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To,

All the Zonal/Divisional/State/Regional Units

Dear Comrades,

NATIONWIDE PROTEST BY JOINT PLATFORM OF CENTRAL TRADE UNIONS ON 22 MAY

The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to a serious crisis in India. What started off as a health crisis soon became an economic and humanitarian crisis of huge proportions. Poor migrant workers and workers of the unorganised sector became the worst sufferers due to the sudden and unplanned lockdown. The sudden closure of factories and establishments with hardly four hours' notice rendered lakhs of workers jobless. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), 122 million workers have already lost their jobs. The CMIE has also estimated that for the week ending 17th of May, the unemployment rate is as high as 24%. While loss of jobs and livelihoods has become a serious problem, many workers are dying due to hunger, exhaustion and accidents. The NDA government at the centre has however stubbornly refused to recognise the problems of the workers. Rather than taking some genuine measures to ameliorate the suffering of the working people, the government has launched a savage attack on the hard-earned rights of the workers.

The government at the Centre and many States have utilised the Corona crisis as an opportunity to attack workers. It all started with an attack on the DA of central government employees. Recently, the BJP government of UP promulgated two ordinances nullifying 35 of the 38 labour laws in the state for a period of three years and extending the working day from 8 to 12 hours. The Factories Act 1948, the Minimum Wages Act 1948, the Trade Unions Act 1926 and all major labour laws were annulled in one fell swoop. The laws dealing with minimum wages, with safety measures and health and well being of workers were denied to them by executive fiat. The BJP ruled Madhya Pradesh government has also decided that all new industries will be exempt from the labour laws for a period of 1000 days. The BJP government in Gujarat has decided that labour laws will be made ineffective for 1200 days. Following this, the governments of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar and Punjab have enhanced the daily working hours from 8 to 12 hours through executive order.

The implication of the exemption of the labour laws is that the workers cannot demand drinking water, first aid boxes and protective equipment. They will not be able to demand such basic necessities as cleanliness, ventilation, lighting, canteens and restrooms! And all

this at a time when sanitisation of the workplaces, provision of masks and safety equipment to workers, enforcing social distancing etc. are part of the established protocol to prevent the spread of the coronavirus!

The Corona pandemic has wrought havoc on the Indian economy. The Indian economy was already in dire straits due to demonetisation and tardy implementation of GST. Now the crisis has intensified manifold. The poor, marginalised, vulnerable and unorganised workers are the worst sufferers. Therefore, there were great expectations of a stimulus package from the government for the revival of the economy and for providing some relief to the workers. These expectations were further raised when the Prime Minister announced that a Rs.20 lakh crore package, amounting to 10% of the GDP, would be released. All hopes were dashed when it turned out after the Finance Minister's press briefings that this was not a stimulus package but a credit expansion package. Absolutely no measures were taken to alleviate the suffering of the people. It seems the migrant and unorganised workers are nowhere in the radar of government policy.

The so-called stimulus package has only laid out a road map for wholesale privatisation of the Indian economy. It is strange that while the Prime Minister speaks on the virtues of "Atmanirvar Bharat" (Self reliant India), his government has rolled down red carpet to welcome FDI even in the most sensitive sectors of the economy. Water, Space, Forests, Rivers everything is being privatised. Disinvestment has already made inroads into public sector general insurance companies. The government has already announced that LIC will be listed in the stock market. The writing on the wall is therefore crystal clear. Insurance employees must therefore remain prepared for a grim struggle in the days ahead. The struggle cannot remain confined to the four walls of public sector insurance industry; it has to be broad based and all encompassing. The seriousness of the situation has forced even the BMS, the trade union loyal to the ruling party, to voice its opposition.

The Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions is observing Nationwide Protest Day on 22nd May against these anti-worker and anti-people policies of the government. Joint Demonstrations are being planned across India while maintaining the norms of physical distancing. We call upon our units to join the protest demonstrations wherever possible in solidarity with the call of the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions.

With Greetings,

Comradely Yours


General Secretary