

DEVELOPMENT AS POLITICS : A STUDY OF EMERGING WORKERS' MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Surendra Pratap* and J.C. Bose**

A life of decency and dignity as the goal of development eludes most working people. And what development actually means and how it materializes for the working people is a matter of politics in terms of how capital and state react to workers struggles which are ignored by the elites in their discussions on development. In light of this, this paper highlights in the Indian context (a) rural workers' movements against land acquisitions, (b) rural labour movements around the issues of employment guarantee, (c) organizing the construction workers through a mass campaign for registering them under construction workers welfare boards, (d) industrial labour movements in the formal sector for the right to trade union and collective bargaining, (e) industrial labour movements in informal sectors for implementation of minimum labour standards and minimum wages, and (f) tendencies of integration in the workers movements at various levels.

Key Words: *Development, Politics, Capital, State, Workers Struggles, Workerism*

INTRODUCTION

A voluminous literature on neoliberal-imperial globalization and its discontents has piled up over the last 30 years during which the ordinary people, especially working people have been afflicted with all sorts of uncertainties—economic growth and jobs created by foreign investments are uncertain; job security at workplace is uncertain; incomes generated out of agriculture are highly uncertain; and even life has become very fragile and uncertain due to rampant environmental disasters, occupational health and safety problems, epidemics due to new diseases and injuries and death due to crime and accidents. All such uncertainties are imposed on people in order to ensure certainty of profits to capital. A barbaric competition is also imposed in every sphere. Nations are compelled to compete with one another for foreign direct investment (FDI) and export orders, businesses are compelled to compete with one another to get work orders and workers are compelled to compete with one another to get jobs. In all these rivalries, the winners are always the transnational capitals and the sufferers are always the workers and people at large, because competition between firms always takes the form of cutting labour costs which in turn means exploiting more and paying less to the workers, and competition among nations always takes the form of amending labour laws to ensure sustained supply of cheap and vulnerable labour force and measures to 'discipline' labour. Moreover, the so-called free market forces have already abolished the so-called Asiatic community life based on mutual cooperation and the safety covers offered by joint family and community. The fate of every individual is now controlled by the despotic market, and the market teaches everyone to care for only him or herself and survive or perish alone without getting any support from anyone. The vulnerabilities of the people have increased to such an extent that large numbers of poor people

*Centre for Workers Education, New Delhi (spsurendrapratap@gmail.com)

**Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi (bose.ajc@gmail.com)

are compelled to opt for suicide. In one decade during 1997-2007, more than 182936 suicide deaths were reported, mainly of small-marginal farmers in India. Moreover, a large number of suicide incidents by industrial workers was also reported, including hundreds of such incidents by garment workers in Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu. Does not all this resemble the age of barbarism? Of course, there is a difference in that unlike the age of barbarism, we are now in a modern world of mind blowing absurdities with an unimaginably higher stage of development associated with problems of overproduction rather than scarcity and also unlike in the distant past, the current barbarism is well planned and systematically imposed by corporate capital, hand in glove with state, for profit over people. Therefore, we can say that we belong to the age of modern barbarism.

Little wonder that in this age of modern barbarism, people's and workers' struggles for "a life of decency and dignity", for the right to sustainable livelihoods and for the right to work with open-ended employment contracts with rights to organize and collectively bargain are the real struggles against barbarism and for building a civilized, democratic and equitable society. Politics in terms of the battles between people on the one hand, and capital and state on the other shapes the nature and content of development. But people's protests or workers' struggles for development to be judged by worker well-being or welfare of people at large are generally ignored in the developmental discussions by the power elites as also academic elites despite the ground reality that development is nothing but "a political process that entails, or enforces, a thorough transformation of all aspects of social life. It is a process of change in which social agents seek to transform various economic, political, social and cultural aspects to achieve particular ends, and, as with any process of transformation or change, it is contested. To this end.... the implications of this contested process of change require an incorporation of those actors that directly experience its effects. In the context of industrial development, it is the workers that directly face these changes as they occur in practices of work, and it is the workers that contest them. Workers contribution to, and influence over, development as an ostensibly macro process can only be adequately understood at this micro level. The challenges that occur at the point of production are what give meaning to the broader political protests against policy measures and firm strategies, and which not only place limits on particular policies and practices, but also provide opportunities for new directions and contested outcomes both within and against the prevailing modes of accumulation." (Fishwick, 2013)

In light of this understanding, it may be noted that like in the rest of the world, in India too various social movements have risen against neoliberal-imperial globalization in order to shape social justice based development. In recent decades, India has witnessed a large number of movements— environmental movements, dalit movements, women's movements, tribal/forest workers' movements, fish workers' movement, peasant movements, rural labour movements, industrial labour movements, etc.

The concern of this paper is the resurgence of the working class movement as reflected in six most prominent trends: (a) rural workers' movements against land acquisitions, (b) rural labour movements around the issues of employment guarantee, (c) organizing the construction workers through a mass campaign for registering them under construction workers welfare boards, (d) industrial labour movements in formal sectors for the right to trade union and collective bargaining, (e) industrial labour movements in informal sectors for implementation of minimum labour standards and minimum wages, and (f) tendencies of integration in the workers movements at various levels. In what follows, we discuss some important aspects of these trends and tendencies.

Land Acquisitions And Rural Workers' Movement

In recent decades, movements against land acquisitions emerged in almost all major states and appeared as a resurgence of rural workers' movement in India. In many states, the movement was able to achieve great successes, for example in West Bengal and Goa where the land acquisitions for some projects was stopped. The movement was strongest in West Bengal and Orissa, and it was the force of this movement that played a crucial role in toppling down the Left government in West Bengal and made it easier for the Trinamool Congress to emerge as the ruling party. In some states and in some areas these movements had an overall impact on society and polity, for example in West Bengal, in some parts of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. A new literary and cultural movement has emerged with the anti-land acquisition movement in West Bengal. However, the anti land acquisition movements were not able to integrate themselves at the national level and largely remained scattered, probably because of the following reasons: (a) these movements largely emerged as localized spontaneous movements under the leadership of the local people, largely articulating it as a local issue, rather than a larger economic and political issue of national importance; and (b) there were variations in socio-economic conditions of various states and various regions and also variations in social classes leading these movements. Therefore the nature of these movements was different in different states and regions. For example, in West Bengal, there were two distinct positive factors, unparalleled in any other state: (i) the high political consciousness of the people and presence of political and social forces well rooted in rural Bengal led to the formation of a united front for launching a strong campaign at the state level; and (ii) the land reforms/tenancy reforms were most efficiently implemented in West Bengal and consequently the annual growth rate in grain production in the state was one of the highest (4.2 percent) in comparison with that in all other major states (2.5 percent), and so in this state the majority of agrarian workers had more interest and more hope in agriculture than in other states. On the other hand, if we take the example of Tamil Nadu, we meet with a very different situation. The state has the largest proportion of population (55.43 percent in 2003-04 as against the all India average of 31 percent) that do not own land other than homestead land. Almost 40 percent of the rural male workforce in Tamil Nadu is employed in non-agricultural employment. Tamil Nadu is the only state that has a negative growth of employment in agriculture since the second half of the 1990s. In 2002-03, the average income for farmer households from cultivation (Rs. 7908) was lower than the amount spent on cultivation (Rs. 8597). These situations clearly explain why the movement against land acquisition was one of the weakest in Tamil Nadu.

There has been a broader commonality in the forms of struggle and strategies of resistance in various regions. The commonality in the struggles was in the formation of networks with various likeminded organizations and intellectuals to expose the injustice caused to the people by way of impacts of the land acquisitions. The networks formed at regional and national levels launched advocacy and campaigns by way of conferences, conventions and petitioning and were successful in highlighting the issues of injustice and long term impacts of land acquisitions on the people. Protest demonstrations were simultaneously organized at the local and regional levels.

In Singur and Nandigram movements in West Bengal all the social forces from the extreme left to the more moderate Trinamool Congress formed a common front called the Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee (BUPC), which led the movement. This coalition was able to mobilize large scale support for the movement at local, regional and national levels, and was able to bring an overall impact on the polity and society through a counter-culture upsurge of new documentary films, new songs, new plays and new poems in Bangla. The movement was radicalized and there were repeated clashes.

In Odisha, a state level loose network of anti-land acquisition movements was formed, but stronger coalitions were formed to work in specific regions, for example, POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti in Jagatsighpur district against acquisition of 4000 acres of land for POSCO SEZ (special economic zone) to establish a steel plant and a port (affecting displacement of more than 3350 families of farmers, fish workers and tribals). Most of the people's organizations and movements in the region were part of this coalition, which was successful in building a strong movement in the region against the land acquisition for POSCO SEZ and in highlighting the issue at the national level and gathering a broad support for the movement by way of advocacy and campaigns.

In Goa a state level coalition of anti-land acquisition movement was formed with most of the social and political forces included in the people's movement. Large scale campaigns and advocacy work was done and the movement was not only able to expose the possible disastrous impact of the SEZs, but also the violations in procedural formalities. The movement was successful in compelling the government to declare that there will be no more SEZs in Goa. Almost all the SEZs even if the land was already acquired were put on hold.

In Maharashtra the people's movement compelled the government for a referendum on the issue that was conducted in 22 villages and about 96 percent of people voted against the SEZ. In Andhra Pradesh also the resistance strategies were similar to that of Odisha, but at a smaller scale. However, some other innovative strategies were adopted particularly in the Mehboobnagar region. As part of the struggle against the land acquisition and displacement, the movement decided to challenge the political parties in parliamentary elections in 2009 in order to highlight the sufferings, expose the political parties and make them understand the cost of ignoring the wellbeing of the people. Fifteen contestants, all victims of Polepally SEZ and two supporters of their cause, filed their nominations from the same parliamentary seat- Mahabubnagar, and focused their campaign in their own villages. They collectively bagged as many as 77,568 votes (The Hindu, 2009). Thirteen activists also contested in the legislative assembly by-elections in Jadcherla, and secured 13000 votes. This indeed strongly reflected the strength of the movement (Pratap, 2011a)

NREGA And New Rural Workers Movements

The rural workers movement on the issues related to National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is one of the most important movements that have emerged in recent decades. Its importance in terms of revival of the rural labour movement can be understood in the background of structural changes in the rural economy that have created a downfall of agricultural labour movement largely during the decade of 1980-90 (in some regions even earlier). Mechanization in agriculture reduced the labour inputs and created a surplus labour in the agriculture economy in general, i.e., increased unemployment for wage labour and family labour of subsistence farmers. And with increasing market dependence of agriculture and monopolization of inputs by multinational corporations, input costs increased drastically and made the small scale farming unsustainable. Therefore, compelled by these situations the agricultural workers (including wage labour and subsistence farmers) were largely transformed into rural workers, seasonally engaging in agriculture and for the most part of the year engaging in various kinds of wage work in their own region or in distant cities and states. In the earlier phase the labour market and collective bargaining was largely restricted to village-panchayat boundaries, but with this transformation, the labour market was largely transformed into a broader regional labour market, and therefore the strategies of organizing and collective bargaining based on village-panchayat labour market and employment relationships in agriculture were no more effective. This situation created a crisis for the agricultural labour movement. However, these developments had some positive impacts as well. The intensity of caste

based exploitation and repression of dalits and adivasis was based on their livelihood dependence on upper caste farmers who actually owned major part of the land. With diversification of wage work these communities were actually freed from the slavery of upper caste farmers. It was in this period and in this background that the dalit assertion emerged. The left forces engaged in organizing the agricultural labourers, majority of whom were dalits, largely failed to appreciate the situation and were unable to provide a strong platform for the voices of this dalit assertion and this space was almost completely captured by social and political forces engaged in identity politics, focusing on social identities and social exploitation largely detached from economic identities and economic exploitation. This dynamics also aggravated the downfall of agriculture labour movement.

NREGA which was the outcome of agricultural workers movements, created a new space for organizing the rural workers, and we observe a revival of rural labour movement in almost all the states of India, particularly for proper implementation and expansion of the rights under NREGA. Various social and political forces are involved in the movement, and this is reflected in the increasing membership of central trade union organisations (CTUOs) in agriculture. However, the movement largely remains scattered, with large numbers of smaller organizations working at village and regional levels. The demands of the movement include proper implementation of 100 days employment guarantee to one member of a rural family, payment of unemployment allowance if 100 days of employment is not provided, increase in wages fixed by the government, extension of applicability of construction labour welfare act to NREGA workers, payment of wages in time, increasing the days of employment guarantee to 200 days, etc. Another positive aspect of this Act is that the employment guarantee rights are extended to one member of all rural families whosoever is willing to engage in manual works, and therefore it provides an opportunity to the rural labour movements to build dynamic unity among agricultural workers, small-marginal farmers, fish workers, forest workers and other self employed and wage workers engaged in various traditional occupations across the caste categories. However, there is no real scope for collective bargaining at the local level, because the wages and working conditions are fixed and the struggle is largely focused on proper implementation of guaranteed rights under the Act. The scope of collective bargaining is only at the level of state and central governments, for increasing wages, number of employment days, benefits (extension of applicability of construction labour welfare act to NREGA workers) and working conditions. This is probably one of the reasons why this movement has still not gathered strength to take off. Because of scattered nature of the movements, their strength is also underestimated and a large number of protests in rural areas goes unreported. It is also interesting to note that women form majority of the NREGA workforce and therefore some women organizations, like National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), are also taking initiative to organize and support the NREGA workers' movements. It is also to be noted that in a series of general strikes in the last few decades called by the joint trade union council of CTUOs, the participation of rural labour was significant and their issues were also prominently raised. With the growing strength of movements the cases of repression of local activists are also increasingly coming to limelight. Several deaths of rural activists were reported in the last few years and these were linked to the NREGA workers' struggles (The Indian Express, 22 February 22, 2011).

The rural workers' movements across India provide a rich experience of various kinds of strategies of organizing and resistance. Consider an example of some organizations in Odisha. For a long time they were working with tribals separately in adjacent regions cooperating, showing solidarity and learning from each other. To build unity among rural workers, increase their political consciousness, propagate their ideas and expand their organizational base, they organized tribal fares in various areas every year. The tribal fares were cultural as well as political events. To fight against social evils existing in the society they used forum theatre as a campaign tool, and it proved

highly effective. For building awareness among workers and to help leadership emerge from within, they conducted activist school, in which they provided three level training to the active workers. The current grassroots leadership has actually emerged from the activist school. They also started a few schools for children in places where there were no primary schools. To increase the political influence of the movement they contested and won elections of local bodies—village panchayats, and this further helped in expansion and effectiveness of the movement. Along with meetings, demonstrations and rallies, these were part of the strategies of organizing and resistance. Gradually they also realized the necessity of integrating the movements and build a state level united movement of rural workers, and recently five such organizations came together and initiated a process to form a state level workers organization called the Odisha Shramjeevi Union.

New Initiatives For Organizing Construction Workers

Organizing initiatives in the construction sector received a great impetus with the formation of construction workers welfare boards in various states of India under the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 and Building & Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1996. The actual data on union membership on the basis of unions submitting returns and membership of CTUOs is highly under reported, because large numbers of independent unions and mass organizations emerged in recent decades and are engaged in organizing the construction workers but these unions do not bother to submit returns. Currently, the organizing strategy is almost completely based on facilitating the registration of construction workers with construction workers welfare boards and registering them as members of their unions as well. Some organizations also engage in providing various facilities to the construction workers, i.e. help them in ensuring supply of water, providing blankets, and filing complaints and claims in case of accidents, nonpayment of wages, etc. However, even as the number of unions and unionized workers in construction industry increased, the collective bargaining dynamics is still almost completely absent. Owing to almost completely informalized workforce, multi layers of subcontracting, fierce opposition from contractors against unionization, it appears almost impossible to unionize the workers at various construction sites. Even when thousands of workers work in large numbers at huge construction projects always going on in various regions, the unions were not successful in organizing and promoting collective bargaining in any construction project and with any builders/contractors.

There were some attempts in metro-rail construction projects but at a very small level and with very little success. Therefore, the current situation presents a very contradictory picture in that the unions are growing but their impact in terms of improving the working and living conditions of workers is almost zero. This situation creates another problem. The membership of construction workers unions is highly unstable. Large numbers of members may apply to those registered with welfare boards, but there may really be no organic link of union with those workers and there may be no chance of renewing their memberships in coming years. This may be partly due to the fact that the construction workers keep on moving from place to place. But this is not the actual problem, because if the union is able to build awareness among members about their rights and the members are inspired enough to support and work for the cause, then wherever they go, the union can expand. The real problem is that the unions are actually not able to build any union dynamics among the workers, because they are unable to create any kind of collective bargaining dynamics that may change life and work of the workers and resolve the day to day problems that the workers are facing. This is not only true for independent unions but also the CTUOs.

The situation is worsening day by day. Incidents of accidents have been reported almost in all regions. On 28th June, 2014 at Moulivakkam in Chennai, an 11 storey building under construction collapsed and 72 construction workers were trapped under the debris. The final count reported 61 workers dead and 29 injured and most of them were migrants from Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Construction workers unions working in the region strongly protested against the incident and under pressure of unions the police arrested six persons including the contractor, the engineers and architect, and the government provided a compensation of Rs 700,000 to the dependents.

With worsening situation like that, sudden and spontaneous strikes of construction workers are also happening. It was reported in media that on April 27-28, 2013 at a 30 tower-under-construction project of the 3C Company in Noida, during the change of shift at around 8 am in an incident the security guards opened fire on workers and two workers including one 15 year old were injured. The workers were not paid wages for three months and they were demanding for that. It was reported that after firing nearly a thousand workers turned violent and for nearly half an hour, they threw stones and also blocked the traffic on the adjacent main road for hours.

Recently, the bigger and more dynamic unions are seen taking initiatives to change these situations by building broad based struggles. In 2009 a nationwide strike of construction workers was called by Construction Workers Federation of India (CWFI) affiliated to CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions affiliated to the Communist Party of India--Marxist--CPM). The strike was largely successful and more than 7 lakh construction workers in 175 districts of 19 states and in more than 50 big construction projects across India struck work on December 8, 2009. It was reported that in six districts of Himachal Pradesh in all the 15 Hydro-Electric Projects construction work was totally stopped. In Rajasthan the strike took place in 5 big construction projects. More than 50,000 construction workers in 11 districts in Punjab also joined the strike. The strike reflected the growing organized strength of construction workers and was a move to boost the power of workers to assert for collective bargaining.

INDUSTRIAL LABOUR MOVEMENTS IN FORMAL SECTOR

In recent decades, a new wave of industrial workers' struggle emerged from below largely independent from the central trade unions and specifically focused on right to association and collective bargaining. This wave is particularly visible in those sectors where the workforce per unit is relatively high and nature of production is such that employers are compelled to maintain a minimum proportion of regular workers as for example in automobiles, electronics, and certain food and beverage industries. This wave can be said to have started with Honda workers struggle (Gurgaon) in 2005. Thereafter, we observe a continuing wave of such struggles (Pratap, 2011a and 2011b; Bose, 2012)— for example, Hyundai workers struggle, Tamil Nadu (2007- 2011); MRF workers struggle, Tamil Nadu (2006- 2009), Graziano workers struggle, Noida, NCR Delhi (2007-08); Pricol workers struggle, Tamil Nadu (2009); Nestle workers struggle, Uttarakhand (2009); Rico Auto and Sunbeam Workers struggle, Gurgaon NCR Delhi (2009); General Motors workers struggle, Gujarat (2011); workers struggle in Satyam auto and Rockman industries, Uttarakhand (2012); Pepsico India workers struggle in West Bengal (2013); ILJIN India Electronics workers struggle in Noida, NCR Delhi (2013); Bajaj Auto workers struggle, Maharashtra (2013), and Maruti Suzuki workers struggle, Gurgaon NCR Delhi (continuing since 2011) etc. In all the above struggles, the major issue was related to the trade union rights. The workers either attempted to form the trade unions, or were demanding for recognition of their trade union. In all the cases without any exception the corporate-state collusion unleashed a large scale victimization and repression against them. It is interesting to note that in most of the cases, particularly in later struggles, the issue of regularizing the contract

workers was inbuilt in the process of unionization. In most of the struggles the contract and regular workers came together, with varying degrees of unity. In some cases the workers were defeated, in some cases they achieved partial victory and in a few cases their union was successfully recognized. The Maruti Suzuki workers struggle is particularly important in the sense that it took this wave to a qualitatively higher level. Almost all the above workers struggles challenged the capital's strategy of dividing workers into contract and regular workers, but Maruti-Suzuki struggle took this to the culmination with its second occupation of the factory on the sole issue of contract workers. It was also the first major workers struggle that strongly raised the demand to abolish the system of engaging contract workers and regularizing all contract workers. Therefore the level of unity between contract and regular workers was at a qualitatively higher level. This struggle also used new and innovative strategies of struggle, largely beyond the scope of the conventional trade unionism of the day, in terms of the strategy of factory occupation (the workers remained inside the factory for day and night and stopped the work, rather than moving out of the factory) and simultaneous occupation of other factories of the company, viz., Suzuki Power Train and Suzuki Motorcycle, by other trade unions in solidarity and with the same slogans of abolishing contract labour system in their factories as well. The most important aspect of Maruti Suzuki workers struggle was its focus and ability to build strong social linkages in support of the movement. Majority of workers in Maruti-Suzuki were from different parts of the same state, and therefore, they were able to successfully mobilize the local people in support of their struggle and against the injustice done to them by corporate-state collusion. The struggle is still continuing, 147 workers are in jail and their bail applications were rejected by the courts, 2300 workers including 546 regular workers still stand terminated. The companies are denying the right to collective bargaining even in those units where unions are successfully formed and recognized. For example, in Toyota Kirloskar Motors (TKM) in Karnataka the workers were forced to go on strike in March 2014 due to such attitude of the management (Business Standard, April 19, 2014). Rather than respecting workers rights, the management resorted to lockout and threatened to move investments elsewhere. Later the lockout was lifted but 30 leading workers were suspended. The company also insisted that the workers sign a 'good conduct undertaking' targeted to cut the wings of the union. The workers and the union rejected to sign any such undertaking and started hunger strike, but no one cared for them and they had to be hospitalized after their health conditions started deteriorating. Only after the government intervened the workers were able to return back to work without signing undertaking. In some other companies where unions are formed and are able to exercise their right to collective bargaining, the managements are trying to get rid of unionism by forcing more and more workers to accept voluntary retirement as for example in recent months in Tamil Nadu, Nokia, Foxconn and BYD announced voluntary retirements and forced the regular workers to accept it. BYD went on strike in June 2014 against these measures and rather than addressing their demands the management in collusion with state machinery unleashed repression on them (The New Indian Express, June 22, 2014). However, the workers struggles were able to bring some positive developments as well. Recently during a study (Pratap, 2013) on automobile sector in the state of Haryana it was revealed that in some Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and Tier-I supplying companies the unions were able to incorporate wage revision for contract workers in their collective bargaining agreements, and in one of the OEMs a policy for gradual regularization of contract workers was also initiated.

INDUSTRIAL LABOUR MOVEMENTS IN INFORMAL SECTORS

In recent decades, many a movement emerged in unorganized/informal industrial sectors, i.e. in those sectors where either majority of units are not covered under the Factories Act, or even if a significant number of units are covered under this Act, the informalisation of workforce in these

factories is almost 100 percent. In these sectors, for a huge majority of workers even the minimum labour standards are not implemented and the workers do not receive even the minimum wages. And formation of shop-floor unions is almost next to impossible particularly because of frequent hiring and firing. Therefore in these sectors generally the federation type industry unions are registered and industry wide collective bargaining is attempted, by way of building a coalition of workers and unions in the particular industry in a region. In Panipat (Haryana) 30,000 spinning mill workers from 500 mills went on an indefinite strike in 2006 demanding implementation of the minimum wages and labour laws (Indian Express, July 31 2006). In 2010 thousands of workers in hundreds of almond processing units in Delhi went on strike for the sake of minimum labour standards and minimum wages. In 2011, 2,500 textile workers from more than 150 textile factories in Ludhiana (Punjab) went on strike demanding a 25 percent wage hike and implementation of labour laws. In 2012 tea workers of more than 200 tea gardens in West Bengal went on strike demanding a daily wage of Rs 250 or USD 5 (ITUC, 2012). In April 2014 more than 500 workers of more than 25 hot-rolling steel factories in Delhi went on strike for implementing minimum labour standards and minimum wages (The Hindu, April 18, 2013). All these strikes lasted for one week to more than a month, and some of them achieved partial success.

The strategies of organizing and resistance in these sectors were a mix of mass campaigns for awareness building, community based organizing and industry based collective bargaining, and building a mass movement and gathering broader support from democratic organizations and intellectuals, along with petitioning and organizing demonstrations. The major aspect of the resistance strategy is based on integrating and forming a coalition of workers in particular industrial clusters to strengthen the collective bargaining power of workers in a particular industry in a particular geographical cluster. Effectiveness of the strategy is reflected in the ability of workers to launch a successful industry wise strike in Ludhiana and Panipat, and it seems that this will emerge as the dominant future strategy for organizing and collective bargaining in various industries where the informal sectors dominate the economy, and the industrial clusters located in various regions of India may emerge as major flash points of the labour movement.

It is interesting to note that along with special economic zones in various regions that are creating new clusters of industries, clustered development is the dominant trend in many industries. Some of these clusters are so big that they produce up to 70 to 80 percent of the total volume of that particular product produced in India; for example, Panipat in Haryana produces 75 per cent of the total blankets produced in the country, Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu produces 80 per cent of the country's cotton hosiery exports, Agra city in Uttar Pradesh has 800 registered and 6,000 unregistered small and cottage footwear production units, catering to both the domestic and international markets, Ludhiana in Punjab produces 95 percent of the country's woolen knitwear, 85 per cent of the country's sewing machines and 60 per cent of the nation's bicycle and bicycle parts. The cities of India like Bhilwara, Bhiwandi, Joshpur, Jetpur, Mysore, Palli, Panipat, Sanganer and Sambhalpur prominently figure in clusters of textile products. Karur, and Bhavani and Kumrapalayam in Tamil Nadu are major centres of production of home furnishings and carpets, both for the domestic and the global markets. Alappuzha in Kerala has a long and strong presence in coir and coir products. Recently a new and modern coir cluster has emerged in Pollachi in Tamil Nadu. Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai have a strong presence in ready-made garments. Surat (Gujarat), Jaipur (Rajasthan) and Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu) are clusters of gems and jewellery mainly for exports. Leather and leather products are concentrated in Agra (UP), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Howrah (West Bengal) and Kanpur (UP). There are also many agro-processing and agro-industry clusters such as those based on spices, bamboo, rubber and fruits. There are also the clusters of more capital intensive industries like auto and electronics. Auto production is clustered in major industrial centres like Chennai, Pune, Hosur/Bangalore, Noida, Gurgaon and Coimbatore. Electronics clusters are mainly located in the NCR region of Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh (NCEUS, 2009).

Tendencies Of Integration In Labour Movements

With the wave of working class movements in the formal sector for right to association and collective bargaining accompanied with intense repression unleashed against workers and trade unions, tendencies of integration of trade unions and other labour organizations have also been seen emerging particularly in those industrial regions that have emerged as flash points of the labour movement. This is largely in the nature of joint trade union forums formed for solidarity actions in support of workers struggles in various factories and against incidences of repression of workers and trade unions. Such forums are formed mainly by formal sector trade unions and mainly geared to the issues of formal sector workers (both regular and irregular). For example, there is the joint trade union council formed in Gurgaon, Haryana, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand and Pune, Maharashtra etc. The joint trade union council formed by central trade unions at the national level is also promoting formation of such joint trade union forums; however, it must be noted that this is largely emerging spontaneously out of the urgency felt by the workers and trade unions at grassroots level and not by the initiatives of the central trade unions.

The other form of integration that is seen emerging in recent decades is the formation of industrial cluster based platform of trade unions in a particular industry. This is particularly emerging in those clusters and those industries that are dominated by small and medium sized industries, for example, textiles industry in Ludhiana, Panipat and Tiruppur, cycle industry in Ludhiana, etc. The nature of integration is closely linked to the limitations of the scope for company level collective bargaining and compulsions to adopt the strategy of industry wide collective bargaining.

Moreover, with an allround attack on working class and declining political power of central trade unions on the one hand, and rising discontent among the working class and emergence of a wave of independent trade unionism on the other, the central trade unions were compelled to come together to keep their relevance in terms of representing the voice of the working class at the national level. The attempts of forming a common platform of central trade unions started in 1980s when the IMF dictated anti-labour new economic policies were initiated. Subsequently, the National Campaign Committee of Trade Unions was formed which organised the countrywide general strike against anti-labour new economic policies in January 1982. When an allround attack on the working class started in 1990s in the form of privatisation, closures, downsizing and retrenchments, the CTUOs, particularly those linked to the communist parties and socialist ideologies further came together to fight against the policies of economic liberalisation and formed the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions (SCTU) during the first general strike against these policies in 1991. SCTU also took the initiative to form a coalition of trade unions and mass movements against economic liberalisation in 1993 which came to be known as the National Platform of Mass Organisations (NPMO). SCTU (and NPMO) led about 12 countrywide one day general strikes from 1991 to 2008. It was the 2010 general strike which started a new phase of broader collaboration among the CTUOs. After the General Strike of 2010 all major central trade unions irrespective of their political affiliation became part of common platform including AITUC, CITU, INTUC, BMS, TUCC, UTUC, AICCTU, HMS, AIUTUC, LPF, SEWA and also some independent federations. A series of general strikes and demonstrations were organized by joint trade union council with common demands including, concrete measures to curb price rise and provide some relief to the people, effective implementation of all labour laws and stringent punishment to those who flout them, universal social security for all unorganized workers by creating a National Social Security Fund with adequate financial allocations, stopping contractual labour in permanent jobs and equal wages to contract workers, universal coverage of the minimum wages act and statutory minimum wage of not less than Rs 10000, pension for all, removal of all ceilings on eligibility for bonus, provident fund etc, and compulsory registration of the trade unions

within a time frame of 45 days. These demands emerged as the common demands of workers at the national level and these became part of the campaigns of central trade unions in all of their joint programs. On February 23, 2011 a massive March to Parliament was organised on these demands. This was followed by the general strike of 2012 (February 28) in which about 10 crore (100 million) workers participated across various sectors of economy. Again a massive two general strikes with almost equal participation of workers were called in 2013 on the following ten point charter of demands: measures to contain price rise; measures for employment generation; strict enforcement of labour laws; universal social security cover for organized and unorganized workers and creation of National Social Security Fund; stoppage of disinvestment in Central and State Public Sector Undertakings; no contractualisation of work of perennial nature and equal payment of wages and benefits; amendment of the Minimum Wages Act to ensure universal coverage irrespective of the schedules and fixation of statutory minimum wage at not less than Rs 10,000/- linked with cost price index; removal of all ceilings on payment and eligibility of Bonus, Provident Fund; increase in the quantum of gratuity; assured pension for all, and compulsory registration of trade unions within a period of 45 days and immediate ratification of the ILO Convention Nos. 87 and 98.

Integration of workers movements in agriculture and allied sectors were also seen emerging in the phase of liberalization, as from 1990 onwards, we observe significant initiatives towards building broader platforms of informal sector workers organizations like National Centre for Labour (NCL), National Fish Workers Forum (emerged in 1970s but expanded and became more vibrant after 1990), and National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), National Campaign Committee for Unorganized Workers, etc. It is in this period that the organization called New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) claiming to be the representative of informal sector workers emerged. One of the most important informal sector workers organizations—SEWA—was also successful in getting the status of a CTUO in 2002.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There has been a widespread worldwide pessimism about nemesis of labour under neoliberal-imperial globalization since the late 1980s. But the counter thesis as suggested by Evans (2010) points out that worker activism has been on the rise all over the world and in due course in the 21st century, local, regional, national and global worker activism is likely to integrate in such a way as to effectively counter the hegemonic oppression of labour by capital and state. This paper, by highlighting the rise of worker activism in India, adds to the hope kindled by this incipient optimism even as it gives importance to the role of workers' struggles in shaping development with dignity on the workerist understanding that capital and state react, positively or negatively to worker unrest.

Notes

1. India: 55 construction workers reported dead in Chennai, <http://www.wftucentral.org/14061/03> Jul 2014
2. India: Trade unions spur government to increase compensation to injured and dead workers in the Chennai building collapse, <http://www.bwint.org/default.asp?index=5641&Language=EN>
3. Labourers riot as bullets fly in Noida, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/noida/Labourers-riot-as-bullets-fly-in-Noida/articleshow/19761809.cms>
4. Construction workers strike work all across the country, <http://www.cgpi.org/mel/voice-toilers-and-tillers/914-onstruction-workers-strike>

References

- Bose. Annabhujala J.C. (2012), Labour Relations in a Liberalized Industry: A Study of Indian Automobile Workers, Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to Department of Economics, B.R. Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, <https://gurgaonworkersnews.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/full-thesis-in-pdf.pdf>
- Evans, Peter (2010), "Is It Labour's Turn to Globalize? Twenty-first Century Opportunities and Strategic Responses", *Global Labour Journal*, Vol.1, Issue 3.
- Fishwick, Adam (2013), Development and the Working Class in Latin America, D. Phil Lecture, University of Sussex, March 20.
- ITUC (2012), Annual Survey of Violation of Trade Union Rights, <http://www.ituc-csi.org/Cambodia.html#tabs-3>.
- NCEUS (2009), The Challenge of Employment in India, An Informal Economy Perspective, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, April, 2009, www.nceus.gov.in
- Pratap, S. (2011a), Trade Union Repression in India, Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong.
- Pratap, S. (2011b), Shrinking Space for Collective Bargaining in India, Working Paper, Centre for Workers Education, New Delhi, <http://workerscentre.wordpress.com/>
- Pratap, S. (2013), Way Out of Informality: A Case Study of Automobile Sector in Haryana with Special Focus on Small Scale Manufacturing, Centre for Workers Education, New Delhi, November.
- The Hindu (2009), "SEZ Contestants Make Their Point", May 19.