

“This Is the Time to Unite”: Trade Unions, Labourers Support the Farmers’ Protest

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Between 28 November and 14 December, I visited the ongoing farmers’ protest at the Singhu and Tikri borders between Delhi and Haryana, and Ghazipur border between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The agitation began on 26 November as part of a “Delhi Chalo” rally to [protest](#) three recently enacted farm laws. As the protests progressed, I witnessed that labourers and people from working class communities started to join the farmers in solidarity. I heard talk of “kisan-mazdoor ekta,” or farmer-worker unity, and the conversations among protesters seemed to be about the rights of both farmers and labourers.

On 14 December, several members of trade unions were present at the Singhu border. I found a small book stall set up on the road by the Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra, a workers’ organisation. The subjects of the books ranged from the proletarian class to peasant and industrial revolutions. Four members of Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra were distributing pamphlets to the visitors. The pamphlets spoke about the unity of farmers and labourers, and contained information about recently passed controversial labour laws as well as the farm laws. “This is the time to unite and show our strength as these farm bills are not only against farmers but also against the labour class,” Nitesh, a member of the Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra, told me. “We have extended our support to this movement and joined hands with the farmers.”

I also spoke to Shyambir Shukla, a member of central working committee of the Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra. “We organised protests in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and other places on 5th, 8th and 14th December,” he told me. “There is a huge support coming for farmers from the labour class. This is a movement against the capitalist and fascist approach of the government. We will be fighting together until we get justice.” Shukla added that the Mazdoor Adhikar Sangharsh Abhiyan, a workers’ rights collective which consists of 15 labour organisations, including the Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra, has given its full support to the farmers.

On 11 December, the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions and Sectoral Federations/Associations, a joint front of at least ten trade unions, released a [press statement](#) which expressed “whole hearted support” and “rock-like solidarity” with the farmers. “The Joint Platform of CTUs and Sectoral Federations/Associations call upon the workers, employees and their unions, irrespective of affiliations, to be ever vigilant and extend our active solidarity to the call of Farmers’ Joint Struggle in the coming crucial period,” the release stated.

Labour organisations have also been protesting against four new labour codes introduced by the Narendra Modi government—The Code of Wages, the Industrial Relations Code, the Social Security Code, and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. These codes replaced 44 existing labour laws. Together, they [diluted](#) and repealed various longstanding legal provisions that ensured the rights and security of workers. They also excluded a large number of establishments from complying with and enforcing labour laws.

“We have been protesting against the labour code introduced by the government. Even on 26 November there were protests across Delhi and other parts of the country against the labour code,” Amjad Hassan, the national secretary of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, a trade union affiliated to the Congress party, told me. “Now we have decided to support the farmers and raise our voice for them and us jointly. Labour organisations from across the nation have started coming to the borders to show their solidarity on the spot for the farmers.”

Trade union members told me that in the initial days of the farmers’ agitation, they were protesting in solidarity in their own localities, in front of district administration headquarters or company offices. But they soon realised that they should join the farmers at the protest sit-ins on the various points along the Delhi border. Since the second week of December, the presence of labour organisations has been increasing at the places where the farmers are protesting. Trade union activists added that workers from Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have joined the farmers’ protest.

“This farmer movement has given an opportunity to show kisan-mazdoor ekta,” Thaneshwar Dayal Adigaur, the convenor of the Nirman Mazdoor Adhikar Abhiyan, a Delhi-based construction workers’ organisation, told me. “The fight of the working class against the labour code is similar to the protest of farmers against the farm bills. So, we must raise our voice together.”

Farmers’ organisations have welcomed the support of the trade unions. “The ongoing historical struggle against the three farm laws has taken a shape of mass movement,” Vikram Singh, the joint secretary of All India Agricultural Workers Union, told me. “Apart from the other sections of the society, working class is playing a very important role in this struggle. Agricultural workers in the rural India are part of this struggle from very beginning as the impact of the laws is similar for them also. This is the first layer of worker-peasant unity.” Singh said that both workers and farmers are united against the “pro-corporate” policies of the central government. He added that while there have been joint struggles in the past where workers and farmers have come together on common issues, their unity during the farmers’ protest marked a new chapter in history.

“All the mobilisations in last twenty days have seen this unity growing,” he continued. “Workers have understood that this struggle of farmers is not only for farmers but for ensuring food security of India and saving the rural economy. When farmers are fighting against farm laws which will push them to the mercy of brutal market laws and uncertainty, workers are also fighting against the codification of labour laws which puts them in the same situation.”

I spoke to AR Sindhu, the secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, or CITU, a national trade union. She has been actively protesting at the Singu, Tikri and Ghazipur borders. “The labour codes and farm acts were passed in September at the same time. Trade unions called for protests against the labour codes across the nation on 23 September and it

happened successfully. The trade unions supported the farmer's protests against the farm acts on 25 September too. In that way, the labour class and farmer community both have been together in fighting for their rights and against these laws. The trade unions have been continuously supporting the farmers protests on the ground and have associated themselves with farmers. You can say that sentiment of the labour class is attached to the farmers which is clearly visible at the borders. Now this is a movement for farmers and labour class both because both are integrated with each other."

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Akhilesh Pandey is a journalist based in Delhi.

Featured image: Trade unions protest in Delhi's Shaheed Park. Several trade unions and workers' organisations have joined the ongoing farmers' protest against three recently enacted farm laws. SHAHID TANTRAY FOR THE CARAVAN

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