

EDITORIAL EMPLOYEES' FORUM SEPTEMBER 2009

Globalisation of hunger and India's Food Security

Is the Union Govt serious about food security in the country? Is the Govt serious about the impending food crisis?

United Nations warned that the world is moving towards a massive increase of hungry people – particularly in the Asia-Pacific countries and Africa. India is not outside this alarming prediction of the world body.

Let us have a look at the worrying indications of pre-budget Economy Survey 2008-09. The Survey points out a fall in wheat production. And now because of drought situation in a big part of the country, production of rice and wheat will obviously come down substantially.

The Govt of the day may try to befool the people in the midst of this grave food crisis by playing on their announcement to legislate Food Security Act. The Govt may also assure to provide food grains at subsidized price to peoples below poverty line while forgetting the minimum nutritional requirements of the poor people.

But what is the poverty line fixed by the Government? The official poverty line is so ridiculously low that it excludes overwhelming majority of the poor out of its coverage. As per World Bank estimation, poverty line is defined as \$2 per day of income/consumption and those below \$1 per day are considered to be under extreme poverty. As per official definition in India, poverty line corresponds to Rs 11.3/ per capita per day consumption in the rural areas and Rs 18.5/- per capita per day consumption in the urban areas and around 26 per cent of population is below the official poverty line. On the other hand as per Report of the NCEUS appointed by the same UPA Govt, more than 77% of the population live below Rs 20/- per day thereby accounting for around 51% of the people living between Rs 18 to Rs 20/- per day consumption level which also cannot be considered anything else but a situation of extreme poverty.

An expert panel appointed by the Rural Development Ministry under the Chairmanship of N C Saxena, the Commissioner appointed by Supreme Court, has given another estimation of more than 50% of the population remaining below the poverty line based on Rs 700/ per capita monthly income in rural areas and Rs 1000 monthly income in urban areas.

In totality, the official poverty line estimate which has been made the ceiling for so called targeted public distribution system and other social security and welfare schemes is nothing but a nefarious design for excluding the majority of the extreme poor from the benefits of the schemes and measures touted in their name by the ruling polity to get a political mileage. On the same poverty line parameters, the Govt seeks to deprive ninety per cent of the unorganised sector workers from the benefits promised by the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008.

Trade unions have already demanded, and more so now, universalisation of public distribution system to insulate people from the vagaries of price rise which would also act in containing to a considerable extent the price rise and also speculation in commodity market. At the same time while demanding early enactment of the Food Security Act to

cover entire population, we from the trade unions must also popularize the demand for reformulation of the poverty line on a scientific basis to quantify appropriate income/consumption parameters and also social parameters for capturing and identifying the entire magnitude of the people in abject poverty. The purpose should be for including the entire mass of the poor in the programmes for upliftment of *aam-admi* and not for exclusion of a vast section of entitled beneficiaries from the coverage of the scheme.

So, ensuring food security, while a serious food crisis, may be in the dimension of a famine, is looming large before the country, then Union Govt should take serious and appropriate measures without any talking out the issue. So it is urgently needed to reformulate the poverty line to ensure subsidized food for the country men is another urgent task of the Government Already the recently released report of the Committee headed by Suresh Tendulkar, former head of Economic Advisory Council of the Prime Minister have calculated the number of poor people of this country to 38% per cent of the total population, which numerically comes to around 30 crores of people.

The report of this official committee, if ignored by the Govt, then the country will be going to face a fatal situation. And the Govt of India should shoulder the entire responsibility of this criminal negligence.

Meanwhile, people at large cannot remain a silent spectator. The poor and the common people must assert themselves and build up a countrywide militant mass struggle to force the Govt for taking appropriate measures to supply food at subsidized rate. People cannot die of hunger any more. People cannot allow India to be a victim of globalisation of hunger.

Trade unions of the country and AISGEF should take the issue seriously to build up mass struggle to save the country and country's common people.

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United Trade Union Struggle – Urgent Need Of The Hour

Though the capitalist Governments worldwide and their economists have now started to repeat claiming that the adverse impact of the world economic crisis and the recession set off by the Wall Street crash on 15 September '08, have been receding and the world economy is going to recover its earlier position in no time, the fact is terribly otherwise.

The actual happenings whether in the USA, EU countries, Japan or anywhere in the developing countries do not confirm this loud claim of the votaries of capitalist system. Not only financial institutions and industries are shivering under the impact of the crisis, setting off an epidemic of formidable job losses at almost every minute of the day and the Government in these countries are still issuing bailout and stimulus packages to put the economy on its feet.

Prices of all commodities are shooting up at an astronomical speed without the least sign of let up. The agricultural economy has severely come under the damaging impact of the crisis and the consequent recession.

As usual every burden of this crisis falls on the back of the working class and the common people and the capitalists who are guilty for inviting the crisis, try to escape its

grave impact by shifting the entire burden of the crisis on to the workers. Retrenchment, flexibility of labour, intensification of the exploitation – all multiply and the workers become the hapless victims. It is in this dire situation the working class have no way out but to build up united resistance against such economic onslaughts of the capitalists and protect themselves.

In all parts of the world, big working class struggles are surging ahead against the offensives of neo-liberal globalisation. But the current grave economic crisis has further worsened the misery of the working class in a much bigger dimension. Now, their existence is coming into stake and the capitalist Governments are bent upon to bail out the failing economy with huge money doled out from the tax payers' money.

In India since 1991 continuous struggles are going ahead and by August 2008, as many as 12 general strikes have been organised in addition to numerous mobilizations and strike struggles at different industry level. State Govt. employees of the country has joined in numerous struggles of state levels and participated in all the India strikes, struggles and conventions.

After the 15th Lok Sabha elections held in India in a situation of a formidable price rise of all commodities as formidably as never seen before. And though the Union Government was claiming to have tamed down the most adverse effects of world economic crisis, the situation was not at all so. Huge number of employees and workers were losing their jobs, irregular employment almost totally replaced the system of regular appointment and new employment was totally stopped.

Moreover, like adding salt to the wounds, the newly elected Govt. of India in their first budget projected the aim of disinvestment, privatization of banking sectors, pension privatization, adverse amendment of labour laws, practically depriving the workers from their trade union rights earned and enjoyed so long, through the numerous and hard struggles of the employees, the Govt. no protection for workers of the unorganised sectors, no move to restrain uncontrolled rate of unemployment and all these projections and promises destructive to the entire system of the working class.

It is in this situation, even the trade unions controlled by the capitalist ruling classes felt alarmed as their own bases among the workers were threatened to be seriously eroded.

This unprecedented situation compelled the trade unions like INTUC and BMS and also HMS to open dialogue with the Left Trade Unions as to how a united trade union struggle can be built up on these issues so that the interests of the working class can be safeguarded.

This dialogue and desire for a joint action resulted in finalizing a date for joint convention of these trade unions on the *14 September 2009* at Mavalankar Hall, New Delhi. Ultimately, at the gathering of more than a thousand labour leaders from all these trade unions the convention was successfully held and a charter of 5 point demand along with a 5 point course of action urging upon the Govt. to act upon it, were adopted. Above all to push forward these joint united action it was unanimously decided to organise Joint Convention followed by *All India Protest Day on October 28, 2009*.

In the present situation it is really a very significant development that the Right wing and Left wing trade unions are coming together and having established a joint charter of demands and the urging the workers for a united fight.

Actually, this was the historic necessity of the day. Such a joint action by the trade unions irrespective of political affiliation or no affiliation, coming together to take to the path of struggle to protect the suffering workers and common people if properly pushed forward , will fulfill the needs of the day.

Two AISGEF representatives also joined the Convention and AISGEF feels it their bounden duty to follow the decisions of the Joint Convention to mobilize its full strength for success of the united struggle of the workers - particularly, a challenging success of *28 October, 2009, All India Protest Day* and state level joint conventions.

Let this most desired attempt for joint action of all trade unions in building up the class unity of the working class to act as an inspiring direction to the workers and employees of the country. AISGEF pledges to be a proud partner to this unfolding united struggle.