

The Code on Social Security (2020) and Workers' Movements during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India

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This paper is concerned with the multiple lines of labour divisions unfolding under the Code on Social Security Code (2020) through varying definitions of workers, different payment scales, different accessibility to social security and the reproduction and intersection with social divisions of caste, class and gender. By looking at the implications of the Act on the process of collective bargaining, it explores the scope of action for workers' associations after these new provisions.

As an investigation of the long-term origins of regulating bargaining processes, it argues that the new law passed in 2020 social factors of inequality are perpetuated by embedding them into a rationale of the "modern" labour process following the terminology of efficiency, productivity and flexibility.

The structure of this investigation is three-fold: First, it analyses the new law and the various components with regards to trade union actions, social security and remuneration which the Social Security Code aims to synthesise. Second, drawing on various interviews conducted with trade unionists from INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress) and the WPC (Working Peoples' Charter), it analyses workers' mobilisations in Delhi which followed the passing of the law under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, the paper looks at the contradictory trajectories as unfolding under the Act. By extending the scope of workers falling under "informal" categories, the law cements precarious structures, yet opens up possibilities to form broad alliances and unite various sections of the workforce, as rendered visible during the general strike in November 2020.

Primary author: HAENSEL, Catharina (Scuola Normale Superiore)

Presenter: HAENSEL, Catharina (Scuola Normale Superiore)

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