

Ahead of all-India strike, workers form an alternative to central trade unions

- Special Correspondent

With the all India general strike called by central trade union organisations (CTUOs) just a couple of days away (September 2), 14 workers' organisations and federations from different parts of the country have come together to form an alternative to the CTUOs. They have formed a new platform, christened Mazdoor Adhikar Sangharsh Abhiyan (MASA).

The formation of MASA was announced at an All India Workers Convention, organised at Ambedkar Bhawan in New Delhi on Sunday. Labour organisations under the MASA umbrella include the Trade Union Centre of India (TUCI), Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), All India Workers Council (AIWC), Indian Council for Trade Unions (ICTU), Jan Sangharsh Manch, Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendra, and Democratic Trade Union Centre (DTUC), among others. The sectors covered by the MASA banner include automotive, manufacturing, agriculture, tea garden workers, cotton mill workers, IT and services.

“In the 25 years of liberalisation, the CTUOs have proven themselves incapable of building a strong labour movement to protect worker interests,” said Amitava Bhattacharya, co-ordinator, MASA. “We had an All India strike on September 2 last year as well, and in the years before that. Has there been any progress on any of the labour issues since then? The CTUOs have diluted worker interests time and again, and made compromises with a pro-corporate state. Workers have lost faith in their leadership. Hence this initiative to create an alternative.”

MASA will, however, join the all India strike on Friday. “We need to campaign for workers' rights round the year, not just one day in a year. Nevertheless, we will join the September 2 strike in full force and use this day to kick-start our year-long campaign,” Mr. Bhattacharya said.

The worker organisations which have joined hands under MASA have representation in 20 states, including Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, and Punjab, among others. Unlike the CTUOs, MASA is unaffiliated to any political parties. According to a spokesperson, it will focus on mobilising workers around three specific demands: abolition of contract labour for perennial jobs, a minimum wage of Rs. 22,000 per month, and an end to labour law reforms.

When contacted, a central trade union leader who did not wish to be named, said, “It is true that there are weaknesses in our work. But that doesn't mean we aren't trying our best, or that we have done nothing in the last 25 years. It has become fashionable to attack us. I wish this new initiative all the best.”