



Why India Labour Solidarity UK (ILS UK) is calling for suspension of the UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) talks

Full briefing at: <http://www.indialaboursolidarity.org/fta>

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ILS UK, led by Indian and other South Asian activists in the UK labour movement, calls for UK-India talks for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to be suspended, due to the dire and worsening situation for human rights in India in line with the position of the UK TUC and numerous Indian trade unions.

Social justice, especially workers' rights and human rights must be at the heart of any trade deal between the two countries. The deal being negotiated between the Conservative government and India's right-wing BJP government will likely worsen the situation for working people in both India and the UK.

The significance of the FTA

- Both the Conservative Party and the BJP are engaged in severe attacks on people's rights on many fronts. While the exact content of a likely FTA is obscured by the lack of transparency, accountability and proper reporting when it comes to trade negotiations, the policies it will embody and promote are likely to continue and develop those attacks.
- There is little evidence that such an agreement will generate wealth or create jobs – and less that it will benefit the living standards and rights of the majority in either country.
- Trade between the UK and India will continue regardless of whether there is an FTA – which in many ways is as much a political as an economic agreement. Such an agreement will represent a major victory for the two right-wing governments, both facing elections in 2024.

The situation in India

- The human rights situation in India continues to deteriorate, with sectarian violence in the eastern state of Manipur killing hundreds and displacing tens of thousands and an escalation of Hindu-chauvinist attacks on Muslim communities in many parts of the country.
- There is a rising tide of arrests and jailing of dissidents and activists, legal harassment, state violence and censorship, and relentless undermining of democratic and liberal institutions.
- All this is taking place in the oppressive conditions of a largely “informal” – hyper-precarious and deregulated – economy in which hundreds of millions of workers are denied access to the most basic labour rights and protections.
- The exploitation operates with particular sharpness on those from oppressed castes, religious minorities, tribal/indigenous communities, and women – the same groups suffering most from far-right Hindu-nationalist violence.
- Despite widespread struggles by India's workers, building on a proud tradition of labour solidarity, rights won since the end of British colonial rule are being eroded, even in the formal minority of the economy, inequality is soaring, and scanty public services and benefits are being rapidly eroded.

What is needed

- ILS urges the UK labour movement, the Labour Party and all MPs and political representatives committed to social justice, especially human rights and workers' rights to call for the suspension of the FTA talks and reject any Tory-BJP deal.
- We call for serious discussion about alternative, rights-promoting criteria for any future deals, involving consultation with labour movement and human rights organisations in both countries and including the incorporation of the [Ambedkar Principles](https://idsn.org/key-issues/caste-business/ambekar-principles/) (<https://idsn.org/key-issues/caste-business/ambekar-principles/>) to ensure just and equitable conclusion for marginalised groups.
- Meanwhile, we encourage MPs to call for transparency, scrutiny and accountability in regard to the FTA negotiations and possible deals. We encourage the greatest possible use of the UK Parliament to expose and challenge what the UK and Indian governments are doing.
- Please get in touch with queries, for discussion, suggestions for oral or written questions for submitting to Parliament or for support with raising these issues.