

While Modi touts India's growth rate,

## Four jobless youths commit suicide

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4 December 2018

In a collective suicide, four youth aged 17 to 24 years old jumped into the face of an oncoming train in the northwestern state of Rajasthan late last month.

The college-educated youth reportedly took this horrific step because they were overwhelmed at the prospect of being jobless. Three of them, Manoj Meena aged 24, Satyanarayan Meena aged 22, and Rithuraj Meena aged just 17, died on the spot. Eighteen-year-old Abhishek Meena succumbed to his injuries after being hospitalized.

All four hailed from the same village and shared an apartment not far from the railway tracks where they took their lives. The media reported their friends, 18-year-old Rahul and 19-year-old Santosh, as saying that the four youth had seen no escape from an abysmal future of joblessness and poverty. Without work, they would be forced to return to their backward village and to try to subsist as farmers in what is one of the most arid and impoverished parts of India.

The tragic joint suicide of these young graduates highlights the stark reality facing Indian youth.

Despite the incessant boasting of India's ruling elite, particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government, about the country having the highest growth rate among the world's large economies, India faces a devastating jobs crisis, with millions unable to find work, let alone well-paying, secure employment.

According to India's Labour Ministry, at least 1 million new workers enter India's job market every month. Yet the *Business Standard* reported in May of 2018, based on findings of the International Labour Organization (ILO), that from May 2014, when the BJP took office, until October 2017, just 823,000 additional jobs had been created—and most of these it classified as “vulnerable employment.”

India's youth-suicides are the highest in the world. The Indian Home Ministry's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported that more than 9,000 students committed suicide in 2015, or more than one every hour. Yet many experts believe these figures underestimate the phenomenon.

All over the world, youth face increasingly difficult circumstances due to the capitalist crisis. But in India, the pressures are especially severe. Because of the lack of or dilapidated state of health care and other public services, and of pensions and other social provisions, the vast majority of parents are dependent on their children in retirement, or even earlier, should they become sick or injured.

Joblessness is a burning issue in Rajasthan, where the campaign for the December 6 state assembly elections is now in high gear. As usual, the various bourgeois parties are falling over themselves making grandiose and entirely vapid promises of jobs for youth.

Currently, Rajasthan is governed by the BJP, under Chief Minister Vasundara Raje, a member of the Scindia clan, the royal family of the former princely state of Gwalior. The BJP combines rabid Hindu communalism with total subservience to big business, claiming that the only way to bring “development” and create jobs is to do whatever investors ask.

Epitomizing the vast gulf that separates her government from the bleak reality that faces Rajasthan's youth, Raje cheerfully commented to the press that the “mood in the state is good.”

According to India's Ministry of Labour and Employment, in March 2018 Rajasthan had a mere 12,854 openings in all sectors for 857,316 job seekers. The Census Bureau has reported that in 2016 the unemployment rate for the state's 20 to 29-year-olds was over 30 percent.

When the BJP campaigned for the 2013 state assembly election, Raje made the now often quoted pledge to Rajasthan's youth, "Lathi nahi, naukriya doongi (I will provide jobs, not police truncheons)"—a reference to the police beating unemployed youth who had protested against the then-Congress Party government earlier that same year. However recently, when over 200 youth marched peacefully to the BJP headquarters to submit a memorandum demanding jobs, the police beat them up in a similar fashion.

During the 2013 election campaign, Raje promised to create 1.5 million jobs by 2018. But according to the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), out of the 127,817 people who received vocational training from the state only 9,904 were placed in jobs between 2014 and 2017.

There is a spate of other statistics that demonstrates the paucity of jobs in Rajasthan, in both the public and private sectors.

In 2017, when the state assembly secretariat advertised 18 job openings as office-attendants, over 13,000 people, including 129 engineers, 23 lawyers, a chartered accountant and 393 postgraduates, applied. Similarly, when the government recently advertised for five orderlies, it received over 23,000 applications, many of them from persons with advanced degrees.

The Rajasthan BJP government's principal "job-creation initiative" has been to "reform" the state's purportedly "rigid labor laws." These changes, which have been held up by the Modi government as a model for all India and copied by several other BJP-governed states, allow businesses in Rajasthan to effectively hire and fire workers at will, while erecting further barriers to workers engaging in collective action.

Nationwide, the situation for youth is similarly desperate. Facing widespread disenchantment, Modi and his BJP are stoking communalism in the run-up to the April-May 2019 general election. In the previous 2014 parliamentary elections, Modi loudly proclaimed that he would bring "Acche Din (Good Days)," and create 100 million jobs by 2022 with his so-called "Make in India" program.

The "Make in India" campaign has involved Modi traveling to Europe, North America and elsewhere in Asia to urge investors to take advantage of a government determined to provide them with plentiful cheap labor, rapid land acquisition, and lavish tax

subsidies. One of Modi's biggest boasts is that industrial wages in India are one-quarter of those in China.

The Modi government is well aware of the widespread hatred and disenchantment it has evoked with its bogus promise of providing employment through its pro-business agenda. That is why it has now resorted to crash, albeit limited, "job-creation."

In February 2018, the government-owned Indian Railways, the nation's largest employer with 1.3 million workers, placed advertisements for 90,000 railway jobs. An eye-popping 28 million people applied. This has created a logistical nightmare for the railway since it now has to sift through over 21.2 million final applicants. Given the Indian Railways' notorious safety record there is every reason to fear the new hires will be put hurriedly to work without adequate training.

Although those who committed suicide typify educated youth facing misery, the prospects facing working-class youth and the poor are bleaker still. The overwhelming majority of the latter are compelled to eke out a living working as temporary or part-time workers with no benefits and uncertain income.

The Modi government and their henchmen constantly boast about how their policies have achieved a "world-beating" economic growth rate of over 7 percent. There is good reason to suspect the GDP growth rate as computed by the Modi government is skewed. But be that as it may, the overwhelming benefits of what growth there has been has gone to India's rich, above all the 1,500 persons possessing \$100 million in wealth or more.

Credit Suisse's "2018 Global Wealth Report" reveals only one in 10 adult Indians possesses more than \$10,000 in wealth. On the other hand, the number of dollar millionaires, which numbered just 39,000 in 2000 had increased by the middle of 2018 almost 10-fold to 343,000. This includes some 130 billionaires.



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