

Resisting the Neoliberal Project in India: Punjab and the Struggle against Corporate Encroachment into Agriculture

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Abstract: The imposition of the Three Farm Laws by the union government of India in 2020 was intended to further corporate encroachment in agriculture. However, this resulted in an unprecedented resistance movement of farmers and workers. The union government of India eventually had to retreat, and the Three Farm Laws were repealed in 2021. In this article, we intend to briefly review with special reference to Punjab, the historical context of corporate encroachment into Indian agriculture, the unfolding of the resistance to this corporate encroachment, and a prognosis on the political economy of the neoliberal project in India.

Key words: Three Farm Laws; corporate encroachment; Punjab; farmers; workers

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Introduction¹

The consolidation of the neoliberal project in India is evidenced by the consensus that has been achieved about it among the bourgeois parties in India (Wilson, Loh, and Purewal 2018). Underlying this consensus is the incorporation of the regime (led by the bourgeois-landlord Indian state) into the ambit of global finance. However, the establishment of a near hegemony on the neoliberal project by neo-fascism has inaugurated a new phase in the political economy of India

(Patnaik 2020). As a result, the corporate financial oligarchy has sought to unleash a counter-revolution to roll back whatever was left of the limited gains made by the workers and peasants during the dirigiste regime (Patnaik 2017). As part of this counter-revolutionary process, the union government of India imposed Three Farm Laws to further corporate encroachment into agriculture. However, this resulted in a resistance movement of farmers and workers which was unprecedented in India in terms of geographical spread, tenacity, and participation. This struggle against the Three Farm Laws had begun soon after their imposition in 2020. In spite of numerous attempts by neo-fascism to disarm the struggle against the Three Farm Laws and the loss of more than 726 lives of protesters, the struggle continued unabated.² The union government of India, in spite of being ensconced in the neoliberal project, ultimately had to repeal the Three Farm Laws in 2021.³ The democratic movement of India has been galvanised by the upsurge of farmers and workers who protested democratically around the borders of Delhi and elsewhere. The success achieved by this upsurge constitutes the first setback to the neoliberal project in India since 2014.

In this article, we intend to briefly review with special reference to Punjab, the historical context of corporate encroachment in Indian agriculture, the unfolding of the resistance to this corporate encroachment and present a prognosis on the political economy of the neoliberal project in India. We conclude the article by highlighting the need for a broad-based unity to solidify the resistance against the basis of corporate encroachment in agriculture, namely, the neoliberal project (and neo-fascism which dominates that project in India).

The Three Farm Laws and Corporate Encroachment in Agriculture

The Three Farm Laws were the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, was to allow (definitionally unregulated) sale and purchase outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandis* (market yard), which would have enhanced the relative bargaining power of private procurers of agricultural produce (especially corporate agribusiness) to the detriment of farmers. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, involved an amendment that would have allowed corporate agribusinesses including multinational corporations to have an unimpeded part in the contract farming set-up in India. This would have resulted in the drawing up of contracts whose consequences

would have been disadvantageous for farmers' incomes and wages of workers. The implementation of both these acts would have brought about declines in employment in both agriculture and non-agriculture (including wage employment in *mandis*).⁴ In the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, the maximum permissible stock quantity and supply regulation that pertains to private procurers of agricultural produce were amended. These amendments would have allowed these private procurers (including corporate agribusinesses) to maintain a large speculative stock of agricultural produce including essential items of mass consumption. The ability of private procurers to maintain large stock holdings of agricultural produce would have resulted in lower incomes for farmers but also higher food prices for workers. The Three Farm Laws could have resulted in a shift of acreage, over time, towards crops that would serve metropolitan demand (as was the case in colonial India) resulting in a decline in domestic food security (Patnaik and Patnaik 2021). Besides the Three Farm Laws, the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020, has involved a proposal to eliminate all subsidies on the supply of electricity. The government through the Electricity (Amendment) Bill seeks to incorporate the "full" cost of electricity through power tariffs from farmers.⁵

The Three Farm Laws were designed to dismantle the extant system of public support for agriculture.⁶ The APMC *mandis*, which were one aspect of this system, were set up in the 1960s.⁷ It was envisaged that these APMC *mandis* could defend farmers against the predaceous activities of private procurers of agricultural produce. If APMC *mandis* functioned as envisaged, the expectation was that the agricultural produce of farmers would secure remunerative prices.

In the Indian states of Haryana and Punjab, a rice–wheat sequence has become predominant in the post "Green" Revolution phase partly as a result of the system of public intervention in agriculture. The incomes of many farmers in Punjab and Haryana increased as the government was able to ensure procurement at a minimum support price (MSP) for much of their agricultural produce. However, agricultural procurement often proceeds at private procurement prices that are below MSP in most other states, as well as for crops other than rice and wheat.

Private procurement prices tend to be below MSP for a number of reasons. To begin with, state governments in India tend to be financially constrained given the skew of financial resources in favour of the union government of India. Further, procurement of agricultural produce outside states such as Punjab, Haryana, etc. is limited; 27% of households sold paddy (rice) to public procurement agencies from July to December 2012. This was 14% for the period of January to June 2013 (NSSO 2014). Wheat from 35% of households was publicly procured from January to June 2013 (NSSO 2014). In Punjab, among those from whom paddy is procured, the share of small and marginal farmers is 38%.⁸ However, the absolute number of farmers who gain due to public procurement is significant.⁹ Public

procurement tends to indirectly increase the income of even those farmers whose agricultural produce is privately procured.¹⁰ Even prior to the introduction of the Three Farm Laws, due to a rise in the cost of cultivation, agricultural activities of small and marginal farmers had been increasingly becoming non-viable. Costs of cultivation have increased since potentially cost-reducing government initiatives, such as public investment, inputs subsidies to farmers, concessional credit to cultivators, agricultural extension, etc., have declined on account of the dominance of the neoliberal project in India. The system of MSP and public procurement, in the post “Green” Revolution period, has primarily (but not exclusively) benefited the richer sections of farmer households (primarily capitalist landlords and rich farmers). Consequently, there has been a stimulation of the process of accumulation of capital by capitalist landlords and rich farmers.

Changes in agricultural policies in a neoliberal direction (by the union and Punjab governments), as we mentioned previously, have resulted in an increase in the cost of cultivation. Farmers operating in a regime of conventional farming have sought to respond to these policy changes by increasing the use of synthetic chemical fertilisers or over-exploiting groundwater in an attempt to prevent agricultural yields from plateauing or falling.¹¹ As a result there has been both a depletion of groundwater resources and a marked deterioration in the quality of agricultural land in Punjab. Despite this persistent rise in the cost of cultivation on account of the use of fertilisers, machines, seeds, interest payments, and land rent, poor (and a section of semi-medium) farmers have been able to obtain a rate of return in agriculture that exceeds subsistence on account of public procurement of rice and wheat in the state. However, rice is not a staple item of consumption in the state of Punjab. Therefore, most of the rice produced in the state is sold at APMC *mandis*. Therefore, small and marginal and semi-medium farmers are significantly dependent on the APMC *mandis* system for remunerative prices.

In Punjab, the share of small and marginal farmers (defined as those whose landholding is below 2 hectares of land) is 33%. Further, semi-medium farmers (defined as those whose landholding is between 2 to 4 hectares of land) have a 34% share in Punjab, and the remaining 33% belong to medium and large farmer households (with landholding above 4 hectares) (Agricultural Census Division 2019). An implementation of the Three Farm Laws would have adversely impacted small and medium farmers as well as semi-medium farmers. Not surprisingly these farmers have been in the vanguard of the struggle against the Three Farm Laws.

Agrarian Transformation in India and Punjab

Before we examine the contours of the struggle against the Three Farm Laws let us briefly examine the historical record of struggles for agrarian transformation in

India with special reference to Punjab. During the colonial period, the setting up of canal infrastructure in some parts of Punjab transformed the agrarian set-up. The agricultural output produced in Punjab was partly exported and thereby contributed to the ongoing drain of wealth from India (Patnaik and Patnaik 2021). In the process, colonialism gave an impetus to both the process of differentiation of the peasantry and landlordism in Punjab. However, this limited process of agricultural growth in Punjab reached an impasse since the colonial government did not engage either in sustained public investment (and public support activities towards agriculture) or redistributive land reform. In 1947, with canal-irrigated areas of the Punjab becoming part of Pakistan, east Punjab (in India) became a food deficit state (Singh 1980). Canal irrigation was developed in Punjab as part of major irrigation projects in India after independence.

In the first two decades after 1947, barring some limited land reform at the very top (wherein land of very large landowners was redistributed after a generous compensation payout) there was no significant government effort to overcome the impasse confronting Punjab's agriculture. Then the Indian economy witnessed three crop failures in the mid-1960s. The Indian government was compelled to go in for food imports. But the government of the USA sought to undermine India's sovereignty by linking US wheat exports to India to policy changes that were not acceptable to the Indian government.

As a result, the Indian government opted for a dirigiste intervention to augment public investment and other public support measures in agriculture but primarily in Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, western Maharashtra, and some parts of Tamil Nadu. This "Green" Revolution strategy augmented both the rate of growth of agricultural output and the yield, above their past average levels, for a few years. This process was also supported by the system of public procurement of selected agricultural crops, in selected regions (such as Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, western Maharashtra, and some parts of Tamil Nadu). This public procurement of agricultural produce also disproportionately benefited the rural elite as we have repeatedly emphasised. But in a few states, such as Punjab, the ambit of public procurement was wide enough to incorporate most of the farmers (for paddy [non-basmati] and wheat crops). In other states, many peasants ended up selling their agricultural produce to private traders at unremunerative prices since public procurement was relatively limited. Consequently, in such states, pauperisation of the peasantry was more heightened when compared to states like Punjab. However, it is undeniable that the existence of public procurement of agricultural produce has aided the peasantry (Gupta, Khera, and Narayanan 2021).

However, in other states such as Bihar, where public procurement of agricultural produce through the APMC *mandis* is non-existent,¹² private traders rule the roost (Ramakumar 2021). This not only results in procurement prices of

agricultural produce being below the minimum support price announced by the government, it also paves the way for corporate penetration into agricultural trade. Besides, there has been no significant private investment in marketing infrastructure (Intodia 2015). In other words, attenuation of public procurement in different parts of India has been a precursor for corporate encroachment into agriculture.

This publicly procured agricultural output was partly held as a public buffer stock and partly disbursed at subsidised prices through a public distribution system (Swaminathan 2000). The nationalisation of private banks and the institution of priority sector lending was accompanied by an increase in public sector bank lending to agriculture which too disproportionately benefited the rural elite.

But the “Green” Revolution also had two other deleterious consequences. First, there was a rise in land concentration (and reverse tenancy) and consequently a refortification of social oppression along gender and caste lines in Punjab. Second, the shift towards a water-intensive, conventional farming-based persistent wheat rice cycle in production in Punjab has had detrimental ecological consequences. As the impact of adverse climate change rises the crisis of ecological sustainability in agriculture has tended to exacerbate. However, it is undeniable that a modicum of food security was achieved in India with Punjab transitioning from a food deficit state to one that is food surplus.

But as the neoliberal project became ascendant in India, the hitherto near-universal public distribution system has been shrunk on account of targeting (Swaminathan 2000). Further, the quantum of government support to agriculture in terms of public investment, agricultural extension, subsidised credit, and power, etc. has tended to taper off. Along with this, the government has increasingly allowed corporate agribusiness to dump agricultural commodities in India at low prices. These low import prices are partly the consequence of heavily subsidised agriculture in developed countries, which is dominated by corporate agribusiness (Saratchand and Akhter 2021). As a result, the per capita growth rate of agriculture in India has tended to stagnate. Besides, farming increasingly became unviable for many small, marginal, and semi-medium farmers which has resulted in a rise of suicides by such farmers as well as rural workers (Singh, Kaur, and Kingra 2020).

The consolidation of the neoliberal project through measures such as the aforementioned ones, has meant that, instead of addressing the actual determinants of agrarian crisis, the government has sought to intensify it through a refortification of the process of corporate encroachment in agriculture. The current attempt to impose the Three Farm Laws was a “logical” follow-up of previous neoliberal policy endeavours. In the next section, we briefly examine the struggles of farmers in Punjab which played a critical role in the resistance to the Three Farm Laws.

A Brief History of Farmers' Struggles in Punjab

Punjab has had a long history of farmer protests. In the early twentieth century, the *Pagdi Sambhal Jatta* movement of 1907 witnessed a struggle against three laws brought by the British colonial government. These three laws were the Punjab Land Colonisation Bill, Bari Doab Canal Act, and the Punjab Land Alienation Act. Farmers resisted the Punjab Land Colonisation Bill since it introduced inheritance by primogeniture thereby undermining farmers' rights over land which could have resulted in the seizure of control from farmers over such lands. Likewise, the Bari Doab Canal Act undermined the viability of cultivation since irrigation charges for water were increased by 25%.¹³ The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 was opposed by farmers since it restricted the transfer of land between arbitrarily defined sections of people in agricultural and non-agricultural activities.¹⁴

A sustained protest of 11 months led to the withdrawal of these three laws in 1907. Following this, the movement for a reduction in land revenue and water tax was carried out from 1931 to 1934–1935, as the farmers were also adversely affected by the Great Depression and were unable to bear this burden (Mukherjee 2021).¹⁵ The period between 1937–1939 witnessed a struggle by peasants in the canal colonies of Nili Bar, Montgomery, and Multan. The tenants (sharecroppers) neither had occupancy rights nor security of tenure. Besides, they received merely a 30% share in agricultural produce. This peasant resistance movement lasted until 1938–1939. In 1939 another tenant farmer movement (*muzara* movement)¹⁶ began in the princely state of Patiala (in Punjab) against local landlords (*biswedars*). This movement was centred on three major issues (Mukherjee 2021):

- a) a forfeiture of proprietary rights of farmers and a decline in their stature in the structure of agricultural tenancy;
- b) the resulting rise in their payment commitments to the *biswedars*;
- c) the *kankut* system (which involved measurement of the standing crop prior to the harvest) which resulted in an inordinately large share of agricultural produce being claimed by the *biswedars*; besides, there was a marked uncertainty over the determination of the amount that was to be paid by farmers to *biswedars* at harvest time.

The resistance movement spread to other parts of Punjab and lasted until 1953. As a result, a law came into being which conferred proprietary rights on the *muzaras*. This law also provided for some modest compensation to the landlords (Singh 1980). After this law was enacted, occupancy tenant farmers obtained land rights with government recognition. However, those farmers who were tenants-at-will were evicted from the land by the landlords through the time-tested tactic of falsification of *girdawaris* (land cultivation documents) (Singh 1980).¹⁷

The anti-betterment levy struggle involved another large peasant mobilisation in Punjab in 1958–1959 (Surjeet 1986). This historic struggle was carried out against the increase in tax charges by the government to bear the expenditure of the Bhakra Canal system. This increase in taxes was effected in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of peasants and workers were in debt. Approximately 85% of households had debt according to a survey of the PEPSU government in 1955 (Singh 1980).

In the 1970s, after the “Green” Revolution (that began in the 1960s) had run its course, there was a fall in the rate of return of all farmers. This fall was due to a greater dependence on the market for both agricultural inputs and agricultural produce that involved rising input costs without a rise in procurement prices. For instance, from 1970–1971 to 1980–1981, per-hectare net income from the cultivation of wheat in Punjab witnessed a sharp decline of 84% (Table 1, Gill and Singhal 1984a, 1729). This was the background to the emergence of new farmers’ movements (Gill 1994; Brass 1994). Unlike the previous struggles of farmers against unfavourable tenancy and high land rents and for land rights, in the farmers’ protests of the 1970s and 1980s, a demand for remunerative crop prices became central.

The course of class struggle doesn’t automatically tend to converge towards the denouement that some have discerned (Marx and Engels [1848] 2010). This is especially when the workers and peasants have not constituted an alliance that effectively challenges the hegemony of the ruling bourgeois-landlord alliance in India. Further, in such a situation, class conflicts between different fractions of the exploitative ruling classes also tend to be decisive. The “Green” Revolution did lead to a system of class relations with capitalist farmers¹⁸ in the state at one end while also creating a class of agricultural labour on the other (Gill and Singhal 1984b). However, there was also a sharp rise in contradictions between the different peasant classes (to varying degrees), on the one hand, and capitalist farmers, on the other.

In the same period, pragmatically communal politics that is a staple of bourgeois parties in India led to the rise of the Khalistan movement in the late 1970s, involving armed militancy, whose principal demand was a separate country ostensibly for Sikhs in Punjab. A proximate cause for this was the fact that consistent federalism has been antithetical to the class interests of the big bourgeoisie in India.

A number of issues pertaining to Punjab such as water sharing were communalised by both the Congress Party and Akali Dal (Gill and Singhal 1984b). On the face of it both the Congress Party and the Akali Dal were deploying communal mobilisation that sought to accentuate divides between members of the Hindu and Sikh communities in Punjab (Alam 1986). But this also resulted in a communalisation of authentic democratic demands such as price subsidy for canal water, demand

for assured electricity for agriculture, etc. (Alam 1986). These demands impinged on all peasant classes in Punjab and these classes were mobilised by Akali Dal (whose leadership was effectively in the hands of capitalist farmers). The concrete interweaving of different political economy contradictions in Punjab during this time meant that conditions were not conducive for full-fledged differentiation of the peasantry. This remains the case till now though differentiation of the peasantry is ongoing. The armed Khalistan movement that coursed through the 1980s and its eventual suppression by the Indian state in the decade of the 1990s resulted in a serious setback to both the left and consequently the peasant movement in Punjab. However, peasant mobilisation began to emerge under non-left leaderships.

For instance, during the 1970s and 1980s when India (and Punjab too) witnessed new farmers' movements, there were also large-scale mobilisations of workers for wage increases, redistributive land reforms, allotment to workers of *shamalat* (common land), *nazool* (government land for non-agricultural purposes), and evacuee land (land left behind by landowners who migrated to Pakistan when India was partitioned), against price rise and so on (Singh 1980).

The period from the 1980s until the beginning of the twenty-first century saw a decline in mobilisations by farmers. Division in the farmers' organisations was one of the factors in this demobilisation in Punjab (Gill 2004). With the decline of dirigisme and the ascendancy of the neoliberal project in India, agricultural growth slowed, and later yield growth declined due to a fall in public investment in agriculture. As a result, the cost of cultivation increased (also since subsidies were reduced), and the income of farmer households declined, in particular for small and marginal farmers in the *Malwa* belt of Punjab. Deceleration or decline in agricultural production and a rising cost of cultivation resulted in a mounting burden of debt, particularly among small and marginal farmers in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Gill 2004). Many farmers committed suicide as a result. A study by three institutions in Punjab on suicides revealed that 16,606 farmers committed suicide in the period between 2000 to 2015.¹⁹ A principal reason for these suicides among marginal and small farmers has been the rising level of debt in Punjab (Singh, Kaur, and Kingra 2020).²⁰ However, along with an inward-looking protest (through suicides) there were also large-scale mobilisations of small and marginal farmers in Punjab to resist this neoliberal offensive. These struggles were centred on demands for various land-related issues and other economic betterment measures.

Farmer–Worker Alliance and the Role of the Left

For a few years from 2002, five farmers' organisations, Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta), All India Kisan Sabha (Ajoy Bhavan), Jamhoori Kisan Sabha, Kirti Kisan Union, and Kisan Vikas Manch, had formed a working alliance (Gill 2004). The

crisis that triggered the large-scale suicide of farmers in Punjab led to the formation of the alliance of these five left-oriented organisations. These organisations had membership in different parts of Punjab (Gill 2004). As a result of this alliance, there were various mobilisations of farmers on various issues including demands for compensation for crop failures, remunerative prices of agricultural produce, restoration of power supply for tube well use, and other agriculture-related demands (Gill 2004). These struggles by these left-leaning organisations were part of the resistance to the consolidation of the neoliberal project in India. Other organisations of farmers in Punjab also extended their support to these struggles thereby enhancing their reach and effectiveness.

The division in the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta) (Indian Farmers' Union [Unity]) in 2003 led to the formation of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan)²¹ and Bhartiya Kisan Union (Sidhupur) in Punjab (Gill 2004). Subsequently, various left-oriented unions (of both farmers and workers) have worked in solidarity for various social and economic issues. Some of these struggles could achieve a degree of success partly due to an alliance between farmers' unions and workers' unions. We will highlight some of these struggles in Punjab in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

The government of Punjab issued a notice in 2005 to acquire 376 acres of land in three villages in Punjab. These three villages were Dhaula and Chhanna (from Barnala district) and Sanghera (from Fatehabad district) for the Trident Group (Sharma 2018). The land was given to the Trident Group by the Punjab government for establishing a sugar mill in the region. A sustained struggle of resistance to this corporate takeover of agricultural land was initiated by the BKU (Ekta Ugrahan). Subsequently, other organisations²² including the Association of Punjab Kisan Sangharsh, Punjab Kisan Union, Punjab Kisan Sabha, Bhartiya Kisan Union (Krantikari), Jamhoori Kisan Sabha, Bhartiya Kisan Union (Sidhupur), and Kisan Vikas Front joined the struggle.²³ The struggle continued for two years and in 2007 the farmers were paid compensation (Rs. 1.436 million per acre) that was 70% higher than the original compensation award that was announced in 2005. Besides the revised compensation award, it also included an amount of Rs. 13,000 per acre for the damage to the standing crop in 2005 on account of the corporate land grab (Sharma 2018). These organisations were able to sustain this prolonged struggle, in part, due to the land being a significant source of employment and income among small farmers.²⁴

Between 2008 and 2014, the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) and Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union undertook a series of struggles for justice and compensation for families affected by the suicides of farmers and workers. The Punjab government initially commissioned a survey of only landed households that were adversely impacted by the suicides of farmers.²⁵ However, a joint struggle of

farmers and workers compelled the Punjab government to extend the survey to worker households too. Both types of households (impacted by suicides of farmers and workers) were provided compensation (Singh 2017).

In Gobindpura (Mansa) in Punjab, an attempt to coercively acquire land by the government in 2011 led to a widespread protest by farmers and workers. Seventeen unions of farmers and workers jointly led this struggle.²⁶ As a result, the government of Punjab agreed to return the coercively acquired land. Moreover, the Punjab government paid compensation to 133 Dalit worker households at the rate of Rs. 50,000 for each such household besides providing homestead land plots to them (Singh 2017).

In 2015–2016, organisations of farmers raised a demand for compensation due to crop loss and loss of wages for rural workers on account of the failure of cotton crop due to the whitefly pest attack in the *Malwa* region of Punjab. This struggle was led by eight organisations of farmers²⁷ (BKU [Ekta Ugrahan], Bhartiya Kisan Union [Ekta Dakaunda], Punjab Kisan Union, Kirti Kisan Union, Bhartiya Kisan Union [Krantikari], Jamhoori Kisan Sabha, two fractions of Kisan Sangharsh Committee Punjab) and four workers' unions (Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, Pendu Mazdoor Union, Dehati Mazdoor Sabha and Mazdoor Mukti Morcha).²⁸ The 12 organisations also demanded compensation for wages foregone for cotton picking workers most of whom were women. As a result of this joint struggle, both farmers and workers got compensation for crop loss (Rs. 8,000 per acre) and loss of wages (10% of compensation provided to farmers, i.e. Rs. 800 per acre).²⁹

Organisations of farmers and workers were also active in struggles against gender oppression. Two such instances in Punjab were in Gandhar (Sri Muktsar Sahib) in 2014 and in MithriBudhgir (Sri Muktsar Sahib) in 2020. In both cases, sexual violence against Dalit women led to the large-scale mobilisation of both unions of workers and farmers (Singh 2017).³⁰ These struggles continued until justice was achieved for the survivors.

In Jhaloor (a village in the Sangrur district of Punjab), there arose an issue of *Panchayat* (village council) land in 2016. Though a third share of *Panchayat* land was reserved for Dalits, that was not made available to them. This was followed by a criminal and violent assault on Dalit households by some landlords.³¹ The struggle against this instance of exploitation and oppression was initially led by the ZameenPraptiSangharsh Committee (Committee for Struggles of Land Distribution).³² Six organisations of farmers (BKU [Ekta Ugrahan], Bhartiya Kisan Union [Ekta Dakaunda], Punjab Kisan Union, Kirti Kisan Union, Krantikari Kisan Union, Bhartiya Kisan Union [Krantikari]) and four unions of workers (Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union, Pendu Mazdoor Union, KrantikariPendu Mazdoor Union and Mazdoor Mukti Morcha) participated in this struggle.³³

Many of these aforementioned movements on land issues, social and economic issues witnessed participation by organisations of both farmers and workers. The alliance between these left-oriented organisations of farmers and workers derived from the left's understanding of the broad-based democratic struggle that was further concretised in the process. The left could play this role first due to its historical record of intense involvement in the anti-colonial struggle. Besides, their participation in different anti-imperialist movements and their leading role in agrarian struggles in both Punjab and elsewhere further enhanced their credentials to provide this leadership (Singh 1984a, 1984b; Gill 2004; AIKS 1982). For instance, workers from Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha participated actively in the anti-betterment levy protest. In this regard, it may be recalled that the share of *siris*' (share workers)³⁴ wages payment was also deducted for the payment of the betterment levy (Singh 1980).³⁵ Workers' organisations subsequently participated in various other movements of farmers on the issues of remunerative prices, subsidies for the use of electricity and related issues.

The process of accumulation of capital in agriculture leading to the formation of the classes of capitalist farmers and rich peasants in the country (also in Punjab) affected the unity of peasants and workers (Gill 1994). The significant protests in the 1970s and early 1980s in Punjab primarily involved the issues of prices and were led by rich peasants and capitalist landlords. Left-oriented organisations of farmers (All India Kisan Sabha [Ajoy Bhawan] and All India Kisan Sabha [Ashoka Road]) along with some other organisations successfully led protests on the issues of crop damage in 1984 (Gill and Singhal 1984a). Subsequently, the Kisan Sabhas took up other issues involving exorbitant electricity bills, concerns regarding electricity connections, and other demands of the peasantry. The government responded to this wave of struggles by seeking to divide and demobilise the left organisations. Thus, for instance, the mobilisations by the rich peasants and capitalist landlords were provided with water and medical supplies while the mobilisations of peasants, led by left organisations encountered violent repression (Gill and Singhal 1984a). As a result, in some cases, these organisations of the rural rich emerged as centres of gravity for other peasants too. But the potential for mass struggles was not extinguished. Given this brief recapitulation of the past struggles of farmers in Punjab, let us turn to a consideration of the struggle against the Three Farm Laws in 2020–2021.

Political Organisational Aspects of the Struggle against Three Farm Laws

Subsequent to the promulgation by the central government of three ordinances pertaining to the Three Farm Laws in June 2020, protest actions commenced

throughout Punjab. In September 2020, the union government of India proclaimed that the Three Farm Laws had been passed by the Indian Parliament. Punjab began to witness protest actions such as sit-ins on railway tracks, at toll plazas, shopping malls, silos, etc. The number of participants in such resistance actions began to increase day after day. At these protest sites, widespread, participative and detailed discussions on the Three Farm Laws took place. At various sites of resistance, popular pamphlets, which set out in simple language the adverse consequences of the Three Farm Laws were widely distributed. Besides, Punjabi language translations³⁶ of the text of the Three Farm Laws were also circulated. This initiated and furthered detailed and critical exchanges of views on the issues concerned. As a result, there emerged an in-depth understanding of various facets of the Three Farm Laws, among the people of Punjab. The farmers' organisations, especially those led by the left had a key role in rallying the protesters. The national and international media in Punjab and artists too had a key role in creating awareness, with persistent debate and deliberations on the consequences of the Three Farm Laws.

The districts where the rice–wheat crop sequence in Punjab prevails were the initial sites of the resistance to the Three Farm Laws, since they would have been affected directly and adversely by a decline in public procurement of rice and wheat at MSP. The resistance subsequently advanced to other districts of Punjab. However, a relatively large fraction of the participants in the protests were drawn from the rice–wheat belt of Punjab. Further, households in rural Punjab have demonstrated solidarity in the struggle, for instance, by assisting in the cultivation of crops in the fields of those farmers who were protesting on the borders of Delhi. The protest was sustained amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and adverse weather conditions, because of wide-ranging solidarity. The village-wise fund and grain collection initiatives accounted for a significant chunk of the financial resources required to undertake and sustain the protest. Apart from these two initiatives, the institution of community kitchens and medical camps at protest sites provided both material support and morale-enhancing succour to participants in the struggle against the Three Farm Laws. Besides, since the struggle against the Three Farm Laws had become a veritable people's movement in Punjab, broad-based solidarity from a cross-section of individuals and organisations from that state buttressed the sustainability of the struggle. It is arguable that the ability of the protesters to constructively draw upon the long tradition of peasant struggles in Punjab based on peasant-worker unity was a significant determinant of the tenacity of the struggle against the Three Farm Laws.

During these protests, there has been a rise in female labour force participation. This came about since in households of small, marginal, and semi-medium farmers, women have been involved more actively in agricultural activities. One possible reason for this could be that male members of such households are relatively

overrepresented in protest sites that are locationally distant.³⁷ However, it is also the case that there has been a general strengthening of collective ties in the villages of Punjab.

It may be noted here that rural Punjab has a small share (21%) of labour force participation by women (PLFS 2020). A study on census data from 1981 to 2011 by Singh and Goyal (2019) points out the wide gender gaps in workforce participation partly on account of the large-scale mechanisation of agriculture tasks undertaken by women workers. The limited access to non-agricultural employment and MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Scheme) work has resulted in women workers from Punjab migrating to neighbouring states (Rajasthan and Haryana) for cotton picking work (Kaur and Kaur 2021). On the other hand, merely 1% of landholdings are with women in Punjab and the proportion declines further to 0.04% for women from Dalit households (Agricultural Census Division 2019).

Women accurately perceived the uncertainty engendered by the Three Farm Laws as regards their livelihood and viability of farm cultivation for their households, particularly those with small holdings. As a result, a notable fraction of women especially from small, marginal, and semi-medium farmer households were actively involved in these protests. Besides, female farmers and workers from various states of India were intimately involved in the resistance. Their presence has been significant at Delhi's borders as well as at resistance sites in other states of India (Kaur 2021a). Given that women have had limited geographical mobility due to gender oppression, even in terms of employment, their involvement in the resistance is arguably on account of their understanding that the Three Farm Laws will not only reduce employment and income but will also reduce food security for women and wage workers in general (Kaur 2021a; Sewewala 2021). Contrary to the claim of Jodhka (2021), women from Punjab have had a long history of participation in various agrarian and social movements (Mukherjee 2021). Moreover, as we have emphasised, women from both farmer and worker households have been active in the struggle (Kaur 2021a). Women have played a very important role in the initiation and persistence of the struggle. The local-level sit-ins at toll plazas, shopping malls, railway stations, etc. were primarily carried out by women. The BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) protest site, stage organisation, and proceedings (at Bahadurgarh, Haryana-Delhi border) were organised by female activists on the sixth day of every week since the beginning of the sit-in.

Rural workers (the majority being Dalits) too extended their solidarity with the struggle by actively participating in the protests. This has happened in spite of some recent instances of intensified class conflict in certain parts of Punjab between capitalist landlords and rich farmers on the one hand and rural workers on the other. This intensification of class struggle was proximately triggered by the

adverse but a skewed impact of the unplanned lockdowns in India that the union government of India imposed in an unsuccessful effort to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. The consequent economic distress underlay the restrictions on the movement of rural workers and the unilateral imposition of wage rates for transplantation by a few *Panchayats* in Punjab (that were hegemonised by capitalist landlords and rich farmers). This heightened class conflict in Punjab in June–July 2020 (Tur 2020; Kaur and Kaur 2021). However, the higher wage rate offered by some small farmer households to rural workers diffused to some extent the intensity of the class contradictions between the two principal classes in rural areas (Kaur and Kaur 2021).

In 2021 again, a few *Panchayats* in Punjab (dominated by capitalist landlords and rich farmers), in anticipation of possible labour shortage on account of the second wave of COVID-19 in India, had unilaterally and illegally fixed the wage rates (of piece-rate work) for activities such as paddy transplantation. This perception regarding labour shortage emerged on account of restrictions on movement that adversely impacted migrant workers from states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and some parts of Uttar Pradesh. These *Panchayats* also illegally decided to levy fines on those who were unwilling to follow the unilaterally decided wage rate. Unlike 2020, some *Panchayats* in the *Majha* region of Punjab imposed such illegal wage rates, which were subsequently replicated in a few villages in the *Malwa* region. Such decisions by some *Panchayats* were criticised by both workers' unions and various left-oriented farmers' unions of Punjab. These organisations made an appeal for bilateral determination of wage rates. The opposition by both workers' and farmers' unions led to a gradual end of such unilaterally imposed wage rates in different parts of Punjab. From the beginning of the protest against the Three Farm Laws, there have been various attempts to create divisions along both caste and class lines,³⁸ between farmers and workers by right-wing organisations.³⁹ A material basis for possible caste divisions is on account of land ownership being skewed along caste lines. For instance, the share of Dalit households in Punjab is 32% but they have only a 3.6% share in the total landholdings of the state (Agricultural Census Division 2019).⁴⁰

A number of studies have expounded the view that both the growing participation of workers in the struggle and the alliance between the workers and small farmers is formed on account of workers being less dependent on capitalist landlords and rich farmers for wage employment (Patenden and Bansal 2021). However, a study on secondary data sources by Thomas (2020) points out that in rural areas there has been a relatively larger rise in levels of employment (principally in construction work) recently.⁴¹ In the case of Punjab where industrial development has been largely confined to the *Doaba* region, rural workers are highly dependent on agricultural and related non-agricultural (construction work,

loading unloading activities, and so on) wage employment in rural areas, especially women (Kaur and Kaur 2021). A study on capital accumulation among capitalist farmers by Sinha (2021b) has pointed out that capitalist landlords and rich farmers have also significantly ventured into agricultural trading, rice mills, and cold storage, etc. However, this process has not proceeded to the extent that these activities have involved their incorporation into the capitalist mode of production (involving the tendency towards inter-sectoral equalisation of the rate of profit). Kaur and Kaur (2021) in a study on class contradictions in rural Punjab during the COVID-19 pandemic, found that these capitalist landlords and rich farmers were able to employ their leverage in agricultural trading (in APMC *mandis*) to adversely impact the movement of rural workers for higher agricultural wages. In other words, the capitalist landlords and rich farmers do continue to dominate the demand for rural labour (both agricultural and non-agricultural).

In spite of the resultant class contradictions among rural classes, left organisations were able to construct a tendential working alliance between farmers and workers, rural workers in particular. This tendential working alliance of farmers and workers was achievable despite the organic interrelatedness of gender and caste oppression with contradictions between rural classes.⁴² They were able to accomplish this since the Three Farm Laws would not only have adversely impacted farmers but also would have negatively affected the magnitude and conditions of employment in agriculture and related non-agricultural activities (such as *palledari* work in APMC *mandis*, etc.). Besides, left organisations were also able to effectively communicate to peasants and workers that the Three Farm Laws would have undermined the viability of the public distribution system.

There have been persistent attempts to mobilise workers for the struggle, from its inception. However, the relatively lower participation of workers (when compared to farmers) has been on account of economic livelihood factors for workers such as the cost of transportation to struggle sites, livelihood expenses, etc. Unlike many farmer households, the primary source of income for these worker households is wage labour in agriculture and non-agriculture.⁴³ Therefore workers' participation in these protests was not symmetrical to farmers. This asymmetry was also due to high unemployment, a fall in wage income and a rise in the indebtedness of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁴

The workers' mobilisation has been of three different types: first being the long-term involvement of workers such as those who have joined the protests along with their employers (though this number is quite negligible); second, the workers who are mobilised by various workers organisations and join the protest in large numbers episodically; third, some workers who join the protest with various farmers organisations.

The first large joint protest of farmers and workers, the *Mazdoor–Kisan* rally (large rally of workers and farmers), was organised by the BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) and Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union on 18 February 2021, in Barnala, Punjab. It was followed by many other rallies in different parts of Punjab. In this rally, the emphasis was laid on mobilising workers which is why, for instance, the rally was termed as a *Mazdoor–Kisan* rally, instead of a *Kisan–Mazdoor* rally. Workers have joined the protests at the borders of Delhi on events such as *Kisan–Mazdoor Diwas*, *Yuva Kisan Diwas*, *Mahila Diwas*, Women’s Day, and May Day. May Day was celebrated on the Delhi border in 2021 where both farmers’ and workers’ unions (both rural workers’ unions and trade unions) participated. The demand for a revocation of the new anti-worker labour code was also emphasised in these protest actions. The workers’ organisations have been participating both at local protest sites in Punjab and have also joined the protests on the borders of Delhi.

Sections of the mainstream media often try to portray that some organisations led by the rural rich are the exclusive leaders of the current movement. This view is empirically invalid. For instance, a recent study on the lives lost in the struggle at the borders of Delhi, which is a key site of resistance to the Three Farm Laws (Singh and Shergill 2021), points out that most of those who have been participating in the struggle are small and marginal farmers. In their study, they additionally clarify that the average landholding of farmers whose lives were lost in the struggle is less than three acres. This statistic becomes clearer once leased agricultural land is taken into account. The movement against the Three Farm Laws has involved a joint mobilisation by all farmers’ organisations of the state of Punjab and elsewhere, in particular by left organisations. A large share of the farmers who protested on the borders of Delhi were from small, marginal, and semi-medium landholding households. It is evident that it is these households which would be most adversely impacted by the Three Farm Laws. As far as many small, marginal, and semi-medium farmers are concerned, even their subsistence (which depends on the viability of their agricultural activities) is decisively dependent on how successfully they resist corporate encroachment in agriculture.

Within the framework of this tendential working alliance between farmers and workers, left-oriented farmers’ organisations lent support to a recent joint struggle of farmers and workers in Punjab in recent months. As a result, farmers and workers were also able to obtain compensation from the Punjab government for the loss of cotton crop in some districts of Punjab during October–November 2021. While farmers are to be paid a compensation of Rs. 17,000 per acre, cotton picking workers will also be paid a compensation that is 10% of this amount (i.e. Rs. 1700 per acre). Such joint movements also strengthened the tendency towards an issue-based alliance of farmers and workers.⁴⁵

Conclusion

A key background element for the struggle against the Three Farm Laws was the series of struggles of various left organisations in Punjab, in particular in the *Malwa* region in the 2000s. This paved the way for a struggle by 34 farmers' organisations (32 farmers' organisations formed a united front and two other organisations, the BKU [Ekta Ugrahan] and Kisan Majdoor Sangarash Committee, were part of the struggle but carried out the struggle under their own banners) of Punjab along with other mass and class organisations.⁴⁶ It is arguable that these organisations increasingly came to the understanding that if they could not achieve their goals (principally the repeal of the Three Farm Laws, a guaranteed MSP for agricultural produce, etc.) then that would adversely impact not only rural Punjab but the whole of the state. Left organisations played a significant role in crafting this setback to the neoliberal project by decisively influencing the contours of the resistance.⁴⁷ To begin with, left organisations had a decisive role in the leadership of the struggle against the Three Farm Laws. Further, as we pointed out earlier, the historical record of left-led struggles contributed to the process of broad basing and democratising the struggle. Finally, the participation of the left in the resistance to the Three Farm Laws resulted in an enhancement of political support and popular involvement in the struggle in Punjab. The dimensions of the resistance outside Punjab were critical but they are outside the scope of the article. But an effective resistance, that would be necessarily country-wide, would need to combat all aspects of the neoliberal project in India.

Under the aegis of the neoliberal project in India, the ruling classes have unleashed a counter-revolutionary process that has sought to roll back the relatively limited advances made by the working people during the dirigiste period. As part of this counter-revolutionary process, the union government of India imposed the Three Farm Laws to further the process of corporate encroachment in agriculture. However, the unprecedented resistance of farmers and workers has compelled the union government of India to repeal the Three Farm Laws. The policy-driven process of corporate encroachment in agriculture that culminated in the Three Farm Laws was not only an assault on the farmers and workers but also an attempt to reconfigure the bourgeois-landlord alliance that has exercised state power in post-independent India. The decision to repeal the Three Farm Laws was not only on account of the upsurge of farmers and workers but also arguably because of the uncertainty in the consequences of the attempted reconfiguration of this alliance.

In response to this setback to the neoliberal project in India, the partisans of this project have tried to ring-fence this reverse from other neoliberal policies. It will be necessary for farmers and workers to cut through this ring-fence so that a

credible resistance to the neoliberal project can be mounted. The popular resistance to the Three Farm Laws that has emerged on account of the upsurge of workers and farmers could be strengthened if lessons are drawn regarding issues such as the following: promotion of an alliance between the farmers and workers (involving a democratic resolution of the agrarian question going forward), a renewal of a focus on combatting caste and gender oppression, undertaking authentic efforts to build durable solidarity among the various constituents of India's democratic movement. Unless these lessons are understood and acted upon, the counter-revolution under the aegis of the neoliberal project will be untheathered once again.

In other words, a resistance has to be mounted firstly against the fascist tendency which is hegemonic over the neoliberal project in India. But the very sustenance of this resistance will require workers and farmers to challenge every dimension of the neoliberal project as we pointed out earlier. This resistance would have to develop a programmatic charter involving issues such as: a striving for land redistribution and for other agrarian support measures to decisively eliminate corporate encroachment in agriculture, a renewed emphasis on an expanded policy of employment guarantee in both rural and urban areas, a return to a universal public distribution system, etc. However, a necessary condition for the realisation of this programme is the institution of capital controls to effectively tackle the caprices of global finance (Patnaik and Patnaik 2021). Global finance, needless to say, is the principal bulwark of India's neoliberal project and a key driver of neofascism. This resistance to the neoliberal project will also be a long-term process since all bourgeois parties are willy-nilly entangled, in various ways, in the neoliberal project.⁴⁸ But the democratic movement can advance only if this programmatic resistance is sustained.

Notes

1. The article is partly based upon our multiple visits to protest sites from November 2020 to December 2021. We conducted interviews with various farmers and workers to understand different aspects of the protest. A previous version of this article was presented at the 15th Forum of the World Association for Political Economy in December 2021. Non-incriminating thanks are due to anonymous referees and the participants in the Forum for their comments on our article.
2. The webpage (<https://humancostoffarmersprotest.blogspot.com/2020/12/list-of-deaths-in-farmers-protest-at.html>) contains a blog with various data points on farmers and workers who lost their lives in the protest against the Three Farm Laws. The death toll increased to 726 by 15 December 2021. The government continues to claim that it does not possess data on the deaths of farmers and workers in the protest against the Three Farm Laws.
3. The government had 11 rounds of inconclusive discussion with farmers on farm issues. The last meeting was held on 22 January 2021. A single bill was passed in the Indian Parliament, without any discussion, on 29 November 2021 to repeal the Three Farm Laws.

4. Contract farming often tends to involve the use of more machines per unit of output. The resulting rise in the productivity of labour would reduce agricultural employment if output from contract farming does not rise adequately. The rise in the output of contract farming may be constrained if the demand for contract farming output is limited. Such a limit may emerge if the income elasticity for commodities produced through contract farming is low.
5. For details, see Kantikar and Chatterjee (2020). Therein it has been pointed out that since Indian villages are geographically dispersed the cost of supplying electricity to the rural areas tends to be higher than in urban areas. In other words, it has been proposed in the Electricity (Amendment) Bill that cross-subsidies for rural consumers of electricity be eliminated.
6. More details about the various types of public support for Indian agriculture are presented in the next section.
7. See Harriss-White (1996) for discussion on agricultural marketing.
8. See Khera, Narayanan, and Gupta (2020) for details.
9. See Khera, Narayanan, and Gupta (2020) for details.
10. If public procurement of agricultural produce decreases, then the bargaining power of private procurers of agricultural produce will tend to increase. As a result, private procurement prices of agricultural produce will fall even in those areas where public procurement was limited or absent.
11. See Sinha (2021a) for a discussion of conventional farming in Punjab.
12. The state government in Bihar abolished the APMC acts in 2006, for details see <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-nitish-kumars-govt-scrapped-apmc-act-14-years-ago-but-farmers-in-bihar-still-languishing/378104>.
13. See <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/leading-light-of-pagdi-sambhal-jatta-stir-216210>. See also Lal (2021) for details. The colonial government in India viewed irrigation as a for-profit activity with a “sound” rate of return.
14. See <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1907/apr/16/punjab-land-alienation-bill>. The colonial government also sought to further a communal divide through such a policy.
15. The Punjab state committee of AIKS was formed in 1937.
16. Also referred to as the PEPSU *muzara* movement. Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) was a state of India between 1948 and 1956 formed after amalgamating eight princely states, Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala, Malerkotla, Faridkot, Jind, Kalsia, and Nalagarh. See <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/remembering-pepsu-muzara-movement-govt-should-study-our-past-our-history-we-never-gave-in-even-during-british-rule-7239246/> for more details.
17. Occupancy tenants had permanent rights over land whereas tenants-at-will did not have security of tenure.
18. Capitalist farmers in this article refer to a class which employs wage labour (that is juridically free to varying degrees). Further, they own a part of the land that is cultivated by wage labour and reverse tenancy too tends to prevail. Many of these capitalist farmers redeployed a part of their surplus accumulated in agriculture to non-agricultural activities. But capital accumulation by these capitalist farmers of Punjab, unlike capitalist farmers of Britain as identified by Marx ([1867] 2010), was not subject to the tendency for equalisation of the rate of profit across different branches of production.
19. See <https://en.gaonconnection.com/death-by-debt-86-farming-households-in-punjab-under-debt-over-16606-farmers-died-by-suicide-between-2000-2015/>. See also Singh, Kaur, and Kingra (2020) for more details.
20. The number of suicides reported in official statistics is much lower than the actual cases.
21. Hereafter BKU (Ekta Ugrahan). BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) has been able to expand its membership threefold since the beginning of the protest. See <https://theprint.in/india/bku-ugrahan-the-outlier-kisan-union-that-the-farmers-protest-cannot-do-without/567097/> for BKU (Ekta Ugrahan).

22. See https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/land-seizure-alleged-in-trident-deal-107020901050_1.html.
23. Various issues of *Trolley Times* provide brief profiles of various farmers' organisations. *Trolley Times* was the first newspaper brought by a few young participants in the protest at the Delhi border. English version of the newsletter is accessible at <https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/AHBT/5>. Majority of these organisations have members and a cadre of small farmers.
24. This led to the formation of a united front against coercive, corporate-driven land acquisition by the state. Further details are available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060524/punjab.htm>.
25. A study by Singh, Kaur, and Kingra (2020) about farmer suicides in Punjab has highlighted that the major cause of suicide among smaller farmers has been the increasing cost of cultivation, which in most cases led to high indebtedness.
26. Interview with Lachhman Singh Sewewala. Punjab had 17 farmers' organisations during that period. Further divisions led to the formation of new organisations after 2011.
27. Interview with Lachhman Singh Sewewala.
28. *Trolley Times* (various issues) provide brief profiles of farmers' organisation, accessible at <https://archive.leftove.rs/documents/AHBT/5>.
29. See <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/compensation-to-farm-labourers-policy-formation-begins/story-9F2RXM3539RAoAVNDBW1LN.html>.
30. Interview with Lachhman Singh Sewewala.
31. For a detailed account of events in Jhaloor, see <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/jhaloor-dalit-villagers-punjab-reclaiming-panchayat-land>.
32. For details see Thakor (2020).
33. Interview with Lachhman Singh Sewewala.
34. For *siris*, see Rawal (2006) as well as Kaur and Kaur (2021).
35. Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha was the first organisation of agricultural workers and was founded in 1954.
36. Typically, the drafts of bills in the Indian Parliament are not necessarily available in languages other than English and Hindi.
37. There was a large contingent of female protesters on the borders of Delhi during the struggle.
38. See Lerche (2021) and Kumar (2021) for the caste and class aspects of the protest.
39. Interview with Lachhman Singh Sewewala (PKMU).
40. For a proportion of scheduled caste households in Punjab, see <https://socialjustice.nic.in/UserView/index?mid=76663>.
41. We have also found the same case in rural Rajasthan in our study, see Kaur (2021b) for details. See Thomas (2012) for the structure of the Indian labour market in the 2000s.
42. Paramjit Kaur Longowal (of ZPSC) and Lachhman Singh Sewewala (of PKMU) emphasised that workers' organisations were able to participate in the movement against the Three Farm Laws due to the presence of the left-oriented farmers' organisations.
43. Interviews with Lachhman Singh Sewewala (PKMU) and Paramjit Kaur Longowal (ZPSC).
44. Interviews with Lachhman Singh Sewewala (PKMU) and Paramjit Kaur Longowal (ZPSC).
45. See <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/punjab-cm-channi-promises-farmers-to-quash-old-stubble-burning-firs-against-them-339359>.
46. The consolidation of the current upsurge at the all-India level under the umbrella of *Samyukta Kisan Morcha* (Joint Front of Farmers) was furthered by the formation of the *All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee* (All India Coordination Committee for Farmers' Struggle, AIKSCC) (with 252 farmers' organisations as its constituents) in 2017, with demand for increasing MSP to 50% above the cost of cultivation (including the cost of family labour and imputed rent for land and interest on capital).

47. Some organisations that were part of the farmers' struggle were All India Kisan Sabha (36 Canning Lane), All India Kisan Sabha (Ajoy Bhawan), Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan), Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta Dakaunda), Jamhoori Kisan Sabha, Punjab Kisan Union, Kirti Kisan Union, Krantikari Kisan Union, two fractions of Kisan Sangharsh Committee Punjab, and two fractions of All India Kisan Federation. The leadership and mass base of these unions is composed of marginal and small landholding households.
48. The principal opposition bourgeois party, namely, the Congress Party had proclaimed in its 2019 election manifesto that: "Congress will repeal the Agricultural Produce Market Committees Act and make trade in agricultural produce—including exports and inter-state trade—free from all restrictions." This is a euphemism for furthering corporate encroachment into agriculture. A copy of the agricultural component of this document is available at <https://manifesto.inc.in/en/agriculture.html>.

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