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India

Farmers' revolt in India

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Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India and leader of the BJP (Indian People's Party), a party with a nationalist and Hindu orientation, came to power in 2014 on the basis of an ultra-liberal programme. In the meantime India has been hit like the rest of the world by the covid-19 pandemic from January 2020. On 11 December this year, there were more than 9.8 million reported cases and over 142,000 deaths. These figures are below the reality, given the relatively weak health network in India.

350,000 suicides in 25 years

The impact of this pandemic on the country's economy has been enormous, since the services sector, which is the most efficient sector of Indian capitalism, collapsed last April. Industry is not in a better state either, especially since the bulk of the workforce is concentrated in SMEs. Many city dwellers are in fact wage earners who have not really left their villages where the rest of the family continues to live and work. The loss of their jobs has put them in a particularly tragic situation. While agriculture has suffered relatively little from the economic effects of the pandemic, it suffers from many other difficulties. Nine out of ten farmers work on plots of less than 0.8 hectares. It is therefore hardly surprising in these conditions that 350,000 suicides have been recorded in 25 years due to over-indebtedness and a massive rural exodus that displaced nearly 15 million people between 1991 and 2011, despite the few jobs that can be found in the cities. In 2013, a family of five had an estimated monthly income of 72 euros and many rural families survive only thanks to state social programmes.

Modi has won the support of some Indian capitalists to carry out structural reforms in agriculture - knowing that in the long run this threatens them with a large-scale social explosion because Indian capitalism does not for the moment have the capacity to absorb labour from the countryside, as has been the case in China, for example. Last September, it therefore enacted three laws that challenged the state-guaranteed prices for agricultural products and ensured a minimum income for peasants. With this in mind, it removed both perishable and non-perishable staples from the list of essential commodities (unless their prices rise by more than 50 per cent in the first case, 100 per cent in the second), which would ensure that supermarkets and other middlemen could make handsome profits in the most legal way.

Delhi under siege

This policy can only contribute to an increase in agricultural prices on the market and to the creation of monopolies for certain products, from which, for example, Mukesh Ambani, an Indian tycoon very close to Modi and whose fortune today reaches 63 billion euros, or Gautam Adani ("only" 23 billion euros), another one close to the Prime Minister, could benefit. Eventually, many small farmers who are deprived of the minimum income guaranteed by the old system risk being expelled from their small plots.

The situation is particularly worrying for the peasants of Punjab and Haryana, rural states in north-east India with 28 and 26 million inhabitants respectively, who were the main beneficiaries of the 1966 Green Revolution. It is in these regions that the revolt movement is most significant, especially since many of the agricultural products affected by liberalization account for a significant share of their production. Demonstrations have been taking place in the region for the past two months. In recent weeks, roads and railways around Delhi have been blocked and many peasants

are determined to lay siege to the capital for several weeks if necessary, despite the repression against them.

The Congress Party, India's largest historical party, but whose electoral influence has collapsed in recent years, is trying to use this opportunity to regain legitimacy. It is leading a coalition of other small parties, criticising Modi's policies. However, he is obviously not in a position to bring any clear perspective to India's small farmers.

India's small farmers can only get out of this situation by joining forces with the urban workers, who have been hit hard by the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, to ensure the overthrow of capitalism and the reorganisation of Indian society in a way that benefits the vast majority of the country's population, not profit-hungry entrepreneurs.

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*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Anticapitaliste](#).*

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