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India

Against the Rule of Capital; For the General Strike

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The industrial strike initially called for 28 February is all set to become a general strike. For the last two years, the UPA government has virtually refused even to negotiate with workers and their unions over any issue. Meanwhile, working class militancy has been picking up after a long period. In India, only about seven per cent of the working class is organised. Demands for union recognition have been at the heart of a number of struggles, especially in certain sectors such as the growing automobile sector. Bank employees, coal miners, forest workers (unorganised till recently, and not recognised as part of the working class by the government) and a variety of others have entered the lists with their own demands.

For a long time, India has been trumpeting about high growth rates. Contrary to all claims, however, there has been no trickle-down effect. The bulk of the labour force remains badly paid, without health care, without education, without even the minimum daily wage promised by the government. Meanwhile, over the last few years, the numbers of millionaires and billionaires has been steadily rising.

Among the general demands, common to all, there is the demand that the proposed Pension Bill must be withdrawn. In the name of "regulating" Pension funds, the bill is a move to make pensions dependent on volatile market driven financial instruments. This will in fact benefit financial sectors at the cost of workers.

Peasant associations have joined in, demanding that the government must buy from them at a minimum base price, instead of forcing them to sell at a loss to profiteers.

It is estimated that as many as 100 million workers might take part in the general strike. The ruling class is not taking it easy. In West Bengal, where the CITU, the CPI(M) dominated union, is strong, the Trinamul Congress government has announced that no government employee will be given leave for any reason on 28 February. In other words, taking part in the strike can be met with docking a day's pay, or even causing a break in service and losing seniority. The TMC has also announced that it will counter the strike actively. What this means concretely was shown yesterday, 22 February, when a CPI(M) rally was attacked by TMC thugs, and two CPI(M) leaders murdered. One had old charges. This was used by the Chief Minister to claim that internal conflict within CPI(M) had led to the death. But all accounts agree that it was a TMC force that organised the attack, and literally smashed the man to death.

A government that is unwilling to discuss minimum rights and dues with workers is willing to discuss the financial problems of Kingfisher airlines. The priorities are clear. Only united and repeated strikes by the workers can make the government yield ground.

The New Trade Union Initiative, in its Calcutta General Council meeting of January 2012, adopted a resolution supporting the strike which said in part:

NTUI has consistently demanded equal wage for equal work, strict implementation of the eight hour work day and universal social security in order to articulate comprehensively the interests of working people as a whole.

The NTUI welcomes the inclusion of demands of equal pay for equal work for contract workers and will continue to strive for the inclusion of the demands of all sectors of the working class, while also supporting the 10 demands formulated by the Central trade unions in their call and agitation for the strike.

â€¢ Support the strike

â€¢ Oppose the Pension Bill

â€¢ Fight for equal wages for equal work

â€¢ Fight for implementation of the eight hour day

â€¢ Build democratic, multi-tendency trade unions and organise the unorganised as the best route to opposing the exploitation by capital

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