



WORKERS RESISTANCE

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A Report of the National Council Meeting of AICCTU Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, 10-11 July 2022 National Situation and Our Tasks



The first meeting of the national council of AICCTU was held at Coimbatore on 10 – 11 July 2022 after the all-India conference in early 2020. Due to Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns, we could not hold the meeting, despite managing to hold the meetings of Office-Bearers and the Central Working Committee (CWC) physically, in addition to some online meetings.

The most unprecedented development immediately following our conference was the Corona pandemic (Covid 19) that inflicted all countries across the globe, including India. The Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns imposed by the Modi government, especially the first one, forced unlimited miseries on the common people. In addition, the death of lakhs of people also exposed the extremely rotten condition of public health care system of our country. The country also witnessed

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unprecedented sufferings – including deaths – of migrant workers, unorganized workers and various other sections of frontline workers.

The most essential and barbarous feature of this Covid period was the Modi regime's inhuman tactics of converting the pandemic crisis – the worst ever crisis facing the humanity – into an opportunity to aggressively push its corporate, communal fascist agenda by reinforcing the corporate stranglehold over the country, the assets, the wealth, the people, and the working class.

Along with the corporate takeover, the communal stranglehold over the people and their minds continued with the Hindu/Muslim narrative fomenting communal hatred and venom, particularly targeting Muslims. It led us towards a sharper communal polarization and helped facilitate the project of building a Hindu Rashtra. The BJP's goal of communal polarization not only diverted the peoples' attention from the burning issues and dented the peoples' unity, but it also increased the influence of the BJP brand of politics on the common and poor people. There was a lot of resentment and agitations against the regime, but at the same time, the BJP's influence also seemed to have grown in this period.

Record job-loss and price-rise, along with the nose-dive of the economy, massive retrenchment, and wage cuts, all-out contractualisation of work force,

skyrocketing poverty, and inequality, have been the stories of these times. In the midst of all these, the enactment of 4 labour codes, which forced workers into slavery, marked a brutal attack on the working class.

The dismantling of all welfare boards, social security systems and replacing them with the 'e-shram Portal', the policy of monetization for wholesale privatization of all public sector undertakings and government departments including those of strategic importance like railways, defense, banks and insurance, the enactment of three Farm Acts for corporate takeover of agriculture and the land; the inauguration of the Agnipath scheme to contractualise and at the same time, to saffronise and to privatise the army of the country; the enactment of the Essential Defense Services Act (EDSA) to snatch away the defense workers' right to strike and even to protest; the strengthening of the regime of oppressive laws and diktats subverting the constitution - have all defined the Covid years. These years have also witnessed quite a bit of resistance by the people, but the expressions of resistance have been severely restricted under the pretext of Covid protocols.

Even after the passing of the worst ever pandemic, the contractual and other informal workers are being thrown out of jobs in lakhs. Many of the contractual health, scheme, sanitation, and other frontline workers, who played the role of Covid warriors

during the pandemic and who were also promised job permanency and benefits, have also been thrown out of employment. Now, the entire agenda of the RSS-BJP is embodied in the “Bulldozer Raj”.

The movement of farmers against the Farm Acts, during this period, is a historic development from the point of view of peoples’ movements. The movement has struck a big blow to the arrogance of the Modi government, by compelling it to scrap the farm Acts. This movement has proved to be highly inspirational for the peoples’ movements. And very recently, in the month of June, the country witnessed an unprecedented outburst of youth and students against the Agnipath scheme of the Modi government.

Thus, while the attacks against the working class and various other sections of masses have been brutal and mighty, many have resisted these attacks braving the repressive Modi regime. The issues like unemployment, price-rise, restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS), etc., have found their echo in several assembly elections held in this period and some state governments ruled by parties other than the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) have also gone to the extent of declaring the withdrawal of New Pension Scheme (NPS).

The resistance has also resulted in slowing down the central government’s pace of implementation of some controversial laws. Yet, when it comes to the question of Labour codes, none of the state governments, including the non-BJP governments, have rejected them. Rather, all are hastily making

rules now for its implementation in their states. It is the same with the various policies and steps related to privatization and other anti-worker measures. There is a consensus – a corporate consensus – on these matters, among the ruling class. The united trade union movement, despite repeatedly resorting to strike action, has not proved strong enough to resist the attacks. This is also, of course, due to various inherent problems of the movement. So, the issue of utmost and urgent importance is the building of a powerful resistance movement towards withdrawal of these disastrous policies and steps, and of course, to oust the Modi government, which is the most concentrated expression and the symbol of corporate attacks on the working class.

Obviously, the resistance of the working class cannot be limited to the fight against the pro-corporate agenda of the Modi government alone. In equal force, it must also combat and thwart the all-pervasive communal, fascist agenda of the Modi government. We should do all to prevent any tactics of the ruling class to divert or divide the working class of the country. The worst ever challenge since the country’s independence is looming large over the working class, the common people, and the country under the Modi government now.

This ‘new normal’ situation demands a new, extraordinary preparedness on our behalf. Let us prepare our organization to meet the toughest challenge of our times before the working class and the people at large. ■



Resolutions Adopted In The National Council Meeting Of AICCTU

10 - 11 JULY 2022

COIMBATORE

1. The National Council of AICCTU resolves to intensify the struggle against the disastrous policies of the Modi regime. It has decided to launch a country-wide campaign in the month of September 2022 which would culminate in state level rallies in the state capitals including the national capital, Delhi. The campaign will demand the repeal of four anti-labour codes and scrapping of the National Monetization Pipeline, in addition to protesting the escalating unemployment, skyrocketing price-rise, rampant privatization, contractualisation of work force, massive retrenchment, wage cut and dismantling of social security including welfare boards.
 2. The AICCTU appeals to the State Governments not to implement the Central Labour Codes and to reject formulating mandatory state rules for its implementation.
 3. The AICCTU demands the scrapping of the Agnipath Scheme in military recruitment.
 4. The AICCTU resolves to fight against the targeting of religious minorities, especially Muslims, against the Hindu supremacist policies of the BJP Government and against any attempts to divide the working class.
 5. The AICCTU condemns the actions of the Modi Government including the arrests of dissenters, those who speak truth to the power and those who fight for the rights of people, the working class, dalits and adivasis. We demand the release of all political prisoners.
 6. The AICCTU stands with the struggles of all municipal workers of Karnataka in their fight for the permanency of all workers including drivers, helpers, loaders involved in solid waste management in Karnataka and also in other parts of the country.
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7. The AICCTU resolves to continue the struggle of scheme workers, especially ASHA, Anganwadi and MDM (Mid-Day Meal) workers and demands that they be recognized as workers with wages on par with the government employees and with dignified working conditions and social security benefits.
 8. The AICCTU strongly opposes the launch of the private train from Coimbatore to Shirdi (Maharashtra) on 14 June 2022 under the policy of “Bharat Gaurav Yojna” – a policy that facilitates the privatization of passenger trains in an underhand manner.
 9. The AICCTU expresses its solidarity and extends full support to the struggling workers of Zydus (Glucon-D manufacturing company situated in Sitarganj, Uttarakhand) against the closure and demands immediate re-opening of the company.
 10. The AICCTU demands the Modi Government to arrive at a wage settlement with the Public Sector Insurance Company employees by fulfilling their demands and extends its full support to the demands of the insurance employees and their struggles including strike actions.
 11. The AICCTU strongly condemns the repressive actions of the Bihar government against the striking employees of local bodies in the month

of June 2022, including imprisonment of their leader Bhagya Narain Choudhary from Motihari for 23 days. It demands the government to withdraw all cases against leaders of striking employees and to fulfill their demands.

12. The AICCTU stands with the struggles of disguised contract workers of the Public Sector Undertaking, the ITI Ltd (Indian Telephone Industries), who were terminated for having unionized. The struggle has reached its 223rd day (as on 11 July 2022) and we demand that the Central Government and Ministry of Communication to step in and immediately reinstate the workers with full back wages and attendant benefits.
13. The Puducherry L&T Management has thrown out nearly 300 workers on the streets for demanding their legitimate rights and wages. The workers consequently launched a struggle which is still continuing for more than 120 days. The AICCTU demands immediate reinstatement of all the workers. It also demands the intervention of the Puducherry Government in fulfilling the just demands of workers and for an immediate resolution of the industrial disputes.
14. The AICCTU resolves to stand in solidarity with the struggling employees of Puducherry Electricity Department against the privatization of the Electricity Distribution Company (DISCOM). It demands the Union Government to stop the privatization of DISCOM in Puducherry.
15. The AICCTU demands the Tamil Nadu Government not to indulge in anti-labour and illegal contractualisation of load men in the public distribution system (PDS) of the state and in the zoological park at Vandalur, Chennai. We demand that the wages of the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) workers be placed on par with that of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) workers, and that the services of all so-called temporary workers employed at the zoo be regularized.
16. The AICCTU stands in solidarity with workers and the people of Vizag, Andhra Pradesh, against the privatization of the Vishakhapatnam Steel Plant and demands that the Central Government should stop the privatization of all steel plants.
17. The AICCTU extends solidarity to the strike call given by the municipal and sanitation workers of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh and demands that the State Governments fulfill all their demands.
18. The AICCTU stands with the struggles of contract workers of Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, Lady Harding Medical College, Kalavati Saran children Hospital and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur College of nursing who have been protesting for more than 100 days at various places in Delhi.
19. The AICCTU condemns the “out of bound” order issued by the administration of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi against Comrade Sucheta De, the Vice President of AICCTU and former president of JNUSU (Jawaharlal Nehru University Students’ Union) and stands with the struggles of the JNU workers.
20. The AICCTU wholeheartedly supports the farmers’ demand for Minimum Support Price (MSP) and demands justice for the killing of farmers at Lakhimpur Kheri.
21. The AICCTU strongly condemns the police attack on the people of Dhinkia, Orissa who were agitating against land acquisition by the government in favor of Jindal’s company, the JSW.
22. The AICCTU strongly condemns the central and state governments for their negligence which resulted in the untimely deaths of frontline workers including health and ASHA workers.
23. The AICCTU strongly condemns the negligence of state authorities that has resulted in the untimely deaths of workers in man-made factory fire accidents in Mundka, Delhi and in several other places. It demands that immediate action be taken against those responsible for these incidents and demands just compensation to the families of the deceased. ■

A Study by Working Peoples Coalition: 95% of Delhi Workers Do Not Get Minimum Wages!

★ SAURABH NARUKA

A latest study by the Working Peoples Coalition (WPC) has revealed that 95% of Delhi workers do not get statutory minimum wages. The stark reality that is staring on the governments and the civil society for quite long is substantiated by statistics now. The statistics reveals an outrageous scenario.

Violation of Labour Laws:

A Rule Rather Than an Exception

The ground reality in the very heart of the capital of the country, Delhi, is brought out by a report of the WPC on access to minimum wages based on a survey of 1,076 workers across four clusters—domestic, construction, industrial and security guards, carried out in Jan-Feb, 2022. WPC study states the obvious truth that 95 percent of workers in Delhi are not paid statutory minimum wages even when existing labour laws are in force.

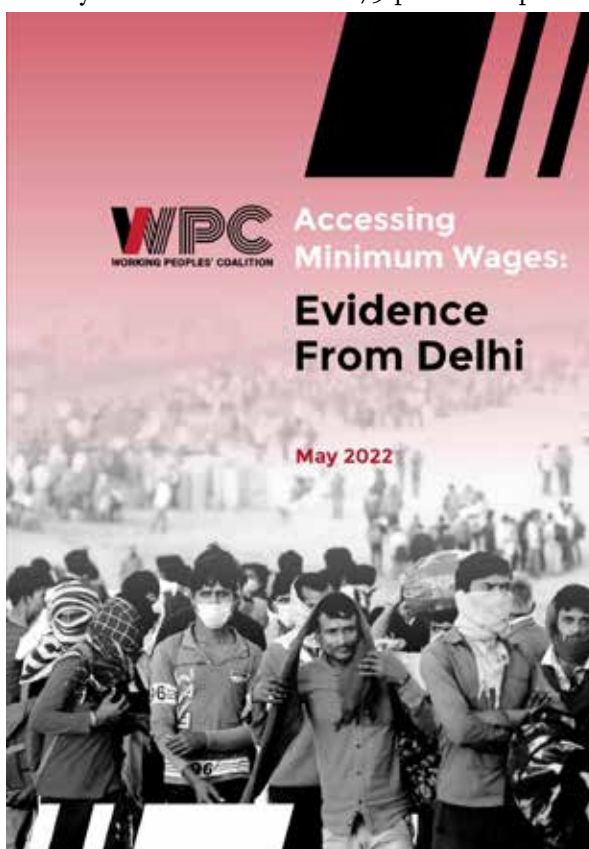
The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, which governs the legal framework for the payment of legally mandated minimum wages, has practically very little compliance in the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD). Seldom does an inspector visit any factory, now a days, to check the compliance. The workers, who are forced to overwork throughout the extreme weather conditions of Delhi, in the ill maintained sweat shops of Okla, Bawana, Wazirpur industrial areas and a dozen other big and small industrial areas of the city, are still longing for a basic compliance of minimum wages.

Half-paid, they are forced to live a life in slums devoid of any dignity, deprived of bare minimum, basic infrastructure and amenities like water, road and sanitation. The majority of the working class living in slums are under persistent threat of eviction both from their jobs and also from the place of their

residence. The basic industrial safety at place of work has become a rare commodity and industrial accidents have become very regular. These are just glimpses of what workers of Delhi, mostly migrants, go through day in and day out. The study also brings out that 90 percent of sample respondent are not aware about their social security rights.

The Poor working conditions Revealed

Only 8 percent feels that their site is safe to work, indicating that more than 90 % of workers are working in very unsafe conditions. 48% of workers reported that they do not have a drinking water facility at their worksite and 79 percent reported



to have no place to eat. Only 6 percent reported to have food available at worksite while 55% workers work in an environment of no proper ventilation and 68% without any toilet facility at worksite. Only 13 percent reported to have separate toilet for women workers. Overall, more than two third workers work in a very unsafe, insecure and indecent environment without any basic amenities.

Violation of Labour Laws

Delhi encompasses more than 5 million strong workforce at a conservative estimate and most of whom are unorganized and also employed in informal sector. Even if the employment is in an organized and formal sector, it's likely to be based on a contractual, casual or any other irregular form of relationship. Even if the work is of perennial nature, the workers are employed on contractual basis. These are violations of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1969 (CLARA) in letter and spirit. The employers shrug off their mandatory responsibilities simply by not showing them on rolls. This reduces scope for the unity and bargaining power of the workforce. In case, if they decide to unionize, it's likely that they will be shown the doors at the first hint of it. The study also brings this out when it states that only 28% of workers amongst the respondents are in the permanent category and the remaining are either working as contractual or daily wage workers i.e., 19% and 30% respectively. Across types of employment, the share of daily wage workers is higher, followed by permanent workers and contractual workers

It is evident that the consecutive governments in power in the NCTD have allowed such violations to continue. Implementing the Minimum Wages Act on ground has never been on the agenda of the governments. Most of the workers in Delhi would be getting only 50 to 75 percent of mandated wages. Payment of overtime at double the normal rate is an exception rather than a rule even when majority of the workforce end up working for more than 8 hours.

Minimum Wages on Paper

Recently in May, 2022, the monthly minimum wages in Delhi were increased from Rs 16,064 to Rs 16,506 for unskilled workers, and from Rs

17,693 to Rs 18,187 for semi-skilled ones. For skilled labourers, the minimum wage is increased from Rs 19,473 to Rs 20,019 a month. The minimum monthly wage for non-matriculated workers has been increased from Rs 17,693 to Rs 18,187 and for matriculate employees, from Rs 19,473 to Rs 20,019. For graduates and those with higher educational qualifications, the monthly wage has been hiked from Rs 21,184 to Rs 21,756.

But this is rarely paid despite being mandated under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. The study of Working People Coalition reveals that 95 of workers are not paid minimum wages notified by the Delhi government despite having required set of skills. The study says that over 75% of workers work without sufficient facilities or security.

The report finds that noncompliance with minimum wages is higher for casual workers, for females, for unskilled workers and for migrants. As per the study, approximately 46 percent of workers earn a monthly wage of only Rs. 5,000 to 9,000, around 15 percent workers earn between Rs. 3,000 to 5000 and 13 percent workers earn a monthly wage of Rs. 9,000 to 12,000. Less than 5 percent of workers earn a monthly income of Rs. 16000 and more. Hence, it is more than obvious that only 5 percent of workers in the study receive minimum wages. It is a shame that even this paltry level of wages are paid only when 10 percent of workers work for 12 hours a day while more than 35 % of workers work more than stipulated working hours (more than 8 hours) in a day. With the abysmally low wage levels, the hope of any savings to meet out any exigencies is only a mirage. It indicates that not only the present situation is in a more precarious condition for workers, but their future also is much more precarious that can only reproduce a cobweb of vulnerability for their children and the family.

Although the Delhi government's step of fixing minimum wages as per the recommendations of 15th ILC 1957 is a welcome step, but with this absurdly low level of compliance of mandated minimum wages, the announcement remains only on paper and doesn't make any difference to the actual living conditions of millions of workers of Delhi.

Conclusion and Way Forward

A well-designed minimum wage system can be a strong tool for protecting workers and alleviating poverty. The study points out that high rate of noncompliance not only negatively affect the workers and their families, but also ensure impunity to employers who continue to violate the law and exploit workers. It states that ensuring minimum wage compliance is not only a matter of putting in place a well-equipped system of inspection, rather, an improved compliance depends on the effectiveness of the entire process of designing and implementing minimum wage policies, starting from the determination of the right level and rate structure in consultation with the employers' and workers' organizations (RANI, et al., 2013). The study recommends universal coverage of minimum wages, regular adjustment, information and awareness, grievance redressal, implementation of urban employment guarantee scheme along the lines of MGNREGA, effective penalties for non-compliance, involvement of workers organization and unions and collective bargaining for increased compliance of the minimum wages act. It points out that the Supreme Court in Bandhua Mukhti Morcha case has stated that non-payment of minimum wages is an indicator of work being in nature of bonded

labour. The Bonded Labour Act which makes it a criminal offence should be deployed, if required, to ensure compliance with Minimum wages.

It also points out that the new Wage Code, which would replace four acts - Minimum Wages Act, 1948; Payment of Wages Act, 1936; Payment of Bonus Act, 1965; and Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 - despite its claim of coverage for all, has a range of challenges and gaps, including lack of consultation mechanism to consult stake-holders in the process of fixing minimum wages, evidence-based adjustments that take into account the needs of workers and their families, economic factors and measures to improve the implementation.

In such a scenario, the need of the hour is to acknowledge and recognize the rights of workers and ensure their enforcement. What the Modi government has done, instead, is to do away with the existing labour laws. All labour laws have been replaced by four Labour Codes. These codes not only exclude a huge majority of workers from the arena of legal protection but they also give more freedom to companies/employers to violate the labour laws.

The way forward is to strengthen the movement of the working class to ensure the enforcement of workers' rights. ■



AICCTU Greetings To the 8th Congress of GEFONT, Nepal

★ SK SHARMA



The 8th Congress of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) was held at Kathmandu from 23 to 26 July 2022. Com. K. P. Sharma Oli, the president of CPN-ML and former Prime Minister of Nepal, inaugurated the open session of the Congress. Over 6000 workers attended the session. About 34 foreign guests from different countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, France, Italy, Turkey, Indonesia, Singapore, Sweden and others attended and greeted the Congress. On behalf of AICCTU, Com. Shailendra Kumar Sharma, National Vice-President, attended the Congress.

GEFONT organized a panel discussion on ‘Consolidated and Comprehensive Democracy for Dignity and Prosperity of Working Class’. All the foreign guests and leaders of GEFONT took part in it.

The patron of GEFONT Com. Vishnu Rimal inaugurated the delegate session on 24 July 2022. A total of 512 delegates from 21 affiliated national federations attended the conference that included

25% women delegates.

Greeting the delegate session on behalf of AICCTU, Com. S. K. Sharma congratulated GEFONT for the grand success of its 8th Congress and expressed solidarity with the militant working class movement in Nepal against the neo-liberal and imperialist onslaught. He said, “Ever since the inception of the GEFONT and the AICCTU in 1989, we have shared a cordial relationship. For the last 33 years, we have been keenly observing the progress of your organization and hailing your achievements in improving the working and living conditions of the working people of the country and in ensuring workers’ rights. We are here to express our solidarity with the GEFONT and the working class of Nepal on behalf of the AICCTU and millions of workers of India. Our relationship is built upon a shared vision and strong commitment for attaining the common goal of building a socialist state”.

“The crisis of capitalism is worsening day by day and is passed on to the shoulders of the working people.

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The rights of the working class are being snatched away. On the other hand, we are witnessing powerful movements across the globe against the attacks on labour rights, minimum wages and social security.

India, under the majoritarian, fascist government, has experienced a massive destruction of livelihood, rights and the constitution. The pandemic was used as a ploy to aggressively push the corporate neo-liberal agenda of the saffron forces. Four labour codes were enacted to replace all existing labour laws and to do away with protection mechanisms. The workers are being made as slaves. In the name of monetization, all public sector undertakings and government departments, including entire infrastructure of the country, are being offered on a platter to corporate houses. A large number of

contractual and other informal workers are being thrown out of jobs. The Modi led BJP government has become the rule of corporate – communal – fascist forces.

The working class of our country continues to resist the rightist onslaughts on the working class through united platforms. The country has witnessed several nationwide protests, industrial and sectoral actions, including several all India general strikes. As a revolutionary trade union, the AICCTU has been in the forefront of all these struggles," he said.

The Congress elected Comrade Vinod Shreshth as the president and Comrade Laxman Sharma as the General Secretary with 57 member executive committee, including 18 office-bearers. ■

Start-Ups End Up in Shrinking the Workforce!

United Workers Resistance is the Need of the Hour!

★ ATANU CHAKRAVARTY

The dark side of Start-Up Unicorns has begun to raise its ugly head. Under the garb of 'restructuring', and 'realignment of operations', the Start-Ups have begun to fire or terminate contracts of employees as a 'cost cutting measure'. Indian start-ups have retrenched a little over 11,000 people in the last six months. Industry experts predict that the situation might get worsened soon when more than 60,000 employees are expected to be axed by the end of this year!

On 29 May 2022, Mr Modi, in his 'Mann Ki Baat' show, trumpeted that the Start-Ups are a 'matter of immense pride and have renewed confidence in India's abilities'. He boasted that the country's unicorns are valued at \$ 330 billion, i.e., 25 lakh crores of rupees with faster average growth rate like the UK, the US and other western countries. A single unicorn is assessed to make a turnover of, at

least, 7,500 crore rupees. "Even during the COVID pandemic, the Indian start-ups continued to create wealth and value", he claimed.

However, this "pride of every Indian" has burst asunder. Start-Ups in the country have fired 11,615 employees since January this year. Seven unicorn start-ups - Ola, Blinkit, Unacademy, Vedantu, Cars24, Mobile Premier League and Byju's have also slashed their workforce following this trend. In April 2022, Ola retrenched 2,100 contract workers in a massive restructuring of its quick commerce business Ola Dash. Blinkit, acquired by Zomato a couple of weeks ago, laid off 1,600 workers in March. World's most valued edu-tech company Byju's axed 600 workers.

The Start-Ups have immensely benefited through a host of economic and other policy measures by the Central Government. A funding of Rs. 960 crore has been enabled for Start-Ups through various schemes.





Rs. 868 crore sanctioned fund for infrastructure, tax exemption on investment above Fair Market Value, exemption from compliance of nine environment and labour laws through Start-Up India web portal, online self-certification for labour laws through Shram Suvidha portal, relaxation of norms for public procurement, credit guarantee scheme (corpus of Rs. 2,000 crore across three years - collateral free, fund & non fund-based credit support) and such other benefits have been extended to Start-Ups.

Extracting huge benefits from the government, the Start-Ups gained exponential profit during the pandemic-induced boom. It is worth recollecting that the “Start-Up India” scheme is an initiative of the central government supposedly for employment generation and wealth creation. The goal of Start-Up India is the development and innovation of goods and services and is also to increase the employment rate in India. The eligibility for a Start-Up, according to the central government policies, is that it should be an incorporated company as a private limited or as a registered partnership firm and its turnover should be less than Rs 100 crore in any of the previous financial years. The much-touted goal of generating and increasing employment through Start-Ups has proved to be the greatest hoax.

At present, according to the CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy), India’s

unemployment rate has soared to 7.8 per cent in June 2022 with 13 million jobs lost, mostly in the agricultural sector. Now, retrenchment in the Start-Ups are adding to the vast army of unemployed. The grim unemployment scenario and ever rising inflation are the main economic issues today. By its own admission, vacant positions in the central government employment are close to 8,00,000. Mahesh Vyas, CEO of CMIE has said, “the proportion of people employed in GOI is amongst the lowest in the world. In most countries, the proportion of people hired in government jobs is much higher and those governments do provide a lot more services to their people”. However, in India, the situation is just the opposite.

The new labour codes have provided an arm to the employers to fire the workforce at their own whims and fancies. The precarious situation of huge working population and their vulnerability has increased manifold. All the existing institutions have not only failed to protect the teeming millions, but have exacerbated their miseries to its zenith. It is time to fight back these draconian laws. United workers resistance alone is the befitting challenge to the fascist regime and its onslaughts on the working class and the economy. ■

LABOUR SNIPPETS FOR AUGUST 2022

★ LEKHA

Implementation of ESI Across the Country by 2022

The Labour Ministry has issued a press statement that the Employees' State Insurance Corporation will implement their health insurance scheme – ESI – throughout the country by the end of 2022. The ESI has already seen a full implementation in 443 districts and partial implementation in 153 districts. It stated that a total of 148 districts are not covered under the ESI scheme. This is being done to augment the medical care and service delivery mechanism across the country and that by the end of the year, the districts which are partially covered and not covered under the scheme will be fully brought under the ambit of the ESI scheme.

Gas Leak in Andhra Leaves Hundreds of Workers Sick

Around 200 women workers in the Atchutapuram SEZ fell sick due to ammonia gas leakage from a nearby plant. The workers began to vomit and felt dizzy, and were rushed to the nearby government hospitals for treatment. This comes in just two years after the lethal styrene vapours leaked out of LG Polymers killing 12 workers and hospitalizing over 300 workers. Even though a probe has been ordered into the incident, there are no forthcoming assurances from the state government.

Crisis in Salt Sector

India is the third largest salt producer in the world and Gujarat is one of the main producers of salt in the country. The salt farmers and workers are demanding proper system for wages and social security. There is a growing crisis in the salt industry with the farmers bearing the brunt of the demand and supply issues. The salt farmers stated that they are facing low price as there is no minimum support price and the workers are also in distress due to a lack of proper system for wages and social security. The farmers state that they get about Rs. 250 to Rs. 300 per tonne of salt, whereas their input cost for labour

is about Rs. 1 lakh. Some of the manufacturers too are demanding that it be declared a seasonal industry, just like agriculture, and must be extended crop insurance and minimum support price.

Teachers Demand Salaries

In June 2022, the Delhi University's Executive Council and Finance Committee wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of the University seeking disbursement of salaries without any delay. Extreme level of workload they are put through, the delay in paying emoluments is putting them through hardship. It was stated that for 1,200 students in a master's course, there were only 12 or 13 permanent teachers and therefore, they are put through disproportionate and inhuman level of workload. Alongside this, there has been a delay in extension of work for ad-hoc teachers, which is adding to their stress and difficulties.

In Meghalaya, after a long drawn battle from the ad-hoc teachers, the state government has conceded to their demands to increase their salary by Rs. 9,000. This means that higher-secondary teachers will get Rs. 33,000, secondary school teachers will be paid Rs. 29,000 and science teachers will be paid Rs. 31,000. For lower and upper primary teachers, there will be a hike of Rs. 6,000. Hence, lower primary teachers will be paid Rs. 18,000, upper primary teachers will be paid Rs. 22,000, Hindi teachers Rs. 18,000.

Similarly, in Karnataka, about 1,000 teachers who teach students with disabilities organised a protest demanding increase in wages of both teaching and non-teaching staff of special schools. It has been stated that the honorarium to schools are paid under the Child Centric Scheme (CCS), which was doled out to encourage a higher proportion of student enrolment and to achieve 100 per cent literacy rate among children with disabilities. The teachers are paid an insufficient amount of Rs. 13,000 a month. The teachers who have to provide education to children with disabilities are specially-trained and skilled in therapy and teaching techniques. Given the large number of students with disabilities, the

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teachers demand an increase in their salaries.

Ford Workers Protest at Maraimalainagar Plant

Several hundred workers of the Ford Maraimalainagar plant have launched a struggle demanding better compensation as the company has decided to shut down the plant. The union members, who spoke to the media, stated that the management offered 85 days' pay for every completed year of service, along with a fixed sum of Rs. 42,500/- for every completed year of service. Earlier, the company had offered 75 days' salary and a fixed sum of Rs. 20,000 for every completed year of service. The workers claimed that in the same automobile industry and in the same region, compensation of up to 135 days' wages for every completed year of service was being paid and the same was being demanded from the Ford company. They said that there are around 2,600 permanent workers and about 1,000 contract workers at the Maraimalainagar plant, and the closure of the factory will lead to a loss of 3,600 direct jobs and about 30,000 indirect jobs.

BSNL Employees' Unions Demand Restoration of All Abolished Jobs Post-VRS

After close to 79,000 employees opted for voluntary retirement scheme in 2020, the remaining workers and employees in Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited are facing many issues, which continue to remain unaddressed by the officials running the PSU. Taking to protest last month, several hundred employees under the banner of 'All Unions and Associations of BSNL' stated that there has been no timely redressal of any issue faced by them. This means that the operations and maintenance of the public sector is taking a hit. As nearly half the workforce took up VRS, the employees claimed that all posts of executives and non-executives were abolished, thus ensuring no upward mobility for the existing employees, and that there have been massive cuts in vacancies alongside contractualisation of jobs. The employees stated that under the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), the centre has plans to monetise 2.86 lakh kilometer of optic fibre cables as per the Bharat Net project, as well as 14,917 mobile towers owned by

BSNL, and that the Central Government has been deliberately delaying the rolling out of 4G services alongside the monetization of telecom assets.

Sanitation Workers Protest in Tamil Nadu and Punjab

Staging a protest in Dharmapuri (Tamil Nadu), the sanitation workers demanded regularization of employment, along with equal pay for equal work, increase in wages and setting up of sexual harassment committee at the workplace to provide a safe and conducive working environment for the women workers. They also demanded that the existing 139 vacancies be filled up to meet the demands of the expanding jurisdiction of the municipality.

The protest sought for regularization of 90 sanitation workers who are currently working under a sham contract system, and sought that they guarantee equal pay for equal work as directed by the Madras High Court recently, and that wages of Rs. 596 per day be guaranteed to the workers.

They, further, demanded regular payment of wages, safety equipment, provision of ESI and EPF facilities among others.

The women sanitation workers in Ludhiana began a relay hunger strike from 5 July 2022 demanding regularization of service of workers under the sham contract system. As part of the protest, the workers resorted to dumping garbage on the road to block it and locked the main gate of the Municipal Corporation office. The officials then agreed to address the demands of the workers.

Beedi Workers in West Bengal Seek Increase in Wages

Stating that the beedi workers are being paid a meagre amount of Rs. 116 for every 1,000 beedis, the workers took to protest demanding an increase in their wages, standard payment scale system, better healthcare facilities, better working conditions and identity cards from the government. These workers who suffer severe detriment to their health due to rolling beedis have sought better healthcare benefits from the government, including support for their families. ■

International Labour Conference – 110th Session, 2022

Safe and Healthy Working Environment Adopted as Fundamental Convention of ILO

The International Labour Conference (ILC) has adopted a resolution to add the principle of safe and healthy working environment to the International Labour Organisation's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. With this decision, the occupational safety and health will become the fifth fundamental convention. The new fundamental convention will be "the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No.155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No.187)."

The other four categories of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work are: 1. Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; 2. Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; 3. Effective abolition of child labour and 4. Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

This new fundamental convention has been adopted in view of the worsening situation of work-related accidents or diseases. According to ILO, around 2.3 million women and men around the world succumb to work-related accidents or diseases every year. This corresponds to over 6000 deaths every single day. Worldwide, there are around 340 million occupational accidents and 160 million victims of work-related illnesses annually.

ILO Indicts the Government of India for the Poor Record on Labour Inspection

The Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations on the application of ILO

standards has openly criticised India's poor record on labour inspection. To quote the report, "The committee requests the Government (India) to take measures to ensure that labour inspectors are empowered, in law and practice and in line with Article 12 (1) (a) and (b) of the Convention, to make visits without previous notice. In this respect, noting that the Code on Wages provides for inspections subject to the instructions or guidelines issued by the appropriate Government, the committee urges the Government (India) to ensure that the instructions issued fully empower labour inspectors in accordance with Article 12 (1) (a) and (b) of the Convention No. 81 of ILO. The committee also requests the Government to provide further information on the meaning of the term "survey" in section 20 of the OSH and Working Conditions Code, and to indicate whether labour inspectors are required to provide notice of all inspections in writing under the Code."

Further the report says, "It also urges the Government to take the necessary measures to ensure that labour inspectors are able to initiate legal proceedings without previous warning, where required, in conformity with Article 17 of the Convention. In this respect, it requests the Government to provide further information on the meaning of the term "inspectors-cum-facilitators," including the functions and powers of officials performing this role. Noting the statistics already provided, the committee requests the Government to provide information on the number and nature of offences reported, the number of penalties imposed, the amounts of fines imposed and collected, and information on criminal prosecutions, if any".

Similarly, the report notes that there was no Indian Labour Conference, the highest policy making tripartite body on labour, since 2015. ■



WFTU Condemns the Unacceptable Attacks Against Militant Trade Unionists in Italy

Issued on 20 July 2022, by the
WFTU Headquarter

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) unequivocally condemns the new unacceptable attack against militant trade unionists in Italy. A few months after the provocative police raid on the Unione Sindicale di Base (USB) office, a new attack against militant trade unionists is escalating since yesterday, with trade unionists to be placed under house arrest and searched, based on a 350-page indictment of the Piagenza Public Prosecutor's Office against USB and Si Cobas unions.

It is obvious that the militant struggles of the class-oriented trade unions bother the bourgeois class, its state, and its political representatives who blatantly violate any notion and concept of trade union and democratic rights and freedoms. The trade unions and trade unionists are being

persecuted for organizing strikes, protests, and demonstrations in the logistics sector. They are openly and unashamedly being persecuted because they are defending their own class interests and fighting for dignified working and living conditions.

This new attack must not remain unanswered by the class-oriented trade union movement and all those who are opposing the authoritarian practices that are increasingly being imposed all over the world.

The World Federation of Trade Unions calls upon its affiliates to stand beside the trade unionists in Italy and condemn the new attacks with a protest to the embassies and consulates of Italy in their countries, sending the clear message that the workers in Italy are not alone and the attempts to subordinate the militant unions are in vain. They cannot stop the class struggle, they never could! ■



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APAR (Annual Performance Assessment Report) and the Rail Workers

★ NN BANERJEE

The new model of revising norms for APAR (Annual Performance Assessment Report) is designed to scuttle the rights of annual increment and group incentive for the workers of railway production units. Unlike the existing norms of adjudging performance by the authority concerned as "average, good, very good and outstanding", this new methodology has a cascading effect on the career progression and annual increment. In the proposed methodology, 70% marks would be awarded by the immediate supervisor and countersigned by the Assistant Officer in case of group 'D' & 'C' staff while the remaining 30% marks would be provided by the efficiency cell Directorate. In the event of any worker scoring less than 90% marks, it is apprehended that his/her increment is likely to be reduced to 2% from

the existing 3% of the basic salary. The cascading effect of 1% reduction is bound to lower the quantum of HRA & D.A. This would also bring about change in the slab for transport allowance. It is crystal clear that the Modi government wants to rob off billions of rupees from the pockets of workers surreptitiously and by tweaking the existing norms of APAR.

The essence of the game plan is based on the anti-worker ideology of the corporates - 'Perform or Perish'. This game plan must be exposed and resisted. The IREF (Indian Railway Employees Federation affiliated to AICCTU), an alternative Left federation, is committed to build a united movement of rail workers against the exploitative design of proposed revisions in the norms of Annual Performance Assessment Report. ■



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Reflections on the 2022 Global Rights Index From the Perspective of the Indian Labour Codes

★ AVANI CHOKSHI

2022 Global Rights Index

The 2022 ITUC Global Rights Index depicts the world's worst countries for workers by rating 184 countries on a scale from 1-5+ based on the degree of respect for workers' rights, with 1 being the best rating and 5+ the worst rating.

Violations are recorded each year from April to March. Each country is analysed against a list of 97 indicators derived from ILO conventions and jurisprudence. The index represents violations of workers' rights at law and practice.



The 2022 Global Rights Index published by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) points out the world's worst countries and categories countries for workers on a rating of 1 (sporadic violation of rights) to 5+ (no guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law). On this scale, India is a 5 – a country where workers are found to have no guarantee of any rights.

Now, India is bringing in 4 new Labour Codes to replace the existing 29 labour statutes, pointing to a formalization of the crony corporate, anti-worker mode of governance. The Index points to the most violated rights in the world. While the index points to some such violations in India, in fact, all these violations have already become a norm in the country, and are now being legalized by the legislation of Labour Codes.

Increasing Criminalization

of the Right to Strike

The Index finds severe restriction / ban of the right to strike in 129 out of 184 countries. Such a ban / restriction is being institutionalized in India with the introduction of the new Industrial Relations Code. The Code mandates 14 days' notice prior to any strike, upon which conciliation proceedings are to be mandatorily initiated. However, the Code prohibits strikes during the pendency of conciliation. Hence, the right is gravely restricted and rendered ineffective because of the long wait and accompanied conditions. For illegal strikes, the Code permits heavy fines, imprisonment and also deregistration of trade unions.

Erosion of Collective Bargaining

79% of all countries violated the right to collective bargaining as per the Index. In fact, in India, Rule 3 of the Industrial Relations (Central) Recognition of Negotiating Union or Negotiating Council and Adjudication of Disputes of Trade Unions Rules 2021



while providing a number of matters to be discussed by the negotiating union/council and the employer, it utterly fails to mention important matters including the employment or non-employment of any person, permanency of workers, overtime work and other such necessary matters. Rules 5 and 6 also formalises and legalises, hitherto illegal, unions sponsored by the managements. They also provide powers to the Managements from the appointment of verification officer to the preparation of the voters list and to the manner of verification. This is nothing but interference in the affairs of trade unions and also the curtailment of their freedom of association.

Blocked and Excluded from Labour Protection

The Index notes that Countries which excluded workers from labour protections increased from 58% of countries in 2014 to 77% of countries in 2022. By enacting Labour Codes, the Government of India is formalising and legitimizing the increasing informalisation and exclusion of workers from the ambit of labour legislations. This takes the forms of increased thresholds of coverage, increased contractualisation and also by introducing a form called ‘fixed term employment’, etc., amongst several other mechanisms. Of course, the protections to the vast majority of unorganised workers continue to be mere eyewash, as in the Unorganised Worker Social Security Act, 2008.

Restrictions on Access to Justice

The Global Rights Index notes that “In 97 countries out of 148, workers had no or reduced access to justice, and the due process of law and justice was denied. Trade union leaders were often detained and prosecuted on trumped-up charges, and their trials were frequently fraught with disregard for due process and with lack of impartiality.”

Importantly, in the Codes, the changing definition of the term ‘industry’ has wide implications on the access to justice, with workers from excluded establishments and industries being deprived of their legal rights. Such excluded establishments include religious establishments, charitable establishments, defense establishments and any

other establishments that the Government chooses to notify.

The Industrial Relation Code also now brings changes in judicial set-up with administrative members now presiding over tribunals and hearing cases in the absence of a judicial member. Such administrative members are government appointees and members of the executive organ of the State and not the judiciary. Hence, they are political appointees whose action cannot be expected to fairly redress the violations by State.

The introduction of a strict limitation period for the raising of a dispute before the conciliation officer or industrial tribunal will result in a severe impact on the access to justice for workers, who are often delayed in approaching court. Till the enactment of Codes, Indian labour laws contemplated only holding of relief on account of delay and not outright rejection.

De-registration of Unions

Shockingly, the 2022 Index notes that “Between April 2021 and March 2022, authorities impeded the registration of, deregistered or arbitrarily dissolved unions in 110 countries out of 148.” Now in India, such deregistration will be absolutely permissible with the coming in force of the IR Code, which allows for cancellation or withdrawal of registration of a union on any violation of the Code or the Rules or its own constitution or rules. For example, an illegal strike could now be grounds for cancellation of registration of the union. The lack of framed parameters regarding the nature of violation could also lead to entirely absurd, disproportionate and undesirable results – for example, the failure to inform the Registrar of a simple change in union rules could result in the registration of the union itself being liable to be cancelled! Effectively, the provision could be weaponised against unions that prove to be a challenge to State or corporate power.

Attacks on Free speech and Assembly

Again, the Index notes a dramatic increase in the number of countries that restrict free speech and assembly (From 26% in 2014 to 41% of countries in

2022). In India, a fundamental right to freedom of protest has been derived by the Supreme Court from the fundamental rights to speech, assembly and to form associations and unions (Articles 19(1)(a-c) of the Constitution of India). However, in recent years, the same has been gravely restricted in capital cities. For example, pursuant to orders of the Karnataka High Court, all protests in Bengaluru city can only take place in a park called Freedom Park – which, ironically, detains protestors to a marginal location invisible to the public gaze. A similar situation exists in Mumbai and Delhi as well. Hence, the public rights of workers to seek redress are chipped away on one hand. On the other, the increasing insecurity of tenure and the lack of social security, both exacerbated and legitimized by the labour codes make it increasingly risky

Violent Attacks on Workers and Murder of Trade Unionists

Across the world, the Index notes a rise in such incidents, with workers being arrested/ detained, exposed to violence and murdered in 69, 50, and 13 countries of 148 countries. So too, in India

the weaponisation of law to clamp down on those who peacefully exercise their constitutional and statutory rights is only growing, and has been seen across the country. Challenges to various systems of oppression in society – including institutional casteism, communalism, patriarchy – face similar state repression. In the context of the class struggle, attacks on workers and union leaders have also become a commonplace.

The Codes reveal a real commitment to corporate plunder and suppression of rights of the working class. The increased penalties for worker violations versus the reduced penalties and mandatory compounding of offences for management violations makes this even more clear. Of course, even the implementing agencies, namely, the Inspectors, have now been converted into Inspectors-cum-facilitators, whose mandatory duty is now not to ensure prosecution for violation of law but to give the management an opportunity to comply. In this context, it is only to be expected that the struggle for rights of workers will meet the iron hand of the State – and the working class must rise with vigour and commitment to meet the new challenges ahead of it. ■

Broken Cogs in The Machine: Collectivism and a Witnessing Note of a Propagandist

★ AVIK DEBDAS

D-53 Defence Colony now becomes an address of almost a monochromatic world of resistance over an array of injustice, a witnessing note of a communist-propagandist-Anupam Roy (b.1985) who is displaying his last three years' body of works, culminating as an exhibition titled 'Broken Cogs in the Machine'. If the contradiction starts with the idea of displaying works in a white-cube gallery space itself, then I want to request the reader to remember the image of the common mass enjoying the swimming pool at the residence of the Sri Lankan president. Why can't we spread our limbs to the so-called

elite spaces, when our roots are grounded in the actual space of resistance? Defence Colony is an affluent neighborhood in the center of South Delhi, developed in the aftermath of historical partition of the subcontinent in 1947. This area was allotted to resettle the serving military officers whose homes lay across the border in Pakistan. Thus, the space itself contains a history of partition, migration, and the politics of owning land, and similarly, one can rethink the very idea of 'politics of owning land' from this ongoing exhibition.

The name Anupam Roy sounds like an individual entity but his body of work generates or belongs to

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the very act of collectivism or partisan-comradeship, which he also proclaims in each and every public intervention. Anupam was born in Silchar, Assam. His memory of childhood is a memory of migration, traversing from Assam, Ladakh and Bihar to West Bengal, as his father was a technician with the Indian Armed Forces. Finally, the family settled in Ashok Nagar, Habra, a semi-urban space of West Bengal, very close to the border with Bangladesh. After completing his formal training in painting at the Bengal Fine Arts College in Chandpara in 2008, he became a fervent propagandist of the CPI(ML) Liberation, and started making posters for its different mass organizations such as the All India Students' Association (AISA), Revolutionary Youth Association (RYA) and All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU). Since then, he has traveled to various parts of India and engaged himself with different movements and resistances. From 2008 to 2016, Anupam and other artist comrades – Pronobes, Tumpa, Kallol, Ritika, Vishakha and many others – painted and pasted the famous monumental posters against the corporate and fascist regime on the walls of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. Not only at JNU, he worked at different other University campuses such as Jadavpur University, Lucknow University and Banaras Hindu University. For a short span, he also founded an artist forum called 'Liberation Art'. Due to these grassroots engagements with various activists, artists, writers and students from different disciplines, the show has a footfall of different common masses apart from elite art lovers. Anupam completed his two consecutive masters' degrees in Visual Art, the first from Ambedkar University, Delhi in 2016 and the second from the De Montfort University, Leicester, UK in 2020 as a Charles Wallace Scholar. He was also awarded the FICA (Foundation of Indian Contemporary Art) Emerging Artist Award in 2018, and the ongoing show at Vadehra Gallery is a part of this award.

While entering into the monochromatic three-

dimensional world of black ink and white paper with a glimpse of three colors – red, blue, and green – on the left side wall of the first gallery, one can understand the fast but meticulous way of making propaganda paintings. The affinity to the minimal colors is not just an aesthetic choice rather a political subject of material consciousness. While considering the economy of colour, Anupam also explores his artistic endeavors with various scales from long paper scrolls to the page of small diaries, and also plays with different media such as oil on canvas, watercolor on handmade paper and printed copies, ink on cloth, ink on corrugated sheet, marker on printed paper, pen and ink on printed books, sculpture with wood, m-seal and wiggle eyes and a performative animated video.

The long scroll on the first right-side wall, composing a band of a headless drummer, sweeper, farmer, fisher, and other working figures, delving into a wet vegetational land reveals a non-narrational history of his homeland. Multiple background strokes assimilate the figures, and thus create an obscure imagery as a symbol of 'inarticulateness', a very basic question of 'representational impossibility' for a propagandist. How one can witness a holistic history of a landscape? The 'inarticulateness' not only exemplifies the question of 'representation' or 'witnessing history', but also verbalizes a question of 'land' and its 'ownership'. This transforms into different complexities and underpins the entire exhibition as a specter of 'guard', which he terms



‘Land-garde’ for some instance or the ‘broken cogs’¹ of this machinic Leviathan² as described in the curatorial note of the exhibition, written by Sandip. K. Luis and Shivangi Mariam Raj. In his argument for continuous change of political subjectivity, ‘Land-garde’ is a revolutionary class, akin to the Leninian conception of the vanguard³ in this contemporary climate of neo-liberal global capitalism and its nexus with fascism. In this continuous historical change of political subjectivity, the very idea of ‘Land-garde’ is not limited to the anthropological periphery, rather it transgresses to the realm of ecological questions around land which is clearly evident in the imagery of an endangered reptile, trying to guard the constitution while peeping from a red blooming flora at the foreground whereas a ‘bulldozer of development’ is in an incessant operation at the far background. The persistent movement of the ‘Land-garde’ covers the ceiling of the first gallery, thus creating a monument of resistance against agony and injustice launched by tormented bodies and organs.

The existence of the ‘Land-garde’ is as precarious as the question of ‘encroachment’. Who encroaches on whose land? Some landless laborers from the villages of India encroach on the municipality-owned space of Delhi or the Capitalism-induced modernity encroached on the space of trees, animals, and species? Thus, in Anupam’s oeuvre the ‘bulldozer of development’ runs over to the yellow helmeted birds, sometimes transforming into the ‘bulldozer of fascism’, deliberately targeting the bulging faces and skulls which could be the minority or any other precariat of our society.

Just opposite the gigantic bulldozer image and in contrast to violence and resistance, there is a hilly monochromatic landscape with a frozen sense of a crime in a mining site painted with acrylic on the tarpaulin sheet describing the departure of a certain



historical moment where a couple is leaving their land, carrying sacks on their head and perhaps going towards the megacities like Delhi where the bulldozer is waiting for them. The painting reminds me of the famous sculpture ‘Mill Call’ by Ramkinkar Baij, here also the lady is stepping forward but at the same time looking backward to their village, creating memories and referring to history, whereas the man is looking forward towards the future.

Within the variety of materials and mediums, the industrially produced wiggle eye of different sizes is one of the most significant objects that Anupam has used in his various enunciations. Starting from the white-on-white oil painting where a small wiggle eye is sleeping on an empty hospital bed, one can think of the idea of witnessing the horror of Covid, the shortage of hospital beds, the next painting depicts a tormented open trunk with several wiggle eyes spreading here and there, perhaps a propagandist’s attempt to the question of ‘presence of witness’ in communal violence. In this era of the mobile camera, the question of ‘witnessing violence’ is in a state of dilemma where the eye of the camera itself became a weapon for spreading hatred. Then, what is the role

[1] *A cog in the machine is an idiom that is sometimes used to express a worker’s alienation to their own manufactured products. Actually, if a cog does not work smoothly in a machine, the entire machine will collapse. Thus, here the idiom reimagines as ‘broken cogs’ to address the fracture or brokenness as political tool to combat against the corporate regime.*

[2] *Leviathan is a commonly known biblical monster what first used as a title of a book of social contract theory by Thomas Hobbes, published in 1651. Here, the machinic leviathan refers the complex nexus between government and the industry based global capitalism.*

[3] *Lenin’s idea of vanguard suggests a group of advanced working class who can lead the struggle against the bourgeoisie power structure.*

of a painter-propagandist in this digital age? Is the presence in each place of violence necessary to be a propagandist? How can one understand and depict the distance? What could be the possible ways of representing violence, injustice, and struggle when one is claiming himself as a ‘propagator of truth’? These questions haunt the mind of the artist while brushing a single stroke on any surface. It is clearly manifested when one finds the watercolor images of burnt factories of Delhi, painted on an opaque photoprint on handmade paper and displayed on the surface of the gallery, an attempt to showcase the process of witnessing from a distance and with solidarity.

The wiggle eye travels to the next room of the gallery, consciously scattered on the large white scroll and three other paintings on the handmade papers where a series of moving legs also contain a few eyes. Placing the most precious sensory organ on the legs is possibly an attempt to break the hierarchy of body parts, as described in ‘Manusmriti’⁴. Using industrially manufactured eyes is not a new stance in the art industry but consciously scattering the same object into different contexts in different paintings is a radical artistic proposition in response to making a

singular spectacular object out of industrial products by other artists.

Poetry, quotes, slogans, and texts are some conceivable parts of Anupam’s practice, developed from the longstanding proliferation of political posters and banners, repetitively juxtaposed with the visual entries in his diaries. In the history of art and literature, the diary is considered an intimate space for a creative mind, and the art industry always unravels it in a way that creates the aura of an artist and celebrates individualism. While arguing ‘Personal is Political’, the displayed diaries are some notable examples of collaborative personal practice, where all the contributors can claim their authorships, and diminishes the idea of individualism, possibly proposing an alternative question ‘Is political personal’? Thus, all the solid form of collectivism that he developed in his practices now melts into the air of the Vadehra Gallery and resonates as morbid symptoms, sometimes echoing slogans like “Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise, both will wither and die” ... B.R Ambedkar. ■

[4] *Manusmriti is an ancient Hindu scripture of law. It has been subject to critical examinations by B.R Ambedkar who held it responsible for discriminatory caste based practices in India.*





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