

CPI(M) Appeal



**Defend
Workers' Rights**

17th Lok Sabha 2019

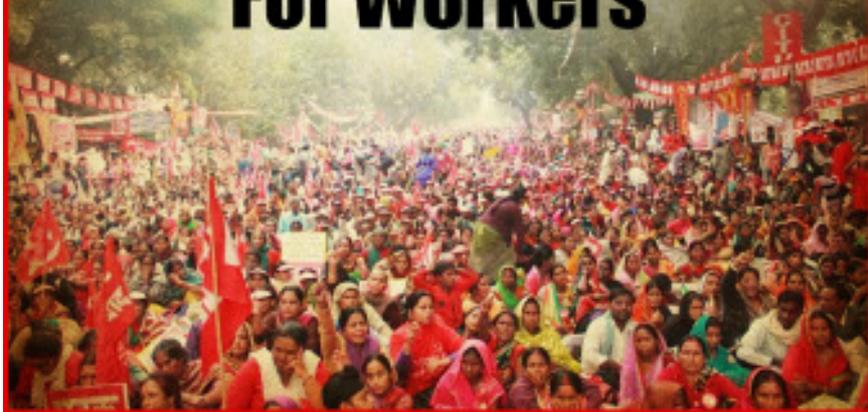


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CPI(M) Appeal to Workers

Achhe Din for the Capitalists: Slashing Wages, Jobs and Rights for the Workers

Dear Friends and Comrades,

As workers and employees, you have fought hard against the Modi Government's policies which, in the name of "labour reform", have sought to eliminate all the rights you have won through decades of struggle and sacrifice. Not only for yourselves, you have fought to protect India's interests against the selling out of India's strategic and important sectors to big capitalists, both foreign and Indian, through reckless privatisation policies. Public sector, Air India, insurance, banks, IT sector, mines, minerals, defence – there is nothing that this Government is not prepared to sell out. Even retail trade is being taken over by big business and big e-marketing companies.

The CPI(M) has stood in active solidarity with all these significant and historic struggles as the Party believes that it is the working classes which can unify India and drive the change for alternative policies. In Parliament, it is CPI(M) MPs, being the voice of India's trade union movement, who have unequivocally fought against these policies.

Jungle Raj for Workers, Ease of Doing Business for Big Capital

The workers are seeing savage attacks on their hard won rights, while the Modi government helps its cronies: the Adanis, Ambanis, Birlas, Tatas. This is all done under the mask of bringing in investments but are actually designed to help big capital at the expense of the workers—Ease of Business to loot India's working classes—this is the Modi gift to workers.

Some of the key attacks by the Modi Government are:

Amending the Apprentices Act: This allowed employers to engage up to 30% of the total workers in the establishment as "apprentices", at a fraction of the wages of permanent and contract workers, even though they perform the same work. Nor are they given any other benefits that other workers receive.

The Labour Law (Exemption from furnishing returns and maintaining of registers by certain establishments): This raised the threshold level employment for an establishment to be treated as ‘small establishment’, from 19 to 40. Thus 72% factories in our country were exempted from filing returns and maintaining registers related to 16 major labour laws including Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act, and Equal Remuneration Act, etc.

Amending the Industrial Disputes Act: Due to strong opposition of the central trade unions, the Modi government could not remove the legal protection of the workers and institute a ‘hire and fire’ regime that big capital wanted. Modi government chose to use its state governments and its allies to dilute the Industrial Disputes Act, Factories Act, Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act and Apprentices Act, eliminating protective measures for workers. The BJP government in Rajasthan took the lead followed by the BJP state governments in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Haryana and its then ally, the Telugu Desam Party.

Attack on Labour Laws is an attack on the Organised Labour Movement

Ignoring the fact that only a small proportion of the total workers – only around 7% – were covered by labour laws in our country, Prime Minister Modi termed the labour protection laws as ‘jungle raj’. This was the major theme of his inaugural address to the Indian Labour Conference (ILC) in 2015, the only one held during the entire tenure of his government. His solution to the “jungle raj”: merging 44 major labour laws into 4 labour codes, curtailing the hard won rights of the workers and facilitating unhindered exploitation by the employers. In other words, impose slavery like conditions on workers.

Due to strong opposition from the working class, none of the Code Bills could be passed. But the Modi government started a new series of attacks on the workers, bypassing the Parliament, amending the Rules under various Acts, avoiding tripartite mechanisms, and issuing executive notifications. Some of these are

Fixed Term Employment (FTE) for all sectors: The first notification on FTE, which is different way of saying short duration contract employment, was issued in 2003 by the earlier NDA government led by Vajpayee. Under

pressure of trade unions and Left parties, it was withdrawn by the UPA I government. After coming to power, the Modi government issued it, first for the textiles and apparel sector, then for all sectors. The objective is to pressure a worker having no job security, not dare to join any trade union and to fight for his basic rights.

Working Women's Intensified Exploitation

The Modi Government has intensified discrimination against women workers by refusing to implement the equal wages law as a result of which in many sectors women are earning one third less than men. Women in India are mainly employed in the unorganised sector with very poor working conditions and no guarantee either of security of jobs or minimum wages. There has been a big increase in sexual harassment cases at the workplace but the Government has utterly failed to implement the law. In fact the RSS and the BJP have no respect for working women as their ideology determines the role of women only as homemakers.

This Modi Government claimed to have increased the maternity benefits for women but gave the monetary benefit directly to employers in the name of "incentive." This is highly insulting to women and in fact only helps the employers. Instead the Government should ensure strict implementation of the Maternity Benefit Act and act against employers who refuse to implement it.

The New Bonded Labour: Short Duration Employment, Apprentices, Trainees

Trainees as virtually unpaid labour: Another tool deployed by the BJP government under Modi is the use of trainees through National Employability Enhancement Mission (NEEM). Employers are allowed to get their work done by the 'trainees' for a period of three years, paying a meagre stipend that is lower than the wages of permanent workers or even the contract workers. As another batch of NEEM trainees will be ready by the time one batch completes its term, the big companies can drastically reduce their workforce. Already, the big automobile manufacturers including MNCs, are now using NEEM trainees to replace permanent and contract workers.

Treating Apprenticeship as Employment: In order to hide its failure to create jobs, Modi government created the National Employment Through Apprenticeship Programme (NETAP) that treats apprenticeship as employment. This is a public private partnership programme of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, TeamLease Skills University, CII and NSDC under the Ministry of HRD. In this scheme, every year NETAP proposes to 'appoint' 2 lakh apprentices for up to 2 year durations, for the next 10 years. They are paid a stipend, which qualifies as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending of the companies.

In totality, the entire project of the Modi Government for so-called labour reforms both through legislative initiative and through executive orders, is aimed at imposing conditions of virtual slavery on the working class, to facilitate intensified exploitation by the corporates.

Keeping Wages at Starvation Level

Decreasing Wage Share and Denying Workers Trade Union Rights: Neoliberal policies pursued by successive governments have resulted in the number of permanent workers being drastically reduced. Under Modi rule, it has declined even more steeply, while the number of contract, casual, temporary, part time, FTE, apprentices, trainees etc has increased many times. The employers get double benefits: the wage share comes down and the workers can be prevented from joining trade unions and fight for their rights. According to the 2015-16 report of the Labour Bureau, the maximum monthly income of 57% of the self-employed was Rs 7000. The average monthly income of over 50% of total employees was up to Rs 5000 only. This is well below the minimum wage in various states, the absolute minimum for keeping a human alive. The 7th Pay Commission had recommended that the minimum wage in govt. has to be Rs.18,000 based on costs of minimum essential requirements like food, clothing shelter, and spending on education, health etc. The CPI (M) has fully supported this demand of the trade union movement.

The Modi govt. has refused to accept this bare minimum for other workers, bowing to strident opposition by corporate sections. In fact an expert committee set up by the govt. to redefine how wages should be fixed recently declared that workers can survive on less food - at just 2400 kcal food per day rather than the accepted norm of 2700 kcal!

In 2016, Supreme Court gave a judgment that contract workers and others, doing the same work as the permanent workers, should be paid the same wages and benefits. But till today the government has not taken any measure to ensure implementation.

Modi's New Gift to Capital: Use Workers Savings for Stock Market Speculation

The Code on Social Security proposed by this government intends to dismantle the entire social security system, and use workers' hard earned money for speculation in the share market. Already, despite opposition from the workers' representatives in the central board of trustees of Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), the BJP government has decided to invest 15% of the accumulated savings of the workers in the share market. It has also decided to deploy Rs 75,000 crore of Employees' State Insurance (ESI) fund for speculation through Ambani's Reliance, despite opposition. Is this is not a clear case of looting of workers' money for the benefit of the corporate/ big business lobby?

Changing workers pensions schemes in the public and defence sectors: Large sections of government employees, including the defence and railway employees, particularly the young employees who joined after 2004, are today at risk of losing their pensions. The New Pension System (NPS) or the Defined Contributory Pension System does not ensure guaranteed amount of pension as the Old Pension scheme. Some organisations are trying to utilise this anxiety by converting it into anger against the established union leadership carefully diverting it from anger against the government. The fact is that the PFRDA Bill was originally introduced by the earlier NDA government of Vajpayee. The state and central government employees' organisations and the left leaning trade unions opposed it strongly. It was only the Left parties that vehemently opposed it in the Parliament. Congress led UPA I government tried to get it passed in Parliament but could not do it because of this opposition from the Left parties on whose support it depended for its survival. It was only in the UPA II government led by the Congress that it was passed, **with the support of the BJP.**

The then Left led state governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura refused to implement it. But the UDF government that came to power in

Kerala in 2011 introduced NPS. Now after being elected in 2016, again the LDF government is once again trying to restore pension rights. It has constituted a committee to examine the possibility of reintroducing the old pension scheme in the state. The BJP government that gained power in Tripura in 2018 has not only failed in implementing its pre-poll promise of implementing 7th Pay Commission recommendations for the state government employees, but instead has introduced NPS.

One of the priorities of the BJP government under Modi is total dismantling of the public sector including the sensitive and strategic sectors like railways, defence, telecom etc. Despite all its talk of 'nationalism' and slogans of 'Make in India', it is taking measures to kill our manufacturing capacities built over 70 years after Independence and also threatening the jobs of thousands of employees working in these sectors.

One Crore Scheme Workers not Even Considered Workers

The BJP's 2014 election manifesto promised to improve the conditions of anganwadi workers and helpers. But after coming to power it has drastically cut down the budgetary allocation for Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. The NITI Ayog, which has replaced the Planning Commission, has recommended winding up many of the centrally sponsored schemes. The Modi government has drastically cut down the share of funding by the government of India for such schemes. Attempts to hand over schemes like ICDS and the midday meal programme to NGOs and private players have intensified.

During this entire period, not a single paisa was increased in the remuneration paid by the government of India to the scheme workers. After playing deaf to their demands raised repeatedly by their unions the Prime Minister suddenly woke up just before the elections to announce a meagre increase in the remuneration to the anganwadi workers and helpers, and the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). But the midday meal workers were totally left out. The finance minister reportedly said that he 'missed' to include them!

The 46th ILC which Prime Minister Modi inaugurated, reiterated the recommendation of the 45th ILC that the workers employed in various schemes of government of India should be recognised as 'workers', paid

minimum wages and provided social security benefits. There are around 1 crore such workers. But the BJP government has totally ignored this recommendation.

Destroying Industries and Workers Livelihood

Demonetisation and GST Destroying Small and Medium Scale Industries: Demonetisation and GST have wreaked havoc with the livelihoods of workers in the small and medium establishments. Many of the establishments including the lakhs of workers employed in them have not been able to recover till today. While this exercise helped the hidden agenda of promoting cashless platforms and big corporates, public sector bank employees were forced to work round the clock. Over 100 people including bank employees died. Most of the employees have not been compensated for their extra work.

Only Hype and Advertisements for Unorganised Sector Workers: The BJP government is spending thousands of crores of people's money on its advertisement blitzkrieg about its welfare schemes for the unorganised workers. The reality is that not a single new scheme has been specifically formulated for the unorganised workers during its entire tenure. The few existing welfare schemes applicable to the BPL people in general were repackaged as new schemes with new names. Even worse, the amount which was sanctioned for the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act by the earlier UPA government was returned to the finance ministry by the labour ministry under the Modi regime.

Swachh Bharat Hype While SafaiKarmacharis Die

Despite all the hype about 'Swachh Bharat', safakarmacharis, the people really involved in keeping the cities, towns and village clean, continue to live in most miserable conditions. Despite the ban on manual scavenging, this inhuman practice continues to be prevalent. It is reported that women manual scavengers in some cities in Rajasthan are paid 1 or 2 rotis per household for manually clearing human excreta.

Which section of workers or employees have then benefited under the Modi regime? Not the workers in the organised sector, public or private; not the workers in the unorganised sector, men or women; not the

government employees; not the scheme workers employed in various government departments.

Providing Violence and Hate as an Alternate to Work for the Youth

Not only that. The BJP leading the government and its ideological mentor, the RSS are trying to divert the attention of the people and particularly the energies of the youth into unproductive and destructive channels. The RSS and its many outfits are utilising the frustration among the youth against lack of jobs, against lack of opportunities to develop their talents and creativity to create animosities on the basis of religion, caste, region etc., to polarise society for the electoral gains of the BJP. The issues of construction of Ram mandir at Ayodhya, the instigations against Supreme Court judgment allowing entry of women of all ages to the Sabarimala temple, the increasing attacks on minorities and dalits being engineered by the RSS and its various outfits, are meant to achieve such polarisation of society. They are meant to divide the working class, youth and society in general, disrupt people's unity and weaken the fight against the neoliberal policies. They are meant to weaken workers' unions and ultimately the struggle of workers to improve their conditions.

This BJP government under Modi has shown its anti-worker character through each and every one of its policies. It is only the Left which has championed the cause of the workers. The CPI(M) appeals to the working class and the employees to totally reject and decisively defeat BJP in the ensuing elections to the Parliament and strengthen the presence of Left parties so that their voice is much more effectively raised in the Parliament.

Defeat the BJP to Save Our Livelihood!

Jobs not Hype, Wages not Advertisements!

Workers Unity Will Defeat the Modi Regime!

In Defence of the Rights of the Working People

The CPI(M) stands for:

- Ensuring that statutory minimum wage for workers is not less than Rs. 18,000; minimum wage to be linked to the Consumer Price Index; wage fixation to be based on 15th ILC recommendations.
- Periodic wage revision to all Central PSU workers without insisting any affordability condition; immediate resolution of the issues of the central government employees related to the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission.
- Scrapping all anti-worker and pro-employer amendments to labour laws.
- Improving the legislation on Unorganized Sector Workers and implementing the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Labour in this regard.
- Scrapping of the “New Pension Scheme” and the PFRDA Act and putting in place a benefit-defined pension scheme with adequate funding by employers and government for all workers/employees ensuring at least a pension of 50 per cent of last pay drawn with indexation.
- Withdrawing the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill; providing social security to unorganized transport workers.
- Ensuring recognition of trade unions through secret ballot and protection of trade union rights.
- Adopting an effective scheme for workers’ participation in management in both public and private sector;
- Discouraging contractualisation and casualisation of work;
- Ensuring equal remuneration for women workers in all areas of work;
- Strict implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act.
- Implementing paid maternity leave of 26 weeks,

(from the CPI(M) Election Manifesto,
17th Lok Sabha 2019)

Vote CPI(M)



Defeat the BJP alliance

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CPI(M) and the Left**

For an Alternative Secular Government

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