

The Greatest Strike Ever: Indian Workers' Strike

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The working class emerged from the industrial revolution in the late 18th century. As the industrial revolution brought new definitions, new global rules have also emerged. By the 20th century, human rights issues became one of the most important goals of the industrialized civilization. And perhaps the most fundamental right for a worker is the strike action right. Today, we will examine the greatest strike ever, the Indian Workers' Strike.

Last year, besides the Covid-19 pandemic, India faced the widest general strike of history. On 26 November 2020, with the calls of 10 trade unions across the country, 250 million Indian workers and farmers started to flock to the capital Delhi with the slogans of "Chalo Delhi" (Go to Delhi). The strike began with protests at the capital Delhi. As time goes, farmers around the states also brought their tractors to the capital, threatening that they could enter the government buildings with their vehicles. Typically such a strike could diminish within days; however, the scale of this strike was unprecedented. To compare the numbers: If the people participating in the strike founded a country, it would rank 5th in the population ranking, above Indonesia and Pakistan. [\(1\)](#)

The reasons behind this massive strike are economic, as one could expect. The rate of unregistered workers, which is over 90%, has long been a bleeding wound for the country. With the pandemic, the gross domestic product (GDP) declined historically by 23.9%, and the unemployment rate increased by 27%. Furthermore, increasing the working hours to 12 hours can also be shown as a reason for the strike to be so major. Most of the strikers think that the price protection law, that was enacted in order to protect the laborers, caused them to not get the reward for their labor. All these events combined, constituted the factors that triggered the strike.

They have four demands which they expect the government to satisfy:

- Withdrawal of the laws that had prepared under the name of reform for agriculture and workers' rights,
- Stop the privatization of state-run enterprises of the government, such as railways, ammunition factories, and ports, including state banks,
- Cash support of 7,500 rupees (about \$100) per month for all families unable to pay income tax,
- 10 kilograms of free food per person per month,

The most crucial point is the families that cannot pay the income tax. This shows the overall poverty in the state. Statements such as “Delhi is fully furnished.” could point to the magnitude of the event. As the farmers and the workers are flocking to Delhi, the police have taken measures to break the workers’ resistance on strike. After the farmers' statements such as "We can enter the administration buildings with our tractors", the police chose to block many streets and used water cannons. There are reports of brawls between striking laborers and police in these hot spots. Apart from these events, tens of thousands of farmers camped in three locations on the borders of Delhi. They came prepared with months of supplies and say they are determined not to head back until the Modi government relents.

One of the opposition politicians Sukhdev Prasad, stated: “*Achhe din* (happy days)? This government has pushed us into hell! We are barely able to survive, ground down between price rises on the one hand and low wages on the other. Now, they have changed labor laws so that employers are sitting on our chests.”. The existence of such harsh rhetoric and the tens of thousands of people from outside the capital who stayed in the camp to stockpile supplies for months is a sign that the Narendra Modi government is facing a really challenging situation. [\(2\)](#)

Considering the unregistered workers' numbers and free food demand, the workers' strike can be justified. I hope that the misery in the world will come to an end and we will not face such food aid demands and I wish the workers and farmers get what they want. On the other hand, strikes with such a large number of people are particularly critical in pandemic conditions. It would be very painful for anyone to be harmed or infected by this friction between the police and the demonstrators. All in all, I wish that the greatest strike in our world will resolve peacefully as soon as possible.