

Two-day conference on

Negotiating Globalization: Trade Unions and Labour in Contemporary India

IDSK, September 22-23, 2016

Concept Note

India has been pursuing the policies of globalization for the past 25 years. In this quarter of a century, there have been rapid changes in the economy and politics in the country. On the economic front, there has been a significant increase in the growth rate of GDP. On the other hand, improvement in the indicators of human development has been rather slow, with India being overtaken by some of its neighbours in South Asia. In this discourse on development vs economic growth, what has been lacking is a scholarly discussion on the issues faced by the working people in the country.

It can be argued that with capital becoming internationally mobile and relative immobility of labour, the bargaining power of labour vis-à-vis capital is bound to decline. In India, we have witnessed a slowdown in the rate of growth in employment, with the bulk of jobs being informal in nature. Increasing contractualisation of labour – even in the organised sector – and absence of social security benefits have become the predominant features of the employment. Within the organized sector there has been a significant decline in the share of workers in net value added.

Trade unions are the collective bargaining agents of the workers. On the face of rapid deterioration of the conditions of the organized labour and the burgeoning informal labour, the trade union movement is facing a challenge in the country. While we see some trade union actions in terms of all India strikes, almost every year, one wonders how far the trade union movement of this kind has been successful in protecting the interests of labour. On the other hand, there has been a tendency towards fragmentation of the ambit of the centralised trade unions, which is evident from the rise in independent, non-affiliated organised actions of workers at the local level. Very few studies are available on the nature of collective bargaining and trade union organisations in a context of changing nature of labour processes and conditions under globalization. The conference will try to address this phenomenon and other related issues as follows:

- a) **Status of Trade Union movement in India:** In the last 25 years, how far has the trade union movement been successful in protecting the rights of the workers? What are the factors that are responsible for the current state of trade union movement?

- b) **Informal Sector and Trade Union:** What is the extent of penetration of the trade union movement in the informal sector? Are there specificities in the manner of mobilization and issues in informal sector?
- c) **Politics and Trade Unions:** How do trade unions negotiate the political space? Does larger politics determine trade unions' strategies? Is labour and trade union able to intervene effectively in the mainstream political discourse?
- d) **Role of State:** How does the state look at labour and the trade union movement? Has there been a change in discourse? If so, how?
- e) **State Experiences:** Does the experience of the trade union movement differ across states of India? Are there lessons which states can learn from each other?
- f) **Strategies:** Has there been a change in strategies with respect to the articulation of demands and mobilization of the workers, since the advent of globalization? Do these strategies vary across states and industries?
- g) **Gender and Trade Union:** How do trade unions understand the question of gender?
- h) **Caste and Trade Union:** With the rise of caste based politics in India, has the trade union movement suffered? How do unions respond to issues of caste?
