

Country Report: India

Dear comrades,

- India is the fifth largest mineral wealthy country in the world. It has vast iron, bauxite, manganese, copper, zinc mines apart from radio-active minerals such as Uranium. It stands in second place in coal production. Today nearly seven lakh workers, including out sourcing and contract workers are working in the coal industry. At the same time more than 25 lakh workers, who are the unorganised sector workers, also working with private sector companies in the name of contract and out sourcing workers. In coal industry, there were six lakh workers during 1990s. Now it has declined to 2.83 Million. India stands in second place with nearly 1,000 million tons of coal production.
- Underground mines decrease, open cast mines increase. Open-cast mines have only 10 per cent of coal reserves in 300 meters of depth and the underground mines have 90 percent of coal reserves up to 1,200 meters from the surface.
- Before 1971 all mines are private, after 1973 all mines are nationalised. In the year 1991 the union government launched the New Economic Policies (NEP) in line with the prescriptions given by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). From 1991 to 2008, 289 mines were privatised. By June 2020, 41 coal blocks were handed over to private parties.
- As a consequence of these policies, the structure of the mining workers has also undergone changes with the regular employment on a continuous decline and contractual employment increasing. For example, in the SCCL there used to be 1,16,972 regular workers in 1990 and today this has declined to 43,895. In 1990 there were just a sprinkle of contract workers but today there are some 30 thousands of whom a large part is engaged in production related activity.

In the backdrop of increasing contractisation in the mining industry for reaping more profits the conditions of this work force can be best described as deplorable. In the first place these contract workers have no security of employment. Their wages are but of a fraction of wages of regular work force.

- In the open-cast mines there are migrant workers coming from other states whose conditions are deplorable. They are all bundled into some camps without any proper civic facilities.
- In the coal industry at the global level while China tops the list of number of accidents in India accidents are frequent occurrences. Deaths of workers due to roof collapse, lack of ventilation, heavy presence of gas and gushing in of water are major reasons for these accidental deaths. Even in the open-cast mines accidents have occurred due to mud slides and collision of loaded trucks.

- The regular workforce in the coal industry faces several issues such as proper wage settlements, work load, deprivation of certain facilities like dependent employment. With regard to medical care, workers are sent to private hospitals which in effect means denial of proper medical treatment. Health care is a business here also. These regular workers live in quarters which are very old and without proper maintenance.
- In the last six years since the Second International Miners Conference in 2017 in Telangana, many agitations of mining workers have taken place in the country. Coal mining workers struck work against the sale of coal blocks to private parties in the second week of June 2020 and also 9th until 11th December. There have been protest programmes against privatisation and allowing 100 per cent FDIs in the coal sector. Contract workers have been for long demanding their inclusion in the national coal wage agreement which is restricted only to the regular workers. Since contract workers are also a part of the coal industry this demand is a just one. Because, the government does not accept this basic demand contract workers have been launching struggles for better wages and other facilities. Recently, in September 2022 the contract workers under the umbrella of the joint action committee, in which our IFTU played a crucial role, struck work for 18 days as a result of which some partial victory was achieved. In the last six years there have been protests against open-cast mines by both workers and as well as local people and environmentalists. In the name of covid heavy harassment took place. Harassment took place not given proper medical and also not given dept benefits.

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