

DECLARATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION OF WORKERS

Constitution Club Annexe

30th January, 2023, New Delhi

This National Convention of Workers being held in New Delhi on 30th January, Mahatma Gandhi's Martyrdom Day, at the call of the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Independent Sectoral National Federations/Associations representing all sections of the working people of our country, takes stock of the alarming situation before the workers and all sections of common people in our country, because of the policies being pursued by the Modi led BJP government at the Centre. These policies are, as we have noted earlier, not only anti worker, anti peasant and anti people, but are also anti national. They have proved to be disastrous for our national economy and for the unity and integrity of our country. This National Convention has met here on this Day to decide the future course of joint actions to 'Save the Country and to Save the People' from these disastrous policies.

We, who have gathered here, represent workers from almost all sectors of our national economy: the organised sector, the unorganised sector, the public sector and the private sector in the industry, services and infrastructure; we represent the construction workers, the workers engaged in building hydropower and other infrastructure projects, the scheme workers, beedi workers, the tendu leave growers, contract workers, the loading and unloading workers, the workers engaged in exploration, extraction and transportation of oil and gas, the coal mine workers and the workers engaged in various other mines, the workers in the fisheries sector, the street vendors, domestic workers, home based workers, in carpet weaving, fire-works, the plantation, agricultural and horticulture workers, the gig workers, the IT and ITes employees, the bank and insurance employees, state and central government employees, defence employees, telecom and postal employees, electricity employees, port and dock workers, transport workers including in road, water, air and railways, health and education sector employees, those from government press and many more sectors in the scheduled and unscheduled categories. We also represent those engaged in the field of art, culture, and science, and those working in the print and electronic media and so on.

When we look back and take stock of the more than 8 years of the BJP Rule, since 2014, it presents the picture of a government driven onslaught on the lives and livelihood of the people and their basic rights pushing overwhelming majority of our people into unimaginable miseries, distress and destitution. Job losses and unemployment have been rising unabated. It began with Demonetisation which resulted in serious impact on the livelihood. The government should bring white paper on it. Poverty has aggravated perpetuating further economic slowdown. This in turn is leading to further job losses and worsening unemployment, particularly among the youth. Unrelenting price rise and declining real wages added to the miseries of the common masses and rising hunger index. We have publicly demonstrated, organised sectoral and all-India strikes to draw attention of the Government to our issues, but this incumbent government is totally unresponsive to the concerns of the people.

Can we say that the Government has taken any cognizance? Not only no cognizance has been taken, the government is arrogantly and aggressively pursuing the same policies.

We are worried that our children are not getting jobs. But even government vacancies are not filled up, which is within their ambit. Many PSUs are being closed or sold to private parties, who immediately start "down-sizing", throwing several thousand workers out of employment. The contract workers have become major victims of job-loss and retrenchment. The health contract workers employed in govt. hospitals for fighting Covid are now being thrown out of their jobs even after promise of permanency. Even after Covid, when jobs are desperately needed to bring life on track, factories are being allowed to close down even illegally resulting in large scale unemployment.

We demand MGNREGA to be expanded to 200 days in a year and increase in remuneration and similar scheme to be brought in urban areas as well. But the government has drastically reduced the budgetary allocation; the number of work days has come down to less than 50 days per year; even the reduced allocation is returned unutilised. Drastic cut in budgetary allocations has been made in almost all welfare schemes and peoples-related projects.

We demand that Scheme Workers be made permanent in Government posts with a need-based minimum wage. But the Government responds with nothing more than showering flowers on them. It is nothing but a cruel joke on their exemplary work during Covid pandemic.

The home based workers constituting 3.5 crores of the work force and those in waste recycling work, domestic worker need protection as well as social security. There should be portability in ration cards and social security benefits for migrant workers. The manual registration of construction and beedi workers and similar other workers covered under welfare boards should be allowed.

We demand immediate frame of social security scheme on health and medical, life and disability, child care, maternity and education for the children of all those 28 crores registered unorganised workers on e-shram portal.

We demand universal government funded social security and pension schemes and scrapping of the retrograde market driven New Pension System (NPS) and demand restoration of old pension scheme (OPS). But the Government is moving in the opposite direction; the Finance Minister arrogantly refused to scrap the NPS. We express our support and solidarity to the movement of various forums for restoration of OPS. We demand implementation of Supreme Court judgment on EPS 95 and minimum pension in EPS 95 to be raised to Rs 8000 per month.

We demand a halt to the ongoing mass scale contractorisation and casualisation of regular and perennial work in industries; we demand same wages and benefits for contract/ casual/ outsourced workers doing the same work as regular workers. But the corporate controlled government is trying to legalise and legitimise the contractorisation of regular/ permanent work through various means.

We demand to stop privatisation of PSUs, ordnance factories, departmental undertakings, and scrapping of the National Monetisation Pipeline. But the Government has sold Air India, Pawan Hans, Airports, processing privatisation of Production units of Railways, out sourcing of more than 60% of routine nature, regular activities, the latest decision of appointing technical supervisors, section engineers on contract basis for the contract period in Railways and already made announcements for 150 Vande Bharat trains in the private sector, 500 blocks identified in coal for auction/monetisation etc. It shamelessly announces, "We will sell whatever can be sold and even that which cannot be sold". Is this not rubbing salt in our wounds? Can arrogance go further?

We want good and affordable education for our children; but the New Education Policy is brought in, that will snatch away the chances of educating our children through prohibitive costs. Large number of government and government aided schools, particularly at the primary and secondary levels remain grossly understaffed. The idea is to completely hand over public education with its infrastructure entirely to the private education business. In addition, curriculum is being distorted by changing the courses, text books and syllabus to suit the needs of the communal outfits.

We have vehemently opposed the four labour codes; instead we demanded expansion of labour rights in the face of the aggravating economic crisis and its impact on the workplaces. Totally brushing aside our opposition, the government imposed the Labour Codes, meant to push workers into slave like conditions, to satisfy their corporate masters. However, it is a fact that we made continuous resistance, at the national level as well as at the workplaces; the Labour Codes could not yet be officially notified. But unless they are scrapped, they can be notified any time.

The farmers never asked for the three Farm Laws. Through their historic struggle with the support from the working class, they have opposed the three farm laws. The Farm Laws were withdrawn, but

it was a trick as has become evident by now. The commitment on MSP and procurement has not been implemented.

The demand for tripartite Indian Labour Conference, not held since 2015, which should mandatorily be held at least once every year, as per the ILO Convention 144, is simply ignored. No regard to ILO Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work place, recent resolution to incorporate OSH and safety at work as Fundamental Rights. We have been demanding ratification of ILO Convention 87,98,189,190. Instead “One-to-One” meetings of the Central Trade Unions are organised with the Labour Minister, where he tries to sell “Labour Reforms” aggressively pushing their pro corporate agenda. The united working class movement has to combat such conspiracy head-on, through united action both at national level and workplace level.

We demand that to revive the national economy from the malice of the systemic crisis of the neoliberal order by putting more money in the hands of the common people who create our national wealth and keep the national economy running, by increasing the statutory minimum wages and expanding and universalising social security measures with government funding and other such measures. This can be done by increasing taxes on corporates, rich and the Super Rich, restoring Wealth Tax, and Succession Tax. The Government has rather come out with the idea of digital currency which could prove to be disastrous for economy.

We demand reduction of GST/indirect taxes, particularly on essentials including food, medicines and essential public utilities which have become an unbearable burden on the common people. But the Government is absolutely servile to the interests of the big corporates, domestic and foreign, and the handful Super Rich reduces taxes of Corporates and increases GST/indirect taxes!! Furthermore we demand that GST on welfare schemes be done away with.

There is continuous slowdown of the national economy, deindustrialisation and destruction of the country’s industrial base, destruction of MSMEs, loss of self reliance, increasing burdens on the overwhelming majority of our people along. On the one hand there is phenomenal increase of wealth and incomes of the big corporate class and impoverishment of the mass of the toiling people. The entire system of governance that promotes loot and plunder, of the people as well as the national economy, stands exposed.

The result is extreme and obscene inequality of income in India : top 10% and top 1% in India hold 72% and 40.5% of the total national income respectively while the share of bottom 50% has gone down to mere 3%. The resultant impact has been the alarming phenomenon of widening impoverishment of the masses. The billionaires before pandemic were 100 whereas now have increased to 166. Just 21 Indian billionaires grabbed so much huge wealth, which is more than what 70% of population own. On the other hand India is falling in all indexes like hunger, poverty, child care, women safety, freedom of expression, human rights etc.

But there is something even more ominous taking place: this Government and other state governments led by this party ruling in the centre in order to sustain their regime of loot and plunder, have been overactive to create communal polarisation by raking up issues such as Love Jihad, CAA, NRC etc. and divide the workers and the people to divert their attention from their burning issues and weaken united struggles to benefit the corporate. This is being carried out with the active support of the corporate owned mainstream media.

Writers, Intellectuals, journalists, social activists and members of the opposition are being targeted on flimsy grounds only for criticising this Government with the help of government agencies such as the ED, CBI, NIA, UAPA etc. This is aimed to create an atmosphere of terror, to silent all opposition and dissents, and sabotage democratic processes.

Is this not a Government totally against what we want? We can clearly see that whatever they do, is to the benefit of the Corporate Class, the rich people at the expense of vast work force? This ruling dispensation is not only working against the interests of workers, farmers, students, youth, women and

the other vulnerable sections of the society, against the intelligentsia etc but its policies are facilitating the loot of natural resources and the national assets by the Corporate, Indian and foreign brand. These policies are against the national interest.

The continuous united interventions and struggles against these anti-people, anti-national destructive regime by united movements of the working class both at national levels and sectoral level forcing the Government to retreat, proving that this destructive regime can be combated head-on. Through our united struggles, the privatisation process in several PSUs like BPCL, CEL, some steel plants etc could be stalled, although for the time being. The latest is the united struggle of the Maharashtra electricity employees, where the Maharashtra government was forced to retreat. Earlier, similar success could be realised through militant struggle against privatisation of the electricity sector in Jammu and Kashmir, Chandigarh, UP, Haryana and Puducherry, during the last one and half year or so. Vizag steel struggle against privatisation is going on. Through their militant united struggles, the scheme workers in various states achieved many of their demands including increase in their remuneration.

What is required is to make the workers and the people aware that their real enemy, the cause for their miseries and the miseries of the nation, is the anti-national destructive policy regime being operated by corporate-run Govt. at the centre. They have to change these destructive policies otherwise face the ouster. Working class movement is destined to discharge this task leading from frontline along the people at large. The year 2023 is the most crucial before the general elections next year.

It is a stupendous task which will require each and every one of us to work tirelessly to turn our common experience into a message to common masses to turn the tide against those in power who are pushing the nation and its people into unprecedented crises and destruction.

Keeping in view our past experiences of united struggles, this National Convention of Workers, calls upon the working people of our country to take united struggles to a higher level. We have to heighten our combat against the destructive policies of this government, both at the sectoral and national levels. The entire year of 2023 has to be a year of united campaigns and agitations to culminate into higher forms of struggle at all levels.

This National Convention of Workers, while reiterating their 14 point charter of demands, which projects the alternative to the entire gamut of the neoliberal policy regime, resolves to work in this direction and proposes to organize the following programmes:

- ✦ Month of March 2023 to May 2023 should be devoted to organize state/district/and sectoral conventions.
- ✦ Jatha programmes: Padyatras/jeep jathas/cycle jathas/motorbike jathas etc. be adopted in the conventions to be carried from June onwards.
- ✦ These mass campaigns through jatha programmes to culminate into state-level Mahapadav from 09th August the 'Quit India day'. It may also be multiple days programme as per decision of the joint state conventions.
- ✦ The sectoral struggles to be supported and developed including strike actions.

*The workers farmers unity strengthened during the farmers agitation at Delhi borders needs to be carried further. Some joint programmes would be carried in this year.

There should be review of activities after Mahapadav programme to further heighten the agitation programmes to proceed towards countrywide strike action late in the year.

**INTUC
TUCC**

**AITUC
SEWA**

**HMS
AICCTU**

**CITU
LPF**

**AIUTUC
UTUC**

And Independent National Sectoral Federations/Associations

