



## Farming for Food or Greed

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Thousands of farmers rallied into India's capital, New Delhi, in over 120,000 tractors on January 26 this year, a national holiday on which India showcases its strengths and achievements as it commemorates the Constitution of India coming into effect in 1950. Reminiscent of the Tractorcade of American farmers to Washington, D.C. in 1979, these farmers gathered for similar reasons: to protest three farm laws passed by the Indian parliament in September 2020.

Acknowledged as the world's largest ongoing and the biggest in history of resistance efforts, the farmers' agitation in India has been unrelenting for over 100 days, despite repression, incarceration, and even death. The farmers are in no mood to leave Delhi until new laws replace the current, which they hold will only benefit corporations. They fear that the three laws will expose them to the greedy maneuvers of agri-business.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for more than half of India's population. Nearly 80% of landholders are small, owning less than one hectare. Farmers are concerned that corporate agri-business will decide prices and crops, take over production and storage, and gradually dispossess small farms, eventually pushing them into endless cycles of poverty and misery without any assets to fall back on. The government insists the three laws will actually double the income of farmers by 2024 by ensuring better prices for produce, and particularly benefit small farmers with better choices.

But the farmers are not convinced, and neither are a number of international leaders, politicians, and celebrities who continue to express their support to the agitating farmers. Recently, a group of 87 U.S.-based farm and food advocacy groups issued a statement of support entitled: "[We Stand with India's Farmers! We Stand with India's Farmers! Now Let's Connect the Dots Between the Forces of Neoliberalism that Stifle Farmers, from India to the U.S.](#)"<sup>1</sup> The signatories hold the U.S. responsible for creating conditions that have led to these repressive laws. "What the Indian farmers are enduring now happened in the U.S. almost four

decades ago. The Reagan era furthered the farm crisis through deliberate federal policy changes, with systematic erosion of parity prices and other deregulatory efforts. “Get big or get out” has been our government’s mantra. Farmers with the means to consolidate have been rewarded for growing monoculture commodities.” The small and traditional farmers have been pushed out of the system.

Asserting that the four top agri-business corporations control 84% of the U.S. food supply and over 80% of the world’s grain, the statement calls on President Biden “to stop prioritizing agribusiness over small farmers, and to shift trade policy in the US to allow other countries to support fair markets for their farmers, so food providers are assured a living wage.”

The collusion between political powers and big business is not new. But when the pandemic struck a year ago, some thought that it would compel us—human beings—to abandon our ruthless greed for wealth and domination, and to make changes to our political, economic and social dynamics with a new awareness of our shared vulnerability. Nothing of that has happened. Instead, these trends and habits have escalated further.

The world remains at this crossroads, morally divided between domination and vulnerability. There are those who, no matter what the pandemic has done and can do, continue their pursuits for power and wealth. There are others who insist that the old order must go if the earth and its people must have a future. It is a decisive moment, one of reckoning for churches—in fact for all faith communities—to discern their role in shaping the emerging world. Will they allow themselves to be preoccupied with issues of survival and the continued patronage of the powerful? Or will they choose to be with the restless others who are clamoring for a new world?

<https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Solidarity%20Statement%20for%20Indias%20farmers%20from%20US%20based%20food%20and%20farm%20justice%20organisations%20February%202021.pdf>

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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