

Striking Tamil Nadu teachers denounce state and central governments

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Tamil Nadu teachers spoke with WSWs reporters in Chennai, the state capital, during their indefinite state-wide strike this week. On Tuesday around 700 strikers demonstrated outside state government offices in the Ezhilagam building. Almost 3,000 protested near the District Collector Office on Thursday, the third day of the strike.

Nelson, 55, rejected claims by the state education minister that the government could not pay teachers' salary arrears because of the so-called fiscal deficit.

"But judges, IAS and IPS [Indian public service and police] officers were paid 21-month arrears by the pay commission," he said. Nelson denounced India's major political parties. "Both the Congress and the BJP pursue the same economic policies," he said. "The Modi-led BJP government is pushing harder to implement anti-labour policies..."

"The CPM-led state governments also pursued the same economic reforms in favour of the rich. The 'Left' government in West Bengal even went to the extent of killing the farmers in Nandigram for refusing to give up their land to the investors. That government lost power in West Bengal because of its anti-labour stand."

Thamil, 53, another teacher, said teachers' living conditions were deteriorating every day. "My family's economic situation is very bad," she said. "I can't afford to send my children to better quality private schools and so they go to the public schools. And when I fall sick I try go to a private hospital but if we face a major illness that involves a lot of money, then I go to the government hospital."

Commenting on strike action by US teachers, she said: "I heard about the American teachers, and that they are trying to break the grip of the trade union and fight independently to organise the strike. I welcome

this."

Thamil denounced India's central and state governments. "They are not for working people. I support your program and the fight for a workers' government based on socialist policies."

Baskar, 42, a commercial tax junior assistant, earns just 21,000 rupees (\$US295) per month. Having participated in the recent national two-day general strike, he called for united industrial action by all workers and government staff. After WSWs reporters told him about the 13 framed-up and imprisoned Maruti Suzuki auto workers, he condemned the trade union leadership and Stalinist-led alliances.

"Both the CITU [CPM-led Centre of Indian Trade Unions] and the AITUC [CPI-affiliated All India Trade Union Congress] are communist unions. Why didn't they include the release of the 13 Maruti Suzuki workers in their general strike demand?" He added: "I'm not in favour of the Congress government as an alternative to Modi, but we need, as you say, a workers' government."

Shankar, another teacher, said: "Modi came to power to aggressively implement austerity measures. Before he was elected, Modi promised to generate about 20 million jobs, but this promise was never carried out."

Referring to the rising number of suicides by poor farmers, he said: "The farmers' crisis is never overcome and farmers are committing suicide on a daily basis." The Tamil Nadu state government, he added, "is even seeking to abolish the ration system [public distribution of essential commodities] for the poor."

Jeba, another striker, said: "I support the socialist idea. People are facing a real crisis but none of the governments pay any attention to this. It could lead to an insurgency. I agree that in order to resolve the major

social problems, including poverty and farmer suicides, we need a workers' government. I welcome the development of a workers' party.

“I don't support Modi. His government is attacking journalists, writers and left-oriented people. Congress is also a bourgeoisie party. It was a Congress government that initiated the neo-liberal policy in 1991.”

A teacher who wanted to remain anonymous said: “Most of us are concerned about our future economic security. If the government does not restore the old pension scheme our economic future is uncertain.

“In 2003, the AIADMK [All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] government sacked striking state government employees. The same government is attacking us again but our fight will continue.

“The opposition DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] is also a capitalist party. It was previously aligned with the BJP but has now formed an alliance with the Congress party.”

The teacher said he had no faith in any political party, then added: “I've only just have heard about the Trotskyist party but I agree that workers' demands can only be won in a struggle in solidarity with the international working class. I understand the trade unions are not for workers.”

Another teacher denounced India's dominant parliamentary parties. “Most of the parties that ruled this country in the last 70 years have never been concerned about the people's welfare and rights,” he said.

“Most of the time the communist parties forged alliances with the Congress party. I only have contempt for the communist party. If you look at the living conditions of the people in the states where they ruled—West Bengal and Kerala—the situation is no different to that facing the people in other states.”



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