

India: Tamil Nadu government arrests hundreds of protesting teachers and public sector workers

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In a desperate bid to prevent a planned mass protest on Tuesday outside the Tamil Nadu secretariat in Chennai, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)-led state government arrested more than 1,200 government employees and teachers.

The May 8 demonstration was called by the Joint Action Committee of Teachers Organisations and Government Employees Organisations (JACTO-GEO).

Government employees and teachers want a new regressive contributory pension scheme scrapped and the previous system restored. They are also calling for immediate payment of wage rates recommended by the 7th Pay Commission.

The New Pension Scheme (NPS) was first introduced by the Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led central government in August 2003 and came into effect in early 2004. Under the NPS all central and state government employees hired after January 1, 2004 were deprived of previously existing government-funded pension rights and forced to pay 10 percent of their salaries into the NPS, with an equivalent contribution from the government.

The NPS shifts the financial burden of pensions onto workers themselves and establishes a new funding mechanism for big business investment. The protesting Tamil Nadu workers are deeply opposed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP government allowing pension scheme funds to be invested in the share market.

Expecting more than 20,000 protesters from across Tamil Nadu to arrive in Chennai, the state government mobilised about 6,000 police officers near the secretariat and established barricades throughout the city to stop, search and arrest state government

employees and teachers.

Early morning police raids were conducted on the homes of leading JACTO-GEO members and activists. Some people were arrested while still in their beds. While most detained workers were later released, arrests continued across the state throughout the day.

The heavy police deployment blocked teachers and government workers reaching the secretariat building. Protests were held in other parts of the state capital and other cities. Tamil Nadu Higher Secondary Vocational Teachers Federation members demonstrated in Trichy over the arrest of 200 people from that city.

Tamil Nadu Minister for Personnel and Administrative Reforms D. Jayakumar rejected demonstrators' demands, arrogantly declaring that the state faced a financial crisis. He claimed that the government only had 6 rupees out of every 100 rupees collected in tax receipts to pay for what he described as "government welfare schemes."

The AIADMK government's rejection of government employees' demands and its brutal crackdown on their protest is another indication of its anti-working class, pro-investor policies.

In 2003, the AIADMK government led by the former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa Jayaram used the draconian Essential Services Act to sack nearly 200,000 striking state government employees.

While the JACTO-GEO denounced Tuesday's mass arrests, it has no intention of mobilising workers against the state and central governments' new pension system. It continues to call for the state government to negotiate with the union. As one JACTO-GEO coordinator told the media, this week: "We have further appealed to the government to invite us for negotiations

about our long-pending and legitimate demands.”

Last year, the JACTO-GEO capitulated to a Tamil Nadu high court directive and shut down a week-long strike by 33,000 teachers and other state employees over the hated NPS and for other demands.

The JACTO-GEO is dominated by the All India Trade Union Centre (AITUC), the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and a union affiliated to Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a rival regional capitalist party in Tamil Nadu. The AITUC and the CITU are affiliated to India’s main Stalinist parliamentary parties—the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) respectively.

The treacherous manoeuvres of the JACTO-GEO and their affiliated unions flow from the big-business policies of all these parties.

The CPI and the CPM are hostile to any independent mobilisation of the working class and have functioned as key props of Indian capitalist rule, supporting all non-BJP central governments, including those led by Congress Party, since the Indian bourgeoisie initiated pro-market economic “reforms” in 1991. In the 2011 Tamil Nadu state elections, the CPI and CPM supported the AIADMK and its openly right-wing anti-working class record.

CPM Tamil Nadu state secretary K. Balakrishnan responded to Tuesday’s mass arrest of teachers and government workers by appealing to the AIADMK government to hold talks with the unions.

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WSWS reporters spoke to teachers protesting in Chennai on Tuesday.

Karupaiyan from Cuddalore, said: “I’ve been working for nearly 10 years but my salary is only 22,000 rupees [\$US330]. There are five members in my family and they all depend on my income. I pay nearly 5,000 rupees per month in rent and so my salary is not enough. I’m struggling.

“We have the right to protest but the government is suppressing our rights. We’ve not violated any constitutional rights but the Tamil Nadu government has joined with the BJP-led central government and are attacking the working class. These governments are not for the poor but look after the interests of the corporations.

“In Tamil Nadu the number of peasant suicides have increased but the government is utterly indifferent to

the problems facing the peasants. The politicians say ‘India is a democratic country’ but after Modi came to power the communalist and caste policies became more aggressive in order to divide working people along religious and caste lines. Muslims and Dalits are not safe in India, this so-called democratic country!”

Kala, a teacher from Nammakal, said: “Judges’ salaries were recently increased by 200 percent and they are also eligible for a pension, and legislators are entitled to the pension scheme after a five-year term. I’ve been working for 13 years but cannot get a pension.”

Selvamani denounced the BJP and the Indian Stalinist parties. “The BJP government favours foreign investments and allows 100 percent investment in the retail sector. Every field is dominated by the IMF and its anti-people austerity measures,” he said.

“The BJP and the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] are dividing working people along religious lines and the Sanskrit language is being imposed in the educational sector. People are rejecting the Stalinist parties, which is exemplified by the recent Tripura state elections, and in Stalinist-ruled Kerala [state], poverty, and unemployment are on the increase.”

Kumaresan also criticised the CPM: “The CPM is not a communist party and not for working people. It has no principles and switches electoral alliances between the AIADMK and the DMK. The CPM does not fight for the jailed Maruti-Suzuki workers who have been sentenced to life imprisonment.”

Referring to West Virginia teachers’ strike in the US, he said: “I agree that working class must unite internationally. That is the only way it can win its demands.”



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