

India: All trade unions to strike work on Tuesday

To protest the fallout of liberalisation policy

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In an unprecedented show of unity, all trade unions in the country have come together on the same platform and given a call for a general strike on February 28.

This is the first time since Independence that trade unions, cutting across ideological and political affiliations, have joined hands to register their protest on a wide range of issues arising out of the liberalisation policy.

“The liberalisation and new economic policies unveiled since 1991 have undermined the interests of workers to such an extent that trade unions representing the Left, Right and Centrist parties have been forced to come together. Such unity was not witnessed even during or after Emergency,” All India Trade Union Congress general secretary Gurudas Dasgupta told The Hindu.

Workers of all 11 recognised unions (to be recognised, a union has to have four lakh members) and 5,000 un-affiliated unions will strike work, affecting banking, postal, port and government operations.

The unions have come together on a five-point charter, which seeks strict enforcement of all basic labour laws without any exception or exemption and stringent punitive measures for violation; a universal social security cover for unorganised sector workers without any restriction and creation of a National Social Security Fund.

According to the convener of the coordinating committee of the unions and president of the Congress-affiliated INTUC, G. Sanjeeva Reddy, and CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, things have come to such a pass in some States that even registration of new trade unions is not being allowed.

The charter seeks stoppage of disinvestment in profit-making Central and State public sector units. Disinvestment is paving the way for privatisation of the PSUs, say the unions.

The trade unions want the government to step in against contractorisation of permanent/perennial work, and payment of wages and benefits to contract workers at the same rate as are available to regular workers. Other demands include amendment of the Minimum Wages Act to ensure universal coverage, irrespective of the schedules, and fixation of the statutory minimum wage at not less than Rs. 10,000, removal of all ceilings on payment of and eligibility for bonus, Provident Fund, increase in the quantum of gratuity and assured pension for all.

Mr. Gupta said that despite several representations in the last few months, the government was unmoved on the major concerns of the working people.

At the annual Indian Labour Conference on February 14 and 15, in the presence of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, he articulated most of the demands and conveyed to him why workers were compelled to take recourse to a strike. However, there was no response from either Dr. Singh or the

Labour Minister.

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P.S.

* From The Hindu, New Delhi, February 25, 2012:

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article2932593.ece>