

COMMENT

No Security for Labour

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (ILO) produces fine reports on global labour every year without bothering about how these findings are being utilised by the people concerned. Governments in most cases ignore them while academics treat them as 'food for thought' for their academic exercises. Those who are engaged in labour organising just casually mention them in their routine activities related to collective bargaining.

Labour even in the industrially advanced west has been on the defensive since the Thatcher-Reagan de-regulation era in the 1980s. And globalisation under the baton of Bush the second, has worsened the situation for all—organised and unorganised sectors workers, the latter being more vulnerable.

ILO's latest report says over 50 million may lose jobs in 2009. The same report says some 200 million workers, mostly in developing countries could be pushed into extreme poverty if the adverse impact of globalisation does not get reversed.

ILO's new study 'Global Wage Report 2008/09' chronicles with authenticity that minimum wages legislation and collective bargaining are very weak in third world countries including India where a sort of industrial revolution as claimed by the captains of corporate world is taking place. Between 2001 and 2007 global economy grew in real terms by 4 percent whereas real wages increased only by 1.9 percent. Approximately half of the global labour force works for below basic wages otherwise statutory in most countries. It cannot be otherwise in a situation where most productive activities take place in unorganised sector. Out of total work-force of 457.5 million in India, only 62.5 million workers are employed in the organised sector while the remaining 394.9 million workers toil in the unorganised sector, having no rights, not even trade union rights. What is more the nature of employment of unorganised workers, who are generally low paid, is temporary, without an identifiable employer-employee relationship.

Globalisation and labour-bashing goes in tandem. There is a lot of furore over outsourcing but this outsourcing is creating a huge army of unorganised white collar employees who cannot think of 8-hour working day even in the 21st century.

With recession sweeping the global economy and showing no signs of reversal in the near future, labour remains the sole shock-absorber of the chaotic market. Limited social security schemes as they are in India for unorganised sector workers are vanishing, affecting even the organised sector in no minor way. Budgetary measures for social security for labour are too meagre to address the himalayan crisis. A paltry sum of Rs 487.63 crore was allocated for 'social security for labour' during the 2008-09 budget period. Things won't improve during the next fiscal as the interim Budget for 2009-2010 shows.

The hard reality is that labour organising too suffers from recession. All are busy to rescue the scam tainted corporate world while labour is being continually asked to sacrifice hard-earned rights. Everybody talks of security for capital while security for labour is not even on the agenda of the left. Mere lip service cannot deliver. □□□