

Solidarity with the General Strike in India

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Since the morning of November 26, a massive general strike is sweeping across India. Trade Unions expect up to 250 million participants. The industrial action is accompanied by mass protests of farmers and rural workers against, the Farm Laws, new draconian laws which are supposed to (de)regulate work on the countryside. In preparation and implementation of the general strike, numerous national associations and regional organisations have joined together in the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs).

Politically, they represent the full spectrum. They are associated with the bourgeois-nationalist Congress Party, the different communist parties or represent independent, sometimes more radical, class-struggle organisations. Not surprisingly, however, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the "trade union" arm of the ruling Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party; BJP) is not calling for the action. It has once again revealed itself as an entirely yellow federation of scabs.

Historical Attack

The general strike on November 26, like those of recent years, which mobilised more than 100 million workers, is directed against a fundamental attack by the capitalist class and the Modi government. Four new labour laws were brought into the Lok Sabha (parliament) since 2019 to replace 44 laws previously in force. Basically, they are intended to put aside once and for all the remnants of the relationship between capital and wage labour established after India's independence. Although this process began with the neo-liberal turn of the Congress Party and the opening of the Indian economy after 1980, it has accelerated since the outbreak of the global crisis in 2007 and the coming to power of the Hindu-chauvinist BJP in 2014. This is why key factions of big business have turned away from Congress, the traditional party of the Indian bourgeoisie, and, like imperialist big businesses, see the BJP as the new trustee for their interests.

The Hindutva ideology, according to which India belongs exclusively to Hindus and in which religious minorities such as Muslims, indigenous people, the "lower" castes, women and sexual minorities are to be second-class citizens, provides the cement to harness large sections of the middle classes, petty-bourgeoisie and backward workers to the carts of capital. The "biggest democracy in the world" forms the façade for the increasingly authoritarian, bonapartist form of rule of the Modi regime, which itself relies on extremely reactionary and fascist mass organisations. In recent years, it has intensified attacks on democratic rights and brutally cracked down on protests against the nationalist "reform" of registration and citizenship. In many places, like Delhi, BJP party leaders provoked pogroms against Muslims and protesters. India annexed Kashmir and finally ended its formally autonomous status. The "reform" of the labour laws represents one, if not the core, policy of the Modi government's policies. Here are just a few central aspects:

- The new labour law allows for the immediate dismissal of up to 300 workers without further explanation and without the approval of the authorities. Previously, this number was set at 100 workers. This abolishes

important restrictions on corporate arbitrariness in small and medium-sized enterprises, which has also increased in recent years.

- The 1948 Factory Act previously applied to all enterprises with more than 10 employees, provided they were supplied with electricity, and to those with more than 20 that did not. Now, these numbers are being doubled, to 20 and 40 employees respectively.
- This method permeates many other provisions of the new labour laws. In the first place, the minimum number of regular workers to whom they apply has been increased significantly, often to twice or thrice the original number. This applies in particular to minimum standards for occupational safety.
- The proportion of temporary workers among the workforce has also been increased.

All these measures are aimed at expanding the freedom of entrepreneurs. The extensive disenfranchisement that already characterises the situation of a large part of the Indian working class, which is forced into various forms of contract work (such as day labour, temporary work, precarious employment, etc.), is to be further expanded. Previously "regular" workers are also to be covered by it.

At the same time, these measures also cast a significant light on the business model of Indian capitalism. The semi-colonial economy, which is dependent on the world market and the international financial markets, can only secure the profitability of small and medium sized capitals if they can continue to exploit the labour force to the extreme, that is, buy and utilise it below its reproduction costs. Otherwise, they would not be able to stay in the market to meet the demands of competitive conditions dictated by multinational big business from the imperialist countries. At the same time, this form of super-exploitation also favours the Indian big business, which in turn struggles for larger shares of the world market.

This expansion in itself is already severely hampering the possibilities of union organisation, which new legal restrictions are designed to limit further.

The attacks on labour laws are also complemented by drastic deterioration for the rural population, that is, for the poorest strata of farmers and farm workers. This is also the reason why the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) supports the general strike and combines it with days of action on November 26 and 27.

In addition to calling for the abolition of all reactionary reforms of the labour law, the unions are also demanding a monthly state subsidy of 7,500 rupees (about 85 euros) for all families who do not have to pay income tax, as well as 10 kilograms of free food for all those in need. These and similar demands illustrate that the Corona pandemic and the capitalist crisis are plunging millions of workers and peasants into misery and hardship and, indeed, that they are fighting existential poverty, hunger and death.

International solidarity and perspective

The general strike of the Indian trade unions demands our solidarity - worldwide. At the same time, especially against the background of several mass strikes in recent years, it makes it clear that the workers' movement and all movements of oppressed people against the Hindutva regime need a strategy that goes beyond impressive actions that are limited to just one day. The Modi government will not be stopped by this. The last few years have shown this. As recent months have also shown, it will try to use the pandemic and the crisis to carry out further attacks.

It is therefore a question of countering the permanent attack with a permanent struggle of resistance; to prepare and carry out an indefinite general strike against the labour laws and for a minimum income and

minimum wage for everyone in the city and the countryside.

The unions and peasant organisations must face up to such a task and call for the formation of action committees in the factories, the districts, the communities and the countryside, that is, form organs of struggle that include all strata of wage earners and small and medium-sized peasants, regardless of religion, nationality, caste, gender or sexual orientation.

In the face of state repression and reactionary Hindu-chauvinist associations, such a strike would also have to build up self-defence structures.

A political general strike that permanently paralyzes the country would inevitably raise the question of power and thus the possibility and necessity of moving from the defensive to the offensive. Admittedly, this requires more than just union resistance. It requires linking this struggle to the struggle against all forms of oppression, linking the struggle against the BJP government to the struggle against capitalism, building a revolutionary political party of the working class based on a programme of transitional demands and fighting for a workers' and peasants' government that establishes council rule, expropriates big business and introduces a democratically planned economy.

At present, there is no political force in India advocating such a programme on a national scale. The various communist parties have in fact long since abandoned the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, and the radical left is fragmented and often disoriented. Overcoming the political crisis therefore requires more than support for the mobilisations of the working class and social movements. All those who seek a socialist and internationalist response also face the task of entering into discussion about the programmatic foundations of a revolutionary party and starting to build it.

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