

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4200>



India

Make the One Day All-India Strike on 2 September a Huge Success

- IV Online magazine - 2015 - IV488 - September 2015 -

Publication date: Tuesday 1 September 2015

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

With the electoral victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which got a majority in the lower house of Parliament all by itself, a deeply right wing government is well-settled in power. A little over one year after they have come to power, this government is going to engage in its first test of strength with the working class. We have long ago characterised the BJP, and standing behind it, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, as a fascist force. But this does not mean that the day after they took power a Hitler-regime was imposed in India. But the chipping away at democracy continues daily. Daily, also proceed two efforts, each in its own way, but both with consistent government support – one is the imposition of Hindutva, and the other the politics of imposing the interests of capital.

But the class struggle dimension is not often publicly recognised, because there the bourgeois liberals and the fascists are in essential agreement. So the common area between liberals (who might claim to oppose Hindutva) and the fascists is that in the name of “reforms” for “development”, profit rate must be increased. That is why, we need to discuss closely the one day All-India Strike called by the trade unions for 2 September, 2015.

Why the Strike?

On 26 May 2015, at a National Convention held in the Mavlankar Auditorium at the call of 11 Central Trade Unions as well as 50 national federations of Central Government employees, a one day strike call was issued in order to resist the anti worker-peasant, pro-bosses’ profit policies of the one year old BJP government.

The trade unions had presented a Ten point charter of demands at the time of the UPA government. All-India strikes have occurred thrice, in 2010, 2012 and 2013 over those demands. [1] Just as the UPA government chose to remain silent over those demands, so has today’s national Democratic Alliance government under Modi decided to ignore the demands. Both NDA and UPA have severe objections to implementing any of the recommendations of the Indian Labour Conferences.

Accordingly, we first need to look at the charters of demands, produced by the Central Trade Unions as well as the Central Government Employees Federations. Whenever workers call strikes, the bourgeois newspapers, the television channels, all raise a tremendous hue and cry – these people are damaging the economy. Attempts are made to stoke up conflicts between the poorest paid workers and those slightly better off. So we begin by closely examining the demands.

The 12 point Charter of the Central Trade Unions:

1. Urgent measures for containing price-rise through universalisation of public distribution system and banning speculative trade in commodity market.
2. Containing unemployment through concrete measures for employment generation.
3. Strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measure for violation for labour laws.

Make the One Day All-India Strike on 2 September a Huge Success

4. Universal social security cover for all workers.
5. Minimum wages of not less than Rs. 15,000/- per month with provisions of indexation.
6. Assured enhanced pension not less than Rs. 3000/- P.M. for the entire working population.
7. Stoppage of disinvestment in Central/State Public Sector Undertakings.
8. Stoppage of contractisation in permanent perennial work and payment of same wage and benefits for contract workers as regular workers for same and similar work.
9. Removal of all ceilings on payment and eligibility of bonus, provident fund; increase the quantum of gratuity.
10. Compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days from the date of submitting applications; and immediate ratification of ILO Convention C 87 and C 98.
11. Against Labour Law Amendments
12. Against Foreign Direct Investment in Railways, Insurance and Defence.

The 10 Point Demands of the Central Government Employees Federations:

1. Effect wage revision of the Central Government Employees from 01.01.2014 accepting memorandum of the staff side JCM; ensure 5-year wage revision in future; grant interim relief and merger of 100% of DA; Include Gramin Dak Sevaks [2] within the ambit of 7th CPC. Settle all anomalies of 6th CPC.
2. No Privatisation, PPP or FDI in Railways, Defence Establishment and no corporatization of Postal services.
3. No ban on creation of new posts. Fill up all vacant posts.
4. Scrap PFRDA Act and re-introduce the defined benefit statutory pension scheme.
5. No outsourcing, contractisation, privatization of governmental functions; withdraw the proposed move to close down the printing presses, the publications, form stores and stationery departments and medical stores Depots; regularize the existing daily-rated/casual and contract workers and absorption of trained apprentices.
6. Revive the JCM functioning at all level as an effective negotiating forum for settlement of the demands of the Central Government Employees.
7. Remove arbitrary ceiling on compassionate appointment.
8. No labour reforms which are inimical to the interest of the workers.

9. Remove the ceiling on payment on bonus

10. Ensure five promotions in the serve career.

Some general issues can be understood from these demands. Generally, of course, unions raise demands in the interests of their members. But some of these demands are demands that go beyond union members to serve the interests of the entire working class, indeed of all toiling people.

The Public Distribution System

The governmental logic behind gutting the countrywide PDS has been, why should the government pay “subsidies “ to those who have the ability to pay? By this “logic”, a division has been created between those who are ostensibly “above” the poverty level and those who are below it. A huge part of the population has been removed from the rationing system. We say – the government must increase its revenues by increasing direct taxes on the rich, on companies, etc. Using that wealth, every human being living in India must be given rice, wheat, pulses, soap, and other essential goods through the rationing network.

We feel that if Mukesh or Anil Ambani [3] are willing to stand in queue for the ration or to eat the quality of rice obtained from the ration shop, let them also get their ration cards and draw their rations. The “subsidy” the government would have to bear in order to set up a universal rationing system, will have to be funded by hiking taxes on the Ambanis, the Adanis, the Tatas and the Birlas.

Job creation

Only the state can afford to create employment opportunities without everyday looking at the rate of profit. So it is through public investments that employment can be generated and the problem of unemployment tackled. Not only the second demand of the Central trade unions, but also other demands actually have that thrust.

Minimum wages Rs 15000, Minimum pension Rs. 3000

Over this demand, a fraud is being perpetrated to divide workers and toiling people generally. The argument is, if wages are raised, the cost of living will also go up. If the wages of rural workers is raised, then prices of cereals, lentils, vegetables will go up immediately. Services will cost more. Domestic workers (still called servants in most Indian languages) wages will rise [this is a threat directed at the better paid wage earners, who hire part time or even full time domestic help]. The hike in the wages of transport workers will also mean a hike in transport costs.

First of all, everyone has the right to live a decent life. So regardless of exactly what the impact will be on workers with somewhat higher incomes, the demand for minimum wages and pensions for all is the most socially just demand that one can think of.

Secondly, these two demands are not isolated ones. There is a full charter of demands taking into consideration all

working people. The demands also include demands for wage rise of workers and employees of the organised sector. What is ignored, when the better paid workers are instigated against this demand, is the reality that in today's India, in fact less than 10 per cent of the workers are organised. These are indeed core demands that will have an effect on all the demands of the workers. In today's working class movement in India, the importance of these demands simply cannot be overstressed.

Further, it must be realised that a large part of this unorganised labour force, workers in construction industry, domestic workers, or for that matter workers under contract in numerous industries, do not work under the same owner all their lives. So the central thrust of these demands is not directed to the individual capitalist or boss, as it is directed to the state as the collective voice of the ruling class. It is for the state, rather than any private employer, to guarantee a monthly pension to all workers after they retire.

Globalization and Its Impact

Next come the demands related to globalization and the attacks on working class due to globalization:

These include an opposition to the reduction of permanent jobs and the increase of contractisation. It is worth looking at how massively this has grown in different sectors. Through the introduction of the so-called PPP model, many jobs even in core government sectors have been farmed out to private companies, especially contractors. Vital aspects of the economy are affected. As a result, private profits grow while losses are off-loaded on the gutted, exhausted public sector. At the same time, through contractisation and privatisation, an increasing number of workers are pushed into precarious conditions of existence. For example, in the educational sector, even in higher education (general colleges, universities, and technical colleges), teachers hired through short term contracts (at most one year) now amount to 40 per cent of all teachers. An increasing part of the other staff (clerical, technical, security, etc) are also being turned into contract, often short term staff.

Finally there are basic democratic rights issues, notably the demand that the right to form trade unions be accepted rather than hampered, and that the ILO conventions 87, 98 and 104 be recognised and implemented. Through these conventions, India must promulgate laws that would make impossible the current scenario, where union-busting laws like the Essential Services Maintenance Act are passed and implemented. Government employees must also be given the full and unhampered right to form unions and the right to strike.

Along with these, there are demands relating to already implemented as well as proposed labour law reforms, but so important are these, that they merit a separate discussion.

Before that, however, one core issue must be addressed. In 1991, when P.V. Narasima Rao was the Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh the Finance Minister, India embarked on an open, full-fledged policy of economic liberalisation, under the heading of globalization. Ever since then, we have been given certain promises. At the heart of all those promises was one central argument – that globalization, or the reduction of state control and the increase of economic liberalism, would result in an immense development with a trickle-down effect, so that the poor too would benefit. After a quarter century, the time has surely come to take stock of the concrete effects.

After between ten and fifteen years of the new policies, i.e., in 2001-05, according to the estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the average Gross Domestic Product rose by 6.5 percent per year. But wages rose by 2.6%. In 2006 wages rose by merely 0.4 per cent, and in 2007 they actually declined by 0.6 per cent. But even the word wages can be confusing, when the division is such that the wages of bureaucrats, managers, are piled together with those of truck drivers, brick layers, or domestic help. A few other components help us to understand the

distribution of income (wages, profit, all) better.

1990-91 2010-11

Private Cars 1,80,000 29,00,000

People travelling by planes 89,00,000 5,70,00,000

Cabinet Secretary's wages 30,000 90,000

(Monthly, in INR)

Annual salary of the Tata Steel

Managing Director (in INR) 3.78 million 41 million

In other words, "development" has indeed occurred. It has made the Indian wealthy more wealthy. It has enabled a few within the Indian capitalist class to break through right to the top of the big capitalists globally, and it has meant prosperity for the top 10 to 15 per cent of the Indian population. The clearest gross estimate of how globalization has meant gains, and for whom, come from two sources. We can look at the Income Tax and property tax records; and we can look at the reports on worldwide wealth, including the aforementioned Forbes list of the rich.

These show that in 2009, the top 100 Indian rich had total wealth amounting to 276 billion US dollars. In the same year, the top 100 Chinese rich had wealth amounting to 170 billion US dollars. Yet if the GDP is computed taking into account relative purchasing power, (GDP- PPP) then the Indian GDP was less than half that of its Chinese counterpart. In other words, despite the rhetoric of India being a democracy and how that makes it difficult to garner profits while in China supposedly the dictatorial rule makes everything easier, it is in India that the wealthy have a tighter grip over the distribution of wealth.

So the strike is not because of any shady and manipulative attitude of the union leaders, as bourgeois propaganda tells us all the time. Nor is there any adventurism. What exists is a deep anger among the toiling people, with which has come together in recent times a determination to fight against the proposals for labour law reform by the Modi Government.

[1] See <http://www.radicalsoci alist.in/arti...> ; <http://www.radicalsoci alist.in/arti...> ; <http://www.internationalviewpoint.o...> for Radical Socialist statements and assessments.

[2] rural postal employees

[3] . Mukesh Ambani is possibly India's richest individual. Forbes magazine puts his net real worth at US\$18.9 billion on 26/8/2015 <http://www.forbes.com/profile/mukes...>. His younger brother Anil has been identified by Forbes as India's 19th richest man, with US\$2.5 billion on the same day. <http://www.forbes.com/profile/anil-...> (both last accessed on 26/8/2015).