



befi NEWS

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JOURNAL OF BANK EMPLOYEES FEDERATION OF INDIA



Befi Contractual Employees Family Dharna at Kolkata





Imphal



Jharkhand



Dehradun

On 42nd Foundation Day
BEFI demands
 No Privatisation of Banks
 Adequate Recruitment
 Halt Outsourcing
 Absorb Temporary workers
 Stop Retrenchment
 Scrap NPS
 Pension Updation
15th Oct 2023
BANK EMPLOYEES FEDERATION OF INDIA



Ranchi



Palakkad



Hyderabad



Lucknow



Vijayawada



Guwahati



Karnataka



NABARD Kolkata



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DESK OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Recently, we are coming across several news item regarding employee strength in public sector banks (PSB) vis-a-vis private sector banks (PVB). Statistical data will reveal real changes in different categories over a period of time.

For public sector banks (12) :

	2014-15	2022-23
Officers	383474	397318
Clerks	315292	257771
Subordinate staff	160926	101555
Total	859692	756644

For private sector banks (21) :

	2014-15	2022-23
Officers	277457	713257
Clerks	30399	23589
Subordinate staff	11194	8766
Total	319050	745612

It is clear from the tables that the total number of employees of PVBs have rapidly increased during last few years and nearly equal to that of PSBs, 98.54%. Whereas, in 2014-15, the number of PVBs was 37.11% of the number of employees of PSBs.

Though the number of branches of PSBs declined in the last 5 years, from 91445 in 2017 to 84256 in 2022; but these are still much more in numbers than the PVBs which has been increased, from 24661 in 2017 to 37872 in 2022. Hence, during the period between 2017 and 2022, the branch counts of PSBs declined by 7189 while that of PVBs went up by 13211.

As on March 2023, total deposits of PSBs is Rs 117,09,581 crore in comparison to that of PVBs Rs. 62,99,332 crore. Advances of PSBs stands at Rs 82,83,763 crore as on 31 Mar 2023, vis-a-vis Rs 53,66,673 crore of PVBs.

With every year average business per employee of PSBs is increasing by leaps and bounds in comparison to the PVBs. On 31 March 2023, PSBs average business per employee was Rs 23.80 crore vis-a-vis PVBs' Rs. 15.02 crore.

From the statistical tables, it can be observed that the number of officers in both PSBs and PVBs have been increased, though in PSBs total number has been declined to the tune of almost 12%. While the number of clerks declined by 12%, the number of Subordinate staff is reduced by a whopping 37%.

The tables, quite obviously, expose impact of reduction of strength for the workmen employees, more so for the Subordinate staff. Hence, immediate recruitment in the post of Subordinate staff is necessary along with Single Window Operators.

The issue of recruitment in the PSBs, time and again, has been discussed within United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) taken up by many constituents. In the 2-day strike call by UFBU on 30-31 Jan 2023, the issue, "Adequate recruitment in all cadres to ensure better customer service" was included, The IBA, in its reply to the issue commented, "Recruitment of manpower of Banks is done as per the board approved recruitment policy through IBPS. The matter is out of the purview of IBA to comment".

On 22 June 2023, during bilateral discussion with IBA, the issue of acute shortage of staff in clerical, sub-staff and part-time cadres resulting in heavy workload on the staff was taken up by UFBU. IBA reiterated that recruitment is a bank-level issue and hence IBA has no role in the matter.

Hence, sustained movement for adequate and need based recruitment is necessary. The PVBs are concentrating on recruitment in cost-to-company (CTC) basis as also on fixed term. Following suit, the PSBs started to engage apprentices and contractual officers to render day-to-day jobs.

The Minister of State for Finance Dr. Bhagwat Karad while replying to a question in Rajya Sabha on 08.08.2023, stated that "As per inputs received from Public Sector Banks, as on 31.07.2023, 98% staff is in position against their business requirement." BEFI considers this statement far from reality and issued a Press Statement opposing the claim.

Rampant outsourcing of perennial nature of jobs violating industry level settlement is continuing unabated. Even the PSBs, led by SBI, are forming wholly owned subsidiaries to facilitate outsourcing. Casualisation and Contractorisation, particularly in case of jobs of Subordinate staff, has become order of the day. The MoS for Finance, in reply to a question provided the following details of contract workers in PSBs in Lok Sabha on 12.12.2022.

Category	Number of Contract workers
Housekeeping	5719
Security Guard	29865
Cash movement	3266
IT related services	1054
Catering/Cafeteria services	290
Others (Maintenance, CTS clearing, Call centre ATM Caretaker, Reconciliation activities, Technical Support staff etc.)	46802

These contract workers, as per government, are paid with prescribed minimum wages. Our experience tells the number is much more. Moreover, several thousands of casual workers are engaged in the PSBs throughout the country against paltry payment.

Before the 11th National Conference, we observed Demand Days on 12.05.2022, 22.09.2022, 27.06.2023. Given the pro-corporate neoliberal economic policy pursued by the government since 2014, it is not an easy task to accomplish adequate recruitment or for that matter, stopping outsourcing and Contractorisation. Militant joint movement is need of the hour. BEFI will continue its endeavour on these issues till joint movement develops in the Industry.

(30 Nov 2023)



(Debasish Basu Chaudhury)
General Secretary

rediff BUSINESS						
	PSBs	PVBs	SFBs	PBs	Total pvt sector	SCBs
2014-15	844,454	310,043				1,180,069
2015-16	856,071	374,794				1,256,085
2016-17	857,500	403,461	14,179			1,300,008
2017-18	844,163	420,534	44,320			1,333,405
2018-19	807,577	477,709	55,781			1,364,285
2019-20	790,659	554,418	95,249	2,048	651,715	1,465,955
2020-21	784,258	570,753	104,336	4,435	679,524	1,491,503
2021-22	770,812	646,446	116,393	7,051	769,890	1,568,789
*private sector staff strength almost equals public sector in 2021-22 *PSBs staff strength started falling from 2016-17 *PVBs more than doubled staff since 2014-15 *total includes employees of foreign banks in India SOURCE: RBI						

Smart Electricity Metering Project : A Deceptive Theft

—Sudip Dutta

The Indian power sector has undergone a complex and challenging journey of anti-people, anti-national reforms in recent decades. . The Electricity Act of 2003 was introduced with the aim of reducing government intervention in the regulation of the electricity business, opening doors for potential privatisation. However, due to extensive and sustained resistance across the country, state-owned distribution companies (DISCOMs) continue to retain control over the majority of the electricity distribution sector.

As the distribution stage represents the final link in the electricity service chain and plays a crucial role in revenue collection, the Modi government, known for its anti-people stance, sought to deliver a severe blow to state DISCOMs shortly after assuming power in 2014 through the introduction of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill. However, these efforts encountered strong resistance. Despite facing opposition, the BJP government persistently made multiple attempts to pass the bill, with the most recent being the EA Bill 2022. It became evident that their intentions were to systematically dismantle state DISCOMs and thereby destroy the remaining aspects of public service orientation within the electricity sector. However, these efforts faced determined opposition from both power industry professionals and the people of India.

On June 1, 2021, the power ministry issued a notification to introduce the Market

Based Economic Dispatch (MBED). This framework proposes the establishment of a centralised Day-Ahead Market (DAM), where sellers and buyers from across the country are obligated to submit their offers and bids. The Power Exchange would then unilaterally determine the dynamic Market Clearing Price (MCP) without any consultation or transparency regarding the mechanism to stakeholders. It is evident that this entire mechanism aims to compel generators and state DISCOMs to submit to a centrally-controlled market system, paving the way for large private players to exploit and manipulate the market using unscrupulous methods. This agenda ultimately seeks to take control of the Indian public power sector, while forcing state DISCOMs and State Load Dispatch Centers into risky, high-priced, need-based real-time purchases.

However, it turned out to be a precursor to a malicious blueprint. In a planned assault on the public electricity sector, under the guidance of the World Bank (WB), the ministry of power, launched a highly detrimental smart metering project. This scheme was abruptly made mandatory, leading to the sudden withdrawal of all existing financial support schemes from the central government.

The dangerous Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) is designed to shift the entire burden of the accumulated debt in the electricity sector onto state distribution utilities, state governments, and all

consumers. Consequently, this will result in a massive lack of access to electricity in rural areas. The scheme aims to segregate agricultural consumer lines from non-agricultural ones, creating an antagonistic environment and eliminating cross-subsidies. As a result, farmers will face water scarcity for irrigation, posing a severe threat to our country's food security.

Furthermore, this scheme will subject every consumer to market forces when it comes to electricity pricing, eliminating any safeguards or protection. Additionally, it will lead to a significant loss of jobs, as a large portion of the electricity sector workforce will be permanently affected. The scheme also facilitates the forced inclusion of private renewable energy sources (REs) into the energy mix, paving the way for the privatisation of the entire state distribution infrastructure at incredibly low prices. This desperate scheme serves as an alternative method to implement the oppressive clauses of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill without the need for parliamentary approval.

While the Revamped Reforms based and Results Linked Distribution Sector Scheme has an outlay of Rs 3,03,758 crore with an estimated gross budgetary support of Rs 97,631 crore from the central government, it clearly imposes a huge burden of Rs 2,06,127 crore on the consumers and state DISCOMs.

BRUTAL ASSAULT ON THE PEOPLE

The salient points of the reform guideline, as stated in the document, are as follows: demarcating and accounting for the exact electricity consumption by the subsidised categories; eliminating all forms of cross-subsidies in the name of Direct Benefit

Transfer (DBT) (we are all aware of the impact of DBT on household LPG costs!); compelling State Electricity Regulatory Commissions to continuously enhance tariffs to reflect the ever-increasing electricity purchase cost, resulting in a tariff shock for poor consumers; introducing blatant market-profit driven corporate governance reforms; operating part or the entire area of DISCOM's supply through private participation; forcing state governments to establish electricity police stations to enforce disconnections and penalties on poor or defaulted consumers; and installing feeder, transformer, and consumer meters using public funds under the Total Expenditure (TOTEX) mode.

It is evident that under this scheme, every individual consumer will be required to pay a substantial amount of Rs 7,000-8,000 for the installation of prepaid smart meters. These meters have a maximum lifespan of approximately 7-8 years.

Considering the estimated 26 crore consumers in India, this translates to a direct burden of Rs 26 X 8,000 = Rs 2,08,000 crore taken directly from the pockets of the people. It is worth noting that with just half of this cost, the entire distribution system's infrastructure could be upgraded, yet the conditions for grant approval practically guarantee minimal assistance from the central government.

The scheme claims to address the persistent issues of revenue realization gaps and technical and commercial losses. However, it is striking to see that the Central government has set targets for states to reduce the ACS-ARR*¹ gap from Rs 0.56/kWh to 0 and AT&C*² losses from 22 per

cent to 12 per cent by FY 25 as a precondition to qualify for grants under this scheme.

While these issues have long been prevailing and require comprehensive planning between generation, transmission, and distribution entities, the sudden and stringent introduction of this revamping scheme raises questions.

The central government is increasingly pressuring state DISCOMs to participate in the virtual electricity market. Through the power exchange mechanism, a real-time dynamic market price for electricity is determined using algorithms developed by market agencies. Alarming, the volume of electricity transacted through power exchanges has seen a significant increase, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of approximately 25 per cent from 2009-10 to 2021-22.

In reality, about 77 per cent of the financial burden faced by DISCOMs stems from the cost of power purchases alone. And the cost of power has been on an uncontrollable upward trajectory. On April 1, 2022, the regulatory commission directed power exchanges to set bidding prices within the range of Rs 0-12/kWh for both the day-ahead and real-time markets. However, market players created an artificial supply scarcity by abstaining from bidding, even at the highest sanctioned limit of Rs 12/kWh. This compelled the commission to increase bidding prices across all segments. A staff paper on pricing, prepared by CERC in October 2022, revealed that in March 2022, India witnessed a period of demand surge coupled with a supply shortage. The increased prices of fuel, particularly imported

coal led to an abnormally high market clearing price, frequently touching Rs 20/kWh, i.e., the maximum quotable price. The problem was exacerbated by excessively high market prices and concerns regarding super-normal profits earned by infra-marginal generators.

Suddenly, the ministry of power proposed the introduction of a High Price Market segment (HP-DAM). Citing this proposal, IEX*³ approached Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) to raise the price cap to Rs 99/kWh.

Consequently, in an order dated February 16, 2023, CERC approved an upper price limit of Rs 50/kWh for the HP-DAM. Market pricing, in essence, serves as a devastating and exploitative mechanism to exploit consumers, as evidenced by the maliciously inflated price of Rs 50/kWh. Typically, the market clearing price corresponds to the highest bidding price. Therefore, any company can submit an exorbitantly high bid through its affiliated subsidiaries or sister companies, resulting in windfall profits through this manipulative mechanism.

DATA HANDOVER TO PRIVATE DISCOMS FOR CHERRY-PICKING

One of the most concerning aspects is the provision of real-time data to market players through SCADA*⁴ mechanisms via prepaid smart metering, communicable smart feeders, and DT-level metering. This data accessibility poses a significant risk as it can be exploited by private competitors to manipulate speculative market prices and selectively target regions that offer the highest profits. We have witnessed private players like Adani aggressively seeking parallel distribution licenses in Maharashtra,

Uttar Pradesh, and other states, focusing on revenue-generating areas. With access to comprehensive consumption and billing data, which will be in the possession of private smart meter companies such as Adani, they can strategically apply for the most lucrative regions. The implementation of the Electricity (Amendment) Bill alongside smart metering will complete the destructive cycle of undermining public DISCOMs.

This scheme will establish a dynamic pricing system for individual consumers, directly linked to the real-time demand for household electricity. However, it is crucial to consider the potential vulnerabilities introduced by the underlying technology that controls data-smart operations. The integration of substantial IT and process impacts creates a heightened susceptibility to cyber-attacks. Even the World Bank, in its survey paper on the international experience of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI), explicitly highlights the risks associated with smart metering technology. These risks include accidents leading to voltage surges that jeopardise the health and safety of utility personnel and customers, the potential for prolonged disruptions in electricity service delivery, the misuse of data for political purposes (raising concerns about the role of the BJP government in non-BJP states), and breaches of customer data privacy that can

be exploited to attack residential or industrial networks and equipment.

Electricity stands as one of the most critical services in India, with its pricing still regulated to some extent by certain agencies, despite their limitations. In the year 2022-23, India produced a staggering 1,624.158 Billion Units of electricity, generating an average revenue of Rs 6/kWh. This translates to an ever-expanding market worth Rs 975 thousand crore per year. However, international finance capital, led by institutions like the World Bank, is fervently plotting to seize control of this market, subjecting every consumer to the whims of market forces.

It is imperative to understand that this scheme has no genuine association with network upgrades. Rather, it represents the final assault on India's public electricity distribution sector. It threatens the very foundation of India's federal structure. Some state governments have already begun rejecting this scheme, and electricity workers from various states are taking to the streets to protest against the imposition of smart metering. EEFI (Electricity Employees Federation of India) calls upon all electricity workers across the country, as well as workers, farmers, and the general public, to come together and resist this smart metering project.

(Com. Sudip Dutta is the Secretary of CITU)

*1 Average Cost of supply (ACS) and Average Realizable Revenue (ARR)

*2 Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses

*3 Indian Energy Exchange Limited (IEX) is India's power trading platform

*4 The full form of SCADA is Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition

Hegemony of Dollar is under threat

— Saji Varghese

Many financial experts believe that the US Dollar's hegemony which has endured for nearly 80 years, is finally coming to an end. The share of foreign exchange reserves in US Dollar is on decline. The holding of reserve currency in dollars with the global countries in the beginning of the year 2000 was 71%. However, it decreased to 58.36% in the current year. During the last two decades of the previous century, around 88% of the reserve currency was in US Dollars. Is the hegemony of dollar questioned?

Pound to Dollar...

Pound Sterling was the main reserve currency of the world during colonial days. It was weakened when British colonial days eclipsed. After second world war, the newly formed International Monetary Fund and World Bank under the auspices of Bretton Wood agreement, took the initiative to declare US Dollar as reserve currency and the central banks of different nation states agreed to link their national currencies with dollar. US agreed to give an ounce of gold equivalent to 35 US dollars as a matter of currency exchange with central banks of various countries.

However, United States withdrew from their promise by 1971 and US President Richard Nixon declared that they would not honour their earlier commitment of one ounce of gold for every dollar. That led to the collapse of Gold Standard. However, the hegemony of dollar continued. America usurped the dominating power of controlling

the world after the collapse of Soviet Union. They imposed a concept of unipolar world. Those who didn't fall in line to the tune of US, had to face military interventions. They imposed sanctions as tool on several countries to draw them to their line. They even annihilated certain Arab leaders who questioned the authority of US and the supremacy of dollar. In other words, dollar gained strength with the back up of military might of US.

Hegemony of Dollar questioned?

After the 2008 economic crisis, American allies started withdrawing from their military occupied areas and this forced US to follow suit. This led to the formation of new alliances. The failure of globalisation has too contributed to this state of affairs. This further paved the way for bilateral agreements. As such international trade agreements shifted away from US Dollar to nation states national currencies. With the emergence of Euro, Dollar currency reserve has started showing a back ward trend, further aggravated. So much so, the share of dollar reserve currency diminished dramatically.

United States has frozen around \$300 billion investment by Russia. There is one trillion dollars in circulation in various countries except China. Around two trillion-dollar currency reserve is there with China. United States continued their efforts to put blocks on the rise of China and Russia. "Encircling China" and the supply of weapons to Ukraine were a part of this

agenda. In order to block the export of crude and wheat from Russia, US and its allies are weaponizing Ukraine and postpone an amicable settlement to this war. Faith is very important in trade and financial exchanges. The credibility of the dollar was eroded day by day by the actions of US.

Immediately after the decision of BRICS nations on common currency, American Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen flown to China. India and several Asian countries too have decided to think and join in these lines with BRICS. India has signed a bilateral agreement with UAE to negotiate trade in their respective national currencies. All these aspects have contributed to the de-dollarisation process.

De-dollarisation

With no wonder, De-dollarization is the process of making the dollar less indispensable in international trade. It's a new development that several countries opted to trade in their own national currencies avoiding US Dollar. Not only China and Russia, but Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia joined in this group. Moreover, the 2008 world economic crisis and the period of Covid have created a substantial financial distress which inter-alia exposed the weaknesses of US Dollar as a single global reserve currency. Hence the central banks of various countries started to invest their reserves in different hard currencies.

BRICS countries have decided to opt national currencies for their exchanges in trade avoiding US Dollar. There was a discussion on a common currency in their meeting, it was reported.

A new global monetary system, at least one in which there is no near universal reserve currency, would amount to a reshuffling of political, economic and military power; a geopolitical re-ordering not seen since the end of cold war or even world war II.

Emergence of Digital Currencies

The rise of digital currencies around the world has further shaken the dollar's position as the global intermediary currency. This has made it possible to switch from one currency to another without the backing of the dollar. Changes in information technology have also added to this. The collapse of crypto currency and their exchanges has largely led to bank failures. Smelling the danger, various country's central banks have come out with their own digital currencies under their control and supervision.

Russia and China have decided to build up an alternate to SWIFT for exchange of foreign currencies globally. The merged entity after the merger of SPFS of Russia and CIPS of China with the adoption of new technology avoiding US Dollar may come in a short period of time. This too would weaken further the might of US Dollar.

American Election and De-dollarisation.

As a candidate in the run for Presidential election, old president Mr. Trump has focussed the dangers of de-dollarisation as an election propaganda. He has given a warning that place of US dollar as a global currency may be lost in the near future. The de-dollarisation trend is gaining momentum despite obstacles, which might have severe

effects on the US economy. Any way that is going to be a hot topic in the coming American presidential election. However, Biden administration would take all steps to stop this propaganda. That may further lead to military interventions, trade wars and economic sanctions.

Warning signal to Banks

It is sure that if you question the supremacy of US Dollar, that may pose danger to banks globally. Majority of banks keep their considerable part of foreign exchange reserve in US Dollars. In this context, it may be noted that during the sub prime crisis of 2008, ICICI Bank too faced the same sort of crisis and threat and it was on the verge of a collapse. The Indian government could manage the situation by

pumping 1000 crore rupees to ICICI Bank from State Bank of India and save it from a liquidity crunch.

The recent bank failures in United States are only an indication and tip of an ice berg. The government of United States rescued about 200 banks from failures through injecting around two trillion dollars from their exchequer. Banks are facing same situation in Europe also.

Economists are warning that the NDA government's major overhaul in the banking sector will be harmful in this situation. But to appease global financial capital, the NDA came up with measures to privatize public sector banks. Patriots of our country can watch the government move only with concern.

Events and Programs

BEFI Telangana organised a seminar to commemorate the 42nd Foundation Day of BEFI at RBI Hyderabad on 26.10.2023. Speakers were Com. Prakash Pande, ex-Vice President, BEFI and Com. S. Venkateswara Reddy, Secretary General, AIRRBEA. The 42nd Foundation Day of BEFI on 15th October 2023 was celebrated in different states throughout the country by members joining in meetings and demonstrations including in Ranchi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi, Agartala, Guwahati, Dehradun, Vijayawada, Palakkad, Chennai and other places. In Manipur, the 42nd Foundation Day of BEFI was observed at different banks at Imphal, Manipukhri and Changangei. A Blood Donation Camp was organised on the Foundation Day of BEFI jointly by Punjab National Bank Sramik Union and Bank Employees Federation, Birmhum District Coordination Committee.

A large demonstration and public meeting was organised by BEFI at Palakkad on 27.10.23 to express solidarity to the people of Palestine facing brutal genocide under the military occupation of Israel.

Mass demonstrations were organised by Bank Contractual & Contract Workers Union on 27th September at IDBI Bank, Zonal Office, Kolkata against retrenchment of 147 ATM Security Guards at the Bank. It was followed by a massive family dharna in front of Bank of Baroda, Zonal Office, Kolkata on 6th October against the retrenchment of ATM Security Guard.

Union Bank Employees Association, West Bengal and Sikkim organised their 3rd women convention at Kolkata on 8th October participated by women employees from different districts of the state.

A mass demonstration was held by Business Correspondents (BCs) at Bank of India, Zonal Office, Kolkata on 10.10.23 on their urgent and immediate demands followed by a deputation and submission of a memorandum to the General Manager.

Two days State level TU Camp was held on 28-29 October 2023 inaugurated by Com. Srinivasa Babu, President, BEFI Karnataka. Com. H Nagabhushana Rao, President, AKGBEF spoke on "History Of Bank Employees Movement."

Two-day Trade Union workshop organised by Indian Bank Employees Association. Bihar-Jharkhand on 28-29 October 2023 at Patna inaugurated by veteran Trade Union leader Com. Ajay Kumar, MLA.

NPS Must Go; Restore the Old Pension Scheme!

(Pension is neither a bounty nor a matter of grace depending upon the sweet will of the employer; it is not exgratia payment but a payment for past services rendered.)

—R. KARUMALAIYAN

Our Central and State Governments employees have been on consistent struggle against the National Pension Scheme (NPS) since long; and have been demanding the restoration of Old Pension Scheme (OPS). Recently, fifteen lakh State Government employees of Maharashtra were on strike since March 14. Similarly in Haryana seventy thousand Government employees agitated braving water cannon. The continuous struggles of our government employees' movement have brought the issues to the socio-political sphere. Five non-BJP ruled state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh have informed the Central Government/Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) about their decision to restart Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for their state government employees.

NPS is the ruling class project

Now all votaries of neo-liberalism started to abuse all these state governments on this 'fiscal immorality' as they characterize this move. RBI has been preaching on financial profligacy of the states by drafting and digging out report after report. All business columns in the mainstream media are full of stories shedding unending streams of crocodile tear on the precarious financial position of states and its presumed effect on the social welfare expenditure of states.

Then official propaganda was unleashed to justify this on the grounds that the cost to the tax payers on the state funded schemes is no longer affordable and the pension fund scheme like NPS could provide finance for productive investment and economic regeneration. Their ignominious idea was that this private individual finance, collected as pension contribution from the employees and workers, when invested in the financial market will boost the declining share market and help economic revival. In fact, the impetus behind the switch over towards funded pension schemes came from politically powerful vested interests in the financial market.

Thus the 'pension reform' was basically a class project of neoliberalism. In 1990s the World Bank had raised alarm on the so called "impending doom" if reforms were not implemented to mitigate the old age crisis that would arise from the then dominant pension model practiced by most countries, which was largely state-funded. As a "panacea" to the impending doom (!), the World Bank strangled the sovereign countries to shift from the defined benefit scheme to various other models mainly based on the neoliberal principles. Evidently, most of the countries have shifted from the defined benefit pension scheme to the contributory pension scheme which operates in line with the principles of

neoliberalism by emphasizing less government involvement in pension obligations and funding of pensions, and also transfers the market risks associated with pensions to the individuals. This roll back of the state from pension obligations and the associated shift to market-linked pension scheme has no doubt ignited protests across the globe.

BJP led NDA Brought NPS

In these background, the New Pension Scheme (Contribution based Pension Scheme) now called National Pension System (NPS), was introduced for Central Government on 22nd December, 2003 by the Vajpayee Regime to serve blood thirsty financial market. NPS was made mandatory for all new recruits to the Central Government service (except the armed forces) from 1st January, 2004. Due to the consistent opposition of Left parties' during the UPA regime, they couldn't able to pass necessary enactment to legalize the same. Then at fag end of UPA regime ruling without Left support, they emboldened to pass the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Act (PFRDA). After the enactment of the PFRDA Act, 2013, as per Section 20 of the Act, the new pension scheme notified on 22.12.2003 has become the National Pension System under the Act. NPS is now regulated under PFRDA Act, 2013 and regulation framed thereunder by Department of Financial Services and PFRDA.

Left Parties Opposition to NPS

The Left parties opposed NPS vociferously in both houses of parliament. The Left ruled states in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura in that period refused to implement the NPS. In West Bengal due to

the Left and the pressure from the employee's union, the old pension scheme continues as the successive governments have refused to implement the NPS. In Kerala it was during the UDF rule that the NPS was adopted in 2013. The present Left government in Kerala has constituted a high-power committee on November 7, 2018 to review the NPS and adopt the OPS. In Tripura the incumbent BJP government immediately after assuming office has adopted the NPS in its first budget session in 2018.

What is NPS?

Now NPS covers three categories; they are – a) The Government model for the Central and State Government Employees. NPS is mandatorily applicable on Central Government employees (except Armed Forces) recruited on or after 01.01.2004. Subsequently, all State Governments excluding West Bengal have also adopted NPS for their employees. Govt. employees make a monthly contribution at the rate of 10% of their salary and a matching contribution is paid by the respective governments. For Central Government employees, the employer's contribution rate has been enhanced to 14% w.e.f. 01.04.2019. b) The Corporate Model: Companies can voluntarily opt NPS for their employees with contribution rates as per the employment conditions. c) The All Citizens Model: The All Citizens Model of the NPS allows all citizens of India aged between 18 - 65 years to join NPS on voluntary basis.

On exit/retirement/superannuation, a minimum of 40% of the corpus is mandatorily utilized to procure a pension for life by purchasing an annuity from a life

insurance company and the balance 60% of the corpus is supposed to be paid as lump-sum. All the proponents of neoliberalism portrayed this the ideal pension scheme. What is the reality as of now; Let us see one live illustration.

NPS is a fraud

An employee in NPS serving railways for 14 years retired with basic pay of Rs.46,000. As per old pension rules 10 year service is enough to fetch 50% of salary as pension. In OPS she would get Rs 23000 as pension. In addition, she could commute her 40% pension i.e., Rs 9200 and would get Rs.9 lakhs as commutation amount. She would get Rs 13800 residual pension with dearness allowance for full pension of Rs 23000 for 15 years after which she gets full pension with dearness allowance. Here her benefit had been defined. Whereas in NPS where she had 12 lakhs in her pension corpus which had accumulated from her 10% of pay plus DA and government contribution with "returns" on investment. She could take 60% lump-sum i.e., Rs 7.2 lakhs and had to invest 40% ie 4.8 lakhs in an annuity which is default annuity for central government employees. She has to pay 18% GST for this purchase price. Annuity is the pension. She got only Rs 2600 as pension at the rate of Rs 520 per one lakh. Where is this paltry sum of Rs.2600 when compared to Rs 23,000? There is neither commutation nor DA. The present political dispensation and its cohorts say that Rs. 2600 is so decent! ; And so adequate pension. It needs not to be mentioned here that annuity service Provider Company will invest in share market and the pension continuation is dependent on market

volatility. There is no minimum pension guarantee. Minimum pension in central government is Rs 9000 plus dearness allowance. In NPS, to avail Rs 23,000 pension she should invest Rs 45 lakhs and should have a pension corpus of Rs.1.12 crore. Even after 30 years of service no employee could accumulate so much amounts after her entire service period. Thus it is a fraud on employees/ workers.

Prof. Prabhat Patnaik summaries this phenomena as "the change in the pension scheme for government employees introduced by the Vajpayee government was part of this parsimony that is the obverse of the largesse towards the rich. By bringing in a self contributory element and investing pension funds in the financial market, this "reform" reduced government contribution; it imposed a tax on each employee for his or her own pension, thereby offloading pensioners from the general revenue; and it made the pension amount uncertain and dependent on the market by making the pensioner rather than the government bear the investment risk". He added that "the main argument for the change that it reduced the burden on the exchequer was an illicit one. A government must raise revenues to meet its social obligations rather than reneging on its social obligations on the plea of inadequate revenues".

No dearth of money

Since we adopted the policy of Liberalization, Globalization and Privatization as the guiding principles of state, these had brought in a paradigm shift in the economic governance of the country. This is more visible in the taxation policy. Our Tax-GDP ratio is globally the lowest. Much of tax

revenue comes from poor working people of the country through indirect taxes levied on their daily essential goods and services. Most of our so collected tax revenue is routinely being diverted to big corporate as they did in during Corona period to the tune of ten lakh crores rupees. Around Rs.12 lakh crore have been written off from our Banks in the first eight years of Modi rule - by the big corporate borrowers. It added the total defaulted loan amount whopping to Rs 16 lakh crore. Thus there is no dearth of resources if there is a political will. If we levy 1% wealth tax, it will suffice to finance our all our social expenditure including pension obligations. In addition, 15% global minimum tax on the profits of Multinational Corporations could also be contemplated which is, now, gaining currency throughout the world.

Moreover, Pension is neither a bounty nor

a matter of grace depending upon the sweet will of the employer; it is not ex-gratia payment but a deferred payment for past services rendered. It was repeatedly pronounced by the Supreme Court as a deferred wage of the workers who toiled ceaselessly in their heydays of life for their employers. Given the phase of globalization in the stage of imperialism, finance capital in its quest for return maximization seeks unhindered access across the globe. One of such a hunting ground for international finance capital is the pension schemes where the scheme to loot the workers' pension money was designed. This expropriation is named in India as National Pension System. Let our fight to restore the Old Pension Scheme be politically integrated with the ongoing struggles of our working people to change policies of the ruling polity.

(R Karumalayan is National Secretary, CITU)

Struggles in banking industry

A large demonstration was held at RBI, Thiruvananthapuram as part of BEFI Kerala statewide program on 8th November anniversary of devastating demonetisation.

Demonstrations were held at FGM offices of Indian Bank around the country at the call of IBEF against placement of equity shares by the Bank to private corporate diluting GOI ownership on 5th October.

The First State Conference of Kerala Gramin Bank Temporary Employees Union was held on 12.11.23. It was inaugurated by CITU State Secretary Com. K. N. Gopinath. Com. K. Prakashan (ex-GS, KGBOU), Com. Shaju A. A., Com. Leena V. M. were elected President, GS and Treasurer respectively.

After several rounds of discussion with the top management at the Central Office, the IOB Staff Federation of India (BEFI) were successful in obtaining upward revision of the contractual rate of sweeping/ cleaning at the rate as Rs. 5/- per square foot in Branches at Metro & Urban areas and Rs. 6/- per square foot in branches at Semi Urban and Rural areas to be implemented within 30.11.23.

Salute the women who kept the Women's Reservation Bill alive.

— Brinda Karat

(They overcame contempt, dismissive attitudes, barriers of entrenched patriarchal power in decision-making bodies and proved, in state after state, that women are no proxies.)

When a government makes a mystery thriller of the parliamentary agenda, you can be pretty sure that event managers have been put to work to generate an added dhamaka. For many of us who have been part of the struggle for the women's reservation Bill, it is indeed unfortunate that what we have fought for almost three decades should be reduced to being an instrument to divert attention from a government's failures. The reason I say this is because the passage of the Bill at this late stage will make not a jot of difference to the composition of the 18th Lok Sabha. The draft of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill being circulated makes this clear enough. It has been linked to the Census, which is yet to begin, the delimitation process and also requires ratification by at least half the state assemblies, so the one-third reservations for women in Parliament and state assemblies will come into effect maybe by 2027.

So, should the women of India be grateful? The answer is an emphatic no. The BJP made an electoral promise in 2014 to the women of this country that a vote for the BJP would ensure at least one-third women's representation. It did not implement the promise in its first term

because of which there was no reservation of seats for the 17th Lok Sabha which has just 14 per cent women. In its second term, after having repeated its promise in its 2019 election manifesto, it did not list the Bill even once in the last four years and brings it only at the fag end of its term, ensuring that the 18th Lok Sabha will also reflect inequality in representation. The Modi government is responsible for this.

The adoption of the constitutional amendment and the Bill are a given since most of the Opposition parties have been demanding the passage of the Bill. It isn't rocket science to figure out that the passage of the Bill at this late stage has more to do with the forthcoming elections and the desire to escape the charge of non-implementation of its electoral promise. But what is objectionable and should be challenged on the floor of the House is the highly partisan Statement of Objects and Reasons. Such a statement should be precisely that — the intent, aim and perhaps a mention of the history of a legislation. But this version reads like an election manifesto of the BJP. It lists all the supposed steps taken by the government for women's advancement from gas cylinders to toilets. An ideology which sees women mainly as homemakers is still hesitant to link women's reservations

and participation in decision-making bodies to the essential process of strengthening democracy. The Preamble should be rewritten to document the fight of women to strengthen democracy. The legislation is historic and should not be cheapened in its stated objects and reasons with electoral considerations.

The media has been full of reports on the history of the Bill. The fact that it does have a history and was not buried deep underground after its first presentation in 1996, is because of the steadfast and sustained mobilisation of women's organisations and movements throughout the country, strengthened by the remarkable work of women in panchayats and local bodies, the first practitioners of women's reservation. They overcame the contempt, dismissive attitudes, barriers of entrenched patriarchal power in decision-making bodies and proved, in state after state, that women are no proxies. When the Bill is brought and adopted, the country needs to remember and salute these women fighters and women's movements which have kept the Bill alive.

When the Bill was adopted in the Rajya Sabha in March 2010 under the UPA government, I was an active participant in the discussions and a witness to the shenanigans of various players. One of the issues raised in the discussions in the Chairman's chamber by a BJP leader was that a condition for passage must be "order in the House". It seemed to me that this was a green signal to those who had already

planned for "disorder" in the House to ensure that the Bill was not adopted and that the credit should not go to the UPA government. There were those in the Congress party too who were not keen, including a top leader who was in discussions with other constituents of the UPA on the issue. But the unequivocal support for the Bill of the then UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi ensured that the various plans being hatched to once again sabotage the Bill were blocked. The firm position taken by the Rajya Sabha Chairperson Hamid Ansari was a critical factor in the passage of the Bill. An SP member sitting just behind me smashed a glass, cut his hand and, dripping blood, leapt onto the table protesting against the Bill. Many others opposing the Bill were loud and noisy. The unfazed Chairperson had all these gentlemen removed without further ado, the House was brought to order and the Bill adopted. A historic moment. When we walked out into the cool night air, there stood a beaming Sushma Swaraj, then leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, waiting for us. She hugged me and women MPs across party lines celebrated together. It was a wonderful example of joining hands for a bigger cause, so lacking today among the women leaders and ministers of the ruling party.

More strength to women's struggles which have ensured that the Bill is back and thereby helped to strengthen Indian democracy.

(Brinda Karat is a stalwart of the woman's movement)

MANIPUR : AIDWA Central Team witnesses a horrifying tragedy

Mariam Dhawale

From August 9 to 11, 2023, an AIDWA team comprising Patron Brinda Karat, President P K Sreemathi, and General Secretary Mariam Dhawale visited the strife-torn state of Manipur. This article is based on that visit.

We could understand the utter grimness of the situation in Manipur only after visiting the state and interacting with the people there, especially women. The pristine beauty of the hills and forests, the clouds resting on the hill tops, the lush greenery around – but today none of this evokes feelings of happiness and joy. If tragedy and sorrow could create echoes, the sound of them would burst our ear drums!

A STATE IN PAIN AND SORROW

Manipur is a state in pain. The divisions between the communities who have lived peacefully with each other is now deep. This is visible from both sides. The signs on the roads, houses, and shops reflect this divide. We spoke to a lot of people and especially to women. There is deep distrust and suspicion amongst them. Both sides feel very insecure and vulnerable. This insecurity is fuelled by the stopping of internet facilities. Rumours abound adding to the vulnerability. Nearly 5,000 colonies and many villages have been burnt to ashes. Properties have been looted. Thousands of people from both communities have fled from their homes. Relief camps have been set up. Barriers have been erected by both sides. The tribals have faced the brunt of the violence.

Who is paying the price for the narrow identity politics and the politics of hatred indulged in by the ruling state and central governments?

The barbarity that innocent citizens have had to face in Manipur is unprecedented.

The victims of sexual violence narrated unspeakable atrocities committed on them. The bodies of women became sites for taking revenge. Neighbours, friends, colleagues overnight became enemies. Wounds inflicted by known people are much harder to overcome. Manipuri women have been known for their strength but today the biggest tragedy is that the politics of division and hatred by the ruling BJP has turned that strength into an instrument being used against women themselves. The trauma that they are suffering will impact them throughout their lives.

TERRIBLE STATE OF RELIEF CAMPS

More than 55,000 people are in the 350 relief camps all over Manipur.

There are no decent facilities in these camps. Women feel very embarrassed having to share their space with all in the relief camps including men. Ordinary everyday activities like bathing, changing clothes, lying down for a rest, etc have to be done in front of everyone including the elders. It has robbed them of their self-respect and dignity.

Food and nutrition are a casualty. People are eating only dal and rice for three months.

The common people who are in their own houses are also totally at a loss how to carry on with their lives in these hostile conditions. They do not have jobs, no other means of livelihood, and no money. Hundreds of families eat only once a day. The rations grains have been stopped. Only the 5 kg grains started during the Covid period is being given.

When we drove from Imphal to go to Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, the intensity of the divide became clear. While crossing the two areas, there was the “No man’s land” between them. Barbed wires, barricades, large stumps of trees separated the two areas. It appeared like a “war zone”. When entering Kangpokpi, our car was checked to see if any Meiteis were there with us.

HEART-RENDING INSTANCES

1. We visited Churachandpur. There are around 250 relief camps sheltering more than 15,000 people. It was heart-rending to meet the young girl and the older woman whose ordeal shocked the entire country. These women were handed over to the marauding mobs by the police. The desperation of the young girl’s teenage brother and father to save her could be felt when it was described to us. The brother clung tightly to his sister. He was dragged away, brutally beaten with sticks and his head was smashed. The father too was killed in a brutal manner.

Somehow, both the victims reached a relief camp. The young girl could not tell her mother of what had happened to her as she was already suffering because of the deaths of her son and husband. She kept her terrible ordeal buried within her for days together. The mother learnt of it only after the video surfaced. It broke her heart.

2. Lhingnei, mother of the girl who was abducted when she went to the ATM on May 15. The father and the mother worked at Imphal. Since both parents were working, she looked after the home. They left Imphal on May 3 while the girl stayed on with her friend. She went to the ATM on May 15 from where she was abducted. They have not seen the dead body of their daughter as yet.
3. Jangkholum lost his eyesight 26 years ago. He has a family of six. His 18-year-old son, Letgunchon used to work as a trainee in an iron factory in Chingore in Imphal East. They had constructed their house in the village four months ago with the money sent by their son. Letgunchin did not feel safe at Imphal. He went to the house of a friend of his elder brother who was a Kuki. On May 5, some Youth Club members started searching the place. They checked the Aadhaar cards to find out who were sheltering the Kukis. Thangminlen, a non-Manipuri who had sheltered him, and Letgunchon

were both brutally killed and burnt.

4. Two young girls who worked in a car wash were killed on May 4. We met the father of Florence, age 23, Paotinthang Haungshing and the mother of Olivia, age 21, Kimneihat Chongloi. Their village was burnt on June 12. The parents fled the village and hid on the mountains. Now they are in a relief camp.

Olivia and Florence were good friends. Olivia was working in the car wash for a year. Florence joined her just a month ago. Olivia supported her family. The girls were paid according to the number of cars they washed daily. They could earn Rs 5,000 to 7,000 per month. The girls lived at the car wash itself. Florence spoke to her mother before the incident planning to be there for 'Mother's Day' which falls on May 14. The car wash owner told her mother that he would get Florence home for Mother's Day. Kimneihat was worried and wanted Olivia to return home. But Olivia said that they would be safe. The car wash owner told them that he would take them to safety. They trusted him. But he did not. Kimneihat called her again. The phone was answered by a girl who spoke rudely and turned the phone off. The car wash owner too did not answer his phone. Now both the girls are dead.

Now both the families are in the relief camp.

Therefore are no health facilities in

the relief camp. Olivia's father has gall bladder stones. There is no CT scan facility in Kangpokpi and they cannot go to Imphal. A surgery has been recommended for her husband. They will have to go to Kohima, Nagaland for this surgery, which is not possible for them.

Paotinthang said, "We are helpless and powerless. Our lives have been destroyed. We, all communities, are suffering". The woman accompanying us said, "If they are after the militants, let them go after them. Why are they destroying a whole community? This is not why the people elected this BJP government. We do not know what lies ahead for us. It is like a war. No one feels safe today. Anything, even a rumour, can ignite a fire."

5. Joshua Hangshing is a man of very few words. He had a love marriage. He is a Kuki and his wife Meena was a Meitei. They had three children. They lived in Kangchup Chingkhong village in Kangpokpi district. This village has a mixed population. Some houses in the village were burnt down. So, they shifted to the relief camp inside the Assam Rifles camp in a school.

When on June 4, Joshua went nearby to get water, his 7-year-old son Tonshing saw him from the window and shouted, "Papa, Papa". A sniper's bullet hit him. The Assam Rifles police did not take the boy immediately to the hospital. They informed the Superintendent of

Police in Imphal. Three gypsy commandos were sent to this camp. They accompanied the boy, his mother and another woman, a family friend who were in the ambulance. The son was alive. They were going to take the boy to RIMS hospital in Imphal. Joshua did not go as he was a Kuki. He thought no harm would come to his wife as she was a Meitei.

The ambulance was stopped by a mob at Lamsang. But they were allowed to proceed. Later when they reached Iroisemba, the police disappeared. The mob stopped the ambulance. They started checking their Aadhaar cards. The mob started taunting the mother. They said, "You are a Meitei but have married a Kuki. You have converted to Christianity. You have become a Christian because you do not want to be cremated but buried. So, we will burn (cremate) you today. The 7-year-old son, his mother Meena and another woman friend were burnt alive in the ambulance.

6. Lhingneikim Lhungdim married Jamksolal, a school peon, in January 2022. She gave birth to a girl named Lamnunnan on April 30, 2023 through a caesarean operation at the Imphal Christian hospital where she is a staff nurse. It was a caesarean operation. She was discharged from the hospital on May 3.

Their area was attacked on May 4. Lhingneikim tried to move to a safe place in a school nearby. She was in pain yet walked to the school. The school was attacked. People started running away from the school. Her husband and her brother tried to help her to run. They were attacked and killed in front of her and her mother. Her brother was killed in front of his children. The Imphal Christian hospital is also destroyed and all the medical equipment have been stolen.

The mother-in-law took the baby and ran to a nearby locality where the Naga community lived. She knocked on the doors for help. No one took her in their house afraid that they would be attacked if they helped her. She begged them. Humanity won and they let her in. They also gave some milk powder for the baby.

7. We visited the two relief camps. Most of the people reached this camp on May 3. The village has been burnt to ashes. More than 700 men, women, including pregnant women and children are living in these two camps. All of them are terrified of the situation. Food is scarce and they have been eating only dal and rice for the past three months.
8. The Santhong camp started on May 3, set up at the temple land in Bishnupur district. There are 380 inmates in this relief camp. People from Turbung, Phaogakchao and nearby villages are in this camp. 70

per cent of the houses in Turbung have been burnt. The police ran away when the mobs attacked the village. No government official has visited this camp. Only the local people and NGOs have helped this camp. The MLA has supplied them water and light.

Minika Mairangthem, age 28, from Phaogakchao village is deeply distressed. She said, "All communities have lived together happily for so long. I used to grow and sell vegetables. Outsiders came and looted all our precious belongings. Then my house was burnt down in front of my eyes. Our own villagers, who knew us, participated in the burning of our houses. We are living in these miserable conditions for more than three months. How long can we go on living like this! Our land has been distributed among the local people. The Assam Rifles asked us to leave and have helped them.

9. The Thongju Kendra relief camp is running in the Ideal College, Akampat, Imphal East with 1,000 inmates since May 8. Dr Radhika, a psychologist visits this camp to help the traumatised people. 123 children here have been recently admitted to class 1 to 10 in the local schools nearby.

We saw a woman learning to weave silk thread. She told us that she used to run a small hotel earlier. Now she is here with her entire family. She makes 250 grams of silk thread in

one week. She works for 8-10 hours a daily. She receives Rs 700 per week for 250 grams of the silk thread. This means Rs 100 per day.

10. We spoke to a Reverend father. He requested us not to name him. He questioned, are we not Indians and humans? Will we be allowed to live like all Indian citizens? This has been created by the political administration. Their ideology is a threat to our existence. The Kukis and Meiteis are both victims of the 'Look East' policy which is all about corporate wealth. They are eyeing the natural resources in Manipur.
11. Chingboi, president of the Zumi Mothers Association told us how they saved 22 orphans from the orphanage in Torbung Bangla. The children were extremely frightened by the firing and burning. They had run out of the orphanage and were hiding near the river bed. Chingboi rushed to the orphanage with two vehicles and brought the children to safety.
12. Sarat Salam from Imphal told us that all women, all mothers spend sleepless nights. Their sons from both the communities are moving around with guns or in mobs and they cannot do anything to stop it. So, thousands of women come out on the roads to keep a watch day and night. The police and government have not done anything.

There are innumerable such disturbing stories of people's lives being destroyed.

कोयला संकट या कोयला घोटाला : मोदी सरकार बेनकाब !

एआईसीडब्ल्यूएफ और ईईएफआई ने मजदूरों के सभी तबकों से विरोध करने का आह्वान किया

जय मोदी सरकार वर्तमान में गैर-जीवाश्म ईंधन ऊर्जा की ओर परिवर्तन के नेता के रूप में अपनी स्वयं की अति-महिमापंडित भूमिका का प्रचार करने में व्यस्त हैं, यहाँ तक कि जी-20 नई दिल्ली घोषणा के परियोजना रोडमैप को भी उजागर कर रही है, यह मोदी के शासन के भीतर एक अजीब विसंगति और विरोधाभास है। दो सबसे महत्वपूर्ण मंत्रालयों, बिजली और कोयला, में प्रशासन, अपने कारपोरेट आकाओं विशेष रूप से अडानी की सेवा पर केन्द्रित करने के लिए सत्ताधारी सरकार की हताशा को उजागर कर रहा है।

कोयले के आयात से लेकर ग्रीन हाइड्रोजन, जीवाश्म ईंधन से लेकर नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा, उत्पादन की लागत से लेकर मंडारण तक और कई अन्य मुद्दों की एक बड़ी क़्रंखला सतह पर और सार्वजनिक चर्चा में आ रही हैं, जिसके लिए बहुआयामी अध्ययन, चर्चा और महान निरीक्षण अभ्यास की आवश्यकता है। हालांकि निर्विवाद तथ्य यह है कि सम्पूर्ण परिवर्तन से विशालकाय निगमों के अपनी निष्क्रिय पूँजी को अकल्पनीय सुनिश्चित लाभ अर्जित करने में मदद मिलेगी। हम आने वाले दिनों में इस मोदी सरकार के एक के बाद दूसरे घोटालों को उजागर करेंगे जो हमारे देश की ऊर्जा सुरक्षा और सम्प्रभुता को खतरे में डाल रहे हैं और निजी पूँजीपतियों को सौंप रहे हैं।

बहुचर्चित कोयला आयात मुद्दे ने एक बार फिर से सूचित वर्ग और हितधारकों का ध्यान आकर्षित किया जब 9 जनवरी 2023 के पहले के आदेश के क्रम में एक हालिया परिपत्र 1 सितंबर 2023 को जारी किया गया है, भारत सरकार के विद्युत मन्त्रालय ने सभी घरेलू कोयला आधारित (डीसीबी) जेनको (केन्द्रीय, राज्य और स्वतंत्र बिजली उत्पादक) को थर्मल पावर उत्पादन के लिए 31 मार्च 2024 तक खुली बोली प्रक्रिया के माध्यम से अनिवार्य रूप से 4 प्रतिशत कोयले का

आयात और मिश्रण करना होगा, उसमें उल्लिखित कथित कारण स्पष्ट रूप से बताता है कि कोयले की आपूर्ति कोयले की आवश्यकता के अनुरूप नहीं है।

दूसरी ओर, एक अजीब और हास्यास्पद कदम में, उसी सरकार के कोयला मंत्रालय ने 5 सितंबर 2023 को एक प्रेस विज्ञप्ति के माध्यम से देश में बढ़ती ऊर्जा माँग को पूरा करने के लिए कोयले की पर्याप्त उपलब्धता की पुष्टि की है। इसके अलावा कोयला मंत्रालय ने कहा है कि देश में रिकॉर्ड कोयला उत्पादन और रिकॉर्ड कोयला आपूर्ति से हमें मानसून के दौरान पर्याप्त कोयला भंडार बनाए रखने में मदद मिली है। परिणामस्वरूप, खदान के सिरे पर और पारवहन में साँक कोयले के स्टॉक में पिछले वर्ष की तुलना में 39 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई है।

एक ही केन्द्र सरकार के दो अलग-अलग विभागों द्वारा जारी थर्मल पावर उत्पादन के लिए कोयले के आयात से सग्वन्धित ये निर्देश और बयान स्पष्ट रूप से विरोधाभासी, भ्रामक, धोखेबाजी और ऊर्जा उपभोक्ताओं, जनता और पूरे देश के हित के खिलाफ है। निश्चित तौर पर यह संदेह पैदा करता है कि इस काले सोने के कारोबार के पीछे कुछ तो काला है।

लेकिन, नेशनल थर्मल पावर कॉर्पोरेशन (एनटीपीसी), या दामोदर वैली कॉर्पोरेशन (डीवीसी) जैसे सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के जेनको को मोदी सरकार के आदेश के तहत शुरू से ही अडानी कोयला खरीदने के लिए मजबूर किया गया था। अप्रैल 2022 में, कोयले की आपूर्ति की कथित अनुपलब्धता के कारण भारत को गंभीर बिजली की कमी की ओर धकेल दिया गया था और मोदी सरकार ने जेनको को जुलाई 2022 से पहले 10 प्रतिशत मिश्रण के लिए कोयला आयात करने का निर्देश दिया था। जबकि इसी अवधि के दौरान सत्तारूढ़ सरकार ने राज्यसभा में दावा किया था कि

देश में कोयले की कोई कमी नहीं थी। घरेलू कोल इंडिया लिमिटेड (सीआईएल) से प्राप्त कोयले से 2 रुपये प्रति यूनिट की तुलना में आयातित ईंधन से लागत 7-8 रुपये प्रति यूनिट हो गई। हमारे सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र के प्रमुख विजली उत्पादक एनटीपीसी ने इस आयातित कोयले की लागत के कारण सितंबर 2022 तिमाही के लिए अपने समेकित शुद्ध लाभ में 7 प्रतिशत से अधिक की गिरावट दर्ज की है।

गौरतलब है कि 2022-23 में कच्चे कोयले के उत्पादन में साल-दर-साल 14.7 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई और 89308 लाख टन तक पहुँच गई और कोयले की खानगी में 7.1 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई और 87750 लाख टन तक पहुँच गई। खदान निकासी से कोल स्टॉक में 45.66 प्रतिशत की मजबूत वृद्धि दर्ज की गई, साथ ही बिजली क्षेत्र में कोयला खानगी में 5.80 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप अप्रैल-अगस्त 2023 के दौरान थर्मल पावर उत्पादन में 6.58 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई। समग्र कोयला स्टॉक स्थिति में 25.08 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई जो सराहनीय स्तर तक पहुँच गई। 31 अगस्त 2023 को 86.00 मीट्रिक टन का रिजर्व (40 दिनों से अधिक की माँग की भरपाई)। निश्चित रूप से कोयले की माँग और आपूर्ति का कोई भी कथित अंतर लक्ष्य को सही ढंग से निर्धारित करने और कोयले की खानगी सुनिश्चित करने में पर्याप्त रिक उपलब्ध करों में केन्द्र सरकार की अक्षमता से उत्पन्न हो रहा है। यह सरकार द्वारा नियोजित कोयला संकट के पीछे के दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण इरादों की पुष्टि करता है।

आश्चर्यजनक रूप से जबकि बिजली मंत्रालय दावा कर रहा है कि अक्टूबर 2023 से मार्च 2024 के दौरान बिजली उत्पादन के लिए 7 मीट्रिक टन कोयले की कमी हो सकती है, वह लगभग 20 मीट्रिक टन आयात करने का निदेश दे रहा है। ध्यान दे, ऑस्ट्रेलिया से माप कोयले के आयात का हिस्सा 2020 तक नगण्य था और वित्त वर्ष 22 में 13 प्रतिशत तक पहुँच गया, जो सारा ही अदानी की खदान से आ रहा था। एक ऐतिहासिक कदम में, आल इंडिया कोल वर्कर्स फेडरेशन (एआईसीडब्ल्यूएफ) और इलेक्ट्रिसिटी एम्प्लॉइज फेडरेशन ऑफ इंडिया (ईईएआई)

8 सितंबर 2023 को अपना पहला संयुक्त प्रेस वक्तव्य जारी कर आयातित कोयला सम्मिश्रण आदेश को तत्काल वापस लेने और सीआईएल के पूर्ण संचालन को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए रेक की आवश्यक व्यवस्था करने की माँग की गई है। एआईसीडब्ल्यूएफ और ईईएआई ने मजदूरों के सभी तबकों और आम जनता से अपनी आवाज उठाने और मोदी सरकार और उसके करीबी कॉर्पोरेट आकाओं के बीच अपवित्र सांठगांठ को उजागर करने का आह्वान किया है, जो रणनीतिक रूप से हमारे सार्वजनिक उपक्रमों की पूर्ण क्षमता के उपयोग में बाधा डाल रहे हैं। 15 सितंबर 2023 को, केन्द्रीय ऊर्जा और नवीन एवं नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा मंत्री ने घोषणा की है कि चूंकि भारत बिजली की रिकॉर्ड माँग में वृद्धि से गुजर रहा है, अब एकमात्र व्यवहार्य और चौबीसों घंटे नवीकरणीय आपूर्ति वाले निशान के लिए संभावित समाधान नेशनल ग्रीन हाइड्रोजन के तहत भंडारण के रूप में ग्रीन हाइड्रोजन की ओर जाना है। अदानी एंटरप्राइजेज की सहायक कम्पनी अदानी न्यू इंडस्ट्रीज अगले 10 वर्षों में हरित हाइड्रोजन में 50 अरब अमेरिकी डॉलर से अधिक का निवेश कर रही है और 2030 से पहले प्रति वर्ष 10 लाख टन की हरित हाइड्रोजन उत्पादन क्षमता विकसित करने की योजना बनाई है, जिसके बाद अंबानी ने 75,000 करोड़ रुपये का निवेश की एक घोषणा की है। जाहिर है, कोयला संकट का पूरा ब्लू-प्रिंट एक कोयला घोटाले के अलावा और कुछ नहीं है। कोयले और बिजली के बनावटी संकट का अपने कॉर्पोरेट आकाओं के प्रति सरकार की निष्ठा से एक महत्वपूर्ण सम्बन्ध है। आयातित कोयला आधारित ऊँची कीमत वाली बिजली का पूरा बोझ उपभोक्ताओं पर डाला जाएगा, जो टैरिफ के झटके के रूप में प्रतिबिंबित होगा। इसका हमारे विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार और चालू खाते के रोष पर बुरा असर पड़ेगा। कोयले से नवीकरणीय क्षेत्र में बदलाव से सार्वजनिक क्षेत्र से निजी एकाधिकार की ओर संक्रमण हो जाएगा और भारत की ऊर्जा सुरक्षा पूरी तरह से निगमों के एक समूह को उपहार में दे दी जाएगी। भारत के ऊर्जा क्षेत्र के मजदूरों का संयुक्त संघर्ष निजी परिवर्तन के इस रथ पर लगाम लगाएगा और निस्संदेह इसकी शुरुआत पहले ही हो चुकी है।

Struggles International

— Jose T Abraham

Hollywood's long, contentious writers' strike has ended.

On September 24 — after 146 days of labor stoppage, the Writers Guild of America (WGA), which represents Hollywood's writers, and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), an association of Hollywood's largest studios and production companies, announced that an agreement had been reached. The union's leadership announced that they'd voted to end the strike and recommended the membership vote in favor of ratifying the contract. The union's membership will begin their vote on October 2.

It appears the union was successful in its effort. The MOA includes increases to minimum wage and compensation, increased pension and health fund rates, improvements to terms for length of employment and size of writing teams and better royalties, including foreign streaming residuals. It also lays out terms for artificial intelligence, with an agreement that doesn't prevent writers or productions from making use of generative AI but prohibits using software to reduce or eliminate writers and their pay. A writer can choose to use AI when performing writing services, if the company consents, but the company can't require the writer to use AI software (e.g., ChatGPT) when performing writing services,

Teachers throughout Europe protest lack of resources and poor working conditions

Teachers and other school workers in Europe are fighting against the disastrous

conditions in schools as the new academic year begins, with a series of protests and strikes across the continent.

Lithuanian teachers began a month-long strike on 22nd September, *LRT* reported. The Lithuanian Trade Union of Educational Workers is calling for an immediate pay rise of 20 percent, and a further 30 percent in January, as well as smaller class sizes and a reduction in workload. The government said it would not consider a pay rise this year, and proposed a 21 percent increase next year. Current inflation is 6.2 percent, but price rises have averaged 16.2 percent over the past year.

Teachers in Estonia may also strike soon, as the government proposed only a 1.7 percent pay rise next year, and a pay freeze for all other public sector workers, *ERR* reported. The teachers' unions said this would betray promises to raise teachers' salaries to 120 percent of the national average.

On 22nd September, Portuguese teachers protested in Lisbon on the last day of their five-day strike at the call of the Union of All Education Professionals to demand the implementation of six and a half years' seniority benefits which were frozen.

Thousands of teachers protested in Belgrade, Serbia on 26th September, ahead of a national school strike planned for October. The education unions are calling for pay in schools to reach the national average, and for schools to be given the

funding for pay rises.

In Italy, the CSLE union called a national school strike on 25th September. It called for a pay rise to the “European standard,” as well as increased staffing levels and other improvements to pay and conditions.

Greek teachers renewed their boycott of a new individual and school assessment system. The Federation of Secondary School Staff (OLME), as reported by *Alfavita*, opposed “the categorisation of schools and teachers, the extension of our working hours and the intensification of working conditions.”

Around 7,000 people joined a protest over education in Berlin on 23rd September, and a further 8,000 joined protests across the rest of Germany, the *Hamburger Abendblatt* reported. The organisers of the protests wrote “Germany is in one of the most serious educational crises since the founding of the Federal Republic,” and warned of an increasing shortage of teachers and underfunding.

In Vienna, around 1,500 extracurricular educators joined a demonstration on September 20, warning strikes against a new law which would eliminate their job role and lead to 19 percent pay cuts according to Judge Welt.

Workers’ strikes and student protests in Finland

Workers and students in Finland during last week of September began a series of strikes and protests against the austerity and anti-worker programme of the government, a coalition led by the right-wing National Coalition Party and the far-right

Finns Party. The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions called a campaign of three days of protests and walkouts per week for three weeks, *YLE* reported. Students at universities and high schools also launched protests and occupations against the austerity budget. This includes a cut to housing benefit, which would force those receiving support to move if their rent is above a certain limit, estimated to affect 56,000 people. Other economic changes opposed by workers and students include an opt-out from national bargaining for companies, unpaid sick leave, cuts to unemployment support etc.

Court workers in Portugal continue strikes

Judicial officials in Portugal continue their indefinite strike, stopping work every afternoon since January, demanding the payment of a supplement in their salary retrospectively to January 2021, as well as new promotions and job posts. A court ruled earlier this month that the government’s imposition of a minimum service requirement on the court strike was illegal.

New protests against austerity measures in Romania

On September 21, workers in Romania gathered in front of the Minister of Finance to protest austerity measures which would cut jobs and pay in the civil service, and abolish whole departments. The protest was called by the Federation of Trade Unions of Public Administration (PUBLISIND), which 3,000 people attended. As many as 15,000 employees of the finance ministry held wildcat strikes in August against the austerity plans, which will cost each worker around 700 lei per month. The National Union

of Public Finance acknowledged that it could not control the walkouts.

Strike in Belgian prisons

Prison staff in Belgium began a 48-hour national strike on 25th September to denounce “inhumane” and overcrowded conditions which affect prisoners and staff. Participation in the strike was very high. Prisoners also protested during the strike, in both linguistic communities of Belgium.

QantasLink pilots in Western Australia strike for higher pay

Over 200 pilots from Network Aviation in Western Australia stopped work for 24 hours on 4th October. Qantas was forced to cancel half its regional flights across the state, affecting about 3,500 passengers. The Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP), covering pilots employed by Network Aviation and QantasLink, is in dispute with the two Qantas subsidiaries.

University of Melbourne educators hold second strike for improved pay and conditions

Close to 1,400 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of Melbourne (UoM) walked out for a week-long strike on 2nd October, 2023. The action followed a 24-hour strike on August 28, with some faculties extending the strike for a week. The strike follows over

12 months of negotiations that failed to resolve differences over job security, workload, flexible working arrangements, and wage rise demands. The NTEU is demanding a 15 percent pay rise over three years, or an increase in line with the consumer price index, plus 1.5 percent. The members last pay rise was 2.2 percent in 2021.

National one-day strike in Belgium against anti-protest law

Belgian workers on 5th October joined protests and strikes against a new law restricting the right to protest. The law would allow judges to ban “rioters” from joining any protests for up to three years, or six years if they rule it a second offence, *L’Echo* reported.

Doctors and pharmacists stop work to protest German government’s austerity measures

On 2nd October, thousands of GPs and pharmacists in Germany closed their practices and pharmacies to protest the austerity policies of the “traffic light” coalition government of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and Free Democratic Party. The federal budget for health spending was slashed from 24.5 billion euros in 2023 to 16.2 billion in 2024, on top of the inflation and energy costs borne by GPs and pharmacists.

Struggles inside country

—Dipon Mitra

The firework factory workers in West Bengal in deep distress

In the recent past, 9 workers had died when a firecracker factory was set ablaze due to accidental bursting of firecrackers while they were being produced. Thousands of workers earn their bread while working in these firework factories that produce beautiful fireworks. After the mishap in the cracker factory, the police forces lord over these fireworks factories scattered across the semi urban areas in West Bengal. Thousands of workers are facing forced closure of factories by the police forces and rendered without jobs endangering the survival of thousands of workers families.

Farmers' associations observed October 3 as black day in Andhra Pradesh

Eight people died after an SUV driven by Ashish Mishra, son of Mr. Ajay Mishra, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs mowed down farmers participating in a rally at Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh against the controversial farm laws in October 3, 2021

Andhra Pradesh Rythu Sanghala Samanvaya Samithi has observed October 3 as black day in all mandals and districts across the State as a mark of protest against the Lakhimpur Kheri incident.

The Samithi demands that the Union government dismiss Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay K. Mishra and that the Central government take stringent action

against the persons who were responsible for the killing of farmers who were staging a protest against the farm laws, he said.

Asha Workers of Bihar clinched a great Victory through a long Strike

August 12th, 2023 marked a historic victory for striking ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists) in Bihar with the state government agreeing to increase the monthly payment by Rs. 1,500 per month and providing the payment as 'honorarium', instead of 'reward' (paritoshik). The 31-day long indefinite strike of around 1 lakh ASHA workers and ASHA facilitators across Bihar had begun on July 12th, 2023 under the joint banner of ASHA Samyukta Sangharsh Manch, with Bihar Rajya ASHA Karyakarta Sangh - Gope-Group (AICCTU), and ASHA and ASHA Facilitators Union at the forefront.

The strike by ASHAs had been the largest women workers movements in recent history of Bihar with tens of thousands of ASHA workers uniting for this massive movement.

The strike continued for 31 days in almost all Primary Health Centres (PHC), Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Referr. Despite the strike, ASHA workers ensured that emergency work as well as cases of childbirth were not adversely affected.

Welcome legislation by the Rajasthan State Government on Minimum Guaranteed Income and Gig Workers

The Rajasthan government, in July 2023, passed two laws – "The Rajasthan

Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023" and "The Rajasthan Minimum Guaranteed Income Act 2023" – both of which represent important labour law reforms and enunciate an understanding of labour rights that needs to be contextualised and understood. These laws come on the heels of struggles by various sections of the working class and organisations in Rajasthan and represent another instance of struggles forcing legal reforms.

The sustained economic crisis, which was exacerbated by COVID and the disastrous lockdowns, have effectively led to increasing informalisation of the labour force, depreciation of wages and growing job insecurity.

The Modi government pushed through the four Labour Codes aimed at denying workers hard-earned rights over the past 150 years, and giving legal sanction to job insecurity through contractualization and informalisation, and starvation wages.

Teachers and Govt. Employees Demand Restoration of Old Pension Scheme

Delhi's Ramleela Maidan was overwhelmed by a wave of protests that saw a massive rally led by the National Movement for Old Age Pension Scheme (NMOPS) demanding restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), on the 1st October.

Ramleela Maidan returning with slogans like "NPS-Privatization out of India" and

"Restore the old pension scheme", converged into a large protest group consisting of government employees and middle class workers from across the country. As its name suggests, the 'Pension Shankhnad Rally' (Pension Call) makes the largest Ramleela Maidan smaller to accommodate the large crowds. There were as many people waiting outside the square. The meeting was the culmination of a three-month struggle. The scale of the meeting clearly shocked the current government. The government's response to popular demands for the restoration of OPS will have a significant impact on the outcome of the election.

Indian Railway Drivers Strike

The number of train accidents in the country clearly shows how bad the job of train drivers (especially freight train drivers) is in Indian Railways. Long working hours, long night shifts and few breaks create workplace problems that sometimes lead to fatal accidents. The plight of these motorists is exacerbated by a lack of innovation and operational restructuring on the railroads. There are approximately 3.15 million jobs available, of which 80,000 are eligible. It is estimated that over the past 31 years, the railway sector has shed more than 4.4 million jobs. The train length is reduced by 18%, the number of carriages is reduced by 21%, and the number of locomotives is reduced by 57%. This increases the pressure on existing staff and colleagues to meet public demands, leading to burnout and fatal accidents.



Com. V. Rajesh (49) President, Federal Bank Staff Union died on 30th September at an early age. We express our condolences to his bereaved family, comrades and friends.



Temporary employees meeting at Indian Bank held at Patna



Kerala Gramin Bank Temporary Employees Union First State Conference



Com. Anathalavattom Ananthan (86), President of Kerala Bank Employees Federation (BEFI) died on 5th October. He was also President of CITU Kerala and Vice President of CITU. We dip our banner in his memory as a mark of respect to our great leader.



BCs demonstrate at Bank of India at Kolkata



3rd Women's Convention
Union Bank Employees Association, Kolkata



Recitation Competition by BEPWS
Women's Subcommittees





Solidarity with Palestine at Palakkad



Solidarity with Palestine at Kolkata



2-days TU Camp at Bengaluru

BEFI demonstration against disinvestment at Indian Bank



Kolkata



Thiruvananthapuram



2-day TU Workshop at Patna



BEFI Kerala holding conventions for public awareness on impact of privatisation and other issues on the common people.

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