

NOTE

Terrorising Labour

Satyam writes :

In order to crush the labour movement which is going on for last two and a half months in Gorakhpur city of eastern Uttar Pradesh, the administration has launched a naked reign of terror at the behest of the factory owners. The industrialist-administration-politician nexus is hell bent on crushing this lawful movement at any cost by taking resort to arrests, implicating in false cases, slandering through the media and naked threats.

On the night of 15th October, three leading activists of the "Joint Workers' Rights Struggle Forum"—Prashant, Pramod Kumar and Tapish Maindola—were arrested by the police. Even though the police have filed cases under bailable sections, the City Magistrate refused them bail on 16th October and extended their custody till 22nd October.

Before this, on the night of 15th October, the district administration called the three leaders to the office of ADM City for talks where they were reportedly assaulted by the officials.

The mobile phones of all four leaders were taken away and switched off in the office of the ADM City and they were not allowed to meet or talk to anyone in clear violation of the directions of the Supreme Court. They related these events on the evening of 17th October when some friends managed to meet them in the jail. They told that the administration refused to take them for a medical check-up despite demanding it repeatedly. Prashant has a serious heart ailment for which he is taking treatment from AIIMS, Delhi and Max Devki Devi Heart and Vascular Institute, Delhi. He was not allowed medical treatment or to get his medicines despite informing the authorities about this. The ADM City allegedly abused Prashant when he asked for it. All the while, the officials were asking them to abandon the workers' movement and threatening them with dire consequences.

Later they were taken to the Cantt. police station where they were charged with section 384 of IPC (extortion) apart from various sections for breach of peace (151, 116, 147). The next day false cases were registered by the factory owners against 8 workers plus these four leaders under various sections for forcefully trying to close the mill, stopping the workers from going to work, threatening etc.

From the day of the arrest itself, the officers of district administration are giving statements that the labour leaders are arrested on the suspicion of being "Maoists" and that "objectionable" literature has been recovered from them. It needs to be mentioned that right from the beginning of the agitation in order to defame it, the local industrialists and administration led by the redoubtable MP of Gorakhpur have been accusing the leaders of being "Naxalites" and "outsiders". Some officers told local journalists that the police were preparing cases to keep the leaders behind bars for a long duration.

The demands of these workers of Modern Laminators Ltd and Modern Packaging Ltd are pretty basic. They are demanding basic rights like minimum wages, job card, ESI card etc and implementation of only a fragment of the labour laws. These workers have been working as modern slaves in almost unbearable and extremely unsafe conditions at very low wages for more than 12 hours a day. All the factories of Gorakhpur have similar Dickensian working conditions. There are no unions in any of the factories; any attempt to organise under trade union is immediately crushed. For the first time ever, around five months back, workers of three factories Ankur Udyog Ltd, VN Dyers Yarn Mill and VN Dyers Textiles, formed the "Joint Workers' Rights Struggle Forum" and

fought for minimum wages and reduction in working hours. They braved all odds and were successful in gaining a partial victory. This motivated the thousands of other workers who are toiling in these conditions for years. This explains why the current workers' movement has become a thorn in the eyes of not only the two factory owners but all the industrialists of eastern Uttar Pradesh. They want to destroy this agitation at any cost and "teach a lesson" to the not-so docile workers. □□□