

Workers connect...

It is Bread we Fight for, but we Fight for Roses, too ...

*As we go marching, marching, in the beauty of
the day
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill
lofts gray
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden
sun discloses
For the people hear us singing, bread and roses,
bread and roses*

*As we come marching, marching, we battle too,
for men
For they are women's children and we mother
them again
Our days shall not be sweated from birth until
life closes
Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread,
but give us roses*

*As we come marching, marching, un-numbered
women dead
Go crying through our singing their ancient call
for bread
Small art and love and beauty their trudging
spirits knew
Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for
roses, too*

*As we go marching, marching, we bring the
greater days
The rising of the women means the rising of the
race
No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil
where one reposes
But a sharing of life's glories, bread and roses,
bread and roses*

Bread and Roses (1911)

Bread and Roses originated from a speech by Helen Todd which became a slogan of the women's suffrage movement in the United States, a call not only for equality and basic rights, but also for the beauty and dignity that allows a person to flourish. This inspired the title of the 1911 poem Bread and Roses by James Oppenheim. While women in the US and

almost across the world have eventually won the right to vote, equality and dignity for all is still a vision that we fight for. Most still hunger for bread and yearn for roses.

The first national Women's Day was observed in the United States on 28 February in honour of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against deplorable working conditions in the factories. In 1910, in a meeting in Copenhagen the Socialist International decided to observe an International Women's Day to honour the movement for women's rights and to build support for achieving universal suffrage for women. International Women's Day also became a day for protesting the World War I. As part of the peace movement, across Europe, on or around 8 March, women held rallies to protest the war.

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WOMAN'S DAY
76 Great DEALS
Food, Home & Style
Easy Ways to Save \$5 Online
Waffle Tacos
LESS MESS = LESS STRESS
Tips to Tame Clutter
Weight-Loss Advice That Works
YES to BREAKFAST!
New Recipes

BE A GIRL WITH A MIND
A WOMAN WITH ATTITUDE
AND A LADY WITH CLASS
REVLON CELEBRATES WOMEN'S DAY

Occasion-based on-pack offer
Celebrate Women's Day with Cadbury
WIN A SWAROVSKI VOUCHER WORTH ₹9999 EVERYDAY
On purchase of ₹100 and above

Women's Day today is celebrated more visibly than ever before. Every women's day we are now made to believe that all a woman wants is great deals!!! Great deals on everything that one can buy: from expensive cars, to diamonds, to clothes, to books, to shoes, to a meal at a fancy restaurant, to a manicure. All these deals use this day to promote the culture of conspicuous

consumption by tempting women and men to spend on all these goods and services as women 'deserve' this. 'Empowerment' of women has got reduced to empowering them as consumers in exercising choices to spend. Thus there is a commercialisation of the day that was meant to celebrate the struggles of working women.

The critical issue that remains unanswered is how many women in our country and across the world can really afford to buy all these things? And to be real, not too many men can either.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

The media and the corporations has made the struggle for women's empowerment synonymous with the struggle of the few to break the glass ceiling. Children at school are taught to see women like Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany) or Marissa Meyer (ex-CEO, Yahoo) or Mary Barra (CEO, GM) or Chanda Kochhar (ex-CEO, ICICI) or Indra Nooyi (ex-CEO, Pepsico) or Kiran Bedi as role models. These have become stories of success that are circulated to create a make-believe world of women's empowerment. But how many Angela Merckels and Indra Nooyis are there in the world of work and influence and more importantly how have they made the lives of other women any better are questions that we need to ask.

This kind of women's empowerment recognises that there is gender wage gap, sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination at work, because even the women on the top of the ladder experience it. In 2014, when Mary Barra joined as the new CEO at GM, her base salary was \$100,000 less than the outgoing CEO Dan Akerson! On the other hand, when Thomas McInerney took over from Marissa Mayer at Yahoo!, he was paid double her salary despite the fact that she had stunned the world by returning to work two weeks after giving birth to her son. However, the solutions that this kind of empowerment model proposes to these problems do not acknowledge the structural basis of these outcomes.

A prescription given for corporations to decrease the gender wage gap in a management magazine read like this:

1. Increase Governmental Interface: This

requires putting in place legislation by government to get companies to make their wage data public

2. Mentoring programmes: Companies should provide mentoring programme where women will be mentored to move up the career ladder.

3. Transparency: Ensure that all employees are aware of the wages earned by each other: this will self-correct the wage gap.

4. Eliminate Negotiation: Negotiation is a 'man's game' and women are bad at it and hence this practice must be eliminated.

5. Promoting Female Entrepreneurship

Each of these solutions is rooted in the crucial understanding that transparency leads to shame and shame leads to self-correction of the problem – as if the existence of this wage gap is a careless mistake. The solutions fail to recognise that discrimination, where it exists, ensures that more profit can be made. The moment the wages are equalised, the profit share will fall and the enterprise will have to look for new ways to cut costs again. But amongst the above solutions the most interesting solution is the one that states that negotiation is a 'man's game' and women are bad at it, hence it should be disposed off. This basically takes away even the possibility of a collective bargaining process for the women demanding equal pay that could tilt the balance of power at a workplace.

Thus the solutions not just overlook the structural causes behind the wage gap, they promote the neoliberal philosophy of the supremacy of the individual, constantly pushing a small section of women to believe that they are solely responsible for their own well-being and they must advance this system to be recognised and allowed to move up the ladder. For some this in itself becomes an everyday struggle at work where she has to constantly prove that she is as good as her male colleagues and deserves the same pay they receive. But all this is pegged to the market and thus every person in this system, men and women, are interested only in their own individual advance and no one is interested in social justice or in collective negotiation for collective gain.

What about the many?

This is the reality only for very few. For the many, the reality is quite different. There is no ladder to climb, there is no mentoring programmes to attend and there is no need for transparency of their poverty wages.

Capital has historically used women to adapt to economic fluctuations. When there is demand for workers, women are pulled in and when there is recession, they are the first to be pushed off. However at a different point of time, women are also brought in to replace men at work to depress wages and working conditions and again these women may get replaced by migrant men, willing to work more for less. The neoliberal global capital has moved within national borders, moved to new countries and developed production bases that are dominated by women to keep the cost of production low.

The only thing in a woman that is greatly 'valued' by a patriarchal capitalist society is her morality. This morality is used to control her, repress her, and keep her undervalued. The fear of a woman to be ostracised as a woman of loose morals defines her choices and decisions in life. She agrees to work for low wages, for longer hours, under oppressive conditions of work and even after being sexually harassed in the fear that she might get ostracised. Thus sexual harassment just like the gender wage gap is an institutionalised structural problem and needs to be addressed as part of a larger question of how profit is made in the production process.

In this discussion one cannot of course forget the huge amount of unpaid household work that women perform across the world. Discussion of socialising this work that formed a large part of discussions in the last century, today has got reduced to a demand for flexible work for women so that they have time to do this care work. The demand for flexible work time now comes from women without questioning why they should bear the burden of household chores and care work. Women across the board, from CEOs to teachers to software designers to domestic workers to home based beedi rollers, come out demanding flexible working hours so they can work once their children fall asleep or are in school or their ageing parents

do not require active attention or when they have finished cooking and cleaning.

In an interview, Indra K Nooyi, CEO of PepsiCo, narrated what happened the day she was appointed so:

"I got home about 10, got into the garage, and my mother was waiting at the top of the stairs. And I said, "Mom, I've got great news for you." She said, "Let the news wait. Can you go out and get some milk?" I looked in the garage and it looked like my husband was home. I said, "What time did he get home?" She said "8 o'clock." I said, "Why didn't you ask him to buy the milk?" "He's tired." ... So like a dutiful daughter, I went out and got the milk and came back."

Where do we go from here?

The conflict that many have been struggling with is should we address the question of gender discrimination first and then address other issues of inequalities and injustices, or should we address the larger issues of inequalities first, and that will automatically resolve the gender question. This has divided people and have pitched those conforming to the first against those conforming to the latter. This conflict has benefited no woman for sure. This conflict is not even real: issues of gender are intricately woven in how exploitation takes place – they cannot be separated – they can only be addressed together.

There is also a view that men do not understand issues of women. While it may be true, but it is also true for most women. Being a woman is not a sufficient condition to find the answer to this. This has to be a fight for uniting workers, men and women, to change the balance of power, to negotiate collectively for a better world for all where women are not pitched against men, migrants are not pitched against local workers, irregular workers are not pitched against regular workers. None of these struggles can be fought in isolation, none of these struggles can wait till the other is resolved, none of these struggles can be won if those of us who are privileged are willing to sacrifice to stand by those who are not. If we believe as male permanent workers in the high end manufacturing sector that these jobs will remain with us forever, Kirloskar Brothers' have found the way forward: they opened their first all-women water pump

plant at Coimbatore in 2011. It doubled its women workers in 2017 which led to a three times increase in production. The plant became a productivity champion. Enthused by the success at the Coimbatore plant, KBL now has 35% women workers in their Sanand plant as well. Britannia has also set up a plant in Assam with 70% women workers. This is no different from choosing Mary Barra to lead GM at half the wage as her predecessor. Each of these cases are instances of how cost is being squeezed: by replacing male workers by first generation rural women workers whose every productivity increase is being incentivised, moving to Assam gives a dual edge to Britannia – they now have access to the most marginalised workers and among them, their women. Thus this struggle is not a struggle against those who are replacing us in our jobs but against those who are taking the decision to do so. It is not the women who decided that the new plant of Kirloskar in Coimbatore should only have women. Neither did the women in Assam decide that Britannia should only hire them. It was Kirloskar and Britannia who made these decisions. They are pioneers laying out the new avenue for other firms to cut their costs. We need to come together against the likes of Britannias and the Kirloskars and not against the women who they employ.

But when it comes to women, this battle is not just about Bread but about Roses too...

It is about an end to gender violence at work and at home.

It is about reproductive justice for all so women have complete autonomy over their bodies.

It is about social provisioning for universal healthcare, education, and social security.

And it is also about sharing household chores and care work.

Policy News

National Mineral Policy, 2019 gets cabinet approval

28 February 2019: The National Mining Policy 2019 has been approved by the cabinet, which would grant mining activity the status of an industry and open the mining sector to private players. Until now, mining was listed as an

economic activity under primary sector.

The new policy will replace the National Mining Policy, 2008 and introduce merger/acquisitions of mining entities and transfer of mining leases to private companies, formation of dedicated mineral corridors, and exemption from taxes, levies and royalties. It would also grant the right to exploration and auctioning of virgin areas on revenue-sharing basis with private firms.

National Minimum Wage committee proposes reducing calorie intake for adults

18 February 2019: Expert Committee on Determining the Methodology for Fixing the National Minimum Wage has recommended reducing essential consumption from 2700 to 2400 calories per unit per day. The committee has cited "reduction in the proportion of workers engaged in heavy work and an increase in the number of workers in moderate and sedentary occupations" as the reason for this change. The new formulae, if adopted will significantly distort the wage calculation.

The committee has also recommended a minimum floor wage applicable throughout the country. It has suggested that the minimum wage should either not be less than ₹375 per day or should be based on a wage slab model divided into five categories based on region, with the amount varying between ₹342 and ₹447 and revised half-yearly. The recommended wages are adjusted to inflation based on July 2018 prices.

The national minimum wage floor will impact the wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) which are currently one of the lowest for any form of work in the country and revised annually on the basis of Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourer (CPI-AL).

Government amends rules, allows women to work night shifts

4 February 2019: The Ministry of Labour and Employment has lifted the exemption on employment of women in mines during night shift as per the provisions of Section 46 of the Mines Act, 1952.

Women will now be able to work in the mines in day shift in underground mines i.e., between

6 AM-7 PM and day as well as night shifts (7PM-6AM) in above ground mines (including open cast mines.)

Gujrat: The Gujrat government has proposed the Gujarat Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Bill, 2019 which includes provisions for employment of women in night shifts (9pm – 6am) provided that the employer ensures provisions of shelter, restroom, night creche, ladies toilet, adequate protection of dignity, honour and safety, protection from sexual harassment and transportation from the shop or establishment to the door step of residence of the employee.

Legal News

Supreme Court: Order for eviction of over 1 million forest working people stayed

28 February 2019: The Supreme Court of India has stayed its previous order dated 13 February 2019 regarding the eviction of about 1.1 million scheduled tribes and other forest dwelling communities in over 16 states whose claims over forest land had been rejected by state governments.

Hearing a case on the constitutional validity of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA), the Apex Court had ruled in the favour of the wildlife conservation lobbies and ordered state governments to evict scheduled tribes and other forest dwelling people whose claims had been rejected before the promulgation of the FRA.

Madras High Court raps government, upholds its order on equal pay for equal work

20 February 2019: The Madurai bench of the Madras High Court has dismissed the appeal of the department of education and ordered that contract safai workers be paid at par with the workers placed similarly in the department.

Contract Safai Karmcharis employed in schools and educational institutions receive ₹13,000 per month while workers in other departments performing the same duties are paid ₹18,000 per month.

A division bench of Justices K K Sasidharan

and P D Audikesavalu upholding the January 2018, order of the single judge rapped the government for its failure to implement its own government order of year 2012 and violating the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Collective Bargaining

Maharashtra: Contract Safai Workers protest against violation of minimum wages

25 February 2019: Contract Safai Karmcharis from Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Nanded and Navi Mumbai came together under the banner of Kachra Vahatuk Shramik Sangh for GR Wapsi (Take back Government Resolution) protest in Mumbai, Maharashtra against non-implementation of government resolutions on payment of minimum wages.

Contract Safai Karmchari's arrears against non-payment of minimum wages amounts to ₹3,36,000 in Nanded ₹1,20,000 in Mumbai, ₹1,60,000 in Thane and Navi Mumbai and ₹1,50,000 in handed per worker. Brihan-Mumbai Municipal corporation alone employs over 4000 contract safai workers who have been not paid their rightful minimum wages since 2015.

National Health Mission workers stage protest across Jammu & Kashmir and Haryana

19 February 2019: Over 8000 National Health Mission (NHM) workers went on strike on 14 February 2019 seeking regularisation and equal wages for equal work. NHM workers have been employed under contract since 2011. Under pressure from trade unions and workers the Jammu & Kashmir government had constituted a committee in 2017 to look in to the matter. The committee had recommended that contract workers should be regularized in a phased manner, however the government has taken no action in this regard till date.

In Chandigarh, over 13000 workers comprising of paramedics, lab assistants and others under NHM have been protesting since 5 February 2019 demanding regularization of their services. The health department has terminated the services of over 2700 workers and ordered the rest to report to work or face consequences in order to break the strike, however workers have refused to return to work.

Bihar: 40-day strike of Mid-Day meal workers yields ₹250 wage hike

18 February 2019: The Bihar government has agreed to the demand of Mid-Day Meal (MDM) workers and hiked their wages to ₹1500 per month, a hike of ₹250 from the previous ₹1250.

Over 2.48 Lakh MDM workers under the banner of Bihar Rajya Madhayan Bhojan Rasoija Sanyukt Sangarsh Samiti were on strike since 7 January 2019 demanding government employee status and monthly wages of ₹18,000.

Gujrat: Ford workers refuse company meals, demand negotiation on charter of demands

17 February 2019: Over 800 workers at the Ford factory in Sanand Industrial Area, Gujrat have shunned company provided meals since 11 February 2019 demanding that the management initiate negotiation on charter of demands which includes wage increment. Under the banner of Karnavati Kamdar Ekta Sangh workers have been demanding a wage hike of ₹17,500 spread over three years.

Tamil Nadu: Royal Enfield workers strike against contract work

15 February 2019: Royal Enfield workers in Oragudam Industrial Area have gone on strike against management's inaction regarding regularization of contract workers and hike in wages.

Workers had struck work under the banner of Working People Trade Union Council for over 50 days in November, 2018 and returned to work after an agreement was reached with the management regarding regularization of 1000 contract workers who have been working for over 2 years, an increase in wages and payment of bonus to all workers.

Undue delay in the process of regularization and indifference regarding issue of wages and bonus has led to the current strike.

Discrimination

Maharashtra: Over 900 employees at Hindustan Antibiotics Ltd., await salaries for last 22 months

25 February 2019: Hindustan Antibiotics Ltd. at Pune which was declared a sick industry

in the year 1997 has not paid salaries of over 900 workers for the last 22 months since June, 2017. Employees have been receiving 25% of their basic salary (around ₹5000-8000 per month) as wages despite the PSU generating revenue of ₹42 crores in production last year.

Telangana: Contract teachers denied hiked wages despite government orders

11 February 2019: The expert committee constituted in 2018 by the education department of Telangana government had recommended an increase of 75% from current ₹475 per hour to ₹700 per hour in the remuneration of guest lecturers and a monthly salary of ₹43,000 for teachers employed on contract basis respectively. Furthermore, a 3% annual hike in wages was also proposed. Taking into consideration these recommendations a government order (GO) was released on 4 April 2018. However, the GO has not been implemented till date.

Assam: Hindustan Paper Corporation workers approach National Human Rights Commission against government apathy

6 February 2019: The workers of Nagaon and Cachar Paper mills of Hindustan Paper Corporation have approached National Human Rights Commission against non-payment of wages for the last 25 months at Cachar and over 23 months at the Nagaon unit.

Furthermore, provident fund and life insurance contributions that were deducted from workers' wages have not been deposited in their account since 2015.

Uttar Pradesh: Government imposes Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) on 20 lakh striking workers

6 February 2019: Over 20 lakh government workers went on strike against Uttar Pradesh government's new pension scheme which has hiked worker's share in the scheme by 4% while wages remain unchanged. To contain worker's protest the government imposed the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) on 4 February 2019. However, the government employees refused to report to work. The strike was subsequently called off after the Allahabad High Court on 7 February 2019 declared the strike illegal.

Health and Safety

Indian fares poorly on work-life balance, average working hours amongst highest in the world

27 February 2019: The National Sample Survey Office undertook its first periodic labour force survey (PLFS) seeking to measure working hours and other metrics of working life in India. According to this report, average working hours in India are among some of the highest in the world.

Indians worked 53-54 hours/week and 46-47 hours/week on an average in urban and rural areas respectively in the period July 2017-June 2018. Long working hours are leading to stress, fatigue and other work related ailments.

Workplace Safety

Construction

On 17 February Raghunath (55) a worker working at the site of an IT complex in Sector 6, Noida, Uttar Pradesh died as the basement he was working in caved in.

On 9 February 1 worker died and 3 others were grievously injured at Chinna Jeeyar Swamy mutt, Papanasanam in Tirupati, Tamil Nadu. Workers were involved in digging the soil at the mutt, soft soil collapsed trapping workers under the rubbles.

Manufacturing

On 23 February 13 workers Chandu, Kalam, Gaffar, Azad, Israfil, Masawwar, Sukran, Qadir, Ata-ur, Kaliyar Mansoori, Irfan Mansoori and Abid Mansoori died and several others were grievously injured due to an explosion at the carpet manufacturing factory in Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh. Kaliyar Mansoori the owner was involved in manufacturing and selling firecrackers illegally inside the premises.

Babloo Mahto (28) died on 19 February after fire engulfed the footwear manufacturing factory in Narela Industrial Area, New Delhi where he was employed. He was sleeping in the basement of the factory when the fire spread in the 3-storey building. The factory was operating in the building without the requisite permissions and safety checks from the authorities.

The police have registered a case against the owner of the factory Ankur Goel under Sections 285 (Negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter) and 304(A) (causing death by negligence) of Indian Penal Code.

On 16 February, 2 workers Saroj Kumar Das (38) and Nayan Kumar Dandaya (38) died when the hook of a crane loaded with molten iron broke down. The workers were working in SAW pipe manufacturing plant of Jindal Saw Ltd. owned by the O P Jindal group company in Samaghogha village in Mundra taluka, Kutch district in Gujarat.

On 11 February 5 workers Sanjib Paria, Paltu Duari, Subodh Roy, Nityananda Roy and Munnaprasad Pry all aged between 30-40 years died after a fire broke out in a 3-storey plastic furniture manufacturing factory at New Barackpore, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The fire broke out in the plastic molding section of the factory which then spread to the other sections. The factory was functioning without the requisite safety measures and permissions from government authorities.

In and Around

Interim Union Budget 2019-2020 tabled in Parliament

1 February 2019: Finance Minister, Piyush Goyal presented the Interim Union Budget 2019-2020 on 1 February 2019 in the Lok Sabha. The highlights of the budget are as follows:

Labour

To provide social security coverage to workers earning below ₹15,000 per month in the informal sector, government has announced "Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan" scheme. A monthly pension of ₹3000 will be provided to beneficiaries upon attainment of 60 years of age. The government has allocated a sum of ₹500 crore for the scheme. While it has proposed ₹750 crore for protection of cows through the Rashtriya Gokul Mission.

Agriculture

Under the new Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme ₹6000 will be transferred to small and marginal landholding farmers in 3 installments who own cultivable

land of less than 2 hectares. The scheme would have a retrospective effect and be effective from December, 2018 benefitting around 12 crore small farmers. For this purpose ₹20,000 crore and ₹75,000 crore have been allocated for financial year 2018-19 and 2019-20 respectively.

News from around the world

Mexico: Unions in 48 factories win 20% wage hike

10 February 2019: After a wave of wildcat strikes across Matamoros, 25000 workers in 48 'maquiladora' factories represented by the Matamoros Industrial Workers and Labourers' Union announced a settlement in which workers won a 20% hike in their wages. The workers also won a one-time bonus of 32000 pesos. With the success in settling a wage agreement, workers in several other factories are also walking out of the factories demanding better pay and working conditions.

Nepal: Hotel workers demand restoration of service charges

5 February 2019: Hotel workers in Kathmandu, Nepal went on strike against government's decision to scrap 10% service charges on food bills in hotels and restaurants. There exists a huge disparity in the government stipulated minimum wages between industrial and service sector workers. Workers in the hotel industry make for the difference through tips in the form of service charge.

Kenya: Over 8000 nurses go on strike demanding better wages

4 February 2019: Over 8000 nurses across the 23 counties of Kenya went on strike on 3 February 2019 under the banner of Kenya National Union of Nurses demanding that government and employers honour the collective wage settlement signed in 2017 which promised hiked wages for nurses.

According to the agreement, the nursing service allowance was to be increased by 3000 Kenyan Shillings (Sh) in 2018-2019 and Sh3,500 in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 which would have pushed the salary of nurses to Sh30,000 by the year 2021.

UK: Hermes workers sign collective wage agreement, company to pay minimum wages and holiday pay

4 February 2019: The app based courier delivery company Hermes signed a collective wage agreement with the GMB union which has a membership of over 15000 workers who Hermes claims to be self-employed. In June 2018, 200 Hermes delivery workers were awarded the status of worker, under the employment law that guaranteed minimum wage, holiday pay, rest breaks and protection against unlawful discrimination.

The new wage agreement which has been termed 'self-employed plus' is the first of its kind in the gig economy. The agreement will ensure a minimum wage of £ 8.55/hour and holiday pay.

Corporate Watch

Adanis fly high

On 27 February 2019, the Adani Group won the public-private partnership (PPP) bid for the operation of Guwahati Airport. The Adani Group has also won the bids for the other 5 airports (Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Mangaluru and Thiruvananthapuram) that the Airport Authority of India (AAI) put up for auction in December 2018. Having no previous experience in running airports, the port to power conglomerate with close ties to the ruling BJP government has in one swoop become the third largest airport operating private entity in India.

All six airports show some of the fastest growing passenger traffic in recent years with 5 out of 6 having grown over 78% since 2014-15.

Therefore, the privatization of airport operations has been strongly opposed by unions but with little avail. Hundreds of AAI employees went on a three-day hunger strike in December 2018 and later in February 2019, they struck en-masse across different cities against the bidding process leading to privatization but the government at Centre went ahead with the process, clearly benefiting a single business house – Adani.