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To,

All the Zonal/Divisional/State/Regional Units

TRAGIC KILLING OF 15 MIGRANT WORKERS ON RAILWAY TRACK

The tragic death of 15 migrant workers, after a cargo train ran over them while they were sleeping on the track, has shaken the conscience of the nation. These migrant workers who were part of a team of 20 were walking from Jalna to Bhusaval, a distance of over 157 kilometer. These migrant workers, according to media reports, were headed to Madhya Pradesh. It is reported that they felt exhausted and fell asleep on the tracks in Aurangabad in Maharashtra. Perhaps they thought that no train would run due to lockdown and sleeping due to sheer exhaustion on a railway track is no risk. But unfortunately, it was not.

The All India Insurance Employees' Association deeply mourns the tragic death of these migrant workers. These were not the first deaths as a result of the lockdown. A number of migrant workers who wanted to be in the comfort of their loved ones in their own houses took the risk of walking on foot hundreds of kilometres and died due to sheer exhaustion and starvation. It is estimated that more than 300 lives of migrant workers have been lost so far due to exhaustion, starvations and accidents on the roads. This is a big blot on democracy and Indian society.

The sufferings of migrant workers and poor could have been avoided if the lockdown had been planned properly. The ill planned lockdown gave only four-hour notice for the people. While declaring the lockdown no assurance was given to the migrant workers and the poor about their jobs, wages and food security. This created a surely avoidable tragedy. It is ironical that 2 days time was given for clapping and beating the utensils and repeated reminders were sent for their observance but the same 2-day notice was not given to the migrant workers to return to their homes. It should also be noted that rich Indians were brought from abroad but no arrangements were made to facilitate these poor migrant workers to go back to their places. There was a clear class bias in the decisions of the government.

The lockdown has also seen the brutality of capitalism in treating the most exploited section of the working class. The migrant workers were treated as slaves with no liberty to travel to their native places. The Central Government took a belated decision to run special trains and some States to run special buses to facilitate the migrant workers to go back to their respective States. But there was no grace and humanity in implementing this decision. The

migrant workers who were without jobs and food were charged exorbitant fares. Only after a public hue and cry some States decided to bear the cost of the fare. Karnataka government after knowing that a large number of workers have listed themselves to travel back to their respective States took an unacceptable position of cancelling the trains. This was done to help the industry and construction lobby. The theory of capitalism that labour is free and it cannot be coerced was shredded to pieces. The events have demonstrated beyond any doubt that the poor migrant workers, far from being free, have to still work under slavish conditions. It was only after a strong protest by the trade unions that Karnataka Government relented and has decided to run the trains again.

The Covid 19 crisis is being used by both Central Government and State Governments to change the labour laws to benefit the industrialists. The Government has allowed a 12 hour working day. The glorious struggle of the working class for an 8 hour working day is being nullified taking advantage of this crisis. The Uttar Pradesh government has issued an ordinance exempting existing and new industries from the purview of labour laws for three years. This is unacceptable. The Coronavirus crisis has seen the undermining of democracy and separation of powers of the democratic institutions. Even the highest judiciary has refused to entertain the questioning of decisions of the Executive. The comments by the Chief Justice of India that when migrant workers are getting food, why do they require money are most reprehensible. The decision of the Odisha High Court that migrant workers can be allowed into the State only if they test negative for coronavirus raises questions over the status of these migrant workers and their rights and entitlements as Citizens of this country.

The AIIEA mourns the tragic death of these 15 migrant workers and all those who lost their precious lives due to lockdown related issues. The AIIEA shares the grief with the bereaved families of these migrant workers and stands in solidarity with the suffering India. We hold the government and its leader responsible and accountable for this tragedy. It is not our case to say that lockdown was not necessary. But what we find disturbing is that while declaring the ill-planned lockdown the poor and migrant workers simply disappeared from the radar of the Government.

The AIIEA as a socially conscious trade union has been doing its bit to help the migrant workers. Its units across the country have done a commendable job in reaching out to the helpless workers and it will continue to do so. The AIIEA stands in solidarity with the less fortunate section of the Indian people.

With Greetings,

Comradely Yours



General Secretary