



ITUC International Trade Union Confederation
CSI Confédération syndicale internationale
CSI Confederación Sindical Internacional
IGB Internationaler Gewerkschaftsbund

Ayuba Wabba

President
Président
Präsident
Presidente

To the ITUC affiliated trade union centres in India

Sharan Burrow

General Secretary
Secrétaire générale
Generalsekretärin
Secretaria General

DGS OT/IV

6 January 2020

Open letter to the ITUC affiliated trade union centres in India: mass strike protest on 8 January 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the occasion of your mass strike protest on Wednesday 8 January, I am sending you the solidarity and support of the global trade union movement. Your fight is our fight, and we stand shoulder to shoulder with you and the working people of India.

Despair and anger are again driving Indian workers and marginalised communities to the streets. Hundreds of millions of workers are expected to join the 5th national strike protest against the Modi Government.

The Modi Government's proposed reforms would increase labour flexibilisation, deepen fears of employment insecurity, increase labour market vulnerability leading to a supply of indecent jobs and the withdrawal of time-tested health and safety safeguards that protect workers. The dismantling of the labour job security and formal work through mindless policy prescriptions is simply a bid to dismantle democratic trade unions. The latest atrocity is to require unions to represent 75% of the workplace to be legally recognised. The role of the unions as a genuine, autonomous, and independent representative of the economic and social interests of workers in a democratised labour market will systematically decline.

The Modi Government is neglecting India's international labour standards obligations and the evidence of economists. India is a G20 country in terms of wealth but a poor country for the majority of the people suffering from impoverished working lives. Focusing on economic growth for its own sake leads to jobless growth and benefits only the elite, leaving workers and communities poorer, uncertain, unstable, vulnerable, insecure and unprotected.

This Government has done nothing to provide rights, minimum wages, minimum incomes or social protection for the 93% of the economy depending on informal work and is simply pushing more people into desperate working lives. Indian trade unions are, by striking, demanding a National Minimum Wage of 21,000 rupees; the ratification of ILO Conventions 87 and 98 and withdrawal of anti-labour measures; stop the selling off public sector enterprises to big corporates; implement proper social security

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measures for unorganised workers; and strengthen the public distribution system to control unethical price hikes.

When a Government attacks its own people and sets a course to fuel the greedy demands of corporations there can be no decent work and no shared prosperity.

The government is aiming at an improved rating on the World Bank's discredited Doing Business rankings to increase private sector investments in the interest of foreign multinationals and India's business elite. The ITUC has joined the broad criticisms of the World Bank's ideologically motivated ranking system on the lives of working women and men. Conceiving of labour standards as a barrier to private sector development pushes division that wreaks social havoc that becomes a ticking time-bomb that countries must painstakingly deal with at a later stage. It also exacerbates flaws in the economy, depriving people of purchasing power and leaving workers in precarious circumstances.

Yet the IMF and the World Bank agencies have realised that GDP growth has fallen to 4.2%. Due to the demonetization of Indian currency and the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST), 3 million small and medium-sized firms, including manufacturing businesses, have been closed down and 20 million workers have lost their jobs. At the same time big business is earning more and more: 78% of the total assets of the country are owned by 1% of the people.

The Modi Government's war on its working people and trade unions comes on top of the citizenship laws which enshrine an extreme right religious fundamentalism. The great democratic, secular traditions in India are being torn up!

The ITUC stands in support and solidarity with the Indian trade unions and their members in their struggle for democratic rights and freedoms.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B. Singh', written in a cursive style.

General Secretary