

Nationwide Protest on 22nd May 2020

08/06/2020 08:27 by admin

Joint Statement by Central Trade Unions released on 15th May 2020

Fight Back Attempts of Draconian Changes in Labour Laws

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The joint platform of Central Trade Unions in their meeting held on 14th May 2020 took note of the critical situation for the working people in the country during the Lock down period and decided to enhance united actions to meet the challenge.

Taking shelter under the umbrella of COVID-19 Pandemic, every day the Govt. is taking one or other decisions to attack the working class and common people of the country who are already in deep distress and miseries in the midst of lockdown in the country. The Trade Unions independently and unitedly have made several representations to the Prime Minister and Labour Minister in this regard as well as about the rampant violations of the government's own directives/advisories in regard to payment of full wages to workers during lock down and non-termination of employment but in vain. Similarly all the announcements made by the government in regard to ration distribution, even meager cash transfer to women and senior citizens, etc have failed at the ground level and did not reach the majority of the beneficiaries.

As the mass of the working people have been subjected to inhuman sufferings owing to loss of jobs, loss of wages, eviction from residences etc. reducing them to hungry non-entities in the process of 48 days lockdown, the Govt. of the day at the centre is aggressively moving to push the working people into virtual slavery. In desperation the migrant workers have been walking for several hundreds of miles on roads, on railway tracks, through fields and jungles to reach their homes with several precious lives having been lost on the way due to hunger, exhaustion and accidents. But even after three spells of lockdown, all announcements of Govt. including the latest one on 14th May 2020 did nothing for relieving the common people and workers from the miseries they are suffering except making tall claims and statements far away from truth, displaying cruel insensitivity to the miseries and distress of majority of the populace. Now the Government at the centre, in a most dubious manner, taking advantage of prolonged lockdown period, has been targeting the rights of the workers and the trade unions towards abrogation of labour rights. It has taken the strategy of letting loose their pliant state governments to take such anti-worker and anti-people autocratic measures and many other state governments are being made to follow the same path to the detriment of the rights and livelihood of workers. The advisories to this effect are being sent to the state Governments from the Ministry of Labour and Employment Government of India.

UP government has brought a draconian ordinance titled "Uttar Pradesh Temporary Exemption for certain labour laws ordinance 2020" under the guise of facilitating economic activities. With one stroke 38 laws are made defunct for 1000 days (almost three years) and the remaining are only section 5 of Payment of Wages Act 1934, Construction Workers Act 1996, Compensation Act 1993 and Bonded Labour Act 1976 which remain functional. Those laws made defunct include Trade Union Act, Industrial Disputes Act, Act on Occupational Safety and Health, Contract Labour Act, Interstate Migrant Labour Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Maternity Benefit Act etc

Madhya Pradesh Government has brought drastic changes in Factories Act, Contract Act and Industrial Dispute Act in a manner where the employers will be empowered to hire and fire the labour at their will; right to dispute raising and grievance redressal will be put on ban ; the contractors will not be required to obtain license for supplying labour upto 49 persons and hence will function without any regulation and control; inspection will be virtually withdrawn and the entire enforcement machinery is put under freeze making whatever law is in vogue and basic rights of the workers on wages, compensation, safety etc absolutely meaningless. Not only that, the employers were also exempted from payment of Rs 80/- per labourer to Madhya Pradesh Labour Welfare Board. The Shop and Establishment Act is

amended to let the shops function from 6 am to 12 at night that means 18 hours at a go by MP government.

Gujarat government has also taken this illegal decision of increasing working hours from 8 to 12 hrs and also desires to go the UP government way to suspend several laws for 1200 days. The Govts of Assam and Tripura and several others have been actively preparing to take the same route. This retrograde anti-worker move came in the second stage after 8 state governments(Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar and Punjab) have enhanced the daily working hours from eight hours to 12 hours through executive order in violation of the Factories Act, taking advantage of the lockdown situation. These draconian measures are not only to facilitate more brutal and cruel exploitation of workers without their rights for collective bargaining , dispute over proper wages, safety at work place and guarantee of social security etc, but also to throw them in to conditions of slavery, in the interests of more profiteering despite continuing economic slowdown. Women and vulnerable sections will be more exploited in terms of forced labour.

All this means that the workers are to be used as bonded labour without any rights for sheer exploitation in the interest of capital without any guarantee of wages, safety and healthcare, social security and above all human dignity only to benefit those who maximize their profits on the blood and sweat of workers. This is against the basic tenets of human rights. Indian working class is sought to be pushed back into British Era. The trade union movement cannot accept such nefarious design lying down and resolves to fight back unitedly with all their might with determination to defeat the anti worker anti people policies, of which these are a part. We have to mount resistance against such design of imposing slavery through countrywide struggle in the days to come.

The CTUs note with satisfaction that already protests have been organized jointly by the workers and trade unions against such brutal and draconian anti-people and anti-worker measures in numerous states and industries, reflecting the fighting mood of the working people.

In this background, to begin with, the joint platform of Central Trade Unions has decided to observe nationwide protest day against the anti worker and anti people onslaughts of the government on 22nd May 2020. The national level leaders of the trade unions would organize day long hunger strike at Gandhi Samadhi, Rajghat, Delhi. Simultaneous protest actions would be jointly organized in all the states. There will be lakhs of petitions from the unions and members to the Govt. then onwards.

The demands include, immediate relief to stranded workers for safe reaching to their homes, food to be made available to all, universal coverage of Ration distribution, ensure wages to all of the lock down period, cash transfer to all unorganized labour force(registered or unregistered or self employed), withdraw DA freeze to central government employees & CPSEs and DR freeze to pensioners, stop surrendering of live sanctioned posts. In the meanwhile the state wise and sector wise issue based ongoing actions have to be intensified and with the determination and perspective of heightening the united struggle to halt the retrograde policies of trampling the hard won labour rights by the Govt through nationwide strike action in the days to come.

The CTUs have also decided to send joint representation to ILO in regard to the violations being committed by Govt of India in regard to all the international commitments on labour standards and human rights. The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Federations calls upon to make the programme of Nationwide Protest day a massive success throughout the country while maintaining the norms of physical distancing and also upholding social solidarity.

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