

Mass protests by workers in northern India against price hikes due to US-Israeli war against Iran

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Tens of thousands of unorganized workers employed in manufacturing industries in the National Capital Region (NCR) in northern India have been engaged in explosive strikes and protests, which began on April 10, against price hikes driven by the US-Israeli war against Iran. Workers are demanding an increase in minimum wages to keep up with the sharp increase in rent, utilities and food prices.

The eruption in northern India is part of a global wave of resistance to unbearable fuel and food price increases due to Trump's criminal war against Iran and the shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz. In recent weeks, mass protests by workers and farmers have hit the Philippines, Haiti and Northern Ireland.

The NCR is a region surrounding the nation's capital, New Delhi. It includes metropolitan New Delhi, the older Delhi city and adjacent industrialized districts in the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

It is home to about 15,000 small, medium and large domestic and transnational manufacturing industries that employ around 4.5 million workers, most of whom are contract or temporary workers. Before the war, the NCR—along with the Bombay metropolitan region—had one of the highest costs of living in the country. Workers across the region are demanding uniform minimum living wages of around Rs. 23,000 (\$247) per month.

This latest working class eruption began in the Noida industrial township but rapidly spread across the NCR. So desperate are the conditions of India's toilers that even domestic workers employed by individual middle class households joined the agitation.

Wages are so low that a majority earn a mere Rs. 10,000 (\$107) to Rs. 15,000 (\$160) per month for six days a week of intense work lasting 10–12 hours a day. Current wages have largely remained unchanged for about a

decade.

The government responded to the protests with violent police repression, which reached a high point on April 13-14. Both local and state government authorities sent huge contingents of police forces to suppress any opposition by workers to their daily misery.

After firing large quantities of tear gas and beating many protesters mercilessly, police arrested over 350 workers on April 14. The angry workers fought back by throwing stones and firecrackers and overturning several police vehicles.

In addition, the Hindu-supremacist Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh—who has a long history of unleashing police violence against Muslims and the poor—branded this worker uprising as a “Naxal” and even “Pakistan-linked” conspiracy. The Naxalites were Indian Maoists who began armed peasant uprisings in the late 1960s. They have largely been stamped out by the murderous violence of the Modi government.

Despite his threatening rhetoric, Adityanath was compelled to announce a 21 percent hike in minimum wages. Even as he announced the paltry wage increase, the chief minister ordered the police to maintain “vigilance against disruptive elements” and told workers to be thankful that their oppressive employers “provide employment opportunities.”

The long-oppressed workers walked off their jobs by the thousands on April 10 after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government in the neighboring state of Haryana mandated a 35 percent increase in minimum wages. This was in response to widespread and militant worker agitations over the previous months, especially in the Gurgaon–Manesar industrial belt. It was in Manesar township that Maruti-Suzuki car plant workers waged a courageous and bitter years-long struggle beginning in

2011.

The slave wages and working conditions that are the daily lot of the workers were described in a recent article in *The Hindustan Times*. A worker named Tularam, employed in a garment factory, told the newspaper, “I have been working in this industry for 5 years. My monthly salary has gone up by just Rs. 2000 to Rs. 13,000. My pay gets exhausted in just 10 days.”

Even with the wage hike announcements of 35 percent by the Haryana government and 21 percent by the Uttar Pradesh government, the workers can barely make a living. There is deep ferment among the Haryana workers over these meager increases. They are, however, being held in check by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), which is associated with Stalinists of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Two factors have largely driven this spontaneous uprising. The first is the impact on the Indian economy by the US-Israeli war against Iran. India, which imports large quantities of crude oil, fertilizer, and cooking gas from Persian Gulf countries, has been severely impacted by shortages and price increases, which in turn have driven up food prices.

The second major factor is the new set of four “Labour Codes” implemented last November by the pro-business Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led BJP national government. This was a further step by the fiercely anti-worker Modi government to enhance the “Ease of Doing Business,” an utterly reactionary concept initiated and energetically promoted by the World Bank.

The Stalinist trade unions—the CITU and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), which is associated with the older Communist Party of India (CPI)—appear to have been caught flat-footed by the uprising. Both the CITU and AITUC have a long history of betraying strikes, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu, where they have significant presence. They are now scrambling to bring the movement under control by sending delegations to intervene in the strikes and protests.

Describing this as a direct “class confrontation,” the CITU General Secretary stated that the new Labour Codes allow “ruthless exploitation” while weakening “trade union rights.” Similarly, AITUC General Secretary Amarjeet Kaur stated that the eruption of class conflict was the result of the government’s denial of collective bargaining. While the new Labour Codes have vastly intensified the exploitation of Indian workers, the Stalinist union leaders did not call for any sustained action to block their implementation. Instead, they pitched themselves as

forces the ruling class needs to mollify and suppress “class confrontation.”

The latest flare-up is part of a larger wave of workers’ struggles across India after the new Labour Codes were rolled out. In the past few months, militant protests have taken place by industrial workers in Barauni in Bihar, Surat in Gujarat and in Manesar and Panipat in Haryana. Among other things, the new Labour Codes have permitted employers, including giant public corporations, to increase contract labour, workers say. At the Indian Oil Corporation, contract workers toil for 12 hours a day but are paid for only eight hours. In addition, they get only two days off per month, and even their miserable wages are frequently delayed. Workers also said fraud is perpetrated in the name of Provident Fund contributions, and workers are denied even basic facilities such as toilets at the workplace.

Despite the Indian elite boasting of having the highest economic growth rate, the condition of workers in India reflects that of the 19th century. According to the 2025 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), only 23.6 percent are employed on regular salary or wages. Of the rest, 56.2 percent are “self-employed,” a glorified term used to describe people making a living by selling fritters on the sidewalk, while 20.2 percent are casual labourers who work whenever they can find some kind of manual job.

The CITU, which claims to represent 6.2 million workers, has called for nationwide protests on April 16 in support of the NCR workers. But the record of both union federations, which have allowed the national and state governments to escalate their anti-working class policies, points to the necessity of workers breaking the grip of the labor bureaucracies and developing their own independent means of struggle, including rank-and-file committees controlled associated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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