



India: Farmers' victory against Modi government

Javiad Imran Thu, 02/12/2021 - 08:47

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After a year of courageous struggle, Indian farmers have humbled India's "strongman" Narendra Modi. Modi had to broadcast to the nation that he intended to repeal the neoliberal agricultural laws.

Hundreds of thousands have been striking and blockading to force the government, and the big agrarian capitalists it serves, to retreat, persisting in their actions despite heavy weather and the ravages of Covid-19. Even under these circumstances, the government's police continued to brutally torture and arrest them. More than 700 peasants were martyred.

Despite all the repression and violence, the Modi government not only failed to halt the small farmers' actions but also failed in its policy of divide and rule. Despite all such attempts, the government failed to split the farmers' leadership via a series of negotiations which ultimately proved fruitless. Likewise, Modi's lying propaganda, presenting the law as a step forward for economic development and a fairer society, failed.

Instead, the farmers' movement, supported by farm labourers, demonstrated that a united struggle can win. It was supported by labour unions, students' and women's organisations from all over the country. Many protests held in solidarity with the farmers' sit-in were joined by workers, students and women. In these circumstances, the farmers' movement became a beacon of hope not only for peasants from all over India but also for the Muslims, targeted by Hindu chauvinist state governments as well as Delhi.

Earlier this year, on Indian Republic Day, January 22, millions of farmers marched through Delhi and occupied the iconic Red Fort. After this, the farmers' movement spread to Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the country. Attempts to crush it failed. As a result, large numbers of farmers in other states took to the streets and students and workers also joined in, expressing their solidarity with this struggle.

In his address to the nation on Friday, November 19, Modi announced: "Today, I have come to tell you, the whole country, that we have decided to withdraw all three agricultural laws. In the Parliament session starting later this month, we will complete the constitutional process to repeal these three agricultural laws."

The controversial laws included abolishing the minimum support price for farm produce. According to the law, sales and pricing were to be determined by the market, enabling larger private capitalist farmers and the corporate sector to set prices. Small and medium sized farmers realised that this would lead to a veritable economic massacre, with hoarding and other tactics by pro-Modi businesses.

Similarly, farmers were demanding the withdrawal of the law that ended free electricity supplies to small farmers. Finally, they demanded legally guaranteed fair prices for all agricultural products. As long as these demands were not met, they would continue their sit-in. This shows how the struggle has raised the political understanding of the farmers' movement.

Although the anti-farmer bills were supposedly introduced in the name of abolishing feudal relations in the countryside, in reality, they strengthened the role of middlemen by allowing trade between the states and relaxing the grip on stockpiling. Billionaires like Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, Asia's richest men according to Bloomberg's Index, eagerly supported Modi's "reforms" because they meant greatly increased profits from agriculture. As a result of these "reforms", food prices have soared and the cost of living for workers has increased. The plight of the urban and rural

poor, who already spent most of their income on food, was made worse.

The announcement of the repeal was naturally enough a cause for celebration but was also treated with caution since Modi's government has often cheated protesters once their mobilisations dispersed. The farmers, therefore, refused to heed Modi's call to end the blockades. They declared that they would continue their sit-in on the city boundary of Delhi, until the Bill for repeal of these laws had been passed by the Lok Sabha (the Indian parliament) and other demands to secure peasants' incomes had been met.

Elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and other states are the immediate reason why the Modi government withdrew the laws. There is intense hatred among farmers against Modi's government in these states because of the severe effects of the changes on workers and urban and rural poor. Modi and his party thought that in this atmosphere of anger and hatred, big election losses were likely.

From all this, it is clear how deeply the farmers' movement has affected other layers of society as well. This victory shows that other struggles against the repressive Modi government are possible and can be won.

The need now is to warn the farmers that, even if the Modi government repeals these laws through the Lok Sabha, it will try to reintroduce them in a different guise because India's biggest prize for Indian and foreign billionaires is agriculture. Developing capitalist agriculture and a section of capitalists based on this sector, is a key part of the strategy to develop Indian capitalism and its role on the world.

It is not only Modi that is looking to the upcoming elections. The Congress Party and the reformist Communist parties now want to use the success of the farmers to win seats. The latter believe that Modi's BJP can be defeated through an electoral alliance with Congress. This strategy is wrong for two reasons. First, an electoral alliance with the traditional party of the Indian bourgeoisie would only mean political subordination to the alternative party of the capitalists. Second, the elections must be seen as a means for the independent mobilisation of the workers and the peasants, women, youth, Muslims, and all nationally and socially oppressed sectors against the BJP's rule.

The successful farmers' struggle, led by the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC), has made it clear that only a militant anti-neoliberal movement, rooted in the oppressed sections of society, connected with the workers, the peasants and the poor in the cities and the countryside, can defeat Modi's highly reactionary government.

After the crushing of the Delhi riots and the movement against the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019, and the imprisonment of anti-Hindutva activists, the farmers' movement emerged as a powerful alternative to the Modi government. Its victory is a big step forward, but there is a need to unite with the workers, Muslims and the Dalit movement which, along with other demands of the farmers, continue the struggle against the Modi government on the CCA, Labour Code, Kashmir and other issues and offer an alternative programme to Modi.

The struggle against the government and its neoliberal policies needs to expand beyond the limits that Indian capitalism sets to all fundamental improvement of wages, education and health services, not to speak of the rights of women and the nationally and communally oppressed. It is clear that Modi's government can be defeated; but for this, the working class needs a political party with a programme which can turn today's struggles into a struggle against capitalism.

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