

Note on unorganised sector labour

Unorganised sector labour emerged as a by product of Capital's attempt to usurp the product of labour of the masses. Agriculture and other labour organised in clans was able to help guild labour develop. These were directly controlled by the producers or indirectly through the village and associations. In England, the enclosure movement, displaced this form of organisation of labour and threw many into the market place for survival. Many of these were herded into factory production.

This form of organised production, led to the creation of Unions to protect the interest of labour. However to circumvent the need to bargain with Unions, various forms of labour were organised by capital through the means of intermediaries like contractors. In India, British policy relating to promotion of market forces (tax and levies on agriculture and forest produce) destroyed the traditional barter economy and forced artisans and others to sell their labour in the market place. The caste system on which traditional labour was organised (as a production unit) without freeing people from the caste mindsets. So the process of destroying the existing form of production in the feudal set up did not bring with it a corresponding cry of liberty , freedom and equality the Slogan of the French revolution. hence various forms of dependencies and structures were created to deny the genuine rights of labour.

With Independence, the Industrial thrust given by Nehru under the so called banner of Socialist production in the 'commanding heights' of the economy actually led to the Capitalist class (fledgling at that time), to consolidate itself with tariff walls of one hand and a number of incentives to acquire land, grow and prosper on the other. However this could only absorb 8-9% of the labour. The rest had to fend for itself in various forms.

Liberalization, dismantled many barriers to the unfettered production of Capital on one hand and strengthened Capital's hand in terms of conditions of labour (hiring and firing). The result, despite large scale expansion of Capital, the organised sector contracted to around 6%. Self employment touted as an alternative is actually more insecure and heavily dependent on capital for its survival. For eg. with the freeing of conditions in the Telecom sector, many STD booths sprung up to take advantage of 'unpaid home labour'. With the onset of the mobile, this once flourishing business came crashing down. In Agriculture and allied sectors (animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry) the influx of capital, provided a 'free' labour market, to the pools of labour that depended on the infrastructure, services etc.

In the wake of these developments, we notice that unorganised sector labour is organising itself trade wise (construction , agriculture labour, mining workers, fish workers etc) as also coming together as a whole on the following demands

- a. Identity.
- b. Social security - Old age pension, MGNREGA, accident insurance, housing, education.
- b. Demand for minimum wage based on cost of living.

With the threat of displacement from 'development' from projects like Sagar Mala, Corridors etc, there is increasing unity in the demands of unorganised sector labour and those belonging to specific trades like agriculture, fisheries, pastoral-ism etc. While the specific trades have their own specificity which need to be addressed, the possibility of coming together as a unified whole exists. We call on all like minded organisations to come together so that we can united fight the menace looming large before us.

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