

Discontents of Demonetisation

November 7, 2017

organised by

**All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC)
in association with
Centre for Informal Sector and Labour Studies (CISLS)
Venue: Committee Room, SSS-I, JNU**

At 8pm on 8th November 2017, the Prime Minister of India in a broadcast on television announced that all currency notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 would cease to be legal tender from midnight. This was justified as a measure to curb the black economy, and counterfeit cash circulation which was supposedly going to not only hit the perpetrators of such illegalities but also curb terrorism. Soon the aim of becoming a 'cashless' economy was added to the purported aims of demonetisation. At the time of this announcement, the demonetised currency accounted for 86% of the total currency notes in circulation.

Economists across the ideological spectrum in opinion pieces questioned the rationale of this exercise. The RBI and the government's role in this exercise came under both legal and political scrutiny. The banking system was put through an exercise that affected not only its functions in major ways, but bank employees faced the ire of people standing in the queues in the face of the currency crunch.

The political opposition expressed its disagreements with the government both in terms of the aim, design and the implementation of demonetisation. However, in response, demonetisation was called upon as a nationalist war against counterfeit cash, illegal transactions, corruption and terrorism in which the people were asked to bear some 'temporary' hardship for this just cause.

With more than 100 people dying in the queues and many more affected adversely in various ways with the currency crunch that followed and the intense hardships it unleashed, the claim was that this was a sacrifice that was part of the nationalist war against counterfeit cash and other economic illegalities that would strike the rich and powerful who had accumulated wealth through dubious means. Thus, the rhetoric of the perpetrators around demonetisation soon changed to a 'nationalist' war being fought on class lines by the poor against the rich.

This attempt at political consolidation gained a popular hegemony for a few weeks, initially fanned by the corporate media and propaganda through social media. But the material impact in terms of deaths, hardships, disruptions in production and circulation, loss of livelihoods and employment, unravelled over months. The discontent that was initially latent became visible in manifold forms. The articulation of this discontent was wide spread - from bankers, manufacturers, traders, farmers, workers and large sections of petty producers. The impact contrary to assertion of those who perpetrated the process of demonetisation was in keeping with the graded inequality that is built into the social structure of Indian society.

With one year of the discontent around the process and effect of demonetization playing out its course, we feel that it is important to examine its various dimensions - its economic rationale, the politics that it entailed and the institutional structures that it mobilized, the process that it unleashed, the way this process played out in the media and the debates around the digital economy

that it fawned and most importantly the content of the multiple articulations of discontent. The day-long seminar on 7th November, 2017 aims to facilitate a deliberation on all of these.

Organising Committee
D. Thomas Franco, Avinash Kumar and Chirashree Dasgupta

Programme Schedule

Registration and Tea- 9.AM - 9.30 AM

Introduction to the Seminar- 9.30-9.40 AM- Avinash Kumar

Panel I: 9.45- 11.00 Am - Economic Rationale of the Discontent

Chair: Indrani Mazumdar

**Speakers: Amiya K Bagchi
Prabhat Patnaik**

Tea- 11:00- 11.15

Panel II- 11.15- 1.00 PM- Politics and Institutions

Chair: Archana Prasad

**Speakers: Atul Sood
Prem Shankar Jha
Satyaki Roy
Chirashree Das Gupta**

Lunch - 1.00 - 1.45 PM

Panel III- 1.45 - 3.30 PM- Decoding the Process

Chair: D Thomas Franco

**Speakers: Jayati Ghosh
C Rammanohar Reddy
C P Chandrasekhar**

Panel IV- 3.30- 4.30- Digitalisation and Media

Chair: Usha Ramanathan

**Speakers: Nitin Sethi
Prabir Purkayastha**

High Tea: 4.30- 5.00 pm

Screening of a Documentary on Demonetisation prepared by AIBOC

Time: 5.00- 5.30 PM

Panel V: 5.30- 7.30 PM- Articulations of Discontent

Moderator- Chirashree Dasgupta

**Speakers: Usha Ramanathan
D Thomas Franco
Hannan Mollah**

**K E Raghunathan
Rajeev Khandelwal (tbc)
Amit Chakraborty**