

A Non-Partisan View of Farmers' Movement

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The ongoing farmers' movement in India has evoked strong feelings on both sides. This has been praised to an awesome extent; on the other hand very unfair criticism has been inflicted on it repeatedly. It will be useful at this stage to attempt an unbiased appraisal of this movement.

Strengths of Movement

The most persistent demand of this movement for the repeal of the three controversial laws is a highly justified demand. This has already been discussed in detail in these columns (the reader may kindly refer to article titled A Comprehensive Analysis of the Three Controversial Farm Laws by this writer in [Countercurrents.org](#) dated December 23 2020). In addition it may be mentioned that while these laws do not have any provision for the taking over the land of farmers, as rightly and strongly emphasized by government representatives, the overall impact of the tendencies promoted by these laws will be to accelerate the trend of farmers becoming landless which is already taking place at the rate of 100 farmers becoming landless every hour. The people of India as well as farmers worldwide have reason to be grateful to the ongoing farmers' movement in India for giving a timely warning regarding the real trends and intentions of the three controversial farm laws and for leading the strong opposition to them.

Secondly the ongoing farmers' movement deserves our support for promoting the unity of people and our national unity at several levels. It has promoted unity of farmers and promoted unity of farmers with workers. It has promoted regional unity by promoting unity of farmers of various regions, particularly unity at the level of Punjab and Haryana which is very welcome. This movement has promoted unity of various faiths and religions. It has promoted communal harmony at a time when very powerful forces have been trying repeatedly to disrupt it.

Thirdly, this movement deserves much praise for its courage and determination which has been visible ever since this movement started. Along with courage there has been discipline and patience, a commitment to peaceful struggle, a great achievement. This exemplary courage has given a lot of strength to the overall resistance to increasingly authoritarian tendencies in India, as seen in a large number of arbitrary arrests and repression of activists and movements. In a situation of increasing darkness the courage and determination of farmers brings hope.

These three strengths are enough to qualify the movement for our support.

Limitations of Movement

Nevertheless it is important to point out that despite its obvious strengths the ongoing farmers' movement also suffers from a number of limitations. The landless constitute the poorest segment of our rural population and their number is even higher than that of landowning farmers. What should be the agenda for them? What is the overall agenda for justice and equality for rural areas. This most important issue has not been clear yet despite nearly six weeks of the movement.

Secondly for sustainable livelihoods of farmers and for healthy, safe food, ecologically protective farming along lines of social agro-ecology is most important, (for details please see Countercurrent.org dated November 25 2020—article titled Social Agro-Ecology is the Key...) but there has been no clear commitment yet from the farmers' movement that they want to move away from present day ecologically destructive farming towards ecologically protective farming. While rightly asking for removing penal provisions for stubble burning they should at the same time have said that they are committed to reducing this. While justifiably asking for retaining subsidized irrigation, they should have said that they will also work for promoting water conservation. On the whole the farmers' movement needs to come out clearly in favor of ecologically protective farming for protecting sustainable livelihoods of future generations. In addition it should add a women-led social reform effort to its agenda.

Conclusion

If a non-partisan appraisal of the farmers' movement is required in one sentence, then here it is—the ongoing farmers' movement is brave, it is needed, it is welcome, its main demand of repeal of three controversial laws is great, but it badly needs to have a wider perspective of justice and ecology.

You cannot create a great and lasting movement by just negating something (the three bad laws), you also have to clearly and carefully define a much broader agenda of changes which the farming and food system needs and our villages need.

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