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THE WORKING CLASS

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**DELHI
CHALO !**

**MARCH
TO
PARLIAMENT**



**9TH
MARCH
2000**



**RALLY
A MILLION
PEOPLE !**

NPMO

SAVE THE PSU: SAVE THE COUNTRY PSU WORKERS' STRIKE ON 2ND FEBRUARY

The public sector workers all over the country are going in for a one day strike on 2nd February, 2000. The strike call was given by the Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions (CPSTU), the united platform of Public sector workers.

FOR LONG DRAWN STRUGGLE

The extended meeting of the CPSTU was held in New Delhi on 16th December last which outlined the present course of the struggle of the public sector workers. The main issues identified for the united struggle are: 1) all forms of privatisation and disinvestment 2) non-revival and closure of sick PSUs 3) non-payment of wages in many PSUs 4) retrograde Govt guidelines on wage revision 5) attack on trade union rights and labour laws.

On the basis of the above demands, the CPSTU resolved to prepare for nationwide indefinite strike of PSU workers and decided to hold a National Referendum among the public sector workers on 11th January seeking their active support for long drawn direct action, including strikes in the days to come. The CPSTU also decided to go in for a one day 'Warning Strike' in the PSUs to demonstrate the determination and firm resolve of the public sector workers to resist the anti-national bid of the Govt at the centre to sell out the Public sector and thereby put the entire country on sale.

The referendum held among the public sector workers on 11th January, seeking their opinion for long drawn direct action including strike has received enthusiastic response among the mass of the public sector workers in the country. Referendum could be effectively organised even in the areas where trade union movement is not that strong and evoked unexpected response even from the workers not affiliated to constituent units of the CPSTU. As per reports received so far at the CITU centre, in most of the places, overwhelming majority of the PSU workers responded in the affirmative to the call for long drawn direct action including strike against the anti-PSU and anti-national policy of the Govt. The other constituent organisations of the CPSTU also confirmed a similar trend. This clearly indicates the increasing urge, among the mass of the public sector workers, for a militant struggle and also

deeper realisation among them on the real face of the disastrous policy of the Govt on PSUs and the concerned workers.

Precisely in this background, public sector workers are going on for one day warning strike on February 2nd, all over the country. It is the warning to the Govt for retracing its policies, and at the same time it is also a prelude to and warming up for a long drawn battle against the wretched conspiracy to wipe out Public sector from the industrial map of the country by any means. The manner, situation is developing, it warrants much widespread militant long drawn struggle to build up effective resistance to the misdeeds of the miscreants in the governance, to the ploy to wipe out PSUs and enslave the most organised section of the working class.

STRUGGLES AHEAD

In this background, the workers all over the country are already on the path of grim struggle and the public sector workers are also joining them in a big way. The strike of the oil-sector officers on 11th January, the five day strike action of the Port & Dock workers from 18th January and above all the heroic strike of the UP Electricity workers since 14th January, braving all onslaughts have already sent the message that the working class is not going to tolerate the offensive against the interest of the country and her people lying down. The public sector workers' countrywide strike on 2nd February is going to add an important dimension to this series of struggles, besides it being a prelude to a long drawn direct action programmes to save the public sector and save the country.

ATTENTION PLEASE:

CITU
ALL INDIA WORKSHOP
ON ORGANISATION
13,14,15 MARCH, 2000
Venue:
Com. B T RANADIVE BHAWAN
Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg
Near ITO
New Delhi-110 002

COVER PHOTOGRAPHS
NPMO CONVENTION, 20TH JAN. 2000
COURTESY: J BALLABH

THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

FEBRUARY 2000

ALL IN THE GAME



Of course, I said we'll have to create favourable conditions for Clinton's visit — It doesn't mean you go about with an ink bottle and pen, ready to sign anything...

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*)

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EDITORIAL

THE PEOPLE ON THE MOVE ...

' NATION ON THE MOVE '

- This was the caption with which the Government of India released a full page advertisement in the national dailies on 21.1.2000. The occasion was completion of hundred days of NDA Government. But for this advertisement, notably there was no celebrations by the NDA parivar. Nor was there any up-beat mood in the BJP camp. This subdued passing off of the 'achievement' of completing 100 days of returning to power by the Vajpayee led Government is not without reasons.

As many leading commentators in the print as well as tele-media pointed out, this Government had nothing close to count as achievement except the 100 calender days.

Rather, the Government was reeling under the ignomy of its cow-down to the hijackers, with the Union Minister for External Affairs acting as an escort to the freed terrorists, with leading stalwarts in the Government singing differing tunes on this sordid episode.

That was not all.

The nation was really on the move - but on a different direction; a direction that the ruling polity could, in the least, digest.

- * Oil Officers strike
- * UP Electricity Employees strike
- * Port & Dock strike
- * Rajasthan Govt. employees strike
- * J & K govt. staff strike

- all these struggles and more in the offing, loudly proclaimed that whatever be the Parliamentary majority backing for the so called reforms, the Government can not rest on its oars.

It has to face the wrath of the people.

The scheduling of polls in the States of Bihar, Haryana, Orissa and Manipur, well ahead of the budget session also is not without significance. The Government fears it will have no face to go before the people after the budget for 2000.

Not only the Government, even the media appeared to have been dumb-struck by the spring of strike struggles engulfing the country. But, the BJP Government has only exhibited its worst anti-labour character, in dealing with these strikes. Indiscriminate use of NSA, ESMA, armed forces, unleashing repressive measures, manifestation of arrogance and intolerance, marked the behaviour of this Government and its utter disrespect to democratic norms.

The most atrocious facet of this undemocratic behavior is the slanderous, insinuating remark of the Power Minister, the *neo-covert*, Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, terming the UP strike as 'mafia' inspired and financed! He and those of his tribe, in the seats of power, need and will be taught appropriate lessons.

Whatever be the immediate outcome of one or the other of these strikes, one thing is certain:

People of India, particularly its toiling masses, have awakened. They have started echoing the war-cry: "stop these anti-people, anti-national policies!"

CARRY FORWARD THE SURGING TIDE OF STRUGGLES!

Against the backdrop of the surging tide of strike struggles sweeping different parts of the country, the National Platform of Mass Organisations held a largely attended All India Convention in New Delhi on the 20th January, 2000.

Over 5000 delegates representing workers, kisans, agricultural workers, women, youth and students participated in the convention, held at the special pandal erected on the sprawling lawns adjoining the Constitution Club on Rafi Marg, New Delhi.

The convention was chaired by a presidium comprising E Balanandan (CITU), J Chittaranjan (AITUC), A D Nagpal (HMS), Srilata Swaminathan (AICCTU), Bhim Singh Puri (UTUC) Ramesh Sharma (UTUC-LS) Krishna Das MP (DYFI) K Varadarajan (AIKS), Nagendra Nath Ojha MP (AKMU), Kavita Krishnan (AISA), N P Upadhyaya (GIEAIA) Pillai (AIKS) Harish Sharma (BEFI) and V A N Namboodiri (AITEU Class III (N)). The convention commenced its proceedings by observing silence in homage to the victims of the super cyclone that devastated Orissa recently and adopted a condolence resolution. It also called for continuing contributions for the relief operations which are still needed in large measures.

A B Bardhan, Vice President, AITUC, moved a resolution in support of the ongoing struggles of the UP State Electricity Board Employees, all India strike by Port & Dock workers, strike by Government employees in the

States of Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir. The resolution also pledged full support of the NPMO to the proposed countrywide one day strike on 2nd February 2000 by workers of the central public sector units, at the call of the CPSTU. E Balanandan, President, CITU, supported the resolution and exhorted all constituents of the NPMO to rally the masses in solidarity actions throughout the country. The resolution was carried amidst thunderous applause and militant slogans.

The convention also noted the decision of the electricity officers and employees to stage a 24 hours strike throughout the country on 24th January extending support to UPSEB employees' strike.

The convention voiced its full throated condemnation of the repressive measures resorted to by the Central and State Governments to deal with these strikes, particularly the use of ESMA, NSA, armed forces in a bid to break the strike. That the striking workers have bravely faced them with exemplary courage was a fitting rebuff to the government and the administration.

A declaration outlining the anti-people, anti-national policies pursued by the BJP led Government at the centre and listing out the urgent demands of all sections of the masses was circulated at the convention. It also placed the proposals for an action programme as the next phase of movement and agitation. (The full text of the declaration is published separately).

Speakers representing all the constituents of the NPMO endorsed the declaration and the action programme.

The list of speakers included: K L Mahendra (AITUC), M K Pandhe (CITU), Swapan Mukherjee (AICCTU), Abani Roy MP (UTUC), Swapan Bikas Roy (UTUC-LS), R A Mital (HMS), Mohan Singh Rajput (TUCC), Hannan Molla MP (AIAWU), Jagmati (AIDWA), Amarjeet Kaur (NFIW), Atul Kumar Anjan (AIKS), V Tyagi (HMS), S C Mishra (AIRF) Subod Sharma (AIMS), Shyamal (AIDSO), Samik Lahiri (SFI), Satyavan (AIKKMS), Kumudini Pati (AIPWA), Lal Bahadur Singh (RYA), Sukomal Sen (AISGEF), Tarakesh Chakraborty (AIBEA), S R Saini (AIIEA), Srinivas (AISF), R L Bhattacharya (NFPE), S K Vyas (CG Emp Confd), Ramakant Pandey (Fertiliser Fed).

The convention heralded the forthcoming phase of countrywide mass movement jointly by all the mass organisations to reverse the economic policies and defeat the communal designs of the government.

The highlights of the action programme adopted by the convention is a march to Parliament in New Delhi on 9th March 2000, with a targetted mobilisation of more than a million people. A countrywide general strike will be staged on a date to be announced at the 9th March rally.

A group of young activists, belonging to Direct Action Network, from the USA, attended the convention to

MARCH TO PARLIAMENT BY A MILLION PEOPLE!

pledge their support to the Indian movement against neo-liberal globalisation. They were: (Ms) Liani Reinbold, Harley Shuford and David Taylor. They

were invited to the dias and introduced to the delegates, who greeted them with cheers. Jana Natya Manch staged *Nukkad* a street drama at the

end, which exposed the imperialist designs and the saffron brigade's servitude to them.

NATIONAL PLATFORM OF MASS ORGANISATIONS

ALL INDIA CONVENTION

20th January, 2000, New Delhi

DECLARATION

The National Platform of Mass Organisations (NPMO) comprising seven central trade unions, industrial and several employees federations and organisations of peasants, agricultural workers, youth, students, women and other professionals of various affiliations, in its national convention held on 20th January, 2000 at New Delhi, expresses serious concern at the fast deteriorating situation since the BJP led Govt. has come to power.

The Govt. is pursuing a retrograde economic policy inspite of the protest expressed by the people through a countrywide general strike on 11th December 1998.

The inflation rate is declining, yet the same is not reflected in the prices of consumer goods. In spite of the estimated GDP of 6.5 per cent, the people below poverty line have increased to 43 per cent in 1998 compared to 38 per cent in 1997 even

according to the NSS. Whatever growth has been there, it is jobless growth. On the contrary large numbers have lost employment due to closures and voluntary retirement schemes.

Due to liberalisation and reduction in tariffs, coal is imported, while coal from our companies remains unsold. SAIL, a profit making concern is suffering losses due to dumping by some countries. The foreign direct investment comes either in consumer goods or for takeovers through mergers. The airports are being privatised and next the ports will be privatised. Vital sectors like Power and Telecom are also being privatised, thus handing over our infrastructure to big business.

The globalisation and neo-liberalisation have increased poverty and unemployment in all developing countries including India. The model dictated by the IMF and World Bank is only in the interests of the MNCs. In an attempt to appease

ACTION PROGRAMME

The Convention congratulates the port & dock workers for launching countrywide indefinite strike from January 18, and extends full support to the decision of public sector workers to go on countrywide strike on February 2. It also congratulates the strike of U P electricity employees, and the state employees of Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir and condemns the repression let loose on them.

The Convention unanimously adopted the following programmes of movement and agitation.

- * Holding of state/district level Conventions to be completed by February, 2000.
- * Massive rally of mass organisations before Parliament on 9th March, 2000.
- * Countrywide General Strike during second phase of the next budget session, preceded by nationwide satyagraha, padayatra, dharnas by mass organisations (date of strike to be notified later on).

The Convention appeals to all patriotic and democratic sections of people from all walks of life irrespective of affiliation to join the initiative and programmes of NPMO *enmasse* to cry halt to the anti-national policies of the Govt. and save the country's economy and the people from disaster.

the developed economies, the Govt. has post haste opened up the insurance business, which has no technological requirement, for the private sector and foreign direct investment. There is a proposal to reduce the Govts share in Banks to less than 50 per cent. The non-performing assets of banks have reached an astounding figure of over 50,000 crores and the big defaulters, the big business houses responsible for the same, are demanding closures of loss making banks and disinvestment of the profit making ones.

Public sector industries are to be brought under joint sector or privatised by disinvestment. The Govt. has adopted the Patent Bill, which will adversely affect our Chemical and Pharmaceutical industry and agriculture. It will endanger food security of the country.

Big business and MNCs are being allowed entry even into the small scale and tiny scale industries. The big business wants to survive and increase its profits by passing on the burdens to the working class. They want policy of hire and fire and legalisation of contract labour. The 2nd National Commission on Labour has been asked to recommend amendments to labour laws to suit the policy of liberalisation.

For the first time, developing countries wanted review of the decisions taken by WTO and opposed linkage of trade with social standards and environment. The developed countries have included the fast developing countries into the group of 24. There is need for vigilance to guard against a possible compromise and surrender by India.

The peasantry is already suffering because it is more and more getting under the control of MNCs with the genetic terminated seeds, import of fertilisers and the pesticides which are controlled by the multinationals. The peasants are groaning under indebtedness while the rural elites are not even taxed.

Education is being commercialised and also communalised. History is being re-written and text books are also being prepared with the communal ideology.

Sexual harassment of women is on the increase

DEMANDS:

- 1) Reformulate the Economic Policies to benefit the people and the country.
- 2) Halt reckless entry of Multinational Companies in Indian Economy and their unfettered game of take-over and acquisition.
- 3) Stop privatisation, disinvestment,

and so also the attack on dalits and tribals.

Increasing unemployment is the biggest problem that our youth are facing. The Govt., both central and states have stopped filling up of vacancies. Going back on the agreement between the Central Government Employees' Organisation and the earlier U F Govt., the present NDA Govt. have already issued notification to abolish the existing vacant posts and to impose 10 per cent further cut in staff strength in all departments and banned recruitment in Govt. services, and also stayed all promotions for an unspecified period of time.

This situation is being utilised by the communal and fascist forces to divide the working class and the democratic movement with a view to secure the interests of landlords, big business and the multinationals.

The National Platform expresses serious concern over the Govt's move to review the Constitution with a view to formation of Presidential form of Government and a fixed 5 years term for the Lok Sabha. Its move is also to undermine the secular foundation of the Constitution. The NPMO condemns such anti-democratic and anti-secular moves.

The NPMO further condemns the BJP Govt. for capitulating to the US imperialists and expressing its desire to serve as its junior partner in the globalised economy.

By the latest agreement with the USA, it has further exempted import duties on several agricultural and consumer items to serve its interests. This will further affect the Indian peasantry and the small scale industries.

People in various fields are conducting struggles. The port & dock workers, the coal miners, the public sector workers and the officers in the public sector, the students, the youth and women are agitating on their demands.

In the above circumstances this Convention of NPMO has decided to step up countrywide action plans and long drawn struggles of various sections against the retrograde anti national and anti people policies of the Govt.

The Convention, therefore, calls upon all the mass organisations to organise countrywide campaign and agitation on the following demands:-

- corporatisation and downsizing of central and state public sector units and Govt. departmental work. Rescind the steps already taken in this direction.
- 4) Reopen closed industrial units and revive the sick ones by providing adequate and immediate financial inputs and ensure their proper functioning with workers participation in management.

- 5) Protect small scale and traditional Indian industries from the onslaught of the big business and grant financial, fiscal and structural support for them.
- 6) Check price-rise in real sense, strengthen public distribution system, supply adequate quantity and quality of essential commodities at subsidised prices to economically weaker sections.
- 7) Re-introduce Essential Commodities Act and take action against hoarders and black marketeers.
- 8) Take appropriate legislative and administrative steps to bring landlords, both feudal and capitalist, into the tax net. Increase direct taxation on monopolies, MNCs and Corporates, and reduce indirect taxation to the benefit of mass consumers.
- 9) Initiate strong action for recovering unpaid loans from the nationalised banks. Also take concrete action for recovering/confiscating huge black money running into several thousand crores.
- 10) Take speedy measures to implement thoroughgoing land reforms, plug loopholes in land ceiling legislations, distribute ceiling-surplus and *benami* lands to the landless and protect the interest of the share-croppers.
- 11) Step up public investment for agri-infrastructure development, research and irrigation; Ensure availability of adequate credit to agriculture; write off all debts of agricultural labour and poor peasants, ensure marketing facilities, remunerative prices and comprehensive crop insurance for poor peasants, and adequate subsidies for agrarian inputs. Curb liberal import of agricultural products and consumer items to protect the Indian agriculture and small scale industries.
- 12) Introduce comprehensive Central legislation for agricultural labour.
- 13) Introduce Right to Work as a fundamental right under the Constitution. Ensure payment of unemployment allowance. Increase funds for rural development schemes, employment guarantee schemes and food for work programme and provide for strict monitoring to ensure that the benefits reach the poor.
- 14) Withdraw ban on recruitment and downsizing Govt. staff strength and fill up all vacant posts in the Govt.depts/PSUs and other places.
- 15) Make education a fundamental right in the Constitution and ensure free and compulsory education to all. Stop commercialisation and communalisation of education. Step up budgetary allocation for education to 10%. Ensure democratic rights of the academic community to

elect respective unions and to represent in the governing bodies of all educational institutions. Pass the 83rd Amendment Bill.

- 16) Adopt 33% Women's Reservation bill as it is, without further delay; take concrete measures to prevent atrocities against women and take stringent action against perpetrators of crimes and sexual harassment at workplaces; ensure equal property right to women and guarantee pattas jointly in the name of husband and wife and ensure implementation of equal wage for women workers and also all the protective legislations.
- 17) Take speedy measures for abolition of child labour in all forms.
- 18) Guarantee the rights of dalits and tribals; take stringent action against perpetrators of atrocities against them. Fill up the backlog of SC/ST quotas in employment.
- 19) Modify the existing terms of reference of the Second National Commission for Labour and reconstitute the Commission in consultation with all the Central Trade Unions and organisations of peasants and agricultural labour.
- 20) Guarantee minimum wages above poverty line with automatic linkage to price index and regular periodical revision and progressively increase it to need based level. Suitably amend the Minimum Wages Act and place it in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution.
- 21) Curb all media and cultural programmes which violate secular values, dignity of women and glorify crime and violence. Prevent entry of MNCs in the media sector.
- 22) Halt nuclear weaponisation, stop arms race, refrain from signing the CTBT and NPT.
- 23) Take stringent action against all involved in corruption deals, particularly those holding public office.

ON DISINVESTMENT OF GAIL SHARES

Dipankar Mukherjee, MP(RS) wrote to Union Petroleum Minister Ram Naik on 20-12-99:

"... You have assertively told the house that Govt has sold only 6.5% of 13.5 crore GAIL shares to ENRON and British Gas Company out of which 5% were sold to Enron and remaining 1.5% to British Gas Co (page 400 of Rajya Sabha proceedings dt 8-12-99). I am afraid the Parliament has been totally misinformed..."

The Minister replied on 25-12-99:

"... I quoted number of shares sold to them. Enron have been sold about 5% of GAIL's equity and British Gas about 1.5% of GAIL's equity, which is approximately 84.5 crore of shares and not 13.5 crore of shares, as correctly pointed out by you. It was a genuine mistake...."

STRIKE BY PORT AND DOCK WORKERS

As the talks in the Ministry of Transport with five federations have failed, over one lakh port and dock workers all over India in eleven major ports will go on for indefinite strike from 18th January.

The Minister of Surface Transport refused to agree to give any commitment on minimum demands even.

All the federations, therefore, have no other alternative but to give a call for indefinite strike from 18th January, 2000."

This was the message sent out in a joint statement by Dr. Shanti Patel, (All India Port & Dock Workers' Federation (Workers)), S.R. Kulkarni, (All India Port & Dock Workers' Federation), G. Kalan, (Indian National Port & Dock Workers Federation (INTUC)), V.V. Rama Rao, (Port & Dock & Water Workers Federation of India (AITUC)), M.M. Lawrence and M.K. Pandhe, Water Transport Federation of India (CITU).

Within minutes, over one lakh Port and Dock workers in all the major ports in India unitedly downed their tools from midnight of 18th January 2000. The strike call was jointly given by 5 recognised Federations.

UNITED RALLIES

The work in all the major ports, i.e. Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Kandla, Goa, Mangalore, Kochi, Tuticorin, Visakhapatnam, Paradip and Nhava Sheva came to a grinding halt and the entire export import traffic of the country was paralysed. Big rallies of workers were held in all the Ports showing the unity and determination of the workers to fight a long drawn battle.

Despite the efforts of the Port

administrations to use Indian Navy to break the strike, the port operations could not be undertaken. In Kochi, attempts were made to use the Navy to remove the ship, but workers protested and resorted to dharna to oppose the move of the administration.

In Calcutta, the CISF was used to lathi charge peaceful demonstrators resulting in injury to 29 striking workers. In Mumbai, the Home Guards were used by the administration but workers opposed the use of black legs and prevented them from undertaking Port operations. No other instance was reported anywhere and the strike, by and large, was successful.

ADMINISTRATION

Though the national wage agreement in Port & Docks was to take effect from 1st January, 1998, for nearly two years no headway was made in bipartite wage negotiations due to the recalcitrant attitude of the administration. The matters were made worse when the Government of India gave a directive that the agreement should be valid for 10 years. The common charter of demands jointly submitted by the 5 Federations could not be settled despite holding 12 meetings.

The decision of the Government of India to privatise the major Ports has only added fuel to the fire and all the trade unions opposed this move. The Government has already allotted some jetties to P&O and other MNCs.

The Port administration's proposal to form a smaller group to negotiate with the management failed to yield any

result, since the management could not improve its offer and clause of 10 year agreement period was made a pre-condition for the settlement.

STRIKE NOTICE

The situation became intolerable when the administration continued to repeat the same offer and negotiations could not progress much. The Five Federations, therefore, were left with no other alternative but to give a call for indefinite strike from 18th January, 2000. They called upon the workers to serve strike notice through joint demonstrations on 29th December, 1999.

Massive demonstrations were held on 29th Dec, 1999 all over the country which reflected the fighting mood of the workers.

After serving the strike notice, the Ministry of Labour kept silent for 12 days and only on 10th January, 2000, the conciliation proceedings were started. It was, however, clear that major issues involved in the dispute were arising from the policies of the Central Government which the Regional Labour Commissioner (Central) could not settle.

MAJOR ISSUES

Throughout the period, the Ministry of Surface Transport was behaving like a silent spectator. It did not make any effort to take the issue at the Cabinet level and get the Government guidelines changed. It was only on 17th January, 2000 that the Minister of Surface Transport, Rajnath Singh, convened a meeting of Trade Union leaders at New Delhi. Despite discussions lasting for about 10 hours, the matters could not be clinched.

The trade union leaders proposed the following terms for settlement:

1. The agreement should be signed for a period of 5 years only.
2. The rate of House Rent Allowance should not be reduced for any Port as sought for by the administration while removing its ceiling.
3. The Port allowance, which was earlier offered by the management but later withdrawn, should be given as offered earlier.
4. All the pending issues of the previous agreement should be settled within 3 months of signing the settlement or should be referred to arbitration.
5. All allowances should be paid to the workers with effect from 1st January, 1998.
6. The Common Charter of Demands submitted by all the Federations jointly should be settled within one month.

IMPASSE UNRESOLVED

The Minister expressed sympathy with the demands but did not agree to a single issue on the spot. He only wanted time to pursue the demands. The Minister orally agreed with the demands but refused to give any assurance in writing. His appeal for deferring the strike without giving any tangible commitment left no other alternative to the representatives of trade unions but to give a call for strike.

In JNPT Nhava Sheva, the last shift on 17th January was to start at 11 p.m. while in Mumbai, the 1st shift on 18th January was to commence at 12 midnight. While the talks were going on at New Delhi till 10.30 p.m., the workers were waiting at the gates of these two ports to get instructions from Delhi.

The message for the strike was

conveyed to all the ports at 10.30 p.m. on 17th January and the strike commenced amid shouting slogans against the policies of the Government of India.

The Minister of Surface Transport had a telephonic talk on 1st morning with Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister, Government of West Bengal. Jyoti Basu expressed the opinion that the matter can be resolved only if a meeting of the Port and Dock workers leaders is called by the Prime Minister, as the policy

issues will require the decision of the Cabinet.

REPRESSION LET LOOSE

Reckless use of naval forces, army, coast guard, CISF, Home Guards and Police against the strikers has evoked strong reactions among the working class all over the country. The solidarity actions among other sections of the working class emerged all over the country. The repressive measures of the Government made the workers more determined to fight these policies.

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The strike by Port & Dock Workers in India draw instant support across the globe:

The WRTU, in a statement from Prague on 20th January, 2000, said: The World Federation of Trade Unions, on behalf of its members in all continents is expressing its resolute solidarity with the struggle of port and dock workers of India and supports their just demands.

The WFTU is addressing the Government of India not to deploy military to break the strike and urging the Government of India to bring about negotiated settlement with port and dock workers immediately.

The WFTU calls upon its members and friendly trade unions all over the world to follow resolution of labour conflict in India and to express their solidarity and support to the striking Indian workers.

The President of TU International of Transport Workers, Nasr Zarif Mouhrez in a message from Damascus on 19.1.2000, said:

The Trade Union International of Transport workers representing more than 19 millions transport workers in five continents expresses its full support and fraternal solidarity with the struggling Indian Port and Dock workers and their trade union federation for obtaining their legitimate rights and just demands.

TUI of Transport workers greets the unity of trade unions concerned and appeals to the Government of India to conduct immediate negotiations aiming at bringing about fair agreement and to refrain from any repressive measures that may harm The Indian national interests or cause complexity of situation.

Jim Nolan, Chairman of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, from Liverpool, Great Britain said on 20.01.2000:

On behalf of the Liverpool Dockworkers, their families and supporters we send our congratulations to India's Port & Dock workers in their struggle for better pay and conditions.

We would like to offer help and assistance in publishing your dispute to the wider International Dockworkers Movement.

The support given to us by the Dockworkers and Seafarers of Indian during our 28 month dispute will always be remembered.

The CITU wrote a letter to George Fernandes not to use naval personnel to suppress the strike.

The leaders of five Central trade unions, Viz., AITUC, BMS,

CITU, HMS and INTUC, along with Michael B. Fernandes of JAF, Bangalore, also in a letter dated 19.01.2000 urged George Fernandes, as a former trade union leader, to refrain from

using the armed forces against the striking workers and curbing their fundamental rights, specially during the Port and Dock strike, on moral grounds.

STRIKE STEERED TO SUCCESS

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions warmly congratulated one lakh port and dock workers for the magnificent unity they have achieved during the six day long strike which commenced on 18th January 2000 to press for the Common Charter of Demands submitted by the five recognised Federations.

Despite several attempts made by the Government of India and administrations of 11 major ports to suppress the strike, it was complete due to remarkable unity achieved by the workers. In Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (Nhava-Sheva) the police arrested 9 leaders of 3 major unions in the ports. In Calcutta, the CISF lathicharged on the striking workers a number of times, and in other ports similar efforts were made. But the determined workers made the strike successful. Several trade unions expressed firm solidarity with the striking workers which boosted the moral of the workers.

Seeing the high morale of the workers determined to fight a long drawn battle, the Minister of Surface Transport, Rajnath Singh had to convene a meeting of the 5 recognised federations to discuss the demands of the workers.

As a result of the strike the Minister had to ultimately agree to implement the earlier commitment given (but subsequently denied by the port authorities) regarding Port

Allowance (in lieu of CCA). The workers of Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai and JNPT will now be paid at the rate of Rs 300 per month whereas the workers in Visakhapatnam and cochin will get Rs 200. The workers in other ports, viz. Marmagoa, Paradip, New Mangalore, Tuticorin, Kandla and Haldia will be paid Rs 100 per month with effect from 1st January 1998.

Regarding House Rent Allowance, the Minister had to accept that the existing rates would be continued while the ceiling would be raised from existing Rs 400 to Rs 1000, Rs

600 to Rs 1500, Rs 1000 to Rs 2000 and Rs 1200 to Rs 2400 which would cover most of the employees.

Regarding the non-implementation of the previous wage settlement, the port authorities wanted to avoid the issue altogether. However, due to the insistence of the 5 Federations, the Surface Transport Minister had to agree to ensure its implementation while non-settled issue would go to arbitration.

The Minister had to agree that no worker would be victimised for participating in the strike while the absence during the strike would be adjusted towards their leave.

The Water transport Federation of India (CITU) felt that the language of the assurance given by the minister on 5 year agreement and payment of HRA with effect from 1st January 1998 was vague and expressed its reservation to be recorded. Similarly, the question of referring some issues raised by the port administrations regarding manning scales, employment of workers anywhere in the port and productivity norm— was proposed to be referred to adjudication. WTWFI and PDWWFI felt it was not proper to include these issues since the strike was on workers demands only. On this issue also the CITU recorded its reservation. However, in the interest of unity of the workers, the CITU and

HMS GOLDEN JUBILEE CONFERENCE

The Golden Jubilee Conference of Hind Mazdoor Sabha was held in Mumbai on 24.12.1999. Over 2000 delegates and top leaders of HMS from all over the country participated. International delegations from several countries, ILO and ICFTU & its affiliates also attended. M K Pandhe greeted the conference on behalf of the CITU and pledged to carry forward the joint struggle against economic policies and communalism, of which the HMS and the CITU are the sponsors, along with other trade unions and mass organisations.

AITUC federations decided to withdraw the strike along with the other Federations.

The CITU considers that the Central Government was forced to give some concessions to the workers due to complete strike which practically paralysed all the 11 major ports. This unity must be strengthened further so that through united movement

the non-settled issues of the workers can be settled by 28th February 2000, as decided by the agreement.

All the five Federations should strive together that 5 year settlement is positively achieved by 31st March 2000. The question of arrears payment of HRA must also be implemented by that time.

The unity of the five Federations in Port and Dock industry is worth emulating by unions in other industries so that countrywide united movement can be organised in different industries all over India. The CITU appeals to all unions to draw this lesson from the success of the port and dock strike in the country.

GOVT SLASHES DOWN INTEREST RATES

The Business Standard on 15.1.2000 reported: In its pre-budget move, the government yesterday pruned interest rates on provident fund (PF) by 100 basis points to 11 per cent and on other small savings schemes including those with the post office, National Savings Certificate, National Savings Scheme and Kisan Vikas Patra.

Radical Reduction		
	Previous	New
Public Provident Fund	12	11
NSC-VIII	12	11
NSS 1992	11.5	10.5
Post office deposits		
1 year	9	8
2 years	10	9
3 years	11	10
5 years	11.5	10.5
Monthly income account	12	11

The CITU flayed the interest rate reduction in a statement which said:

The Government of India's decision to reduce the interest rates on small savings schemes and public provident fund from 12 to 11 per cent is yet another big blow against the common people and workers which has been dictated by big business corporates in the country. The move will hit hard the small investors, particularly the senior citizens, who prefer these Government investments for safety of their hard earned superannuation benefits and seek modest revenue therefrom. This is the second time that Yashwant Sinha as Finance Minister had resorted to such a measure. The Big Business in the country, had all along the years been demanding lowering of interest rates on PF funds. This was their pet slogan of demanding a "level playing field" vis-a-vis their global competitors.

This retrograde move by the Union Government will lead to diversion of people's savings to private debt and equity options. In recent years, there had been a spate of private non-banking finance

companies failing their investors, who were left high and dry, after being lured by offer of higher interest returns. Such unscrupulous and speculative private finance companies will flourish, as a result of the government decision.

In the post-economic reforms period, despite failures on several fronts, Indian economy could boast of a strong fundamental in the high growth of small savings. The Government decision will ruin that fundamental strength also. It is ridiculous to read reports of Government directing banks and post offices to stop accepting deposits on these small savings schemes.

Mobilisation of small savings for the Government schemes had been one of the main sources of State Governments in their bid to manage their fiscal problems. The Government of India move will thus hit the State Governments also very hard. The Union Government bias against State finances is evident from the fact that it had not accepted even a related recommendation of the Planning Commission to allow the State Governments to retain 100% of the small savings with them.

The CITU strongly denounces the cut in interest rates on small savings and demands of the Finance Minister to restore the rates to pre-1999 levels immediately.

The All India State Government Employees' Federation also described this reduction as "done at the behest of the monopoly houses."

It pointed out that "this would immediately harm the poor people and the pensioners who depend upon the monthly interest on their small deposits in Post Offices. Moreover, it will cause financial loss to the State governments also."

This move is also dangles like a Damocles' sword on the Employees' Provident Fund subscribers as well. The Finance Ministry is only marking time. It has to be vigilantly resisted.

UP POWER WORKERS STRIKE

The authoritarian attempts of the Uttar Pradesh Government to trifurcate the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board (UPSEB), and ultimately privatise it, has met with strong opposition from its more than 80,000 UPSEB employees, and the widely-supported indefinite strike against the draconian move had continued for eleven days.

Despite large scale dismissals, arrests and all repressive measures, the strike continued. The support for the strike had come in from all democratic sections. The Northern India Power Engineers Federation (NIPEF) demanded an immediate withdrawal of all laws such as the MISA, ESMA, NSA, etc., and gave a call for work to rule from the midnight of January 17 up to January 21 and hold protest meetings. This Federation includes the engineers' associations from Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan.

The major trade unions at the national level, held an emergent joint meeting on January 17, to review the situation arising out of the UPSEB engineers and employees strike. The meeting was attended by E Balanandan (CITU), H Mahadevan (AITUC), R K Bhakt (BMS) and R A Mittal (HMS). These trade unions strongly condemned the repressive measures being adopted by the UP government to break the strike. They demanded for immediate withdrawal of the black laws and initiation of a dialogue with the employees.

Expressing serious concern over the enormous hardships being caused to the consumers,

increasing with every passing day, the trade unions demanded the Prime Minister to personally intervene to resolve the matter, and immediate release of all arrested employees.

As no positive steps were taken by the government, the senior leaders of the central trade unions including E Balanandan (CITU), H Mahadevan (AITUC) participated in the satyagraha in Lucknow on January 19, and courted arrest. Further, a call for nationwide solidarity action was given for January 21.

The Northern India Power Engineers' Federation warned that if there was a cascading collapse of the grids, the consequences would be far reaching, possibly plunging the whole of North India into darkness.

Already, by January 16, the northern grid frequency was down to 47.85 cycles/sec as against the normal cycle of 50, due to non-generation in UP.

Any further decline in generation in the entire northern region for any reason would have led to collapse.

The NIPEF condemned the UP government for its high-handedness with its employees who were in fact fighting the World Bank-led restructuring, which aims at benefit of the private vested interests, particularly the

MNCs. The UP government, the NIPEF stated, was hiding the facts from the people of the State. The reforms being carried out by the government were based on the report of the World Bank Consultants, Putnam, Hyanes & Bratletts Inc. This report had recommended that by the current year (at 1994

constant prices), the tariffs should be raised over the current rates by the following percentages.

Domestic - 549.6 %

Agriculture - 612.8%

Public Lighting - 420.7 %

Public Water Works - 254.7%

It is obvious that such massive hikes are intolerable. Apart from the rise in electricity charges, they will lead to a general price-hike, as water charges and the local bodies taxes will, as a natural consequence, be hiked. It is these hikes that the UPSEB employees were fighting.

These reforms are being imposed on 60 lakh consumers of the State as on the employees, without taking them into confidence. In this argument against the proposed measures, the electricity engineers have given the example of NOIDA, where with privatisation in the electricity sector, losses have increased by Rs 100 crore. The concerned private company has dragged the UPSEB into unnecessary litigation. Now the Government wants to repeat the act in Kanpur.

The Federation had given notice that engineers and employees will not allow the reforms, or privatisation in UP or any other state, where the employees and the consumers are not taken into confidence.

Regretting the hardships being caused to the people, the federation had stressed that the strike was not to serve any vested interests of the employees, but for the restoration of the rights of the nation and its people. It had appealed to the Prime Minister to personally intervene in the matter and prevent any further

losses to the electricity sector. But the BJP-led Governments at the centre and

in the State, stuck to their harsh stand, making the possibility of resolution bleak.

and threatening the power crisis in North India taking a serious turn. electricity workers and power

ALL ROUND SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

The CITU on 15.1.2000, congratulated the more than eighty thousand employees of UP State Electricity Board, from the Engineers to subordinate staff, who were on strike opposing privatisation moves by the BJP Government in the State and the trifurcation of the SEB operations in generation, transmission and distribution. The CITU condemned the repressive measures resorted to by the UP Government, by way of large scale arrests, threats of dismissal and cutting off supply of essentials, including drinking water, to the staff colonies. CITU strongly condemned the threat by UP ministers that Army and other service personnel would be deployed to break the strike, if the employees did not withdraw the strike. This threat, took draconian in nature, away the democratic rights of the employees. CITU demanded that the State Govt must halt this repression, give up the World Bank and IMF directed path of privatisation of the SEBs and, instead, negotiate with the striking unions to work out ways and means to maximise the efficient operations of the SEB. The All India Power Engineers Federation (AIPEF), DVB Engineers Association (DEA), Power Engineers Association (PEA), NTPC Executives Federation of India (NEFI), Federation of BHEL Executives Associations (FOBEA) and National Confederation of Officers Associations of Central Public Sector Undertakings (NCOA) in a joint

statement extended support to the striking employees of UPSEB. They expressed "serious concern about the fact that the Govt. of Uttar Pradesh is trying to force major structural changes in the power system of Uttar Pradesh and that too under pressure of the World Bank and to serve the interest of private vested interest particularly the Multinationals."

The All India State Govt. Employees Federation also "congratulated the workers and engineers of U.P. Electricity Board for their heroic resistance against privatisation and strongly urged the U.P. Govt. to stop repression and victimisation of the employees and settle the strike immediately."

The All India Power Engineers Federation which consists of Engineers Associations of all the State Electricity Boards extended full support to the UPSEB strike.

In a statement on 20.1.2000 the Federation said:-

"The All India power Engineers (AIPEF) cannot be a silent spectator to all this. The AIPEF hereby notifies to the Governments of Uttar Pradesh and the Government of India that if by the midnight of the 23rd they do not reach a settlement with the SEB engineers and employees who are on strike, AIPEF, through this resolution, hereby directs all its constituents to go on a strike on the 24th and if the situation warrants the strike may also be extended."

On 24th January, over five lakh

engineers all over the country went on strike in solidarity with the striking electricity workers of UP.

Hundreds of workers demonstrated before the office of the Union Power Minister at New Delhi. The demonstration was addressed by M K Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, K L Mahendra, General Secretary AITUC, Mukund Gore, Secretary, BMS, Aparna, President, IFTU (Delhi), S N Deshpande, General Secretary, Maharashtra Vidyut Karmachari Mahsangh (BMS) and S B Bharadwaj, Secretary CITU.

The leaders of four central trade union organisations, viz., the AITUC, BMS, CITU, and HMS congratulated the electricity workers and engineers of all affiliations for the solidarity strike on 24th January. In a joint statement dated 24.1.2000, they noted: "According to information received so far, complete strike of the electricity workers was reported in Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh while work to rule was organised in other states."

They appealed to the working class of all affiliations to strengthen the unity achieved in the strike and prepare for countrywide movement against the policies of privatisation.

**STOP PRESS !
THE UPSEB STRIKE
ENDED 25TH JAN. LATE
NIGHT. DETAILS IN NEXT
ISSUE**

THE STATE OF INDIA'S CHILDREN DISMAL

Around 41% girl children in the age group of 6-14 years are out of school.... the proportion being as high as 60 and 62 per cent in Rajasthan and Bihar.... Caste Poverty through out the region(India) defying the the laws that prohibit its practice, are stripping well over 160 million people in India from their rights.....

In respect of "under 5 year mortality rate" India's rank is 49(From worst to better order) out of 191 countries...Maternal mortality ratio in India still remains high at 410 per 1 lakh live births....while malnutrition accounts for 50% children below 5 years being underweight

67 million children in the country do not have access to basic education and nearly 360 million Indians will enter the new millennium unable to read and write...

(The State of World Children 2000- UNICEF, The Financial Express, 26-12-99)

AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT EXPECTED TO DECLINE

Production of agricultural commodities is expected to decline by 2.9% to 200.10 million tonnes in 1999-2000 season from that of 1998-99 season, according to Mumbai based Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy(CMIE)....Growth in foodgrains in particular is expected to drop to a negative 1.4%....

(The Observer, 12-01-2000)

INDUSTRIAL GROWTH DIPS TO 3.3% IN NOVEMBER' 99

Just when industry, the Govt and the markets felt good about a recovery, statistics of industrial growth for November 99 seems to spoil the party. The index of industrial production stood at a measly 3.3%. This is a major slump from 8.7% rate recorded in October 99 and over 5% growth during corresponding month of the previous fiscal. The primary reason for the slip is a lackluster performance by the manufacturing sector(3.4%) coupled with negative growth rate in the mining sector(-0.8%)... The growth in the capital goods and intermediate sectors slipped down to 3.8% and 0.9% respectively in November 99 as against 13% and 9.5% in November 98.....

(The Economic Times, 13-01-2000)

JOBS KILLED, VRS GALORE...

Companies across the board were obsessed with the idea of getting trim for reduced cost...And the common agenda to meet the goal...is VRS to entice workers. If companies did not have money, they were willing to mortgage all their belongings to fund the VRS...

In Hindustan Levers Ltd's Lakme factory at Deonar at the suburban of Mumbai, all 250 employees except four workmen took VRS and the factory was closed just a year after the HLL took over the factory from the TATAs....

HLL has retired over 9000 employees in the last few years, mostly from companies it acquired, which includes Brook Bond, TOMCO, Industrial Perfumes and Lakme. The list includes Lever's own factories in spite of an increase in production volumes....

Siemens was able to oust about 2200 employees in the same process....

(The Financial Express, 31-12-99)

LABOUR : THE 'VILLAIN' OF REFORM ?

..... Our labour laws deny the firms the flexibility they need, to operate successfully in highly competitive markets.

Enterprises do not have flexibility to retrench labour or close down a particular unit in the company in response to changing market condition without getting prior Govt approvals. Labour laws also specify service rules which govern employment and which cannot be changed very easily....

Therefore, the Indian industry needs flexibility... to downsize workforce when needed, and also to restructure and reorganise businesses through sale, acquisition and merger. The present labour laws are a serious impediment to this process..... The provisions relating to contract labour also need to be amended. They make it difficult to contract out services which have to be performed on the premises. Greater flexibility is also needed in this area also for the companies unwilling to increase their own labour force.....The existing labour laws actually discourage growth of high quality employment even in the organised sector...

(Montek Singh Ahluwalia, member, Planning Commission to The Financial Express, 31.12.99)

DEBT SERVICING HAS RISEN TO HIGH LEVEL

The domestic debt servicing burden has escalated to unreasonably high level, according to Currency & Finance Report(1998-99) of Reserve Bank of India.....Interest payment already pre-empt 49% of the revenue receipts of the Central Govt and 20% of the State Govts.....

(*Business Standard, 31-12-99*)

BURGEONING FISCAL DEFICIT

The Centre's fiscal deficit has reached 81% of the budgeted estimate to Rs 64459 crore... Revenue deficit during first eight months of fiscal 1999-2000 was 84% of the budgeted estimate....The increase in the deficit is caused by a shortfall in Govt's revenue receipts...the Govt has been able to raise only 47.5% of the targeted tax revenue....The high fiscal deficit so far indicates that target of 5.5% of GDP set in the budget is likely to be missed...

(*Business Standard, 4-01-2000*)

PROFITS GALORE: ALSO TAX EVASION & GOVT CONCESSIONS

The Economic Times' study of the working of 300 large companies, during the entire period of liberalisation since early nineties as published on 5-01-2000 further reveals that,

* Corporate houses and MNCs garnered huge profit, much higher to their contribution in material and service production. That is why net profit increased at a faster rate than net sales.

* The net profit level of these companies both Indian and foreign have been all along higher than Gross profit. This explains the extent of liberal concessions granted by the Govt to the business lobby during the period of liberalisation.

* During last ten years time the MNCs could increase their net sales by almost 322% whereas their excise duty payments increased by only 197%. The Indian Corporates could increase their net sales by 303% during the same period and paid excise duty by 222% more. During the same period the MNCs gross profit increased by 369% in absolute terms whereas their direct tax obligation increased only by 305% and for the Indian Corporates, the figures of increase in gross profit and direct tax obligation are 336% and 223% respectively. This explains the extent of tax evasion by the big business and the MNCs over and above liberal concessions granted to them by the Govt.

* Despite increase in net profit by 21.7% during the decade ending 1998-99, the wage cost for the concerned companies increased by only 15% on the annualised average. This, along with their almost negative contribution to employment generation and also the phenomenon of sharp increase in labour productivity during the period as shown by various studies, explains the extent of deprivation thrust on labour.

Above phenomenon also clearly explains as to how much gains the big business lobby and the MNCs are sucking from the country's economy and how less they are contributing in the form of tax compliance.

(*From the table published in the Economic Times, 5-01-2000*)

DIRECT TAX ARREARS MOUNTED TO Rs 41230 CRORE IN 97-98 THE POOR ARE THE TAX PAYERS, THE RICH ARE THE DEFAULTERS...

Direct tax arrears mounted to Rs 41230 crore in 1997-98 fiscal, an increase of 22.7% over previous years, according to Comptroller & auditor General of India(CAG).

In its recent report presented to Parliament, CAG also said that despite Rs 9554.25 crore from VDIS Scheme(1997), total direct tax collection declined by Rs 168.93 crore, although the number of assessees increased from 1.2 crore to 1.35 crore.

....The tax buoyancy, a key indicator of efficiency of revenue mobilisation in response to growth in GDP which was on the average greater than one per cent over last ten years, turned negative 0.01% in 1997-98....

Analysis of tax buoyancy with reference to GDP excluding the agricultural income, the CAG said, "showed progressive decline over last three years indicating poor mobilisation effort in revenue generation."

CAG said that most of the new assessees belong to low income strata....It was seen that reduction in tax rates did not yield better tax compliance among higher income strata of companies...About 80% of the new corporate assessees was in the range of below Rs 5 lakh from low income range.

(*The Observer, 31-12-99*)

WHO IS HOLDING THE COUNTRY TO RANSOM ?

TAPAN SEN

Last year, the President of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & industries(FICCI), Mr Sudhir Jalan made a audacious statement. As carried by the daily press, the FICCI President wanted the Govt to take tough and unpopular decisions, specially relating to industrial disputes and labour protection. He observed that a few millions industrial workers were holding the country to ransom and creating islands of plenty in the midst of oceans of poverty. Almost in the similar vein, another business lobby, CII has also demanded thorough change in labour laws in order to prevent the workers and their unions from creating disaster in the economy.

Yes, Mr President, Yes Messieurs FICCI and CII and others, we agree, this great country is being held to ransom, is being pushed to disaster, but not by the millions industrial workers but by less than hundred members of the flock of yours.

Who have usurped a hefty amount of over Rs 50000 crore of the nationalised banks and financial institutions which has been termed as Non Performing Assets(NPA, loans taken but not returned), which are in fact the savings of the millions of common people of the country ? Who have evaded direct tax payment to the tune of Rs 41,230 crore ? Are they ordinary workers or you, the "respectable" citizenry ?

The Report of Reserve Bank of India and the CAG Report say— mostly by your members, in FICCI, CII, ASSOCHAM and the big business lobby.

As revealed by the RBI Report, less than hundred big business groups are responsible for the greater part of the NPA. Only 67 big companies, account for Rs 6605.66 crore of NPA, each defaulting payment of more than Rs 50 crore from the banks and financial institutions. Among them are all big stars of the big business lobby, carrying on bonhomie with the Vajpayee Govt— some of them are K K Birla, G M Singhanian, H R Jain, R S Shetty, M R Chhabaria, G P Parasrampurian, Arvind, Mafatlal, Bhalotias, Premier Cable of the Periwals and many others.

And such game of usurping public money deposited in the banks by the captains of industries and business are going on since long, in league with those in governance, and they found many innovative ways to defraud the public sector financial institutions and banks. Firstly, same company takes loan from number of banks/FIs and

start deliberately defaulting in servicing the same and thus converting it to NPA. Secondly same group of companies conspicuously traps a particular bank/ FI through different companies in that particular group one after another or together. And after taking loan, paying a few instalments, and sometimes getting the loan and unpaid interest rescheduled as fresh loan once or twice, they deliberately stop servicing the loans thus pushing them to NPA category after six months of default.

The J K Synthetics of the Singhanian Group owes Rs 82.50 crore from State Bank of India and Rs 76.87 crore from ICICI and has not paid back anything. The Parasrampurian Synthetics Ltd digested Rs 352.10 crore from the banks and FIs, Rs 60.46 from Canara Bank, Rs 57.50 from Punjab National Bank, Rs 122.37 crore from ICICI and Rs 111.77 from IFCI and took all of them for a ride. Interestingly, the same Parasrampurian Group after trapping the ICICI in the name of its Synthetics company for Rs 122 crore could again manage to draw from the same ICICI, an amount of Rs 54.52 crore in the name of Parasrampurian Industries Ltd and stopped paying back that also. The India Steamship Co of Birla group has taken Rs 51.71 crore from State Bank of India and not paid back. The Chhabaria Group have managed to digest Rs 66.77 crore from Bank of India in the name of Orson Electronics Ltd, Rs 1.2 crore in the name of Orson Marketing Ltd from Allahabad Bank and Rs 53.26 crore from Oman Investment Bank in the name of Shaw Wallace with impunity. Delhi based Ganapati Export headed by Aggarwal, Sharma and Kedias have drawn Rs 9.99 crore from United Bank of India and almost a similar amount from United Commercial Bank and added to the volume of NPA as usual.

The so called weak Banks, as identified by the infamous Verma Panel are also worst victims of the loot in the form of NPA by the big business lobby. The United Bank of India(UBI) has been ditched to the tune of Rs 70.43 crores by the Bhalotia Business group headed by CP Bhalotia and G D Bhalotia in the name of BTW Industries Ltd(44.27 crore), BTW Veneers Ltd(Rs 8.28 crore) and SS Industries(17.88 crore). The Bagaria group headed by RL Bagaria and V Bagaria have drawn Rs 25.26 crore from the same UBI in the name of two different companies viz Ratan Exports &

Industries Ltd (REIL) and REIL Products Ltd to the tune of Rs 21.39 crore and 3.87 crore respectively and not paid back anything. The Kanoi family in the Tea sector, consisting of H K Kanoi and O P Kanoi have sucked Rs 14.69 crore from UBI on the letterheads of three companies viz Tonganagaon Tea Estate Ltd (Rs 6.77 crore), Mokaibari Kanoi Tea Estate (Rs 5.61 crore) and All India Tea trading Co (Rs 2.31 crore). And there are Poddars, Khaitans, Aggarwals Bajajs any many others in the list of those defaulters who have sucked to the bottom, all the nationalised banks to turn them "Weak" and pave the way for their closure/sell out.

The whole loan recovery machineries have been so operated as to allow handful of measure usurpers of such huge amount of public wealth go scot free. As per RBI report, till 31ST March 1998, there were 14,36,739 cases of default in bank loans pending in different courts of the country involving Rs 21,824.92 crore of NPA. Upto June 1997, 11700 cases were pending in Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) involving Rs 8866.67 crore of NPA. On an average estimate, each recovery case pending in the courts and DRT pertain to unpaid loan of around Rs. 1.5 lakh and Rs. 75 lakh respectively. Again as revealed in the RBI report, more than 80% of total NPA pertains to the defaulters, each defaulting in terms multiple crores (not lakhs) - all big sharks of the business world. The whole picture shows that all those big shots are kept out side and insulated from the already loose-shunted recovery exercises by the bank/FIs. The lackadaisical affairs of the whole recovery machinery and methodology and interference of corrupt polity in power - all emboldened and enthused the big business lobby to play ducks and drakes with public money.

The profile of NPAs revealed by the Report of RBI also shows that it was the big business lobby defaulting in terms of several crores of rupees company-wise constitute the major portion of the NPAs. On the NPA head, The Bank of India gets Rs 540.1 crore from only 8 companies, Canara Bank gets Rs 225.99 crore from 3 companies, Indian Bank gets Rs 687.27 crore from 8 companies, Punjab National Bank gets Rs 562.48 crore from 7 companies, IDBI gets Rs 1153.61 crore from 11 companies, ICICI gets Rs 447.50 crore from 6 companies and IFCI gets Rs 322.9 crore from only 3 companies.

The entire profile of the holders of Non Performing Assets of the banks and FIs clearly reveals that a conscious game was being played by the handful of big business/industry owners in collusion with

those in power to usurp public wealth deposited in banks and FIs, and it was not merely a case of normal default for the greater part of the NPA. And it was these particular faces who are being seen to suggest closure of so called weak banks (with more NPAs) and privatisation of the rest. The Task Force constituted by the great CII to deal on the problems of NPA of the banks is loaded with most of those persons who are the major digests of crores of bank money such as Arun Bharat Ram, promoter of SRF, Pradip Kumar Khaitan of Khaitan & Co, N N Kamapani of J M Morgan Stanley Ltd and Pradip Shah of Asia Fund Advisors and another person owing more than Rs 180 crore to different public sector banks on NPA head. This Task Force has now suggested closure of the weak banks on ground of bigger NPA which was created by them only and also suggested settlement of NPAs with sharp discount to the criminal defaulters. (The Observer, 20/21-12-99).

Interestingly, it was this section of "great Indians(?)" who are also taking public exchequer for a ride. As per the Report of Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), the direct tax arrears has mounted to Rs 41,230 crore in 1997-98 fiscal, an increase of 22.7% over the previous fiscal and it is on the rise. In the report presented before the Parliament, the CAG observed that despite Rs 9554.25 crore from Voluntary Disclosure of Income Scheme, total tax collection declined by Rs 168.93 crore in 1997-98, although there is an increase in the number of assesseees by 15 lakhs. It was noted by the CAG that more than 80% of the new assesseees, both corporate and non-corporates, are from the low income strata. This clearly reveals that the big-guys in the business lobby who have taken the country's banking system for a ride, are also the villains of tax evasion contributing to tax arrears of Rs 41,230 crore. (The Observer, 31-12-99).

They are looting the nationalised banks by deliberately defaulting payment with impunity, they are drying up the public exchequer by evading tax. Now they are dictating policies to the Govts. Ironically, these big stars of the business lobby have become the guardians of the Vajpayee Govt in respect of the economic policy measures. Let the great pontiffs know that it is not the poor workers but the unholy combination of the this Govt and big corporate leaders are acting together to hold the country to ransom.

(Source:- Reserve Bank of India Publication in the Internet and Ganashakti dated 12-01-2000)

(Prem Shankar Jha, writing in The Hindu, dated 7th January, 2000 has viewed the Seattle protests from what is happening to the workers in the U.S.A. itself. Here is a slightly absided version of his write up. - Editor)

BACKLASH AGAINST GLOBALISATION

More than a month after the debacle at the World Trade Organisation conference in Seattle, participants are still wondering what went so badly wrong as to lead to its ignominious collapse. Newspaper reports laid the blame at the door of the various pressure groups and non-governmental organisations - the AFL-CIO (the U.S. umbrella trade union organisation), the steel workers unions, and various labour and environmental NGOs, that laid siege to the meeting, swearing to abort it. The Republicans in America and the neo-liberal establishment put the blame on the President, Bill Clinton, who took the lead in sabotaging it by giving the green light to the demonstrators, saying that they had a right to protest in the streets on these issues.

More discerning commentators concluded that Clinton did this because America had gone into its pre-election mode and the administration had suddenly woken up to the fact that the opponents of trade liberalisation had votes, lots of votes.

Why there was such a convergence of anti-WTO sentiment in Seattle in the first place? The U.S. had lobbied for holding it in Seattle because the administration believed that it could be presented to the American people as one more feather in Clinton's cap. This expectation was based on the extraordinarily strong performance of the American economy throughout Clinton's second term in office.

This expectation seemed well founded. America is in its third year of four per cent growth. The high growth has swelled tax revenues to the point where the Federal budget is now showing a consistent surplus and the surplus is reducing the national debt. The cessation of government borrowing has reduced the supply of bonds in the market and pushed up their prices. This has made it more profitable to hold savings in shares. Not surprisingly stock market prices are at record highs with the Dow Jones index staying around the 11,000 mark. Unemployment too is at a record low of 4.1 per cent. Indeed the growth and employment indices are the best they have been in 30 years. And all this has been achieved with a virtually zero rate of inflation. If there is any country

that has emerged a clear winner from globalisation, it is America. Why then should there be such a huge backlash against the very development that has propelled America decisively to the top?

The bad news is that even in America, globalisation is tearing society apart in a manner that the world has not witnessed since the early years of the industrial revolution two centuries ago.

In a much discussed book "The Age of Diminished Expectations," the MIT economist, Paul Krugman, captured the change that globalisation has wrought to income distribution in American society. Between 1974 and 1994 - the period in which markets became globalised, the real income of the poorest 40 per cent of the families actually fell in absolute terms. At the other end of the spectrum, the income of the top 20 per cent rose fastest, while the incomes of the top one per cent of the American families rose by 3.6 per cent per annum or 1.1 per cent faster than in 1947 to 1973.

These figures are for family income and not individual earnings. Another authoritative estimate shows that during the same period, **the average earnings of 60 per cent of Americans fell in real terms while those of a tiny fraction of income earners, almost entirely to be found in trans-national corporations and finance companies, rose like an express elevator.** Average family incomes remained static or rose marginally only because more women joined the workforce and salary and wage differences between them and men narrowed. **The widening income gap in industry is reflected in the fact that while the average chief executive earned 35 times as much as the average worker in 1973 he earns 120 times as much today.**

What America's growth figures are hiding is the long tail of workers in distress that has emerged. Two examples will illustrate this point: in 1995, there were more jobs created than destroyed in Long Island, New York. But while the average annual income in the jobs that were destroyed was \$42,790, the median income in the new jobs created was \$18,000 per year. This was \$5,000

less than what a single mother with two pre-school children needed to keep her job and sustain her family. In the same year the Chicago Urban League calculated that only one in every 227 jobs that was being created in the city met the above criterion.

Most Americans believe that in some obscure way, this disappearance of the middle class and the emergence of a poverty tail is the result of a de-industrialisation of America, which is a direct result of globalisation - more specifically of the export of capital by trans-national companies to low wage countries to produce what was previously being produced at home. But this misgiving has been kept at bay by a coalition of big business, the U.S. administration and the media, that has few parallels in history.

For the whole of his second term in office, Clinton has kept assuring the American people that globalisation is a win-win development for all Americans; that their pains were the pains of

transition, and would soon be over. During the past three years as the American recovery turned into a boom, and the budget deficit into a surplus, he told them that the benefits of globalisation had finally arrived.

But American workers know differently. The most recent data show that family incomes have still not increased, mainly because female participation in the workforce and wage rates have ceased to rise. **Unemployment has declined but the jobs that are being created are more and more demeaning - a far cry from the secure blue-collar work that has vanished. And they are asking themselves, if this is all we get from the longest boom and strongest growth in U.S. history, then what will happen to us when the boom ends?** Underlying today's seeming prosperity, therefore, is a rising undercurrent of fear. That is what crystallised at Seattle in the beginning of December.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

DAVE COMMITTEE PRESENTS FINAL REPORT

Under the caption '**Parallel Pension Scheme for Unorganised Sector Mooted**' the Economic Times carried the following report:

'Project OASIS (Old Age Social and Income Security) under the Dave Committee, set up to recommend measure to overhaul the existing pension plan in the country, has recommended several measures to improve the acceptability of the pension schemes in India. The report has been submitted to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and was made public here today by Minister for State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Maneka Gandhi.

The Dave Committee has recommended a parallel pension scheme for the unorganised sector, creation of an autonomous regulatory authority to oversee the functioning of the pension system called the Indian Pension Authority (IPA) and the replacement of public provident fund (PPF) with a new scheme. The new scheme revolves around entrusting the task of managing the funds to six professional fund managers (PFMs) under the regulatory purview of IPA. The PFMs would manage the funds of the individuals under their direction."

The CITU has resented the Dave Committee report and commented thus:

"The S A Dave Committee is reported to have presented its final recommendations on pension schemes to the Prime Minister. Unlike the interim report, which was made public in February 1999, this final report has been kept under wraps, at least for the present.

The CITU, as also other central trade unions in the country, had taken exception to the main thrust of the Dave Committee's first report, viz, diverting part of provident and pension funds to speculative equity market. The final report also has apparently laid emphasis on channelising pension funds for investment in corporate bonds and index funds related shares. This is totally unacceptable to the trade unions and the workers.

The CITU demands of the government not to accept any recommendation of the Dave Committee in so far as they relate to the provident and pension funds which are administered by existing statutory tripartite bodies. The CITU also demands that the report be made public and the Government should not take any unilateral decision on the recommendations without having appropriate dialogue with the trade unions".

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STATE GOVT. EMPLOYEES' CONFERENCE

The 10th National Conference of the All India State Government Employees' Federation held at Mumbai from 27-30 December '99, called upon 80 lakhs of State employees, teachers and employees and workers of State Public Sector undertakings and autonomous bodies to prepare for a countrywide united general strike during the Parliament session as decided by the National Platform of Mass Organisations. The strike programme is to be preceded by a massive March to Parliament at Delhi on 9.3.2000.

The employees will also observe All India Demands Day on 23.2.2000 by holding rallies and demonstrations for realisation of 10-point charter of demands.

The Conference was attended by more than 2500 delegates and observers from all States. It was attended and addressed by fraternal foreign delegates from South Africa, Vietnam,

Bangladesh, Srilanka and Nepal. Fraternal delegates from CITU, AITUC, UTUC and unions from Insurance, Banking, Central Government and Railway employees were also present. The conference was inaugurated by the eminent economist and former MP, Ashok Mitra. Indrajit Gupta, MP and President of the World Federation of Trade Unions also addressed the Conference.

The report of the General Secretary noted that the imperialist globalisation at the present phase of capitalism constitutes the biggest danger before the working class of the country as well as the whole world. The market economy and the rule of profit are desperately seeking to destroy all human values and thus leading to dehumanising the human society. The report called for building up a massive struggle of the workers, employees and all sections of the toiling masses to put a halt to the

ferocious offensive of the capital with the aim of building a new society free from exploitation and the rule of profit.

The other resolutions included restructuring of Centre-State financial relations seeking devolution of more funds to the States, on empowerment of women for better administrative efficiency, the role of the employers, against attempt of WTO to curtail economic sovereignty of the country, stopping economic offensive on the workers and the poor in the name of globalisation and so on.

The Conference concluded with an open session at Azad Maidan of Mumbai, preceded by a massive procession joined by the employees of Maharashtra and other States of the country. The Conference elected a new team of office-bearers with R.G. Karnik as Chairman, M.R. Appan as Hony. President and Sukomal Sen as General Secretary.

MURDEROUS ATTACK ON UNION LEADERS

A gang of 60 to 70 airline employees suddenly appeared and gathered around a landed aircraft in the airport tarmac. They started pointing out, shouting at, pouncing upon and assaulting the disembarking passengers in the presence of airport officers and security guards. It happened in Bay No.16 at the Mumbai domestic airport tarmac at Santacruz at 09.15 a.m. on 14th December. The victims of this gang attack were: C.D. Soman, General Secretary of

Air Corporations Employees Union, its adviser R. Ramanathan and Vice President, Naresh Lal who were coming out of the landed Indian Airlines aircraft (Flight IC 676) from Calcutta. Union activists Dinkar Shetty, V.Y. Kadam and Vivek Rao who were on duty at the airport but had gone to receive their colleagues were also attacked. The attackers were the Shiv-Sena sponsored *STHANIYA LOKADHIKAR SAMITI* members, who are also the employees of Indian Airlines.

This pre-planned murderous attack against the Air Corporations Employees Union leaders by the splinter group led by Shiv-Sena, was a sequel to their failed attempts to capture the organisation. They had lost the elections to the union committees held through secret ballot. These rivals demanded changes in the elected committees at the general council meeting held in Calcutta on 13.12.99, which was rejected by overwhelming majority. The disgruntled elements sought

to terrorise the employees, by first making murderous attacks on the Union leaders. The passengers were forced to run helter-skelter, with no police force coming to their help or to the victims. Amongst the shocked passengers were women, children and senior citizens. And all this took place in the high security area. Though this attack sent shockwaves in Mumbai and in the airlines circles, astonishingly the police and the management wanted to black out this news. However, the Times of

India dt. 16.12.99 and some vernacular papers gave coverage to the incident. The Mumbai based Trade Unions Joint Action Committee which comprises CITU, AITUC, HMS, Kamgar Aghadi, HMKP, Industrial Federations and independent unions took up the matter very seriously and condemned the attack. The leaders of this committee also called on the City Police Commissioner R.H. Mendonca on 16.12.99 and demanded immediate action

against the Shiv-Sena led *Sthaniya Lokadhikar Samiti* group responsible for this attack.

The signatories to the memorandum included Ahilya Ranganekar former M.P., K.L. Bajaj & P.R. Krishnan (CITU), Suryakant Bagal (HMS), Dada Samant (Kamgar Aghadi), A.D. Golandaz (AITUC), G.M.V. Naik (BEFI), Suresh Dhopeswarkar ((AIBEA), C.D. Soman and R. Ramanathan (Air Corporations Employees Union).

(Report by P.R. Krishnan)

ELECTRICITY EMPLOYEES FEDERATION MEETING

The Working Committee Meeting of the Electricity Employees Federation of India was held at Chennai, Tamil Nadu on 25-26, December 1999 under the Chairmanship of E. Balanandan. 31 members from West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Orissa, Chandigarh, Haryana, Rajasthan, D.V.C. of West Bengal, Pondicherry, Atomic Power Federation, Officers' Association of Kerala, CESC of West Bengal etc. participated.

D. Janakiraman, General Secretary, in his report detailed the current offensives of the Central Govt. to unbundle both the Central as well as State Power Sectors and handing them over to private enterprises. After detailed discussions, the committee came to the following conclusions:-

1. The new power policy implemented by GOI in opening up power sector to Indian and foreign IPPs could not raise the installed capacity as envisaged in the 8th & 9th plan. The private

investors are delaying the project execution in order to pressurise the Govt. demanding escrow agreements, counter guarantee etc. The decision taken by GOI not to make investment in the power sector also resulted in increasing power shortage. However, in totality, all the States are facing power shortage, except a few.

2. Of late, GOI has decided to privatise NTPC, PGCIL & NPC besides the SEBs. The NTPC is an entity which really makes huge profit and its performance hitherto was best. PGCIL, has been established with a view to transmit bulk power to different parts of the country from the generating zones. This corporation also was making profit and the formation of this corporation was an important step in the power sector. The availability of energy resources like coal, lignite and hydel potential are concentrated in a few centers. The power generated at these centres could be transmitted in bulk through the transmission lines of Power Grid.

Privatisation of nuclear power generation is a ruinous step. We do not find any rationale in privatising NTPC, PGCIL & NPC. 3. The experience of IPPs are that they are charging higher rates for the power produced, putting the SEBs in financial difficulties. For example, power is being sold to Maharashtra State Electricity Board by Enron at the rate of Rs.4.96 per unit. In Tamil Nadu GMR Vasavi is going to sell power at the rate of Rs.4.10 per unit. In Orissa, the average selling power rate is coming to Rs.3.90 per unit, while the power rate before the restructuring was Rs. 0.97 per unit. Therefore, it is found that the privatisation effort has not only deepened the crisis but also the rates of power have been raised to unbearable levels. This situation will adversely affect our industry, agriculture and total development.

Therefore, the EEFI highlighted the following demands:

* That GOI should retrace and withdraw the steps towards

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privatisation of power sector.

* GOI and the State Governments should give increased allocation of funds for power development.

* Do not privatise NTPC, PGCIL & NPC.

* Do not unbundle & privatise SEBs.

* Give preference to National resources for power generation.

* GOI should step up hydel generation atleast to a minimum of 40:60 which is now only 24:76. Hydel generation should be taken up on war footing.

* Every State should give preference for power generation with the available local resources and other cheaper fuel like LNG etc.

The meeting decided to hold a joint all India Convention in the 1st week of February at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, where the date for one day all India strike will be announced. It also decided that the all India Conference of the EEFI will be held at Chandigarh, Punjab, 24-26 of March, 2000.

In this meeting AIEEF's President

A.B. Bardhan and Working President S.C. Krishnan participated as fraternal invitees. They made brief speeches, endorsing holding of a joint convention at Lucknow in February, 2000.

The EEFI also held a meeting of its officebearers in New Delhi on 20.1.2000, which reviewed the ongoing struggle of UPSEB workers and chalked out solidarity actions. It also worked out the details of the Lucknow convention and the EEFI Conference.

BTR BIRTH ANNIVERSARY IN PATNA

The 95th birth anniversary of Com. B.T. Ranadive, founder President of CITU, was observed in Patna on 18.12.99. Chandni Prasad, President, Bihar CITU,

garlanded the photograph of Com. BTR followed by others. Yogendra Prasad presided. Sachidanand Singh, Convenor of Coordination Committee of trade

unions and associations of Patna, J.S. Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, Bihar, addressed the gathering.

RAIPUR: STRIKE BY FMRAI MEMBERS

At the call of FMRAI, members of their Raipur unit in Madhya Pradesh staged one day strike on 7.1.2000, in pursuance of their 4 points charter of demands. The demands included:

a) Constitution of National

Tribunal:

b) 40% rise in daily allowance:

c) CBI enquiry into black marketing of medicines and sale of spurious drugs: and

d) statutory protection for the sales promotion employees and other

workers.

The striking employees held a rally near the collectorate. They were addressed by M.K. Nandy, N.P. Shukla and N. Gupta.

(Report by Shakrabarti)

DELHI DEMO' AGAINST WTO CHIEF

Several hundred protesters from trade unions and the mass organisations of students, youth, women and others held a protest demonstration on 10.1.2000, before Taj Palace Hotel, New Delhi. It was the venue of the Partnership Summit organised by Confederation of Indian Industries(CII) addressed by Mike Moore, the Director General of

World Trade Organisation(WTO). At the last WTO meet at Seattle, the entire WTO Secretariat, headed by Mike Moore was instrumental in seeking to impose, on the developing countries, atrocious conditionalities at the behest of USA and other advanced countries. This, however, could not yet fructify, owing to stiff opposition by the developing

nations. The same Mike Moore is being given red carpet welcome by CII and Govt of India.

The demonstrators assembled at 11 am before the entrance of Taj Palace Hotel. Police tried to remove the demonstrators from the venue but failed to do so. The colourful placards with slogans like "Mike Moore Go Back", "Govt of India, come to

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sense, don't surrender to imperialists", "WTO, stop operating at the behest of rich countries and Multinational Companies", "CII come to sense, mend your policies" etc. were waved by the demonstrators.

Slogans were raised against WTO, IMF, World Bank and the anti-people policies of CII and other employers' organisations and the Govt of India. Demonstration continued for about two hours. Among those present in the

demonstration were E Balanandan, M K Pandhe, K. Hemalata (CITU), R L Sachdeva and Amarjit Kaur, (AITUC) and Mahesh Kumar (DYFI), Sukomal Sen, All India State Govt. Emp. Federation.

J K TYRE UNION CONTRIBUTES TO ORISSA RELIEF

The J K Tyre Karmachari Ekta Union (CITU), Kambroli has collected a sum of Rs.87817 from

among the workers and, through the Rajasthan State Committee of CITU, remitted this contribution

for assisting the relief operations launched by CITU and other fraternal organisations in Orissa.

MAJOR AIRPORTS LEASED OUT

The Vajpayee Government has leased out five major Airports of the country to private hands. The lease period is for 30 to 59 long years! This long periodicity confirms that the deal is to dedicate the control of airports to big business/MNCs.

Earlier the Govt of India decided to corporatise the airports and then sell the shares thereof to private sector. But, the BJP led Govt is anxious to quickly surrender the airport services to monopoly houses/MNCs. They have, thus, found a faster route in leasing. The country's airports, built up as national wealth, are now being handed over to big business, in lieu of some rent. The rent also is much lower than the actual potential, as has been the case with all the deals of Vajpayee regime with the vested interests.

The CITU, in a statement on 13.1.2000, denounced this move of the Government. Such a move is injurious to national interests and security. The job security and service conditions of the airport employees also are endangered.

CITU demanded reversal of the Govt decision. For this, the CITU urged the trade unions and employees, in aviation industry in particular, to build up a strong resistance opposing the move.

RAJASTHAN AND J&K GOVT. EMPLOYEES ON STRIKE

Five lakh state govt employees and teachers under Rajasthan State Govt and three lakh sixty thousand state govt employees and teachers under J&K Govt had been on strike for more than a month braving dismissal-threat, repression, intimidation and prohibitory orders under ESMA and NSA from the concerned state Govts.

In Rajasthan, State govt employees have long been

agitating over non payment of increased amount of Dearness Allowance in cash consequent upon price rise resulting in accumulation of huge arrears. Additional DA is being impounded in the provident fund account despite strong opposition of the mass of the employees. Moreover, the Congress Govt also refused pay annual bonus to the employees. The strike began on 15-12-99 by a section of

employees and subsequently it took a massive scale with the entire state govt employees and the teachers joining the strike at the call of All Rajasthan State Govt Employees Federation, an affiliate of All India State Govt Employees Federation, along with others.

The State govt run by Congress party resorted to repressive measures including mass scale arrest of leaders and activists and

invoking of ESMA to break the strike and now the Govt is threatening to invoke NSA to prosecute the striking employees. The strike is in full swing. In J&K, the strike of 3,60,000 State govt employees and teachers began from 20-12-99 on the basis of their 17 point charter of

demands including payment of arrear DA and pay-revision. All the unions of various affiliations formed Joint Action Committee to conduct the strike. Despite arrests of leaders, and the strike being declared illegal under ESMA, the J&K Govt could not weaken the strike. In the Kashmir valley, the

fundamentalist outfit of the Huriyat urged the employees not to go for strike in the Ramzan month, but the employees did not oblige them. In the midst of terrible cold and snowfall, employees are organising huge demonstrations and processions in support of their demands.

CITU PROTESTS MAURITIUS BILL

In a letter to **Cassm Uteem**, President of the Republic of Mauritius, CITU conveyed strongest protest against the passage of Public Security Bill in the Parliament of Mauritius. In his letter M.K. Pandhe said: "The Bill should not receive the Presidential assent and should immediately be withdrawn. "Seven leading trade union leaders and functionaries of "All Workers Conference" be released

immediately.

"The Bill is a draconian piece of legislation and is, by no means, compatible to a democratic government.

"The whole exercise of passing the Bill in the Parliament and, in the aftermath, the arrest of seven Trade Union leaders has put Mauritius in poor light among the international community. Working Class and the people of India now feel obliged to stand by

the workers, trade unions and activists of democratic institutions of Mauritius in upholding their fundamental rights, which have been infringed by this piece of legislation."

Pandhe urged the Mauritius President to exercise his authority to see that Mauritius does not slip down to an authoritarian State, where one police official can bring down all the edifices of democratic institutions.

PAK TU FEDERATION EXTENDS SOLIDARITY

The All Pakistan Trade Union Federation has sent a Solidarity Message to CITU on International Human Rights Day. The message read: "All over the world, especially in Asia Pacific Region, workers are denied their basic human rights. They lose their jobs due to privatisation. Mostly workers are working on a contract or sub-contract basis. They work more than 12-16 hours and they get very low wages. If they formed a trade union in factories, then bosses and local authorities beat them up, Government authorities torture them, they harass the family members of the trade unionists too.

"Women all over Asia Pacific Region are more suppressed by the Government as well as by the bosses. They are facing a double burden. The discrimination against women is very much higher, they are exploited by men as well as by the society. In workplaces they are sexually harassed.

"Workers' rights are human rights but unfortunately we are not getting the basic human rights. Our government is denying shelter, employment, health facility and free education for every person.

"Most of the countries, where no democratic government is existing, dictatorship governments

smashed the whole democratic institutions.

"All Pakistan Trade Union Federations is a national federation. Its membership is 1.5 million, all over Pakistan. The Federation is struggling for the rights of working class in Pakistan.

"Now it is a necessity of time to build a National, Regional and International Solidarity. Through collective struggle, workers and general peoples all over the world will get the basic human rights."

This solidarity message had been conveyed by **Gulzar Ahmed Chaudhry**, General Secretary, **APTUF**.

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OIL SECTOR STRIKE

At the call of the Oil Sector Officers Association (OSOA), representing 13 national oil companies, the officers in oil sector commenced an indefinite strike on 11.1.2000. Their demands included withdrawal of anti-employee directives of the Govt. of India, adverse recommendations of Mohan Committee and the anti-employee

guidelines of the DEP, particularly the insistence on 10 year period of agreement.

Despite the High Courts of Delhi and Bombay declaring the strike "illegal", on petitions moved by the Oil Companies, the strike was total in all the oil sector PSUs.

The success of the strike forced the Government to commence immediate negotiations with the

striking officers. Ram Naik, Union Minister of petroleum, assured the OSOA that their demands would be expeditiously settled and the strike had been suspended after a day.

The CITU congratulated the oil officers and urged them to be vigilant against the Govt. moves on the crucial issues involved in their strike.

WITHOUT COMMENTS

DEMOCRACY AND GLOBALISATION

.....One of the biggest threat to democracy also comes from globalisation, which is one of the most vicious doctrines ever propounded. And unlike other doctrines, it is dictated solely by the need of transnational corporations and multinationals, whose turnovers are bigger than the GDP of several countries.....

In India, the transnational and multinational corporations and the IMF and the World Bank are a major threat to democracy because they are able to dictate terms to the Government at the cost of majority of the people....

For instance, because India is a signatory to WTO, It has to open her border to any and every business and even to the fruits and vegetable-wallas of the world . There is soon going to be a situation where the market will be flooded by these foreign items at the cost of local farmers. In India, we have had the example of the multinational Hindustan Lever which has been trying to put out of the market all the soap manufacturers by getting into this category with cheap soaps. And small manufacturers do not have the reach and advertising muscle of the MNC Lever. They have done this even in the ice-cream segmentwill soon be doing it in tea-segment also....

(Olga Tellis in The Observer, 4-01-2000)

Pre budget discussion -

country and the world and held policies of globalisation responsible for this phenomenon.

K.L. Mahendra and H. Mahadevan from AITUC gave examples of well-run units being privatised by selling their shares at throw away prices. The example of sale of Gas Authority of India share below the market prices shows lot of irregularities which are taking place to-day.

It was only G. Sanjiva Reddy of INTUC who welcomed liberalisation and supported the commitments given to the WTO and the World Bank. He, however, criticised the Government for not involving trade unions in decision making process. He welcomed the foreign investment which according to him would generate more jobs and bring new technology in the country.

(Cont. from back cover)

The representatives of UTUC and UTUC(LS) also opposed the economic policies of the BJP Government which are bringing ruin and disaster to the country.

The Finance Minister while concluding the discussion agreed with the need for a dialogue with the central trade unions. He promised to have a full day discussion with the central trade unions along with his officers in the month of April after the budget exercise was over. He further promised that Finance Ministry representatives would attend all tripartite meetings convened by the Ministry of Labour.

(On the very next day on 7th December, no one from the Ministry of Finance attended the tripartite

Consumer Price Index Numbers for Industrial Workers on base: 1982 = 100

Sr. No	Centre	Sep 99	Oct 99	Nov 99	Sr. No.	Centre	Sep 99	Oct 99	Nov 99
1	Gudur	444	457	447	45	Amritsar	387	388	383
2	Guntur	418	424	425	46	Ludhiana	383	386	391
3	Hyderabad	397	401	403	47	Ajmer	417	423	426
4	Visakhapatnam	414	420	425	48	Jaipur	397	395	393
5	Warangal	417	431	434	49	Chennai	446	459	453
6	D D Tinsukia	391	402	402	50	Coimbatore	407	424	429
7	Guwahati	444	451	450	51	Coonor	408	422	436
8	Labac-Silchar	379	386	390	52	Madurai	431	443	441
9	Mariani Jorhat	417	433	433	53	Salem	423	435	438
10	Rangapara-Tezpur	425	440	440	54	Tiruchirapally	458	469	493
11	Jamshedpur	407	415	418	55	Agra	410	409	407
12	Jharia	376	380	377	56	Ghaziabad	455	451	447
13	Kodarma	390	397	401	57	Kanpur	442	440	439
14	Monghyr Jamalpur	421	433	441	58	Saharanpur	390	391	396
15	Noamundi	379	387	396	59	Varanasi	485	486	484
16	Ranchi-Hatia	422	429	430	60	Asansol	404	416	424
17	Ahmedabad	433	437	435	61	Calcutta	443	468	472
18	Bhavnagar	453	466	465	62	Darjeeling	390	396	397
19	Rajkot	414	415	416	63	Durgapur	449	475	479
20	Surat	442	445	442	64	Haldia	475	490	493
21	Vadodra	412	417	415	65	Howrah	493	525	516
22	Faridabad	446	448	444	66	Jalpaiguri	414	423	415
23	Yamunanagar	393	402	410	67	Raniganj	373	388	389
24	Srinagar	466	467	477	68	Chandigarh	455	456	454
25	Bangalore	407	413	418	69	Delhi	483	498	496
26	Belgaum	460	460	468	70	Pondicherry	471	477	486
27	Hubli-Dharwar	431	436	437					
28	Mercara	445	450	452		All India	429	437	438
29	Alwaye	422	427	429					
30	Mundakayam	442	450	454		Additional Series of Labour Bureau			
31	Quilon	427	433	443	1	Kothagudem	436	444	444
32	Thiruvananthapuram	463	466	471	2	Himachal Pradesh	413	416	420
33	Balaghat	391	394	393	3	Bhilwara	425	427	430
34	Bhilai	386	392	390	4	Chhindwara	428	428	429
35	Bhopal	442	455	452	5	Tripura	413	417	435
36	Indore	429	434	432	6	Goa	485	489	494
37	Jabalpur	444	453	449					
38	Mumbai	471	472	468					
39	Nagpur	445	447	442					
40	Nasik	433	435	440					
41	Pune	470	475	471					
42	Solapur	454	460	459					
43	Barbil	390	398	410					
44	Rourkela	396	405	412					

Government of India
Ministry of Labour
Labour Bureau
Shimla - 171 004

BRAVADO AT SEATTLE! AND, YEILDING TO US!

We reproduce two reports that appeared in the PRESS, on the trade related issues, which had been the subject matter of heated debate in the WTO meet at Seattle.

FROM MANUFACTURING TO TRADING.....

All the quantitative restrictions on import will be removed by March 200. Of the total 1300 items on the restrictive and negative list of imports, roughly half the goods will be thrown open for import by March this year....

The Govt has shown very little transparency so far in generating a public debate on many issues including its customs-tariff strategy and tariff negotiation at WTO. The attitude of the Govt so far has been to do things on the quiet.....

The Indian manufacturers have been thrown off-guard, particularly by the speed and suddenness of India's decision to remove all quantitative restrictions(QR) on imports by March next year....

Now large section of the industry are faced with this basic dilemma of whether to continue investing in manufacturing facilities or just import from abroad or sell.....it is possible that some five years down the line, we turn into a nation of traders and shopkeepers.

(MK Venu, in the Economic Times, 13-01-2000)

'GOVT. YIELDED TO U.S. ON QRs PHASING OUT'

The Vajpayee Government seems to have succumbed to the United States on the issue of phasing out quantitative restrictions (QRs) on the import of 1,429 items.

As is known by now, India would be phasing out QRs on 714 items by April 1,2000 and another 715 items by April 1 next year, which is two to three years shorter than the six-year phase-out period that India has negotiated with other countries. It now appears that the U.S. too had agreed to a six-year phase-out period, but the present Government could not cash in on this commitment which came from the highest quarter in the U.S.

Like the U.S., the European Union, Canada, Japan and Australia had objected to the original Indian position that QRs on imports from these countries would be phased out by 2005. Bilateral discussion with these countries continued for some time and by 1997, India successfully negotiated with these countries and agreed to a six-year phase-out period ending 2003. The U.S. was the sole exception.

It now turns out that the U.S. did eventually come around to the six-year period after intervention at the highest level. According to the former Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, this happened when the then Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, and Chidambaram met the U.S. President, Bill Clinton, in New York in September-October 1997. During that meeting, Gujral made a special request to Clinton that India needed at least six years to prepare its industry for the phasing out of QRs. He also informed the U.S. President about the agreement with other countries.

According to Chidambaram, within three days of that meeting, the Indian Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation reported to the Government that he had received word from the U.S. Trade Representative that the U.S. would agree to a transition period of six years, but would like to negotiate the front-loading and back-loading (that is, which items would be phased out first and which later) and build it into the agreement. "The BJP Government should have picked up the thread from where it was left by the United Front Government," Chidambaram has said.

The Vajpayee Government had failed to persuade the U.S. on the front-loading and back-loading process and made a crucial concession of two-three years in the transition time. This, in turn, would have a serious impact on Indian industry which finds its transition time considerably reduced and would have to face up to competition from imports almost immediately.

The manner in which the agreement was reached with the U.S. has also come in for criticism from many quarters. The first point is that the agreement was announced by the U.S. and no announcement was made by the Indian officials. Secondly, many organisations have objected to the fact that a crucial agreement like this was negotiated and finalised at the level of an Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry.

It also transpires that the agreement between the two countries was finalised well before its official announcement by U.S. officials and its entry into force was decided to be a date by which the on-going winter session of Parliament was to be over. Demands have now been made that the agreement be debated in Parliament before it is implemented so that an element of transparency is introduced in this important trade agreement.

(The Hindu, 22.1.2000)

Pre-Budget Discussion

TUs CRITICISE GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC POLICIES

During the pre-budget discussion with the Union Finance Minister Yeshwant Sinha on 6th January 2000, most of the central trade unions strongly criticised the Governments policies and demanded their reversal in the interest of the national economy.

The CITU was represented in the meeting by E. Balanandan, President and M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary.

Balanandan who initiated the discussion quoted from various reports of IMF, World Bank and the WTO to point out how the Indian economy is not progressing well and the recession is affecting the livelihood of the people. He criticised the role of MNCs who are trying to establish control over the Indian economy and how the economic policies of the Government have been helping them.

The CITU President pointed out that the Central Government is having a dialogue with the employers' organisations almost on a daily basis but has no time to discuss the policy questions with the trade unions. He observed that the growing unemployment and increase in population below the poverty line are only indications of failure of the Government policies.

Criticising the failure of the BJP Government to recover Rs.50,000 crores of Non-Performing Assets of the banking industry from the big business houses, Balanandan pointed out that the money can be used to overcome sickness of the industrial units and generate more jobs in the economy.

Noting that the crushing burden of taxation on the common people is becoming unbearable and their capacity to further tighten up their belt is almost over, he visualised a big burden of taxation on the poor people of the country due to heavy dose of deficit financing.

M.K. Pandhe., while speaking in the meeting, noted that the Government has made a fetish of privatisation and every industry is facing the problem. The private sector which has garnered much wealth by not paying taxes to the Government is now out to purchase the public sector with the help of ill-gotten wealth. He criticised the attitude of the Government to equate stability of share market with stability of Indian economy. The workers, PF money is sought to be invested in shares by the Government with a view to boosting the share market. The trade unions

will never accept such a dangerous proposal.

Pandhe observed that the phenomenon of black money was eating the vitals of economy. Former Finance Minister of India has estimated the total black money in India at 40 per cent of gross domestic product. While pleading lack of resources for Government's inability to help the sick industry, he noted that the Government was actually fittering away valuable national resources. The exemption limit of the income tax is now so low that even the unskilled worker is coming under the taxation net. Pandhe, therefore, demanded raising the Income tax exemption limit to Rs. One lakh.

Stating that economic offenders are increasing in the country, the General Secretary of CITU pointed out that these offenders do not get any punishment which enables them to freely indulge in Hawala Scam, misappropriation of foreign exchange, manipulation in balance sheets, smuggling of gold and other white goods, under invoicing and over invoicing in foreign trade etc. He highlighted the phenomenon of MNCs taking over company after company to strengthen their grip over Indian economy and they are getting support from the Government which swears in the name of Swadeshi.

Pandhe demanded that the Government should prepare a review of the developments in India after introduction of so called liberalisation and discuss with the trade unions with a view to take corrective measures to ensure self-reliant growth of the Indian economy.

R.K. Bhakt, former President BMS, also criticised the policies of the Government which are resulting in slow growth of economy and deterioration in living standards of the people. He disapproved the concessions to MNCs in India who are coming to subjugate our national economy. He expressed surprise at the Government of India's policy to close down Indian units and import products from foreign countries in the same sector.

Manohar Kotwal and Umraomal Purohit from HMS joined others in attacking the economic policies which has hit the common people of the country very hard. People are expecting some relief in the budget but the Government is making their life more miserable, they pointed out. They also expressed concern at the growing inequality in the

(Cont. on page 25)