

26th November 2022

To,

Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman
The Finance Minister,
Government of India,
New Delhi

Sub.: Pre-budget (2023-24) consultation.

Madam,

Bi-partite Consultations:

Your invitation for pre-budget consultations with the Trade Unions is a welcome step, if conducted in all sincerity. We are constrained to say this because even the earlier consultations in December, 2021 and December, 2020, amount to not having any consultations at all, as all the suggestions have fallen on deaf ears.

The Trade Unions have been demanding convening of Indian Labour Conference, which has not been called after 2015. In fact, it is mandatory for the Labour Ministry to call the ILC, under ILO Convention 144,

The following is an example of negation of any consultation with the Trade Unions: It is an excerpt from PM's speech delivered in a so-called "National Labour Conference" convened in Tirupati on 25-26 August, 2022. Not a single representative of ANY Central Trade Union was invited to the said Conference. He said,

"Friends,

"As you are aware that there have been so many labour laws in our country which existed since British rule. In the last eight years, we have taken the initiative to abolish the laws from the period of slavery that reflect the slave mentality. The country is now changing, reforming and simplifying such labour laws. Keeping this in mind, 29 labour laws have been converted into four simple labour codes. With this, our labour brothers and sisters will be further empowered on issues like minimum wages, job security, social security and health security...." (Source: A printed booklet titled "National Labour Conference" distributed in the CBT (EPFO) meeting on 31.10.2022 in Delhi).

We protest against the views expressed here, which are totally at variance with the facts and reality which the Central Trade Unions never failed to point out. The 29 labour laws sought to be abolished do not reflect "the slave mentality" as claimed by the PM, nor do the proposed 4 labour Codes "empower labour brothers and sisters on issues like minimum wages, job security, social security and health security" in the least, again as claimed by the PM. They are all brazenly anti-workers, point by point. In fact they take away many rights available in those 29 labour laws, for which the Unions have struggled.

The theatrical announcements of demonetization on 8.11.2016 and the lock down on 23.03.2020 are other instances of lack of any consultation with the stake holders.

Boosting demand to invigorate sagging economy: Recently, the newspapers carried reports of your interaction with employers, where even the employers urged you to take policy decisions that will boost demand, which many renowned economists have been advising for the past three years. This requires putting money in the hands of the toiling people, by increasing the budget allocation for MGNREGA, giving status of Govt. Employees to Scheme

Workers and paying them minimum wages, filling Central Govt. vacant posts, giving up plans to sell public sector enterprises, shelving the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2022, not to privatise government hospitals, reducing GST burden on common people, particularly in fuel and essential commodities and increasing taxes on the corporates along with introduction of Wealth Tax.

Massive demonstrations at Jantar Mantar, all-India Strike on March 28-29, 2022: You must be receiving reports about the large demonstrations at Jantar Mantar or the said strike. We are only reiterating the demands made there:

(i) **Check rising prices:** Please realize that Inflation is only one of the reasons for rising prices. Your policies of privatisation, National Monetisation Pipeline, New Education Policy, Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2022 etc. are bound to increase prices of the services they offer. Forcing coal consumers to buy Adani coal, even at higher prices, is the height of crony capitalism. Scrap all these policies.

(ii) **Pension:** Raise EPS-95 minimum pension and restore Old Pension Scheme in place of NPS, by contribution out of Government kitty. Schemes like PM Shram Yogi Mandhan Yojana, which make low paid unorganised sector workers contribute for a minimum of 20 years, are being touted as "Social Security". *Please scrap such Yojanas, the contributions of which you are using for market investments.*

(iii) **Unemployment:** This issue is assuming alarming proportions. But it is being used as an opportunity by the establishments under the Government as well as the Government itself. Keeping posts vacant, employing workers under contract, Fixed Term Employment, or doing away with their services altogether, is becoming a new normal. Though the employers have demanded "Employment generation incentives" in your interaction with them, they prefer automation to reduce manpower, rather than any incentive. Doing away with security guards at ATMs under the plea of having installed CCTV cameras and insuring the ATM, public safety is given the go-by! *The Agnipath Scheme, not only deprives the youth willing to serve in the defence services of our country of social security but also undermines our national security.* The much advertised "employment melas" are just an eyewash.

(iv) **Blue economy:** Scrap plans to implement the so-called "Blue Economy", which will ruin the fisher-folks inhabiting our extensive shoreline.

(v) Mass agitation **against Privatisation of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd.**, (RINL or Vishakhapatnam Steel Plant) is going on for more than 600 days. Pay heed to their demand which is loud and clear.

(vi) **The employees of General Insurance Companies** have been agitating for a long time for their LTS having been delayed even beyond the duration of the last LTS and for being let down when they were assured wage rise parity with LIC employees. Further, they are saddled with KPI, without any bipartite consultations with their Unions. This needs to be corrected.

(vii) Employees of all other PSUs sold for a song, have been left high and dry with sudden termination of their earlier service conditions. (Air India, Pawan Hans etc)

(viii) **The much touted LIC-IPO** is against the interests of the insured common people, besides being anti-LIC, as with the sale of LIC shares, priority will be to given to pay dividend to share holders rather than bonus to the insured people, as was being done so far.

(ix) **MSP to farmers:** Last but not the least, guarantee MSP to the Farmers, who were promised it, when the farm laws were withdrawn. This will also reduce the number of youth migrating to urban centres, as farming becomes uneconomical without the MSP. MSP covering

all crops as per Swaminathan Committee recommendations (C2+50%) along with ensured procurement should be ensured.

(x) **Insurance compensation:** The climate change has caused havoc with agriculture during 2022. Please see to it that insurance companies compensate the farmers, whose premia have been collected while giving them loans.

(xi) 08th November, 2022 was the sixth anniversary of Demonetisation. It is common knowledge that none of the purported goals of the move - elimination of fake currency notes, black money etc, were achieved. They have resurfaced. But the Government's NIA, ED, CBI etc. are engaged only in hounding opposition leaders and in replacing elected state governments through those who come over to your side due to that pressure. Thus, instead of uprooting corruption, your government is giving the concerned corrupt MLAs/MPs a way to avoid the noose by crossing over to your side. This defeats the very purpose of demonetisation.

(xii) **Taxation Policy to be reviewed:** Burden of indirect taxes, the GST, particularly fuel and other essential commodities to be reduced; direct and corporate tax on the rich should be increased along with introduction of Wealth Tax. This is all the more urgent since the tax-regime has already turned regressive with the indirect tax mobilisation has almost reached half of the country's total tax-receipt.

We are appending our earlier written representations submitted at the time of pre-budget consultations, dated 12.12.2020 and 17.12.2021. We stand by the issues raised therein, as they have not been addressed so far at all.

We have also decided not to attend the proposed online pre-budget consultation meeting on 28th November 2022.

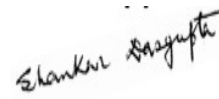
We reiterate our invitation to you to an open public debate regarding these policies, instead of these zoom meetings which *do not provide for scope for interaction nor the time for placing our views.* We look forward to your agreeing to such a debate.

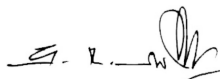

INTUC


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SEWA


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LPF


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Enclosed:

1. Representation dated 12.12.2020 for pre-budget (21-22) consultations,
2. Representation dated 17.12.2021 for pre-budget (22-23) consultations