidarity and wholehearted support extended by the working class of our country to this historic struggle.

This convention strongly condemns the Modi government for reneging on its assurances to the peasants, on legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops, not going ahead with the Electricity Amendment Bill without consulting with them, withdrawal of cases and other issues.

Contrary to its assurance, the government has introduced the Electricity Amendment Bill to privatise electricity in the Parliament, although due to pressure it had to be sent to the Parliamentary Standing committee.

The farm laws, the labour codes, the electricity bill, the privatisation spree are all part of the neoliberal policies to which the Modi government is committed. In its aggressive pursuit of these policies for the benefit of the big corporate and monopoly companies, domestic as well as foreign, the Modi government is resorting to ruthless suppression of any opposition to these policies.

Fundamental and basic human and democratic rights are attacked. The Constitution is violated. Parliamentary norms and practices are flouted. Laws are bypassed. Journalists bringing the facts to light, intellectuals, human rights activists are arrested and jailed without bail. Dissent is sought to be 'bulldozed'. The majoritarian communal forces seek to dictate people's lives – the dress they wear, the food they eat, people whom they can be friends with, whom they can or cannot marry. This in turn is leading to the rise in minority fundamentalism. Both these hues of communalism are being propagated to disrupt the class unity and have disastrous impact on the lives of the people and on social harmony.

This convention warns the toiling people of our country and all progressive sections of society against falling prey to these machinations of the ruling classes and their representative in power today, the BJP guided by the fascistic RSS.

This convention congratulates the workers, peasants and agricultural workers and other sections of the people who have been displaying exemplary courage in resisting and fighting these disastrous neo-liberal policies from their independent as well as joint platforms. The historic farmers' struggle under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), the countrywide general strike on 26th November 2020 and again on 28-29th March 2022 under the banner of the joint trade union platform, the various sectoral struggles of the coal, port and dock, defence, bank, insurance, postal, telecom, electricity, transport, scheme workers and other sections of workers and the struggles of the farmers and agricultural workers in different states on the issues of price, wage, land, MGNREGA work, government procurement, etc show the determination of our people to fight for their rights.

Not only the workers, peasants and agricultural workers; the youth, students, women and many other sections are today fighting for jobs, for the right to food, education, health, housing, and social justice, protection of democratic rights and the secular character of our nation. These united struggles show the potential to carry forward the anti-imperialist, anti-corporate struggle to fulfil the dreams of those who fought for our country's independence, to realise their vision of a free India.

This convention asserts that the struggle today is not only for our immediate demands of livelihood and living and working conditions. It is also to save the country's economy, to save the secular democratic character of our society from this communal and authoritarian BJP-RSS regime. It is to save our Constitution from the onslaught of the 'Hindutva' forces masquerading as saviours of Hindus. As Savarkar who had first used the term 'Hindutva' himself explained, it is a political construct and has nothing to do with religion. It was these communal forces like the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha that refused to participate in our freedom struggle, and along with the Muslim League facilitated the British colonialists' 'Divide and Rule' policy by raising the Two Nation theory based on religion. The struggle today is to Save the Nation and to Save the People from these anti-people and anti-national policies and forces.

Hence, this convention calls upon the workers, peasants and agricultural workers all over the country to rise unitedly to fight for the following demands and to work tirelessly for a defeat of the neo-liberal, communal and authoritarian regime of the BJP-RSS.

Demands

- Ensure Minimum wages @Rs26,000 pm and Pension @Rs10,000 to all workers; No contractorisation of work; Scrap Agnipath Scheme
- Legally ensure MSP @ C2+50% for all farm produce with guaranteed procurement
- One time loan waiver by the central government to all poor and middle peasants and agricultural workers; pension to all of them above 60 years
- Scrapping of four Labour Codes and Electricity Amendment Bill 2022
- Job security and guarantee for all; Expand MGNREGA and increase workdays to 200 with minimum wages @Rs600 per day; Pay all pending wages; Enact a National Urban Employment Guarantee Act
- Stop Privatisation of PSUs and Public Services; Scrap National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP)
- Arrest Price Rise, Withdraw GST on food items and essentials; Reduce the central excise duty on petrol/diesel/kerosene/cooking gas substantially;
- Universalise the Public Distribution System (PDS) and expand its scope to include 14 essential items; Ensure food and income support to all Non tax payer families
- Stringent implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA); withdraw the amendments to Forest (Conservation) Act and Rules that allow the union government to permit clearance of a forest without even informing the residents.
- Stop repression of the marginalised sections and ensure social justice
- Ensure universal and quality Health and Education for all; Scrap New Education Policy (NEP) 2020
- Ensure Housing to all
- Tax the Super Rich; Enhance Corporate Tax; Introduce Wealth Tax

Programme of Action

To take these demands to the workers, peasants and agricultural workers across the country, this convention calls upon all the units, up to the lowest level, of all the three organisations to take up an intensive and extensive campaign comprising:

- **Joint meetings of the state level office bearers of the three organisations to plan the campaign by the end of October 2022**
- **District level joint meetings of the office bearers of the three organisations by the end of November–December 2022**
- **State level joint conventions in January 2023**
- **Massive campaign through distribution of leaflets, posters, wall writing, group meetings, jathas, processions etc on the issues and demands including local demands during the next four months, aiming to reach the unreached, as planned in the state and district joint meetings**
- **District/local level conventions in February 2023**
- **Jathas to take the message of this convention to all nooks and corners of the country**
- **Massive ‘Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Rally 2.0’ during the 2023 budget session of Parliament**

This convention also calls upon all progressive, democratic and patriotic people of our country to extend support and solidarity to this nation-wide campaign and programmes, to Save the Nation and Save the People!

CITU

AIKS

AIAWU