

In What May be the Largest Strike in World History: MILLIONS IN INDIA PROTEST

An estimated quarter billion Indians – roughly 3% of the world’s entire population – went on strike today across the subcontinent, protesting the government of Narendra Modi’s racist and “anti-people,” “anti-worker” policies. The protests were called by the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and are thought to be perhaps the largest in world history.

The CITU has a 12-point charter of demands they have put to the government. The demands include:

- Urgent measures to contain price rises through a universalized public distribution system and banning of speculative commodities market.
- A job generation scheme to combat India’s unemployment problem.
- Stricter enforcement of all basic labor laws.
- Universal social security.
- A minimum wage of at least 15,000 Rupees (≈ \$210) per month.
- A guaranteed pension for the entire working age population.
- Equal pay for equal work.
- The stoppage of pro-employer, anti-labor laws.
- The end to foreign direct investment in key industries like rail, defense & finance.



Many on the streets are also continuing the protest against Modi’s privatization schemes and racist CAA and NRC acts. The CAA explicitly prevents Muslims (India’s largest religious minority numbering around 140 million people) from neighboring countries to acquire citizenship. The NRC (National Registration Council) overturns all previous citizenship laws, requiring all Indians to provide extensive documentation to prove their citizenship—something hundreds of millions will surely be unable to do. It, therefore, gives Modi and his ruling far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the ability to remove citizenship—and therefore virtually all human rights— from any Indian it wishes. The government has already removed nearly two million people’s citizenship in the northeastern state of Assam— around half of them Muslims. It

is also currently building a network of “detention centers” similar to those used by ICE in the U.S. to house the newly criminalized population of “illegal immigrants.” In many cases, it is employing those same people to build their own prisons.

The strike is supported by most major unions except for those affiliated with the ruling BJP. It also has the support of the Indian National Congress Party, which ruled the country for decades after its independence from the U.K. Rahul Gandhi, leader of the party until August last year, also estimated that 250 million would be on the streets,

A common tactic of the strikers across the country is to occupy railway lines, shutting down India’s most important and iconic transport network, effectively paralyzing the country. Representatives of India’s coal unions also announced that its 600,000 members would join the strike, despite an order from the management of Coal India Ltd. not to do so. Many of the country’s enormous population of agricultural workers are expected to down their tools as well.

News of what is billed by supporters as the world’s largest strike has been hard to come by in Western sources.

In fact, there has been an almost complete media blackout of the subject. While numbers for simultaneous demonstrations happening across a subcontinent can never be gauged completely accurately, what is striking is the complete disinterest in such a large revolt from international media organizations.

Modi’s government warned that “any employee going on strike in any form would face the consequences,” while the Supreme Court claimed that protesting today amounts to “grave misconduct,” suggesting that the government sees the nationwide strike as a threat to its legitimacy. Strikers claim that it is just this authoritarian sentiment they are opposing.

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Venezuela, A Tale of Two Parliaments & Four Presidents

The Trump regime’s favorite fake President of Venezuela, Juan Guaido may soon hold the world record for successive unsuccessful coup attempts. Is the #5? Maybe this last one is #6. The situation became unexpectedly complicated for Guaido in recent weeks with the emergence of an opposition faction that declared itself in “rebellion” against his authority and would come to run an independent slate in leadership elections. Calling Guaido a “**dream that turned into a nightmare**,” right wing opposition deputy Jose Brito announced his support for Luis Parra. “*Juan Guaidó from today your time ended.*”

The faction that Brito favors is comprised of deputies from different parties, some of which have joined the dialogue with Maduro while others have broken with their respective parties following the tremendous corruption scandals unearthed in December. Guaido’s latest coup took play the day of the session, which was to include a vote and swearing in of the new leadership. In the process, a scuffle broke out at the entrance between Guaido and security personnel. The deputies in the chamber subsequently proceeded to vote on the dissident opposition ticket, which received the backing of the Maduro bloc and was swiftly sworn in amid chaotic scenes in the chamber. The newly elected president was Luis Parra and some of his allies were immediately “sanctioned” by the U.S.

Guaido succeeded in gaining media attention by attempting to break through the security cordon, claiming that the National Guard prohibited his entry. The alternate session which re-elected Guaidó held on the evening of January 5th in the headquarters of the pro-opposition newspaper *El Nacional*. All of these voted for the slate of candidates headed by Juan Guaidó. Several of the legislators present at the session re-electing Guaidó were substitutes of principals whose votes may have differed from theirs. In fact, precisely because of Maduro’s efforts to co-opt legislators has been focused on principal legislators, there are several cases in which we know that the actual legislator sided with Parra (or was unwilling to support Guaidó) while the “substitute” supported Guaidó. In a regular session of the Legislature, the substitute’s vote intention would be rendered irrelevant if the principal were to show up.

In fact, it is technically possible for two legislatures to function in parallel and for both to hold sessions that satisfy the valid attendance quorum of more than half of legislators even if they have no participants in common. This will happen if they are both partially stacked with substitutes whose principals participate in the alternate session. In normal conditions, it would correspond to the judiciary to decide which of the two sessions has been convened constitutionally. In Venezuela, where the sides to the conflict do not recognize the same judiciary, there is no straightforward way to resolve this conflict.

As a result, Venezuela now has two National Assembly Presidents that claim to be the legally elected leaders of its Legislative Power, as well as two Presidents. Four Presidents is a lot for any country, but then Guaido counts as two of them: **President squared**. He desperately needs the Assembly’s Presidency to support his claim to being the legitimate interim president of Venezuela. He relies on a constitutional provision according to which the head of the Legislature will hold the interim office of the presidency in the absence of an elected president at the start of the constitutional term. The Trump backed opposition, with support from the always reaction European Union, did not recognize the 2018 presidential elections as free and fair and thus claims that there is no legitimately elected president for the 2019-25 presidential term in Venezuela. In that case, head of the legislature serves as interim President. This claim is as phony as the Brazilian election where the popular Lula would have beat Bolsonaro with ease but was put in prison on bogus charges. Similarly, the 2018 Venezuela Presidential election had an opposition candidate running legitimately against Madura but the U.S. back coup hungry opposition boycotted the election and pretended that no one ran against Maduro who won in an election otherwise carried out fairly.

Still, now that Luis Parra has assumed the title of legislative president, Guaido has received a dose of his own medicine and now has a rival, formally dividing the Trump backed opposition, which has lost its parliamentary majority. Guaido’s position as “interim president of the republic,” which was rather unbelievable before, is now outright ridiculous. He must quickly capitalize on this bump in opposition enthusiasm after his athletic maneuverings on January 7 in order to execute a political shift that extricates the opposition from its current stagnation.

The opposition will soon have to decide if it will boycott the legislative elections that must constitutionally be held this year. The legislative branch is the only one controlled by the opposition, and losing it means disappearing from the institutional map. This means that Guaido must, effectuate a political change of course, opening new electoral possibilities which have remained closed to the opposition since it adopted its boycott strategy in the 2018 presidential elections. And he must achieve this reorientation at a time when he is hemorrhaging popular support at an accelerated rate due to the enormous expectations he raised and his failure to advance in the barest minimum.

Guaido needed a new look. Rebranding himself as a street fighter, on January 5, he attempted to scale the fence surrounding the National Assembly, tussling with security forces on the shoulders of his deputies. Finally on January 7, after forcing his way through the security perimeter, he led his deputies into the legislative chamber in what appeared to be a retaking of the palace, projecting an image of audacity before the international corporate media and taking the government by surprise. This was far from a checkmate against the government, but it did allow Guaido to reestablish his leadership in order to make crucial political decisions regarding participation in elections, which would be anathema to his hardline opposition base, especially after successive opposition boycotts in presidential, mayoral, and municipal council elections.

Guaido now commands the support of only around half of all legislators, making his coalition vulnerable. This is perhaps the more notable fact that surfaced out of the tumultuous January 5 sessions. Over the course of the past four years, the opposition’s majority has fallen steeply from the 112 legislators it won in 2015 to 86 legislators (83 without the disputed Amazonas deputies). How did this happen? The answer is a combination of persecution, persuasion, exhaustion and mistakes. While some legislative seats have been lost as a result of overt and explicit actions by the judiciary, others reflect voluntary defections by legislators who were originally elected in an opposition slate and who have decided not to back Guaidó, and others reveal genuine dissent within opposition ranks.

Understanding what is happening in Venezuela is not easy. At the beginning of 2019, we were talking about two presidents of Venezuela. At the start of 2020, we are now speaking of two legislatures. How can this be? We will try to explain. It will take a lot of maneuvering if the US wants to green light the opposition’s participation in parliamentary elections under the current conditions, unless the Trump administration wants to cede the field to the dissident opposition that is already beginning to fill the Treasury Department’s blacklist.

Thanks to **Ociel Lopez**

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