

Who are we ?

● The International Workers Committee Against War, Exploitation, for a Workers' International (IWC) was set up at the World Conference held in Mumbai (India) on Novembre 19, 20 and 21 gathering delegates from 28 countries.

● The IWC was set up on the basis of the Mumbai Manifesto against war, exploitation and precarious labour which was endorsed by labour activist and trade union and political organisations officers from 46 countries (*)

● Its continuations committee is composed of labour activists from all political/ trade union backgrounds:

Innocent Assogba (Benin),
Alan Benjamin (USA),
Colia Clark (USA),
Constantin Cretan (Romania),
Berthony Dupont (Haiti),
Ney Ferreira (Brazil),
Daniel Gluckstein (France),
Rubina Jamil (Pakistan),
Apo Leung (China),
Gloria Gracida (Mexico),
M.A. Patil (India),
Mandlenkosi Phangwa (Azania),
Klaus Schüller (Germany),
Jung Sikhwa (Korea),
John Sweeney (Great Britain),
Mark Vassilev (Russia),
Nambiath Vasudevan (India).

(*) Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Azania, Belarus, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

INDIA
« Kashmiris' legitimate rights must be restored ! »

A letter from Nambiath Vasudevan, trade-union activist and coordinator of the International Committee against War and Exploitation, for the Workers' International (IWC).

Kashmir became a part of India through an instrument of accession signed between the then Kashmir King and the government of India. India had agreed to a special status for Kashmir and this was guaranteed under Article 370 of the Indian constitution. On August 5 this year the special status has been withdrawn by an act of parliament, the federal government claiming that since Kashmir legislative assembly has been dissolved some months ago it is the inherent right of the national parliament to revoke Article 370. Thus the withdrawal of special status to Kashmir did not have the sanction of the people of Kashmir or their elected representatives as provided in the constitution.

The sudden abrogation of Article 370, similar to imposition of the national emergency in 1975, has raised doubts in the minds of non-BJP political parties, that using authoritarian power and control in the parliament any other state in India can be reduced to the status of Union Territory which will amount to the death of constitutionalism.

India is a union of states. Kashmir was a separate state in the union India. Kashmir comprised Kashmir valley, Jammu and Ladakh, known as J & K, Jammu and Kashmir. Of this Kashmir is a predominantly Muslim majority area. Hindus are majority in Jammu.

On August 5 J & K ceased to be a separate state. J & K has been bifurcated, Jammu and Kashmir would become a Union Territory (UT) with a separate assembly. Ladakh will not be a part of J & K. It will become a Union Territory (UT) without an assembly. All UTs in India are under the direct control of the federal government.

From 1947 onwards relations between India and Pakistan turned hostile on the issue of Kashmir and with the involvement of UN line of control came into existence and people were divided in two territories.

Kashmir was embroiled throughout in a demand for autonomy for some and independence for others but for those Indians outside Kashmir it was an integral part of India. BJP has always played its hindu card in fomenting national spirit ignoring the human angle involved.

From August 5 within Kashmir and between Kashmir and rest of the world, there is complete information black out, no TV, landline/mobile

telephone connections, Facebook or Internet. No newspapers, or media connectivity.

All main line political party leaders, activists are detained. No time limit has been set for their release or lifting information black out.

Since security of Kashmir has become the direct responsibility of the Indian federal government it is natural to expect more tension at the border areas especially between two Kashmirs particularly when both countries claim to own the entire territory.

Added to the new tension is the creation of Ladakh bordering China. India is equally concerned about the negative reaction coming from China. The Chinese angle is a new dimension involving Kashmir.

The internal situation and reaction of Kashmiri people will be known after August 15, Independence Day, when normalcy is expected to be restored. Though BJP has a brute majority in parliament, there is tremendous opposition to government using its armed might against innocent people in Kashmir. Kashmir is a hugely militarized zone. Over 40,000 people have lost their lives already in Kashmir. After 2016 thousands of youngsters have been victims in addition to military and para military personnel. By any account there is not going to be a happy outcome in Kashmir. If BJP government is scheming to create Hindu settlements in Kashmir and parcel out lands to outsiders ostensibly for the development of the state, resistance is bound to rise. Whether Kashmir would repeat Kosovo or Wet Bank is the question bothering many.

The labour movement must demand restoration of rule of law, government must free from detention all political party leaders and trade union activists, remove ban on press, media and communication system. Kashmiris must have legitimate right to express their views, defend their constitutional rights. Government of India should adhere to constitutional guarantees given to Kashmiri people.

Finally, the claim made by President Donald Trump that he was requested by Prime Minister Modi to mediate in Kashmir was not contradicted by PM Modi despite demands raised by opposition leaders in the Indian parliament. Latest reports say the American administration has withdrawn from the move. ■

PAKISTAN

« Trade unions should play their important role to unionize home based workers »

An article by Samina Fayyaz, Joint Secretary, Home based workers' union

The women working as home-based workers are working in very difficult situations. There are hundreds of women workers engaged in industrial labor from their homes on an informal and piece-rate basis. The labor outsourced to women includes producing bangles, garments, envelopes, plastic toys, shoe making, stitching suits, embroidery, food items, etc., as well as packaging and cleaning batteries. Since years and years a long struggle for their rights.

Women organizations and trade unions organizing and mobilizing these women and give them voice that the work which they are doing is not recognizing, so let's mobilize and struggle to pressurize government to make laws for home based workers.

Sindh Provincial government to enact a law enabling their access to social security benefits. This is a step in the right direction but the only way to ensure that the law is implemented effectively. To implement this law trade unions and home based women worker's union should play their effective role, meetings with labor ministry, secretary labor, writing letters to implement this law on home based workers, and home based workers should aware about their rights.

We received a lot of complaints by home based workers are constantly working on different work, their health condition is very bad, suffering in different diseases. Those who cut dates for supari packets or separate plastic toys using industrial scissors complain of chronic pain in their hands. Sitting in strained positions causes persistent back and neck aches. Exposure to chemicals used in

multiple processes is harmful. As the work requires intense focus, women complain of vision problems. Many report reproductive ailments and hepatitis.

Home based workers are getting very low wages. The economic rewards are few and earn far below the minimum wage for an unskilled worker. Take bangles, for example. There are roughly 60 processes involved in their manufacture. About 20 of these are performed by women at home. These include evening out the open mouth of a bangle and closing it over a flame. The rates for the latter are Rs6 for a bunch that is sold for Rs365. Even the most efficient workers, maintaining a crouched position with the fan off to keep the flame still, will simply reduce the time for one bunch from 20 minutes to 12. Through perseverance, they may increase their daily rate by Rs50, but it is still not enough to be a living wage.

Home based worker's link up their struggle with trade union federations

Although women are free to take or refuse work, and have the convenience of getting work delivered to their homes, they exercise limited agency. Work from home reduces their mobility and exposure to their peers, the market and government offices. Most women are unable to name the factory or investor they are working for. Middlemen who deliver materials can thus exploit their isolation and coerce them into accepting poor wages. Even when increments are won, they are minimal. Moreover, since there is no formal contract and industrial conditions remain volatile, there is never any guarantee of work.

Their children suffer as well, as they lose access to space in their houses, are drawn in to assist their elders, and are exposed to the same health and safety risks. The fact that home-based workers are predominantly women, unable to unionize effectively, poorly paid, and working in precarious and informal jobs — makes such labor a form of systemic gender discrimination. It contributes to women's economic marginalization. Women home-based workers who also bear household responsibilities struggle to make time for union meetings.

Unions are neglecting home based workers, which is increasing day by day because of the high inflation. NGO's are having funds to contact them. But they are unable to mobilize them on one platform. This ensures the issue gets visibility, and eventually pushes lawmakers to write a policy and then enact a law. But the hard work of making rights real requires organizing and political mobilization. Without that, the law itself is nothing but a set of aspirations.

There is a need to aware and mobilize these home based workers to visit relevant departments with trade unions for the implementation of minimum wage, Social security cards, EOBI and other benefits providing in labor laws. It is time to challenge the long wait for laws and then the rules to implement them. Home based workers should connect their struggle with trade union federations, so it will be easy to struggle and raise their voice to implement labor laws. NGO's are not being able to implement labor laws on home based workers.

