

RESIST CORPORATE TAKEOVER OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE! SOLIDARITY WITH PROTESTING FARMERS!

We stand with the farmers of India who are protesting the three new laws that were forced through India's Parliament in violation of democratic norms and the federal scheme of the constitution.

They will accelerate the corporate takeover of India's agriculture and food systems, deplete farmer incomes, and increase hunger.

We condemn the government's attempt to kill off the country's public agricultural markets (known as mandis). The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 permits trade outside mandis but does nothing to improve the governance and efficiency of the current markets.

We also fear that the creation of private markets is a precursor to the eventual removal of the Minimum Support Price. The Indian state's guarantee to farmers to purchase crops at a pre-declared price is a pillar, both for decent incomes for farmers and for affordable nutrition for India's poor.

The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 permits agribusiness firms to enter into contracts for the sale of future farming produce at a pre-agreed price. The de-regulation of contract farming will enable large firms to direct farm practices and investments.

The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020 removes crops that are vital for food security from the list of essential commodities. To supposedly create an enabling environment for agri-tech and logistics businesses, the government has left itself completely powerless to enforce stockholding limits even to control food price inflation and scarcity.

We challenge the assumption behind these laws that private investments in agri-food supply chains will lead to gains in efficiency. What we will see instead is the large-scale transfer of wealth from farmers to agricultural corporations.

85% of India's farmers are small and marginal, with a landholding of less than two hectares. The vast majority of farmers from India's marginalised communities, including the oppressed castes and the tribal communities, belong in this category. When pitted against large agricultural firms, they have no bargaining power. Instead of providing them access to more and better markets where their produce is purchased at guaranteed prices, these new laws leave them at the mercy of monopsonies.

In spite of food surpluses, India remains one of the world's most food-insecure countries with the highest rates of malnourishment, even among other South Asian countries. The withdrawal of the state from purchasing agricultural produce, from maintaining public stocks of food, and from controlling private hoarding, is a retreat from any public attempt to reduce hunger.

These laws must be repealed in their entirety. In a continent-sized country with a wide variety of climactic conditions and farming traditions, we also believe that agricultural policy is rightfully in the domain of state legislatures. Any attempt to reform India's agriculture sector must centre guaranteed living incomes for marginal farmers, fair living wages of agricultural labour, and affordable nutrition for India's poor.