The Need for a Robust Minimum Wages Act in India

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India, a country aiming to become a major economic force in the world, is nevertheless struggling with severe economic disparities and labour exploitation. The Minimum Wages Act of 1948 clearly addresses the problem of adequate remuneration for workers, which is at the centre of this controversy. But in reality, the Act hasn't been able to prevent wage exploitation, mostly because of poor implementation, weak review procedures, and a lack of political will. The situation of workers has been made worse by the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, which prioritises corporate interests over worker welfare.

The huge differences in minimum salaries throughout India are indicative of a disjointed approach to policy. The minimum wage in states like Delhi and Kerala is comparatively higher; as of 2023, Delhi set it at ₹16,792 per month for unskilled workers. States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, meanwhile, are far behind, with minimum salaries ranging from ₹6,000 to ₹7,000 per month.

This stark disparity undercuts the fundamental concept of equal pay for equal effort and exacerbates regional inequality. This gap has only grown as a result of the govt's inability to set a consistent national floor wage, making millions of workers in states with weaker economkies more susceptible to abuse.

The minimum wage is an essential component of human dignity as well as an economic requirement. It guarantees that employees get a just portion of the wealth they contribute to, allowing them to cover necessities like housing, food, and medical care. Because minimum wages are not strictly enforced in India, where over 80% of workers are employed in informal jobs, workers are left vulnerable to unscrupulous employers.

The BJP's pro-business policies, which put industrial growth ahead of worker welfare, have made this problem worse. For example, under the guise of boosting the economy, the BJP-led states were ready to suspend labor regulations, particularly those pertaining to minimum wages, during the COVID-19 outbreak. This action exposed the government's disregard for the rights of workers and its inclination towards corporate houses.

The periodic modification of minimum salaries, which is necessary to account for inflation and shifting economic conditions, has also been neglected by the BJP, which is crucial. The government's contempt for the reality of subsistence living is demonstrated by its 2019 decision to implement a national floor wage of ₹176 per day, which is significantly less than the recommendations of expert groups. In addition to depriving workers of their rights, these policies have made poverty and inequality worse, especially in rural regions.

As a political activist and law student, I am convinced that attaining social justice in India requires a strong and consistently applied Minimum Wages Act. In addition to providing a safety net for the most disadvantaged, the government must make sure that wages keep up with the growing cost of living.

To safeguard employees from exploitation, it is equally important to hold employers responsible and set up an open grievance redressal process. Regretfully, these progressive measures are still only a pipe dream under the BJP's rule. Its claims to be a party for all have been undermined by its preference for corporate interests over the well-being of workers.

India needs a government that puts its workers first and views progress as a shared right rather than a privilege enjoyed by a select few. The minimum wage is a moral requirement that defines a country's character rather than merely being an economic metric. A clear call for a united demand for labour justice in India must be made in light of the BJP's shortcomings in this area.

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