

ALL INDIA JOINT CONVENTION OF WORKERS AND FARMERS

24TH AUGUST, 2023, TALKATORA STADIUM, NEW DELHI

DECLARATION

This All India Joint Convention of Workers and Farmers being held on 24th August, 2023, at Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi at the call of the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions/Federations/Associations and Samyukta Kisan Morcha representing large sections of the working people of our country, takes stock of the alarming situation before the workers, farmers and all sections of common people of our country created by the destructive and disastrous pro-corporate policies being aggressively pursued by the government at the Centre since 2014. These policies are anti-worker, anti-farmer, anti-people and anti-national. They have proved to be disastrous for our national economy and for the unity of the people and integrity of the nation. This National Convention has met here on this Day to decide the future course of joint and coordinated actions to 'Save the People and their livelihood' from these disastrous policies.

The platform of the Central Trade Unions (CTUs)/Federations/Associations represents workers from almost all sectors of our national economy-formal/organised and informal/unorganised, and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha represents large sections of farmers, including marginal, small and medium.

Farmers Experience

Farmers, driven to suicides due to unending problems from cultivation to marketing, were saddled with the hated three farm laws that were openly pro-corporate. All the big corporates had started acquiring huge tracts of land to build warehouses, to replace government owned godowns. It was only the tenacious struggle of the Farmers, under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha, sitting on Delhi borders for 13 months, facing all odds, harsh weather, even Covid pandemic, oppression and worst defamatory abuses (we will never forget Lakhimpur Kheri incident), that compelled the Union government to back track to save their skin. But even the written assurances given by the Union Government to the Farmers on MSP and Electricity (Amendment) Bill etc. have not been honoured. Due to the Government policies, the indebtedness of Farmers has increased and all the promises made to the Farmers to double their income have fallen flat. Lack of adequate irrigation, non-functioning crop insurance scheme, replacing Public Distribution Scheme with Direct Benefit Scheme only add to the woes of the Farmers. Agrarian economy is continuing to face a crisis, despite their contribution in enhanced production level.

Workers Experience

The workers are faced with rising unemployment, job losses and spiralling prices of all essentials. All their hard-won rights are being watered down through Labour Codes, "for ease of doing business". Permanent jobs are declining sharply; outsourcing, contract work in various formats, fixed term employment, gig work etc along with drastic decline in real wage level on the whole is becoming the new normal. The agricultural workers, a major component of the country's agricultural population, are the worst-hit and pushed into absolute poverty and destitution, being forced to migrate to towns and cities in big number, devoid of any social security.

The Indian Government has been one of the founding members of the International Labour Organisation. But the Government, since 2014, is simply not observing even the ratified conventions. The very first convention enjoins the Government to limit working hours per day to 8, but the Government at the Centre as well as their state governments are increasing it to 12 hours at the behest of foreign multinationals. Convention 144 requires the Government to convene tri-partite meeting (Govt-Employer-Worker) at least once a year. This Government has not convened such a meeting since 2015, in spite of several reminders. All Labour Codes have been passed without such consultation. While the ILO is moving towards ensuring Occupational Health & Safety for the workers (unanimous Convention 189, adopted in International Labour Conference, in June, 2023), this Government has stopped even inspections of establishments. The struggle for Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and against National Pension Scheme (NPS, brought by the previous NDA Government from 1999 to 2004) by Government employees – both Central and State – has assumed a nation-wide proportion, with some of the states restoring the OPS, while the Centre tries to find escape route promising "Pension Committees" to look into it.

Government's Policies

Privatisation is central to the policies of this Government. When sale of cash cows like BPCL, CEL, Air India, Pawan Hans etc was not picking up at the pace they wanted, the Government came up with National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) project, handing over various public sector assets, built with people's money, to big corporates to make money without any investments! Airports, Highways, Ports, Railway tracks, stations everything is up for grabs. Education is being privatised. PSU Banks are being merged and being prepared for privatisation. LIC, GIC are targeted for privatisation. Even 41 Ordnance Factories, producing defence equipment, have been turned into 7 corporations, prior to their privatisation, a patently

anti-national move, affecting 80000 workers. The Government is eyeing huge tracts of land with defence, railways and so on. Pompous display of G-20 Presidentship, (which India got by rotation) as a World recognition of the PM, is sickening to say the least. Despite opposition from Central Trade Unions and ITUC, the Government went ahead to nominate their favoured union to head L-20.

While the Corporate taxes are being reduced, common people are being saddled with higher GST burden and higher user charges of almost all public utility services. The State Governments ruled by parties other than that at the Centre, are being starved of their share of funds, leading to non-payment of MNREGS wages, Scheme workers dues etc. Wilful bank defaulters and fraudsters are being invited for "negotiated settlements" while insuring only Rs.5 lakhs of the depositors. Rs 14.56 lakh crore have been written off by the PSU banks during last 9 years but this govt is not ready to write off the debts of peasants or to provide C2+50% MSP rates of their agricultural produce. National debt has climbed to Rs.153 lakh crores.

The Results

As a result of these policies, mass-poverty has aggravated to a menacing extent, contracting demand, continuously slowing down 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. There is phenomenal increase of wealth and incomes of the big corporate class and impoverishment of the mass of the toiling people : 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%. India is falling in all indices like hunger, poverty, child care, women safety, freedom of expression, human rights etc.

We are worried that our children are not getting jobs. 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 sector contract workers employed in govt. hospitals for fighting Covid are now being thrown out of their jobs even after promise of permanency. After Covid, when jobs are desperately needed to bring life back on track, factories are being allowed to close down even illegally, resulting in large scale unemployment. Under the pretext of Covid, railway concessions to Senior Citizens, Women, Differently-abled persons, Sports persons were withdrawn. The rural economy, based on the farming activity, animal husbandry etc are big contributors to the sustenance of vast majority of our rural population is being systematically crushed through price instability and uncertainty of sales.

The informality in the labour market of the country is increasing. Workers, predominantly women, take to self-employment and home-based trades to make two ends meet. Women comprise 33% of the agriculture labour force and 48% of the self-employed farmers in India. There are no laws/policies for facilitating, protecting and regulating self-employed workers and their trades. The condition of the migrant workers is deteriorating. There is no portable social security for them despite big claims of digitalization. The construction workers cannot avail of the social security despite huge cess collected in BOCW. To make social security more effective, off-line registration and renewal of construction workers should be allowed and ESIC should be made applicable to them from cess amount. Even those registered under E-SHRAM portal are not provided any social security. All these sections rightfully deserve basic social security schemes like health care, life and disability insurance, old age benefit, maternity, child care and educational benefits. The State Governments should be tasked with trade specific schemes to improve the trades and skill of the workers. This will ensure formalization of informal trades.

The Federal Structure and the Rule of Law in Danger

The actions of the Government at the Centre are against the federal structure of our nation: Governors, appointed by the Centre, openly act as agents of the Centre, making it difficult for the elected state governments to function, many elected state governments are overturned to install their own party governments, GST funds collected at the Centre are not shared with the State Governments, prompting them to go to the Supreme Court to claim their rightful dues! The party ruling at the Centre, is using its brute majority to overturn Supreme Court Orders (Case of National Capital Service Matter), reconstituting the 3-member committee that decides the Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners: by replacing the Chief Justice of India by a minister of the ruling party and the PM and the Leader of the Opposition being the other two! Replacing IPC, CrPC and Evidence Act, ostensibly to do away with British era laws, but in fact making them even more stringent, increasing the jurisdiction of BSF in border areas from 5 km to 50 km.... the list is long.

Divisive Communal Policies

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 cultivate poisonous communal-divisive polarisation in the society and divide the workers, farmers and the people in general to divert their attention from their burning issues and weaken united struggles to benefit the corporates. This is being carried out with the active support of the corporate owned mainstream media and social media troll armies.

The continuing ethnic clash in Manipur leading to huge loss of lives and atrocities on women, recent communal clashes in Haryana (Nuh) and similar provocations in other parts of the country as well –are all engineered by the same divisive-polarisation oriented policy regime. Continuing atrocities on the most downtrodden sections of the society (incident of urinating on an tribal person in MP and two dalit boys in UP) and atrocities on internationally acclaimed women wrestlers, who raised their voice against their tormentor, the then President of Wrestling Federation of India, the premature release of Bilkis Bano's rapists last year are also brutal expressions of same divisive machinations on the society being engineered by the ruling-clique. And all those are aimed at tearing out and disrupting common peoples' united struggle against exploitation. What is shocking is that the Prime Minister keeps mum on all these incidents that shock the collective conscience of the Nation.

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 and through misuse of nefarious laws such as UAPA and Sedition Act etc. This is aimed to create an atmosphere of terror, to silence all opposition and dissent, and sabotage democratic processes.

The entire system of governance that promotes and sustains the loot and plunder of the people as well as the national economy, stands exposed.

Determined United Struggle Can Stand UP To This Ruling Clique

The struggle of Samyukta Kisan Morcha has no parallel in the world. The Government had to take back their Farm Laws. Through our united struggles, the privatisation process in several PSUs like BPCL, CEL, some steel plants etc could be stalled, though only for the time being. Saving Vizag Steel Plant from privatisation has become people's struggle. The united struggle of the electricity employees, in Maharashtra, UP, Puducherry, J&K, Chandigarh and Haryana forced the governments to retreat. Through their militant united struggles, the scheme workers in various states achieved many of their demands including increase in their remuneration. We must note here that all the so-called reforms in electricity sector being pushed through desperately by the Govt are aimed at ending the very concept of cross subsidy and role of the State in electricity sector to establish a regime of cost-reflective tariff regime which will spell doom in agriculture, MSMEs and make electricity unaffordable by mass of the common people.

What we are required to do

The national economy should be protected from the malice of the systemic crisis of the neoliberal policies 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, such as subsidy to farmers including agricultural inputs, the state-owned mandies, appropriate MSP etc are the measures necessary to address the distress among the farming community. This can be done by increasing taxes on corporates, rich and the Super Rich, restoring Wealth Tax, and Succession Tax. Even the Nobel-laureates are advising this.

What is required is to make the workers, farmers 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 the corporate-communal nexus in the governance at the centre. They cannot be expected to change their pro-corporate policies. They have to be ousted from power. Our joint and coordinated struggles are to be developed at such a height that no govt either at the Centre or States dare to impose anti-worker and anti-farmers policies. Working class and Farmers' movement is destined to discharge this task along with the people at large, leading from the front.

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 joint and coordinated struggles, of the platform of CTUs/Federations/Associations on the one hand and the united movement of Samyukta Kisan Morcha on the other, as well as our experience of supporting each other in the various programmes in the past, this Joint Convention of Workers and Farmers calls upon toiling people of our country to take joint and coordinated 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 campaigns and combative agitations leading to higher forms of struggle at all levels.

We commit ourselves to work jointly on the following Charter of Demands :

Charter of Demands

- Control price rise, remove GST on the essential items like food, medicines, agro-inputs and machinery, reduce substantially central excise duty on petroleum products and cooking gas.
- Railway concessions to Senior Citizens, Women, Differently-abled persons, Sports persons, withdrawn under the pretext of Covid, be restored.

- Guarantee Food Security and Universalize Public Distribution System.
- Guarantee Right to Free Education, Right to health, water and sanitation for all. Scrap New Education Policy, 2020.
- Ensure housing for all.
- Stringent implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA); withdraw the amendments to Forest (Conservation) Act, 2023 and Bio-diversity Act and Rules that allow the union government to permit clearance of a forest without even informing the residents. Ensure land to the Tiller.
- National Minimum Wage of Rs.26000/-p.m.
- Convene Indian Labour Conference regularly.
- Stop privatization of Public Sector Enterprises, Government Departments and scrap National Monetization Pipeline (NMP). Amend existing law on mining of minerals and metals and ensure 50% share of profit from mines including coal mines for upliftment of local communities, especially Adivasis and Farmers.
- Withdraw the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2022. No pre-paid smart meters.
- Right to work be made fundamental. Fill sanctioned posts and generate employment for the unemployed. Expand and implement MGNREGS (200 days per year and Rs.600/-p.d. wage). Enact Urban Employment Guarantee Act.
- Increase subsidy to farmers on seed, fertilizers and electricity, legally guarantee MSP @ C-2+50% for farmers' produce and guarantee procurement. Prevent Farmers' suicides at all costs.
- Withdraw the pro-corporate PM Fasal Bima Yojana and establish a comprehensive Public Sector Crop Insurance Scheme for all crops, to compensate farmers for losses due to climatic change, drought, flood, crop related diseases, etc.
- Declare Comprehensive Loan Waiver Scheme to free all the farm households from the trap of indebtedness.
- Implement written assurances given by the Union government, based on which the historic Kisan Struggle was suspended : Memorial at Singhu Border for all the martyred farmers, pay compensation and rehabilitate their families, withdraw all pending cases, prosecute Ajay Mishra Teni, the Union MoS for Home.
- Withdraw four labour codes, Fixed Term Employment and ensure equality and safety at work. Stop casualization of labour. All categories of unorganized workers, such as Home-based Workers, Hawkers, Rag-Pickers, Domestic Workers, Construction Workers, Migrant workers, Scheme Workers, Agricultural Workers, Workers in Shop/Establishments, Loading/Unloading Workers, Gig Workers, Salt-pan Workers, Beedi Workers, Toddy-tappers, Rikshaw-pullers, Auto/Rikshaw/Taxi Drivers, Ex-patriate Workers, Fishing Community etc. be registered and given portability in comprehensive social security, including pension.
- Give ESI Coverage to Construction Workers, with contributions from the Welfare Fund, also give coverage of health schemes, maternity benefits, life and disability insurance to all workers registered on E-Shram Portal.
- Ratify ILO Conventions on Domestic Workers and Home-based Workers and make appropriate laws. Make comprehensive policy on Migrant Workers, strengthen existing Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1979 providing portability of their social security cover.
- Scrap NPS, restore OPS and provide Social Security to ALL.
- Tax the Super Rich; Enhance Corporate Tax; Re-introduce Wealth Tax and Succession Tax.
- Stop attack on core values of the Constitution – freedom of expression, right to dissent, freedom of religion, diverse cultures, languages, equality before law and federal structure of the country etc.

Nationwide Call of Action

Apart from working for the above demands, we resolve to appeal to all the workers and farmers across the country to come forward and participate in the following joint and coordinated actions in the coming days :

1. Observe **3rd October 2023** (Lakhimpur Kheri massacre of farmers in 2021) as **Black Day**, demanding dismissal and prosecution of the alleged conspirator, the Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni. (The form of action will be declared later.)
2. Organise **Day and Night Mahapadav Struggle** in front of the Raj Bhawans in the State Capitals of all the States and Union Territories, from **26 to 28 November 2023** (26 November 2020 had been the day of the All India General Strike by workers and the first day of the historic March to Parliament by farmers.)
3. December 2023/January 2024 - **Determined and Massive United Protest Actions** across the country. (The form of actions will be declared later).

Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions/ Federations AND Samyukta Kisan Morcha