

OF

THE WORKING WOMAN

Joint T. U. Convention

On

Problems of

Working Women

November 22, 1981

Delhi



Air Hostesses

Win

Partial Victory

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Women Protest— Lawyers Withdraw

AS a result of a 300-strong women's demonstration on September 12, against the lawyers defending an accused in a dowry murder case in the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Kanpur, the leading criminal lawyer, Sonkar Nath Dubey, withdrew from the case, followed by the other defence lawyers. On the demand of the demonstrating women, contained in their memorandum, the Youth Bar Association President, P. Saini, has announced that members of his association would appear for the prosecution without charging fees.

* * *

WITHOUT COMMENT

“HAVE your baby during the vacation” is the standing order in Avinasalingam College for Home Science, Coimbatore, where teachers are currently on strike. The college authorities however, will never indicate a firm date on which the vacation will begin. So the married among the 126 women teachers keep their fingers crossed.

Some time back a woman teacher of the college had to go in for an abortion because her delivery time did not coincide with the vacation, and the college would not grant her maternity leave. In fact till recently, marriage meant loss of a job for women teachers in private colleges in Tamil Nadu.

Nor is sexual exploitation a rare phenomenon. Last year a college in Vellore hit the press headlines as one of the Governing Body members demanded that every woman-teacher visit him. Eventually it became a police case when he made advances to the Principal. The college has since been taken over.

* * *

Coir Workers' Long Struggle

ABOUT a thousand persons including some women, representing the coir sector and coir cooperative societies in Kerala, staged a dharna at the residence of the Union Industries Minister in New Delhi on August 21, demanding mainly that this industry employing five lakhs, including four lakh women, and on which a million families depend for their living, be saved from its present slump. In this most sweated, unorganised sector, the work consists of the primary processing stages of retting of green coconut husk, extraction of fibre by beating the husk, spinning of coir yarn either by hand or by spindle, and small-scale weaving of mats and mattings.

Specific Problems

The women who came for the dharna were aware of their specific problems as well as the general problems of the industry. They said that the majority of the husk retting units in Kerala were small-scale units but the larger units, constituting 10 per cent of the total retting units control 80 per cent of the husk. The handspinning sector employing over a lakh workers consists mainly (90 per cent) of women and this work is done in the households. About two lakhs are employed in the beating and spinning of coir yarn, of which again 90 per cent are women and girls. Over 60 per cent of them are hired workers.

Organised Sector

The organised sector of coir manufacture consists of 1000 factories employing 50,000 workers. Since the 1970s, there has been a trend towards break up of big factories and setting up of small scale cottage units—a move directed

against the organised struggles of the workers. This has had an important impact on women workers—their terms of employment, wages, service conditions and status in society. Another development having a direct bearing on the employment of women is the introduction of mechanisation at various levels of production, extraction of fibre, and spinning of yarn. Added to this is the problem of unemployment—only 100 days of work is available each year—and the non-availability and high price of raw material (green or retted husk). According to the President of the Coir Workers Union, Susheela Gopalan, "There has not been a single day when a struggle has not taken place—on the question of raw material prices, minimum wages, hours of work". In their thousands women have participated. For the past four years there has been a continuous struggle against mechanisation. Women have lost their lives during police firing when they were struggling for minimum wages.

Participants In Dharna

The women participating in the dharna said, "Except in the private factories where the wages are Rs. 5-6, in other sectors the wages have gone up to Rs. 7.50. We face the problem of procuring husks. The State Government has only got partial rights to procure this raw material which is in the hands of monopolists. Although the workers' co-operatives offer us minimum wages and better working conditions, creche facilities

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The 'Social Welfare' Centres of Delhi

ALL over in the big and small towns of India, there are small pockets of women toiling at various unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. For the most part they are unorganised, many of them still working in their old age. Consequently, apart from poor working conditions, they are badly cheated in other ways.

Currently the Delhi Coordination Committee is investigating the case of some 800 piece-rate women tailors, working in 30 'Welfare Centres' run by the Delhi Administration. Most of them are well over 60 years of age, some over 70, working for the last 35 years. The payments they receive range from Re. 1 to Rs. 25 per piece, which means approximately Rs. 7 to Rs. 8 per day, for 10-12 hours work at the Centre. Many times they carry the unfinished materials to their homes to complete it by the next day.

The cost of the raw material such as buttons, buckles, machine thread and machine oil and sometimes repair of the sewing machine, has to be borne by them. Over and above this the Delhi Administration makes a deduction of 25 per cent from their meagre monthly income which ranges from Rs. 100 to Rs. 150, before the deduction. The reason for the cut has never been disclosed, though the women have many times asked. However old, they have to carry huge bundles of raw as well as finished material on their heads from the trucks to the first floor—or take another cut. They are of course not covered by any of the labour laws and other protective legislation, do not get any D. A., Provident Fund, etc. They work in very small rooms without proper

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WHAT WORKING WOMEN CAN DO

Letter To The Editor

Dear Editor,

About 6000 employees are working in the pharmaceutical plant, I.D.P.L., a Government of India undertaking, near Hyderabad. In the nearby IDPL township, where over 2000 families reside, there was built a Recreation Club, as well as an open-air theatre and a Community Hall. However, over time the Club was turned into a gambling den where card-playing for high stakes, horse-race betting and Matka became prevalent—and where ultimately alcoholic drinks were also freely consumed. The result was crises in a number of families. In a large number of cases even where the wife also worked, the earnings would run out by the 2nd or 3rd of every month, having been gambled away. Most families consequently became involved in debts at extortionate interest.

The climax was reached about six months ago when an employee with more than a decade of service, the father of four children, reportedly set fire to his wife, under the influence of drink, resulting in the death of the lady. While there was a strong reaction in the township and inside the plant, the recognised Union leaders were hesitant to focus attention on this incident and the other vices apprehending objections from some of the

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Delhi's Social Welfare Centres.

ventilation and light arrangements, no separate rest rooms, not to speak of fans. If a worker falls sick she has to pay for any medical attention, and for want of a rest room will lie down where she is working.

In 1977, despite not having a union or any outside support, these women themselves had gone on a 50-day strike and a two-day hunger male workers. But in the meantime four young enlightened women employees came forward, and at their own expense brought out a leaflet exposing how families were being ruined because of this gambling and drinking, as also the factors behind the death of the woman. Printed in thousands and circulated among the workers and employees, the leaflet caused a commotion and surprise among the leaders and others. But it worked like a wonderful drug. Officials, including the General Manager were annoyed to be caught out on this. The four young ladies were called to the office, but their vigorous attack on the state of affairs led to instantaneous steps to put an end to the use of the Club for gambling and drinking. The families of the township heaved a sigh of relief at this development.

A Woman Employee

strike to press for their demands. Their militancy and courage forced the Administration to concede a wage increase of 33 per cent (their present piece-rates), and gave an assurance that the demands for old Age Pension, medical facilities, etc., would be sympathetically looked into. After waiting two-and-a-half years, they have decided to take up the fight again, but this time, because of the intervention of the Coordination Committee, under the leadership of the State Committee of the CITU. A charter of Demands has been submitted to the Lieutenant Governor, Delhi Administration, listing the following demands—coverage under labour laws; increase in the piece-rates, stoppage of the 25 per cent cut and free supply of the raw material; Old Age Pension, Provident Fund, medical facilities, etc., and no discrimination in wages between men and women.

Anti-Price-Rise Protesters Court Arrest

Delhi

OVER 400 women courted arrest at Vijay Chowk near the Lok Sabha/Secretariat complex, on August 5, 1981, to protest against the price-rise. Earlier about 700 women belonging to twelve organisations, had assembled near Gurdwara Rakabganj and marched in procession to Vijay Chowk, shouting slogans, banging empty tins and waving rolling pins. They had wanted to go to the Finance Minister's office in North Block, to present their memorandum. When prevented by the police, they broke three police cordons before being finally arrested.

One of their slogans was,

"Indira raj ki yeh pahchan, nanga, bhooka Hindustan", (The sign of the Indira Government are the naked and hungry people of Hindustan).

The 11-point Memorandum has suggested the setting up of women's vigilance committees in every area, pointing to the success attained in this experiment in other States; withdrawal of the recent hike in petrol, diesel, gas and other petroleum product prices, government take-over of all essential commodities' stocks and wholesale trade in food-grains, regular uninterrupted supply of essential commodities all over the country, a ration shop for every 500 card-holders; a ban on exports of all food articles, and stringent punishment for hoarders, blackmarketeers, corrupt government officials and Ministers.

Organisations Participating

The women's organisations represented included the All-India Democratic Women's Association, the National Federation of Indian Women, the Mahila Dakshita Samiti,

Congress(U) Mahila Front, the Mahila Wing of the Lok Dal, the Janata Mahila Vibhag, the Delhi Coordination Committee of Working Women, Delhi State Janwadi Mahila Samiti, the Delhi State Mahila Federation, 'Manushi', the Indian Federation of Consumers' Organisations and the Delhi INTUC Women's Front. □

Calcutta Rally—

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While criticising the policies of the Central Government, Kanak Mukherjee demanded withdrawal of the recent ordinances, including the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance, warning that otherwise bigger movements of the democratic people would have to be launched. Others who spoke at the meeting included Pankaj Acharya, General Secretary GMS, Bina Guha of the Mahila Samiti, Chinamagi Nag of the AMS, and Sunanda Mukherjee of the NMS.

After the meeting a big procession of women went round parts of the city and came to the Raj Bhavan where the memorandum was submitted to the Governor. The demands included reduction in prices, distribution of essential commodities at controlled prices, strict punishment for blackmarketeers and hoarders, and no imports from abroad. □

RISING UNEMPLOYMENT

The number of women work-seekers registered with employment exchanges was :

December 1979—19.04 lakhs

December 1980—23.45 lakhs

CENTRAL GOVT EMPLOYEES CONVENTION

A working women's convention, held on the occasion of the 6th State Conference of the Co-ordination Committee of Central Government Employees' & Workers' Unions and Associations, West Bengal, called upon the women Central Government employees in West Bengal to organise, to unite and to take increasingly active and leading part in the struggles of the Central Government employees and workers as whole. The convention was held on 6th September, 1981, on the last day of the four-day Conference, in Calcutta, attended by more than five hundred women delegates representing various Central Government employees' organisations.

A draft policy statement was placed before the convention by Anima Banerji of Calcutta Telephones, and seconded by Chaabi Bhattacharyya of Civil Accounts. In all, twenty three delegates participated in the discussions on the policy statement, which was later adopted unanimously. The statement underlined the necessity of organising the women Central Government employees to solve certain special and peculiar problems they have been facing, while joining the mainstream of the Central Government struggles for amelioration of their living and service conditions in general. The statement stressed upon the need of solving the problems of providing creches, transport facilities particularly for those who are put to round-the-clock duty, additional leave reserve, ladies' hostels etc. The convention also called upon the women Central Government employees to build up movements against the dowry system, against use of obscene pictures

of women as objects of advertisement and against the increasing attacks on women.

From the convention a working group consisting of nine members with two joint convenors Anima Banerji and Kshanika Murmu, was elected, to function as an adjunct of the Working Committee of the Co-ordination Committee. Both the conveners become members of the General Council and Kshanika Murmu, was elected to the Working Committee of the Co-ordination Committee.

Sushila Gopalan, MP, Pankaj Acharya, General Secretary of the Paschim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila Samity, Dipen Ghosh and Sisir Bhattacharyya, President and General Secretary respectively of the Co-ordination Committee, and S K Vyas, Secretary -General of the Confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers, addressed the convention. □

United Anti-Price-Rise Protest

On July 30, the women of West Bengal joined in the national campaign with first a rally at the famous Shaheed Minar in Calcutta, from where historic and well remembered struggles have been launched in the past, struggles and sacrifices which ultimately gave rise to the people's Left Front Government of today. Present at the rally were women from the Paschim Bangla Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti, Paschim Bangla Mahila Samiti, Agrami Mahila Samiti and the Nikhilbang Mahila Sangh, presided over by Kanak Mukherjee, M. P., Vice-President of the AIDWA and Editor of the women's magazine, *Ek Sathe*.
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CITU RESOLUTION

THIS meeting of the General Council, August 21-24, notes with grave concern the fast deteriorating conditions, of working women in the sphere of employment due to their displacement on a large scale in those industries where they traditionally constitute a majority while the discrimination in wages, promotions and jobs continues unabated. The unemployment of women has reached the highest water mark with a large section of them being educated.

...It condemns the attacks on the jobs of women workers in Tobacco, Matches and in a number of industries where women are being thrown out by introduction of mechanised processes, despite the Central Government's declared policy that no displacement of workers will take place in the labour intensive industries. It is reported that 50,000 women coal wagon loaders are faced with retrenchment in the Mining Industry, in the near future.

...This meeting takes special note of the serious plight of women in offices and establishments whose working conditions are not satisfactory and need immediate attention of the trade union movement. The air hostesses, doctors, nurses, teachers, professors and others are today deprived of promotion. The sexual harassment of these women is on the increase. They are faced with indignities and insults at the hands of the employers and the Government. This meeting demands an immediate stop to these insults.

...This meeting views with serious concern the increasing incidents of rape and molestation of women workers, of the family members of the workers during their struggles which is being used as a class weapon to intimidate the employees and the struggling workers.

...The General Council indicts the Govt. of India for its failure to provide enforcement machinery as a result of which protective legislation for women workers has remained on paper only.

...The General Council notes that after the formation of the Co-ordination Committees in the States and at the all-India level, we could achieve a number of demands and could bring a number of Trade Unions, women's organisation and individuals together on the issues of security of women, on mechanisation etc. This shows the Co-ordination Committees have come to be recognised by the States and Central Government.

...The Council notes, that despite a little improvement, the participation of women in the unions' activities, their promotion on the higher committees remains still unsatisfactory. The State Committees should pay sufficient attention to this problem and also help the unions to overcome this lag and improve their work.

Convention of Working Women

THE All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women met on August 24, 1981 at Bally, Howrah West Bengal under the chairmanship of the President, CITU, B. T. Ranadive, at the close of the General Council meeting of the CITU. The Committee has given a call for a Joint Convention of Working Women belonging to all Trade Unions, for November 22, 1981, on the eve of the March to Parliament by all Central Trade Unions scheduled on November 23, 1981. The main themes of the Convention will be the general as well as specific demands of working women, and their role in trade unions.

The Committee also decided that classes on trade unionism will be held at the national level at the time of the meetings of the Co-ordination Committee, and at State-level, according to their convenience.

Members expressed their general appreciation of the contents of the Bulletin, which was being well received by working women. Suggestions from the State units for its improvement were discussed.

B. T. Ranadive, while summing up the discussion, emphasised the need for greater attention to be paid to mobilising women workers in trade unions under the CITU and other T.Uns. He pointed out also how middle class employees are slowly being attracted to organised activity by the initiative of the Co-ordination Committee intaking up their problems. □

RIGHT TO STRIKE

IN recent days the Government of India has come out with an Ordinance—the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance (ESMO)—which bans strikes in all 'essential' services,

□

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STRUGGLE TO CHANGE WORKING CONDITIONS

MADHYA Pradesh is among the poorest and most backward States of our country, steeped in equally backward traditions which count women as vastly inferior to men and have made women value themselves as equal to nothing. But the working women in this State led by their union, are finding the strength to break with tradition and organise and fight.

Raibai is one such woman, who has been working in a rice mill in Durg, Madhya Pradesh for the last ten years. She is still temporary, and she earns only Rs. 4.90 a day. Durg has altogether 36 mills of rice, dal, oil, etc., employing more than 1000 workers of whom about a half are women. Most of them are hired on a daily basis. The mills work three shifts, and women are also to be found in the 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. night shift.

Since February of this year a struggle has been on by these workers to improve their lot through their union around the slogans of increase in wages, bonus, regularisation of employment, maternity and other welfare benefits for the women workers, and no night shift for women.

Following a dharna outside the Bombay mill, on February 8 and a large procession in which men and women participated, the mill-owners declared a lock-out. When the owners also refused to pay the due wages, workers in all 36 mills came out on strike. After eleven days, the management agreed to negotiations

which began in the presence of the Additional Collector on February 22.

While negotiations were in progress, Raibai, still out of work, was called to the mill on some pretext, and once in, was set upon and beaten by the sons of the owners. On hearing of this, the workers immediately filed a complaint with the police and demanded arrest of the culprits. When nothing was done the workers decided to again sit on dharna. At night whilst they were sleeping, they were again attacked by the same Girijanand Jha and three other owners. The police again refused to intervene.

Ultimately in the agreement signed between the Union and the Association, only one of the three demands pertaining particularly to the women workers could be achieved: provision of separate toilets for men and women, but not abolition of night shift for women, or payment of maternity benefit and three months of leave.

The management agreed to regularising employment but is still to implement this. Meanwhile Raibai and about 100 other men and women have been dismissed, and forced to find work elsewhere on a casual, contract basis. Legal charges for violence and creating disturbances are still pending against them whilst many women are being forced to seek work everyday in a different mill under an assumed name. Even under such difficult conditions they have not given up their demands, and are mobilising for further struggle. □

HIROSHIMA, AUGUST 6, 1945

ON August 6, 1981, an annual service was held at Peace Park, Hiroshima, Japan, to mark the 36th anniversary of the dropping of the world's first atom bomb over Hiroshima in 1945, which killed more than 200,000 people. Peace Park is built at Ground Zero, the centre of the bomb blast. Some 40,000 people attended the ceremony, including representatives of families of the atom bomb victims from the various districts, as well as foreign guests. A minute's silence was observed at 8 15 a.m., the exact time of the dropping of the bomb 36 years ago.

At the outset the names of 2,753 victims whose deaths were confirmed over the past year, were added to the roster kept in the cenotaph. The roster now contains the names of 100,717 victims who have lived excruciating lives and died in pain from the after-effects of the Bomb.

Preparation For Attack

Hiroshima. August 6, 1945. A soft morning. A day like any other day, until that ghastly moment of atomic bomb blast.

On August 2, the super-secret Order of the Day 13 was signed by President Truman. It assigned U. S. Strategic Air Force Squadron 22 to the bombing of one of three Japanese cities, with Hiroshima as the priority target and Kokura and Nagasaki as the reserve targets. None of them were objectives of strategic importance. But then the Americans were not out to hit military strong-points; only to demonstrate the potential of the atomic weapon. The six biggest cities in Japan had already suffered heavy bomb damage; they were crossed off the list from the outset. There remained Hiroshima, Kokura, Nagasaki, Niigata and Kyoto. Niigata was too distant from the first three. Kyoto was eliminated when the Secretary of War, Stimson, pointed

out that it was a cultural and religious shrine of the Japanese, and wiping out this temple city would only turn the Japanese people even more against the United States!

On August 3, Hiroshima, Kokura and Nagasaki were blanketed by heavy clouds. The zero-hour was put off. The weather forecast was more favourable for August 5 and 6.

The five-ton A-bomb, dubbed "Little Boy", was to be delivered by a plane commanded by Colonel Paul W. Tibbets. It was to be escorted by two B-29s, one of which was to drop over the target area devices to register the power of the explosion, and the other to attend to the aerial photography. If the visibility at the prime target was not good enough, the three planes would head for the reserve targets.

At 2.45 a.m. on August 6 the lead plane was air-borne. The others followed at two minute intervals.

At 7.09 a.m. the scouts reported that the sky over Hiroshima and Nagasaki was cloudless. Hiroshima's fate was sealed. No air-raid alarm was given when the planes approached; U.S. planes had often flown over the city but had never dropped any bombs, and the Japanese thought this time was no exception.

At 8.13 a.m. Tibbets entered the bomb run. At 8.14 a.m. the bomb bay flaps opened. In the blue of the cloudless sky a parachute blossomed out and swiftly descended under the five-ton weight of "Little Boy". At 8.15, when it was 500 metres from the ground the detonator mechanism went into action.

The Atomic Blast

A second sun burgeoned out over Hiroshima. A lethal sun that in a flash snuffed out 94,000 lives; the remains of some 80,000 were later identified, the rest were vaporized without trace. City block after city block was

THE FIRST ATOM BOMB

reduced to ashes, which the blast wave carried to a height of several kilometres.

The attack came at breakfast time when cooking fires were going in a great many houses, and the blast wave turned the stoves into torches that in an instant enveloped wooden structures in flames.

The tragedy of Hiroshima is difficult to put into words. Iri and Toshiko Maruki, both recipients of the International Peace Prize, describe it thus: "A blinding flash, an explosion, the senses stunned, a rush of scorching wind and in another moment everything around bursts into flame. The silence that sets in after the terrible crash, the like of which has never been heard before, is broken by the crackle of the fire storm.

Worse Than Death

"In that moment incinerated clothes fall off people, their arms, faces, chests swell, crimson welts appear and burst, the skin peels off in strips to the ground. With arms upraised they mill about, filling the air with their cries of agony. An infant lies on the ground beside its dead mother. But no one has the strength to come to its assistance, pick it up. Stunned and covered with burns, driven to madness, people blunder about in a screaming mass, blindly seeking escape."

Hiroshima did not perish at once. It became a place where the maimed were to envy the dead as they died a hideous, slow, agonising death. Every one who could still run, walk or crawl was frantically searching for something—water, or a doctor, or something to ease their pain, or their near and dear ones.

"The living were an even more fearsome sight than the dead", one eyewitness described the scene of horror. "Men and women with emptying eye sockets crawled in the streets, groping their way by memory towards the

river to quench a maddening thirst....They no longer looked like human beings, but rather like maggots that had fallen from the trees into the pavement."

But when President Truman was handed the message of "complete success" in the dropping of the "Big Bomb" on Hiroshima, he called for champagne to "celebrate".

At 11.02 a.m. on August 9 the plutonium-charged "Fat man," thus named in honour of Winston Churchill, destroyed Nagasaki, killing 70,000 people, severely injuring tens of thousands more.

The 'Sickness'

Then came the 'radiation sickness'; nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, thirst, fever, diarrhea in the first week; in the second week, hair falling out, the gums becoming painfully swollen, the white-bloodcell count falling sharply—death. For others, radiation damage to the body's immunity system: unusually thick scars on cuts and burns; premature ageing, eye cataracts, and a high rate of blood disorders, leukemia and other cancers. Many children born in the days and weeks after the blast were retarded, microcephalic (with small heads) and stunted in growth.

Against Nuclear War

This is the devastation of the first two A-bombs and let it not be forgotten that by today's thermo-nuclear standards, these A-bombs were puny and primitive.

Thirty six years later at the anniversary meeting, Hiroshima Mayor, Takeshi Araki, appealing to the world to continue to strive for peace, stated a simple but undeniable fact: "The possession of nuclear weapons can no longer guarantee the security of the human race. Only total nuclear disarmament can guarantee security and thus pave the way for peace." Women who form nearly half the human race, must say we want no more such holocausts, no neutron bombs—We want peace, not war.

Gujarat

- ★ Convention of Agricultural Women
- ★ Against Contract Labour
- ★ Transport Facilities
- ★ Protest Against ESMO

A Convention of women in agriculture was held in Walia, Bharuch district on July 23, 1981 on the initiative of the Co-ordination Committee to mobilise the women agricultural workers and see that their demands are taken up and supported by the Kisan Sabha. More than a hundred women participated, speaking on their conditions and formulating their demands. In effect, the system of bonded labour continues; women work, on an average, 12 hours a day, are in debt and very much exploited by the landlords. The women of Sabarkantha, having fought with great militancy against the landlords, are now able to move freely around the area.

* Women in the textile industry had actively taken up a sustained campaign for their demands : against the contract system and retrenchment, for equal wages, and creche, maternity and other benefits. Gate meetings were held at a number of places at Monogram, Anant, Soma Textiles, Bihari, New Swadeshi, Bansidhar, Aryodaya and Calico Mills; cases were filed with the Labour Commissioner, etc. As a result in some mills they have made substantial gains. In Arvind Mill for example, from the previous Rs. 3 to Rs. 4 per day they received under the contract system, they are on page eighteen

Rajasthan

- ★ Dharna at Assembly
- ★ Strike at Jaipur Nurseries, Ankur Carpet (PVT)
- ★ Solidarity with Andhra Tobacco Workers
- ★ Boycott for Bride-Burning

JOINTLY organised by the Kamgar and Janwadi Mahila Samitis, a demonstration and day-long dharna of more than 300 women took place at the time of the last Assembly session to protest against the unprecedented price rise, molestation of women, and rampant corruption in Rajasthan. A seven-member delegation met the Minister of Welfare and Education to present the memorandum on the above questions.

* When women in Jaipur Nurseries, working there for the past 25-30 years, tried in September last year to form their union, over 95 among them were retrenched. For nearly two months, the protest strike continued, led by the Union and supported by the Kamgar Mahila Samiti. In the agreement finally reached with the management, ending the strike, 25 of the women have been re-employed on a permanent basis.

* For more than three months, from May to August, 1981, women workers who constitute the majority in the Ankur Centre—a private carpet manufacturing factory—have been on strike for improvement in working conditions. On the request of the owner, the police on page eighteen

Increasing Entry of Women into Hosiery Industry-Ludhiana

THE woollen hosiery industry in the industrial town of Ludhiana, is becoming a large employer of women—25,000 women of various age-groups coming mostly from the city and contributing a substantial part of the total family income.

Initially the women were given work on a contract basis. They used to take the woollen yarn home and make various packages to be used in the knitting industry. By and by, factories started appointing women on daily wages and found them to be good workers, better “disciplined”.

They handled several types of jobs, including embroidery work, stitching of garments, buttonholing and yarn winding on cones. Of late, the factories have started hiring young educated ladies, assigning them the ‘higher’ jobs, such as inspection of finished goods. They enjoy better pay and better working conditions.

Limited Promotion

Women workers are also now being accepted in the spinning mills, till recently the domain of male workers. They draw the same wages as men and do equally good work, under hazardous conditions. The majority are from Punjab, with a sprinkling of women from U. P. The average wage of the woman worker here comes to Rs. 250 per month: those looking after spinning machines draw a higher wage of Rs. 400 to 500 a month, and handle the automatic link machines. But beyond this there is blockage for no facility exists for imparting further training.

NURSES HARASSED IN PATIALA

Nurses in the Government Rajendra Hospital Patiala, are being subjected to a high degree of harassment as a result of the recent successful opposition by their Nursing Association to an order to shift the examination centre from Patiala to Ludhiana and Jullundur. This has not been to the liking of certain elements in Patiala who obviously receive political backing. As a result the nurses’ hostels were forcibly entered and the student nurses attacked on the night of June 28, July 2, and July 7 with the help, unfortunately of two residents of the hostel. One of them Saroj Kumari, though earlier expelled, was again allowed readmission to the hostel by the Medical Superintendent. Such behaviour is intolerable and unprecedented in the long history of this institution where parents have confidently been sending their daughters for nursing training

According to press reports among those caught red-handed roaming the hostels, arrested and later released on bail by someone said to be a close relative of a Minister, were the Deputy Superintendents, Police and Jails respectively. Simultaneously many false charges of corruption have been filed against many student nurses.

Sri Chander Sekhar, Convenor of the Co-ordination Committee of the Rajendra Hospital Employees has in a press statement on July 19, condemned these attacks and the readmission of Saroj Kumari to the hostel.

The Patiala nurses are receiving support from other parts of Punjab.

FIRST STATE CONVENTION All-India Democratic Women's Association

WITH the first State-level Convention held on June 1,2,3, 1981 at Bangalore, the Karnataka State Unit of the AIDWA came into existence. One hundred and ninety seven delegates, representing twelve districts, consisting of agricultural workers, beedi workers, sericulture workers, teachers, bank employees, house-wives, students, research workers and journalists, attended the three-day Convention.

The Convention began on the evening of June with the hoisting of the flag by Laxmamma, militant agricultural worker from the Dharwar Agricultural University. Inaugurating the Convention, under the presidentship of Dr. Anupama Niranjana, a well-known Kannada writer, Smt. Susheela Gopalan, M. P. General Secretary of AIDWA, outlined the conditions of women in India, their exploitation, how Governments which have ruled India since Independence have done almost nothing to uplift women, even to implementing their own rules and legislation. She made an impassioned plea that women must be made aware of their exploitation, why it continues to exist; they must organise themselves and fight to assert their rights, get the existing laws and legislation strictly implemented, and more benefits and legislation enacted in their favour. Until and unless women take full part in social production, total emancipation cannot be achieved. But, she added, while organising and fighting against their exploitation, women must join the other democratic movements and thus help in the total transformation of society.

Issues at the Convention

About thirty delegates participated in the

discussion, guided by a Presidium of three— S. Malathi, Leela Hagaragi and Shamala— which continued for two days. The delegates recounted their experiences, put forward the needs and demands of various sections of women, and their suggestions for action. The resolutions of the Convention summing up these demands, included among others—

- the setting up of a Women's Commission to go into the non-implementation of legislation on women, and also to give suggestions to improve the condition of women.
- Protesting the price-rise and demanding supply of essential commodities at cheap prices through a massive public distribution system covering cities and villages.
- Provision of water facilities throughout the State.
- Abolition of the Devadasi (temple prostitutes) system and provision of alternative employment to them.
- Eradication of the dowry system.

A sixteen-member State Executive Committee inclusive of six office-bearers, was elected at the close of the three days, with Devaki Warriar as President and N. Gayathri Devi as General Secretary.

On the evening of the concluding day, June 3, a procession in which hundreds of women participated, culminated in a public meeting at Chiklal Bagh, presided over by Mary Devasia, ex-President of the State NGO's Association, and addressed by Susheela Gopalan, Vimala Ranadive Secretary, National Co-ordination Committee of Working Women and a Vice President of the AIWDA, and Dr. Anapuma Niranjana. □

LAXMAMMA *IS THIS JUSTICE ?*

LAXMAMMA, on whom fell the proud privilege of hoisting the flag at the First Democratic Women's Convention in Karnataka, works as a labourer on a Government silk farm just outside Bangalore. For eight hours a day Laxmamma has to finely cut up leaves of the mulberry trees on which the silk worms are fed. The rearing of these trees is strictly reserved for men. For this monotonous, though exacting work, Laxmamma and the other women workers receive Rs. 3.65 a day as against Rs. 4.90 per day given to male labourers which makes a monthly salary of less than Rs. 110. The total workforce on the farm is only 46—20 women and 26 men.

In the sericulture industry as a whole women constitute about 40-45 per cent of the workforce, still classified as a 'temporary hands'. That means that no benefits. If she falls sick, she has to bribe the doctor to obtain a

certificate in order to retain a lien on her job. There is no facility for even drinking water on the farm, let alone any separate toilet and rest rooms.

A member of the Tolaghatpura Panchayat for a number of years and a staunch activist of her union, Laxmamma made a forceful speech at the Women's Convention on the conditions and demands of sericulture workers. Almost casually she added, "I will be paid only Rs. 70 this month, since I will lose wages for attending the Convention. But I do not mind. I am proud to come here. This also is my work".

The pure silk that comes out from this and other farms of Karnataka is of high quality and world-renowned. Laxmamma was correct when she said, bitterly. "The silk sari is sold in the market for five hundred, some for fifteen hundred rupees and more, while we are paid not even a hundred and fifty rupees. Is this justice?"

Is this indeed justice? And for how long can such 'justice' be tolerated? Must we not fight to change it all? ☐

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SELLING AGENTS :-

Writers Building, Govt. Employees' Co-op. Canteen & Stores Ltd., Writers' Building.

West Bengal Dairy Employees' Head Quarter's Co-op. Stores Ltd., Calcutta-1.

New Secretariat Buildings, Govt. Employees' Co-op. Canteen & Stores Ltd. Calcutta-1.

M/s Dogra & Co. Artillery Road, Bangalore.

SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S DAY

NINTH August this year, sees the 25th anniversary of the day when 20,000 women marched on the Union Buildings, Pretoria, to protest against the extension of pass laws to women. This demonstration was one of the biggest and most moving in the history of the African peoples' struggle—20,000 women standing in silent protest for 30 minutes, right hands held aloft in the African National Congress salute, while their leaders delivered a protest petition to J.G. Strijdom, the then racist Prime Minister of South Africa. The silence was broken only by the cries of infants on their mother's backs, until, at the end of the demonstration, freedom songs rang through the amphitheatre of the bastion of the apartheid regime.

Stalwart Leaders

At the head of the march on the Union Buildings were the late Mrs. Lilian Ngoi, President of the African National Congress Women's League and the South African Women's Federation, 74-year old Mrs. Helen Joseph, Secretary of the South African Women's Federation, and the first person to be placed under house-arrest in 1962 under the heinous General Law Act, and who is still under restriction, and Fatima Moosa and Sophia Williams symbolising the unity of the different racial groups in the fight against oppression.

Federation of South African Women

The demonstration was organised by the Federation of South African Women, formed in Johannesburg in April, 1954. At a time when the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Congress, and the Congress of Democrats, were undertaking joint

activities, it was a logical step to form a women's organisation embracing all the different racial groups.

The Pass Laws

In spite of the size of the demonstration and the vast opposition to the new laws throughout the country, the regime was determined to bring about what all previous governments had failed to do—extend the pass laws to African women, requiring them to carry passes when going through White areas.

The pass laws remain in force to this day—an essential element of the continued oppression of the African people. But the mood of the people has changed and is today one of militant determination to end the apartheid system. To this end they are ready to confront the enemy on every level. In the ranks of all those groups of militants who are fighting apartheid today can be found women, drawn into the struggle by women's organisations and the general involvement of the masses. They will fight on till victory is theirs.

Solidarity With the Women of South Africa

To commemorate this historic event and express the solidarity of Indian women with their valiant sisters in South Africa, Vimal Ranadive, on behalf of the All India Coordination Committee for Working Women has sent a message of greeting to the Federation of South African Women, expressing complete identity of goals and full support to the Women of South Africa in their grim struggle for a free and non-racial South Africa.



★ THE BATTLE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS ★ INSIDE CANADA

THOUSANDS of women across the length and breadth of the USA are in battle for the final stage to incorporate the Equal Rights Amendment into the American Constitution (ERA). The brief text of the Amendment runs: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex".

The Amendment, in order to be ratified as law, must be approved by 38 States of the Union. ERA activists have till June 30, 1982, to lobby three more State legislatures to approve the Amendment, to reach the total. However, no State has passed the ERA since Indiana in early 1977, and five State legislatures have reversed their earlier endorsement and voted to withdraw approval. Prospects for passage in the remaining States are somewhat dim.

Reagan Against Equal Rights

The difficulties faced by the National Organisation of Women—NOW—which is leading the campaign, reflect the changing political mood. Unlike his six predecessors, *President Ronald Reagan opposes the ERA*; Congress is considering proposals that would roll back regulations designed to enforce equal opportunity measures, and the Supreme Court in several subtle yet significant rulings, has indicated a willingness to tolerate sex distinctions under existing laws. NOW is therefore, stressing the fragility of women's rights in the absence of a constitutional guarantee of equality.

Nation-Wide Grass-Roots Campaign

New membership in the organisation has more than doubled—to 7,500 a month—since Reagan's election. For the final push, NOW plans a nation-wide grass-roots campaign, to raise 15 million dollars, recruit two million volunteers and compile computerised lists for mass mailing and phone-lobbying efforts.

The real test will come in the recalcitrant States where approval hinges on a handful of votes. Many legislatures won't convene again till next year; in others, Illinois for example, a three-fifths majority is to be obtained; in North Carolina, a gentleman's agreement by thirteen male legislators prevents lawmakers from even debating the ERA till after the deadline passes; in Georgia, the ERA was resoundingly defeated last year and is once again in committee in the House. But the opposition, led by the Speaker, seems adamant.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

In July last, in a long-awaited report, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reiterated its own call for the Equal Rights Amendment. Without it, the Commission Said, "State, local and Federal Government (s) ...have not taken ...and most likely will not take the steps necessary to rid their laws, policies and practices of the sex bias..."

With barely nine months left, NOW has vowed to fight on until the deadline for ratification passes.

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GUJARAT

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now getting Rs. 7 along with whatever benefits are available under the Factory Act; in Mihir Textiles, the women won a ten per cent Bonus and pay arrears of Rs. 500 per worker; in New Cotton Mills, from the previous Rs. 4 for a 10-hour day, they now get Rs. 23 for 8 hours' work and in Nile Mills, Rs. 15 per day. On the intervention of the Co-ordination Committee, orders have been passed by the Labour Commissioner for the setting up of creches. Mobilisation of the women and unions must now be undertaken to get these orders implemented.

* Under the auspices of the Co-ordination Committee, a deputation will meet the Chief Transport Officer to demand 50 per cent reservation of seats in buses for women, and Ladies Specials in the peak hours.

* A dharna of working women in mills, factories, offices, banks, LIC and women school teachers has been arranged to protest against the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance. □

Coir Workers' Dharna

(from page three)

etc., here too employment days are restricted owing to shortage of raw material". The attempt of the unions and the State Government is to change this industry into an organised sector. As the women said, "Although we have inherited a long tradition of struggles our economic base and bargaining power is restricted owing to the fragmentation of the industry." One of them stated, "We have no rest from struggles. Even to come to Delhi for the dharna was not an easy task for me. My college-going daughter is alone at home and I managed to persuade my mother to come and look after her while I was at Delhi. My mother was also apprehensive but I told her—Look you should be proud of me. I've been elected by the CITU to represent the cooperative, and they are paying my fare."

RAJASTHAN

from page twelve

intervened to try and stop the strike, in the process behaving rudely with the women. A 400-strong rally of women again led by the Kamgar and Janwadi Mahila Samitis demonstrated outside the police thana demanding from the DIG an immediate enquiry into the police misbehaviour with the women strikers.

* In Chowtha women were asked to boycott the family of the in-laws of Radhe, suspected of having been murdered for not bringing enough dowry. As a result of the boycott, the police have taken up the case for enquiry.

* At the call of the All India Co-ordination Committee, protest telegrams have been sent to the Prime Minister seeking her intervention against the installation of leaf-threshing plants in the tobacco industry of Andhra Pradesh. □

The Right to Strike

from page eight

and gives Government the right to declare any industry or occupation an 'essential service'. In equally categorical terms the entire organised trade union movement in the country has expressed its determination to fight this Ordinance, and the Bill to replace it. All over the country protests are being organised which will culminate in the mass **March to Parliament** on November 23, 1981.

Working women everywhere must give full support to these protests and actively participate in the actions called by the united trade union committees at various levels. This Ordinance and the proposed Bill to replace it, constitute a severe attack on the democratic right of the people to defend their living standards. Only the united might of all working people, men and women, can defeat this move and ensure that the working people retain this right won through hard struggle. □

E. C. Calls For 'Demands Day' September 29

THE meeting of the Executive Committee of the All-India Democratic Women's Association was held in New Delhi on August 18 and 19, 1981, under the chairmanship of its President, Manjari Gupta, and attended by members from Andhra, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

At the outset the meeting paid homage to the memory of Madame Soong Ching Ling, the outstanding democrat, patriot and leader of the Chinese people and revolution, and Honorary Chairman of the Chinese People's Democratic Republic.

Reports from States

The report of the General Secretary, Susheela Gopalan, as well as the reports from the States showed that the organisational work of setting up AIDWA has been completed or is in hand; reporting on the March 1981 founding conference and its resolutions is being extensively carried out, and according to the capacities of the Statewise units, the programmes of the Association have been taken up in all the States. They show that large numbers of women have been roused by these programmes and slogans and responded with

enthusiasm and determination on issue relating to protests on price-increase, communal amity, against social atrocities and violence against women, on distribution of essential items and on the recent ordinances promulgated by the Government, or as in Kerala, study classes for activists and setting up of Balwadis.

Future Programme

The future programme outlined by the Executive calls for intensification of mobilisation on these issues as well as the issues of communalism, casteism, parochialism, on the issues of wife-beating and alcoholism, employment of women, protective legislation, for extension of democratic rights and for peace.

The medium of street plays was suggested for propagating and educating men and women on the question of dowry; and the conducting of simple and dowryless marriages by the women's organisation. Special emphasis was laid on linking the women's struggle with the general democratic movement, and initiating and guiding research work in women's studies.

To focus and coordinate this work all over the country, it was decided to observe a Demands Day on September 29, with a special appeal to all women's organisations for joint action on women's demands on this day.

The Murderers of Chhabirani Mohapatra

On July 13, eight of the twelve accused in the case relating to the rape and murder of Chhabirani Mohapatra, wife of the journalist, were sentenced to life imprisonment, and another three to various terms ranging from one month to one year. Nabakishore Mahapatra is the Correspondent for the Biridi Block of Cuttack District of the Oriya daily *Pragativadi*, published from Bhubaneswar. Because he had reported on corruption by a local businessman and the

local Congress(I) leaders, he was hounded and his life threatened. It was whilst fleeing to his village with his wife and small child, that they were caught whilst crossing a river. Chhabirani was gang-raped and then killed.

Following the judgement and even prior to it, the Additional Sessions Judge K.C. Kar, who delivered the judgement, has been receiving telephone threats to his life.

AI & IA Air hostesses' Partial Victory

THE Supreme Court's judgement on the conditions of service of air hostesses in Air India and Indian Airlines, is to be welcomed by all interested in securing equality for women in all spheres. Striking down the AI and IA regulations on retirement at 35 and 40, as well as the pregnancy bar on service of air hostesses, the Court has ruled that air hostesses can work up to the age of 45, subject to medical fitness, and has directed the management to suitably amend the regulation on pregnancy. The Court observed in this regard that the argument that air hostesses should be young, attractive and possessing pleasing manners, is an open insult to women, in bad taste and proof of denigration of the role of women. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who some time ago told a delegation of air hostesses, that "40 is too old for an air hostess, and only in very exceptional cases do women keep their looks and figure", should note some of these observations of the Bench of the Supreme Court.

Contrary Comments

Welcome as these decisions are it should at the same time be noted that the judgement and some of the comments go contrary to the principle which the air hostesses in particular, and women's organisations generally were upholding, and which formed the basis of their petition to the Supreme Court.

Firstly, that the retirement of air hostesses before the age of 58—the retirement age for male cabin crew—was discriminatory on the basis of sex. The Supreme Court however, has expressly stated that the service rules do not violate the sexual discrimination guarantees in Article 15 and 16 of the Constitution because the statute prevents discrimination made "only on the ground of sex" and does not

prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex coupled with other considerations. And further, that although air hostesses are part of the cabin crew, "they are entirely a separate class" governed by different "sets of rules, regulations and conditions of service". In fact it would appear that it is only because the Court held that AI and IA form a single unit, and the retirement age in AI, with extensions, goes up to 45, that this particular age limit has been fixed upon.

Secondly, while the Bench characterised the provision for termination of service on first pregnancy as outrageous mockery, holding that pregnancy was not a disability but an "immutable characteristic of married life", termination of services on third pregnancy, provided her two children are alive, has been sanctioned. Further it has upheld sacking an air hostess if she marries within four years of joining service—from the point of view of her health and of family planning. The legitimate question that can be asked is why should such measures be taken in the case of air hostesses when they are not ordinarily taken in respect of women working in other general and specialised fields? More basically, the question concerns the extent to which personal issues like marriage and parenthood ought to be allowed to affect an employee's continuation in service—the same issue that was raised in the recent controversy regarding Indian Foreign Service rules.

Thus while welcoming the changes introduced by the Supreme Court, as a step forward in the battle for women's rights, the air hostesses backed by working women and women's organisations, will have to continue their pressure to win full equality.