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Above: Convention of Working Women in South Kanara (Karnataka) in Dec. 87.

Below: Huge participation of rural women in Andhra Kisan movement in Sept. 87.

Join Bharat Bandh Enmasse

THE working women all over India support the call given by the Left and secular oppositional parties and the mass organisations for Bharat Bandh on March 15th. In December 9th demonstration at Boat Club in Delhi, women joined the rally enthusiastically demanding resignation of Rajiv Gandhi and mid-term election. The participation of working women and women in general from almost all the states, especially from U.P., Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh confirmed their appreciation of the call given by 24 mass organisations including AIDWA, NFIW and others. The Central Campaign Committee highlighted the degrading position of women under the Congress Government. In Delhi, 15 cases of rape on an average daily are taking place by the custodians of law, there is an increase in dowry deaths, educated women commit suicides due to extravagant demands from the parents of the bridegroom. Working women want to join the labour market when they are thrown out of jobs to starvation. The prices of essential commodities have reached beyond the purchasing power of common people. Over and above, the recent budget will hike the prices as usual.

The ordinary women have come to realise the futility of the legislations like equal remuneration and minimum wage Act, Dowry Amendment, Muslim protection or the anti Sati Acts which do not help women as they should. There are many loopholes, and instead of helping poor women, they help the vested interest.

Women and working women in particular are launching struggles under their mass organisations, trade unions including the unions in Coal, Steel, Banks, and also Central and State Government for their specific demands which the Congress Governments of the Centre and in the States are not able to fulfil. Not only that, to add to the insult, they have offered petty jobs in self-employment and ICDS scheme which pay Rs. 150-200/-.

Working women will come on March 15th for Bharat Bandh enmass demanding a complete change in their status, demand job, security, minimum wage for the woman in the unorganised sector, as well forceful implementation of

IN THIS ISSUE

Join Bharat Bandh Enmasse	2
Demands Achieved due to Strong Union in Telephone in Madras	3
LIC Working Women's Convention	4
AIDWA Mourns the Death of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan	4
Working Women in Ahmedabad Hold Convention	5-6
Undaunted Women Compelled Management to settle dispute Custodians of Law Gangrape Women in Bihar, Assam	7
The Functioning of the Advisory Committee, Nurses win their Demands on Housing	8-9-10
Congress Rulers Concern for Women?	11
Organise Working Women in Trade Unions-BTR, Rural Women Organise in Nasik District	13
Comments on Maternity benefit Amendments Act 1987	15-16
Solidarity with the Arab People	17
Free Trade Zone—A fertile ground for the Multinationals, Anganwadi Women to Demonstrate in Patna	18-19
Convention of Anganwadi Workers Helpers In Punjab, Stop Repression in Tripura	20
Ratify the INF Treaty, Shaيدا Parveen Released on Bail	21
A Shame for the Nation	22
Congratulations to Rekha Dixit First Conference of JMS—Shahadul	23
Revolutionary Greetings to Women in Struggle for Peace	24

all the legislations passed and removal of the lacunae and giving stringent punishment to those who disobey.

The AICCWW while supporting the Bandh call for 15th March, appeals to working women to join enmasse in the Bandh demanding the resignation of Rajiv Gandhi and Mid-term Poll.

Demands Achieved due to Strong Union in Telephone Department in Madras

THE Convention of the Madras District WWCC held on 29.11.1987 was attended by 92 women representing 18 offices and factories. Apart from Telephones, Banks and the Electricity Board, the rest of the representatives came from divergent industries such as beedi, leather products, pharmaceutical, Pappad, Water meters and Coal loading and unloading.

The convention was presided over by Com. Thiripurasundari, a member of the District CITU Committee. The CITU District Secretary, Com. P.G.K. Krishnan submitted a written report, which included struggles of women workers led by CITU and experiences gained from them. In the discussion that ensued 17 women participated.

Opening the discussion, the representative from Telephones claimed that due to their strong union, **ALL OF WHOSE OFFICE-BEARERS WERE WOMEN**, they were able to achieve many things like creches in all the branches, and **EXEMPTION FROM NIGHT SHIFT DUTY FOR WOMEN WITH CHILDREN UNDER 3 YEARS OF AGE**.

The EB employees spoke of how transfers were used by the Chairman to penalise employees for active union involvement and wanted union leaders to focus special attention on women's problems.

A leather shoe company employee reported that she was demoted from the post of a supervisor to that of a helper because of her active role in forming a union. The management was extremely feudal and treated the workers especially women (most of them young girls) like children, abusing them and even hitting them occasionally. The workers worked till 9 pm and were paid only single rate for OT. Nearly 100 workers had only a single pot of drinking water and if anyone complained, the proprietor, in the true style of Marie Antoinette, the wife of the French king, on the eve of the French Revolution, said "If you don't have water why don't you buy some fruit juice and drink it!" If a worker was late by 5 minutes

half a day's wage was cut! This was the first attempt of the workers to unionise and they were confident of the outcome despite the autocratic management they had.

The Beedi workers, most of them Muslim Women, complained that there was no evidence to show that their PF deductions were being credited to their account. They were being denied maternity benefit also.

The workers of a pesticides factory (whose owners also ran a daily paper, kept most of the workers as casual, paying them a pittance of Rs 8/- per day. Even this work was not given continuously. The work done was injurious to health and she wanted tonics to be given by the management. Some women were critical of male domination in the unions.

The Vegetable Oil Corporation contract workers who were paid Rs. 8/- a day for 12 hours work said that only after CITU Union was formed and they struck work for 3 days their working hours were reduced to 8 hours.

Some of the important decisions made at the end of the discussion were:

1. Industrial Technical Institutes for women must be increased.
2. Five days a week work must be enforced.
3. Unions must take up special problems of women on a planned basis.
4. The General workers' unions in various industrial estates must set up women's sub-committees that would focus attention on women's problems.
5. In CITU unions of Electricity Board, Madras Corporation and Harbours, women's sub-committee must be formed.
6. Extend solidarity with and actively support all struggles of women workers.
7. A special convention of women workers must be held in the city in 1988.

LIC Working Women's Convention in Madras

BUBLING with enthusiasm, more than 260 women workers of LIC, both old and young, experienced and new, coming from different cities and Branch offices of LIC under Madras Division actively participated in a Convention on December 12, 1987. The Convention was organised by the Insurance Corporation Employees' Union, Madras Division (AIEA).

The Convention was conducted by a Presidium consisting of three comrades. Comrade Mythili Sivaraman of the Tamil Nadu Working Women's co committee who was the main speaker, highlighted the atrocities committed on women in the society. Dealing on Sati, she narrated how an educated young girl like Roop Kanwar was burnt to death in Deorala village in Rajasthan under the guise of Sati and called upon the LIC women to fight such evils. She also urged upon the women comrades to take more active part in the trade union movement so that not only the general problems but also the Problems of women workers in LIC could be solved. She made a special appeal to the comrades to participate in the democratic movements in the country along with other sections of the society.

Three resolutions, on the atrocities committed on women; on the problem of Working Women in general and LIC Working Women in particular; and, on the active role of the women in Trade Unions, formed the basis of deliberations. The comrades who moved the resolutions or the comrades who participated in the deliberations or those summed up the discussions, all were candid in their expressions and assertive of their rights. Quoting Poet Subramania Bharati who said that anyone who belittled womanhood would be condemned, the comrades thundered that they would play their rightful role both in the society as also in the trade union.

Comrade Saraswathi of All India Working Women's committee explained in detail the deliberations and the decisions of the All India committee of working women.

Comrade R. Bhoopathy, General Secretary of the Madras Divisional Union in his con-

cluding address congratulated and thanked the women comrades for their enthusiastic response to the call of the organisation for such a convention. He called upon the women comrades to come forward to take more active part in the trade union. He reminded them that their problems which were linked to the Problems of the people as a whole could not be solved as long as the present system of society persists and hence all should jointly fight and struggle for the same.

It is noteworthy that all the preparations for the conference were planned and executed by the women comrades. They went about mobilising the comrades from office to office, department to department, wrote leaflet for the convention, poems, articles, posters etc all by themselves. Some of the posters depicting the atrocities committed on women, role of women in changing the society etc, attracted attention both in the offices and the venue of the Convention.

AIDWA Mourns the Death of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan

"All India Democratic Women's Association deeply mourns the death of Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, the great leader of the national movement. In his death, India lost a great friend who always fought for the unity of the people of both countries. His immense contribution to the anti-imperialist struggle will always be remembered by the people of our country. After the division of the country, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan continued to fight in Pakistan for the united movement, and for secular values with the result that he had to undergo imprisonment for 3 decades. His love for India was immense and he visited our country thrice before his death.

The AIDWA is grieved at the loss of this courageous fighter for emancipation, who lived a simple life and sacrificed for the people of our country and for Pakistan."

Working Women In Ahmedabad Hold Convention

IN view of a resolution on working women passed by the sixth conference of CITU held at Bombay in May-1987, the Gujarat State Committee of CITU initiated to organise the working women.

The State Committee of CITU met at Siddhapur from 20 to 21.6.1987, had decided to take up the issue of organising the working women who are members of CITU affiliated unions.

A committee under the convenorship of Com. Niruben Patel was formed with the following members: 1. Com. Keshav Rao Survey (Baroda), 2. Com. Mahesh Thakor (Siddhpur), 3. Com. Satish Parmar (Ahmedabad), 4. Com. C.C. Patel (Kheda), and 5. Com. Dinesh Jobenputra (Kutch).

In Ahmedabad Com. Satish Parmar was able to address only 10 working women. He spoke to them and enlightened them on their day to day difficulties at their factory site. He also met and addressed working women of different textile mills and factories and proposed them to have a small committee of working women to discuss and decide their day to day problems.

An adhoc committee was formed having four working women from different textile mills. For formation of this committee a meeting was called. About 30 working women participated in that meeting and elected the Adhoc committee with the following members.

1. Smt. Shardaben A. Rana, working in the Ahmedabad Advance Mills, in winding department as a Winder. 2. Smt. Saviraben Beniben, working in the Kaishare-Hindi mill, as a contract worker in Realing department as a Realer. 3. Smt. Manjulaben Daniben working in the New Cotton Mill Co. Ltd, no. 2 as a realer in Realing department as contract worker. 4. Smt. Revaben Narshibhai working in Misc. department as Misc worker as contract worker in the Ankur mill.

The adhoc committee with the help of leading comrades on T.U. front has decided to hold a convention of working women on

4-12-1987.

A Pamphlet was issued to high-light the problems of the working women. An appeal was made to the working women to participate in the convention in good number. It was issued by the adhoc committee.

This committee have organised meetings of the various textile mills and factories for preparation of the convention. Our full timers have taken up this task and they went mill to mill and addressed the workers of those mills, on the problems of the working women. They addressed about 20 such meetings at mill's gate. Some group meeting were also organised in the working class areas.

The convention was held in Vir Bhagatsinh Hall on 4.12.87 in Ahmedabad. About 152 women participated in the convention. 100 were victimised women. 30 were working in the various mills and 22 were non working women.

SFI Comrades sung revolutionary songs in the beginning.

Com. Niruben Patel presided over the convention. A resolution mourning the departed leaders was passed.

Com. Harekrishna Shah the General Secretary CITU called upon the Working Women to unite despite their difficulties at home being women. He said unity will bring fighting spirit among you, and can achieve your goal through the struggle. So it is the prime duty of all of you to have fighting unity under the banner of CITU. He expressed his happiness that at least after a long time the working women have assembled to discuss their problems where they are employed.

Com. G.K. Parmar, has thrown light on various provisions of labour laws pertaining to women workers. He also narrated some instances in which employer and government officers incharge of implementing are violating

such provision. He reminded the convention that, in past CITU did struggle for the rights of working women of various textile mills, but in the absence of any organisation, that struggle could not go ahead, he appealed to the convention that the situation compelled the working women to unite and struggle for their rights as well as against harrasment of the employers.

Com. Raghuvir Modi, Com. Anand Parmar, Com. Satish Parmer and Com. Nizamuddin Shaikh also addressed the convention.

The following resolutions were passed by the convention: on equal pay for equal work, to absorb the women workers on permanent work, implement the provisions with regards to the working women in various labour laws, Nationalise the closed mills, sick mills and working mills without any compensation and provide job to the workers, ban on Sati, removal of Dowry etc. On these resolutions Shardaben, Jadibe, Lakhiben Savitaben, Zinnatben, Ramilaben, Manjulaben, Kantaben, Motiben spoke.

The convention has elected nine members committee. Five posts are kept vacant.

Com. Niruben patel, as president, in her concluding address, warned the working women that if they will not participate in day to day struggle of the working class, their problems as women will not be solved. At the same time it is the duty of working women to unite for their own cause. In the absence of such unity, employers and government machinery are not implementing the provisions of different labour laws concerning the working women. Thirdly she advised the working women to raise their consciousness about their class. They should also hate the dowry and Sati systems. She gave many examples to convince the audience in the simple language about the participation of working women in day to day struggle of the people and the working class. She also highlighted the feudal behaviour among men at the same time. She appealed to the convention to unite and fight for their just rights. She also congratulated the organisers of the convention for making an effort to discuss their problems.

It is to be noted that for the first time such convention was held exclusively of the working women in Ahmedabad, and a Committee formed from the working women. Barring 20 to 25 women all the participants have attended the convention till the last.

It has generated full confidence in the heart of the participants, so much so that they were inspired to stage a "DHARNA" for the general issues of the working class in front of the office of the Ahmedabad Textile Mills owners' Association on 4.2.88.

Andhra Co-ordination Committee extends its Activities to other industries

An extended meeting of the Co-ordination Committee of working women was held along with the council meeting on 9-10 Jan' 88. It discussed the work done so far and expressed satisfaction that District Working Women's Committees were formed after holding conferences in East Godavary, Visakhapatnam, Nallagonda, Kurnool and Hyderabad districts, and decided to hold district conferences in West Godavary, Nellore, Khammam and Krishna Districts.

The Committee decided to extend its activities to all other key industries like electricity, Oil etc and to hold conventions on the problems facing several sections of the working class in the unorganised sector. It decided to work for more united actions with other Trade Union centres, on various issues facing the working class. The Council gave a ringing call to all its activists to increase the membership of CITU unions in the coming period and to collect CITU Fund for which quotas were given.

(Contd. from page 7)

India, and in most cases the criminals go scot free.

While strongly condemning these atrocities we call upon the State Governments to immediately dismiss these police-men involved and put them behind bars."

Management Compelled to Settle Dispute

THE Orissa police made a brutal lathi charge on the striking women workers at Kalta Iron Ore Mines on January 11, when they were demonstrating before the office of the SAIL. Organised under CITU, the contract workers of the Kalta Iron Ore mines were on strike since one month demanding interim relief, regularisation of contract workers and equal pay to women workers for equal work. The management of the Steel Authority of India called the police and the military to suppress the struggle. When the women workers came in a big procession to join the demonstration, the police swooped on them and started the lathi charge indiscriminately. A large number of women workers were injured and more than 50 of them had to be hospitalised. The police in their brutal craze even stripped two women workers. Later in the day about 200 military force attacked the residential quarters of the adivasi workers and arrested about 30 of them. The incident resulted in further aggravating the situation. All sections of workers in the entire industrial belt of Bonai came out in anger to stage a massive protest demonstration. The agitation was heightened and the management was compelled to agree for a negotiated settlement before the conciliation officer. The strike was thereby withdrawn on January 22.

Attack on Working Women

On January 5, several anti-social elements engaged by the management of NALCO Smelting Plant, Talcher, Orissa in collusion with the local INTUC leaders and the contractors forcefully entered the residence of Susama Parida at night and severely assaulted her. She was beaten up because she formed a CITU union of contract workers and raised demands on their behalf before the management. Undaunted by the attack, the workers intensified the agitation, when the police had to arrest the anti-social hirelings. The NALCO management and the contractors, M/s Bhasin Associates were also compelled to enter into a tripartite settlement with the union on January 8.

Custodians of Law gang rape Women

THE Following Statement was issued to the press on the gang raping of women in Bihar and Assam by Vimala Farqui (NFIW) Brinda Karat (AIDWA) Pramila Dandavate (Mahila Daxata Samithi) Vimal Ranadive (AICCWW) and Leila Chinmdorai (YWCA).

"We the undersigned Women's Organisations strongly condemn the brutal gang rape of women in Deoghar, Bihar and of tribal women in Kokrajhar, Assam. In both these atrocities the police were the rapists utilising the authority of their post as the custodians of law and order to brutalise and sexually assault women. It appears that even the death sentence given to the police rapists of Maya Tyagi in the recent court judgement has not had a salutary effect on the personnel in the police force. It is an indication of total devaluation of women that the number of rapes in the country has registered a big increase and even according to Government figures on an average today 17 women are raped every day in

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The Functioning of the Advisory Committee under the Equal Remuneration Act 1976

[The following note by Com. Mythily Shivraman, a member on the Advisory Committee under the Equal Remuneration Act, Tamil Nadu reveals as to how, the Committee functioned during last 8-9 years, as well as the unequal treatment meted out to women workers with regard to employment, wages and so on. The note also points out the non-serious way the work of the Committee continued under the Tamil Nadu Government. —Editor]

THE Advisory Committee to increase employment opportunities for women in pursuance of the Equal Remuneration Act introduced in 1975 and enacted as a law in 1976, was constituted in 1979 in Tamil Nadu. Although constituted 9 years ago, the way it has been conducted by the Labour Department (Labour Secretary is the chairperson) has shown it to be one of the most devalued committees of the State. It has been conducted more with a view to satisfying a legal obligation rather than with the aim of wanting to really understand the impediments to women's employment potential and to device ways to overcome them.

The Advisory Committee met for the first time on 5.10.79, nearly a year after it was constituted. Although at the first meeting itself it was decided to convene it every 3 months it never met again. Meanwhile, there was an election in the State and the reconstituted committee met on 18.12.80. Ever since, this has been considered the first meeting. The Committee met rather frequently during 1981 & 82 and then went into a long period of inaction. There were no meetings after December 1982 although the committee's term expired only in October '83. Nearly three years later it was announced that the Committee has been reconstituted. In effect, from December '82 to September '86 for 3½ years the Committee did not function.

The Committee reconstituted in April '86 was convened in September '86. After that it took the Chairperson 9 months to convene it again. It has met twice in 1987. A sub-committee of the Advisory Committee met twice in between. As CITU representative on the Committee, I've taken up the issue of not

convening the committee both in writing and orally several times. Without this kind of prodding and left to the will of the Labour Department, it would not have met more than once a year.

Apart from representatives of unions (AITUC, CITU, HMS, INTUC & AIADMK) and employers organisations, the women members (who should form 50 per cent as per the Act) have almost always been the ruling party nominees without any awareness of the problem of women's employment. The only non-AIADMK woman nominee of the Government was Sarojini Varadappan (Congress-I) has attended only one meeting of the Committee. She is not a member of the present committee.

Earlier, sub-committees were set up to study conditions of employment in plantations, textile, ginning, oil mills, match & fire works factories. Summary of their findings prepared by the Labour Department will be given later. The individual reports prepared by the members are in great detail but the Department has made a very brief summary. So far the Committee has had 8 sittings since its inception in 1979.

Some of the decisions taken by the Committee since 1980

1. Job Reservation

In the second meeting of the Committee in 1980, all members excepting myself demanded a legislation fixing a percentage of jobs for women. The women members in particular, were vociferous in raising this demand. In December '87, when the same proposal was mooted by a woman member and supported by some others, it was rejected by the Committee after the explanations given by me and a representative of the employer's association.

2. The Government must issue orders to all Government and public sector units to increase employment opportunities for women.

3. Members, mostly women, suggested appointing only women teachers upto 8th standard. (not recorded as a decision)

4. A repeated demand voiced by some members is that women should be given licenses to drive auto rickshaws.

5. Self-employment bank/loans

A note should be prepared on the quantum of loans given to women in Tamil Nadu, in the previous year, the extent to which it benefited women and the difficulties faced in extending such schemes on a large scale for review by the committees. Such a note was never prepared on the plea that inadequate information was received from the banks.

6. Employment in textile sector

The committee unanimously expressed grave concern at the dwindling job opportunities for women in mills. It was decided that the Government must take suitable measures to protect existing jobs of women by ensuring that a job vacated by a woman was filled by another woman.

The Principle of 25 per cent of jobs in mills for women (the proportion held by them in the past) should be accepted by the Government which must ensure that this is established in practice.

Jobs of Heirs

When a job was filled on the basis of jobs for heirs, women heirs should not be overlooked, as was alleged by some women employees to the visiting members of the Committee in Coimbatore and Madurai. (Some elderly women complained to us that managements put pressure on them to retire prematurely, making it a condition for their heirs to get jobs and that their daughters were denied jobs on the plea that a married daughter would not be able to help them even if she had a job. It was found from the reports from other states that in some cases a daughter-in-law was offered the job of her mother-in-law on her retirement.

Plantations

All plantation managements must be urged to appoint at least one woman supervisor for one division in plantations. The Government owned TANTE must set a precedent in this regard. We do not know the present position.

Mechanisation

The Government should not allow mechanisation in cottage industry, in particular, in match industry, as it would adversely affect women's employment.

Study to be under taken

The Department of statistics or the Welfare Department must be asked to prepare a Note on *Women's Employment Profile* in Tamil Nadu to be reviewed by the Committee to make suitable recommendations for increasing women's job potential. (Some Statistics was given but it was most inadequate and without any analysis) Recently the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Corporation has brought out a book titled *Women in Tamil Nadu A Profile* which has a section on Employment Status.

Technical Education

Technical schools for women (ITIS & Polytechnics) must be set up in all districts and girls must be encouraged, by evolving suitable incentives to join them in large numbers.

Decisions of the Committee reconstituted in 1986

1. Categorisation of jobs on sex basis

The practice of evolving job categories on sex basis and fixing lower wages for jobs held by women, defeats the very purpose of the ER Act and will be brought to the attention of the Advisory Committee on Minimum Wages and officials responsible for implementing minimum wages. The Chairman of the Committee said Government will consider giving representation to women in the minimum wages Committee.

2. Sub-Committee on working conditions of women

A sub-committee was set up in June '86 to study working conditions including wages of women workers in a few factories in Madras. The sub-committee is to visit a few more factories before finalising its report to the larger committee.

Given below are some comments based on our (Sub-Committee) first visit

In an electronic company we found that although initially it was started mainly with women workers, their number has been reduced with men doing the jobs done earlier by women.
Reasons given by the Management :-

1. "Women with nimble fingers are adept at handling the fine components but still we are hesitant in recruiting them for various reasons.

Honestly, I must admit we are biased".

2. In some sections where women have to work closely with ten we would like to avoid employing women.

3. When we have to run night shifts we are unable to use women.

Reasons for women lagging behind in promotions according to the Management

1. Break in service subsequent to marriage or child birth affects their seniority.

2. Attendance is a criterion for promotion and women's absenteeism is high.

The women employees we spoke to, said, barring a few jobs in the factory, the rest involve operations they can do, although they are confined only to assembling and quality checking now.

The Manager of *Gordon Woodroff* (a leather goods company) said women do not get high paying jobs because—

1. They lack the initiative to acquire better skills and to get promoted as they are easily satisfied with what they have;

2. High absenteeism rate. "We understand that women have family responsibilities as well but what can we do about it? We are running a business and not a welfare organisation".

Decision of the Advisory Committee

3. Technical training

My suggestions: To increase women's employment opportunities in factories, an investigation must be carried out to assess any difference in syllabus used by the technical training institutes for women and men and the extent of such facilities now available, the number of women beneficiaries and the reasons for alleged high rate of drop out of women students. When I first made this proposal some years ago, although the Chairman of the Committee was very responsive and some information was secured, nothing much came of it as the committee ceased to function. In the latest session of the Committee a sub-committee was set up including me and 3 others to study this issue and submit a note to the Government, the sub-committee is yet to meet.

Victory for AIIMS Nurses

A delegation of the AIIMS nurses under the banner of Delhi Hospital Employees and Nurses Union met the Deputy Director (Admi-

nistration) on 29.1.88 to discuss the housing problem. Earlier the union had submitted two memorandums signed by the nurses and had made several representations to the management on the issue. During the last two years the management had not allotted any quarters to the nurses and had no plans for the immediate future to construct houses for them.

The Deputy Director assured the union representatives that the AIIMS will construct, 44 quarters for the nurses and 140 hostel rooms for the un-married nurses. She informed the delegation that the construction will be completed in 1989. The Deputy Director also assured the delegation that the nurses will be treated as essential category employees for purposes of quarter allotments, as is the practice everywhere. But the Director, AIIMS went back on her commitments made to the union in December '87 when it was promised to the nurses that the hostel rooms will be allotted on the basis of seniority. AIIMS was the only major hospital in the country where even hostels were denied to the nurses. To add insult to injury, the management was allotting the rooms without any regard to established norms and seniority. In view of the management going back on their commitments, the union decided to call for a mass casual leave campaign as a mark of protest. Subsequently, a notice was served on the management on 18.2.88 demanding allotment of all the vacant rooms numbering more than 50 on the basis of seniority to the nurses at the different centres like CN Centre, R.P. Centre and the Cancer Centre.

The management immediately resorted to intimidatory tactics. They tried to disrupt the struggle by using their 'chamcha' union and tried to threaten the nurses. It is reported that the union sent a memorandum pledging loyalty to the management and stated that they will be working on 7.3.88, the day fixed for the mass casual leave. The signatures to the memorandum were collected by threatening and intimidating the nurses. But the management and their stooges could not break the morale of the nurses. They got wind of the militant mood among the fighting women. Finally on 1.3.88, the last day of the ultimatum given to the management by the union, the management allotted all the vacant rooms on seniority, conceding complete victory to the nurses.

Congress Rulers Concern for Women

A National Committee on Women headed by the Prime Minister himself has been formed recently "to accelerate the involvement of women in the development process and to ensure their status as envisaged in the constitution." Since Rajiv Gandhi heads the committee, the committee has added importance no doubt. About 25-30 women representatives which include women Ministers, members of Parliament, Presidents and General Secretaries of some women's organisations, some social workers and so on, are on the committee. One wonders what was the reason for such sudden decision to form this committee? Why did the Congress rulers suddenly wake up to "suggest ways and means to enable women achieve their inherent potential and utilise their capacity to contribute to the development process and review the progress of implementation of policies and programmes designed for women's welfare" From Shri Venkatraman, the President to Ms. Najma Heptullah MP, Ms. Tajadhar Babbar, President of Nari Raksha Samithi Jayanti Patnaik and Ms. Sundarwata Nawal, Prabhakar, the President and the general secretary of Mahila Congress and many others suddenly realised that there was a need to "bring about the desired change in the system" and "the time has come for Indian women to take full responsibility". Literacy is very low among women and there is "no implementation of the legislations". Some times the Congress rulers speak the reality.

Crime against women are on the increase. The states have failed to take adequate steps to put down the crimes, despite the "Central directives," and "legislative measures". In 1985, 6356 cases of rapes, 837 bride burning were recorded. The number during the first eight months of 1986 has touched the figure 829 already. The Congress ruled states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest number as per the statistics published on 21.2.1988. What happens to the Dowry Amendment Act, Muslim Women Protection Act, Equal Remuneration Act, and the Anti Sati Act passed hurriedly to save the most discredited Minister Harideo Joshi, — who also had to be removed later, everybody is aware. Atrocities on Harijan,

Tribal Women, increasing dowry deaths, and crimes against women has become a part of the present feudal landlord system of the Government. In addition the problem of dowry has become acute for educated girls due to extravagant demands who try to commit suicide by strangling to the fans as in Kanpur. This is where the position of woman has now come to. The Sati at Devrala was the last straw in the 'crime' list. It received publicity all over the world, Some way had to be found out, to save creditability of the congress rule, some women Ministers too felt embarrassed. So the Women's Committee was formed!

Women must realise they constitute 50 per cent of the population, a "Vote Bank." Women voted solidly for Rajiv Gandhi after the murder of Indira Gandhi. Again the mid term elections are in the air. Even after 40 years of our Independence the position of Indian women, not only remains unequal, but further deteriorated considerably, and the prestige of the Congress rule has lowered.

Whatever it might be, the constitution of the committee is welcomed though it is done belatedly and not a real representative of women. But what is the experience of women during last 40 years? The ministers are changed, but their reputation and anti-women outlook remains the same. Only united strength of women's movement compelled the thick skinned Congress rulers to enact a few legislations.

Women, therefore will not rejoice on the newly appointed committee. They will soon realise this is one more step to bluff them who are already suffering too much. It is a vicious circle when you come to the same point. The present set up of the Congress rule is itself the basic reason for all the crimes. Unless it is changed, no improvement is possible. Therefore, it is a futile effort on the part of the Congress rulers to once again approach our rural and urban women for plenty of empty promises which never come out to their expectation.

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"Organise Working Women in Trade Unions": Says Com. B.T. Ranadive

IN the largest attended gathering of Working Women in Shramik Bhavan in Calcutta on 7th January, Com. B.T. Ranadive, President of CITU said that those who are working in Trade Unions, must understand that working women are a part of the working class movement. Leaving them out, no movement of the working class will be successful. Nirupama Chatterjee was presiding over the meeting. Kanak Mukherjee and Manju Gupta also addressed the women. Com. BTR further said that, "things have changed after 40 years and women are earning today along with men which raised the employment of women further. On the other hand, when women want to join the labour market, they are being thrown out of employment. 50,000 women in Coal Industry were already retrenched. On the contrary if 50,000 men were thrown out, workers would have gone on strike for months! There is tremendous weakness in the trade union movement in this respect. There is no representation of women in the trade unions. Economic crisis is growing and under capitalism it will continue to grow on a large scale. The first attack under capitalism is always on women. This is the law of capitalism. Therefore there is a great necessity to organise them and bring them into struggle. There is the All India Co-ordination Committee of working women. In different industries, Co-ordination Committees are to be formed on state level. He further said there are many problems of working women and they are very much neglected. The task of organising them is very urgent. There is unemployment, no equal wage, no proper maternity benefit and all other benefits are denied to them. We must end the discrimination by launching struggles. Unless women are organised for these issues, the total movement of the working class will suffer..."

Com. Manoranjan Roy, General Secretary of West Bengal CITU, said that in his 50 years work in trade union, thousands of women have participated in the struggles, prominent among whom were women in tea gardens and Jute. There is exploitation, injustice against women workers. Therefore, we must take up the work to organise them seriously.

Rural Women Organise in Nasik District

Two conferences of women agricultural workers were held in Adivasi areas in Rakshasbhuvan and Nirgude villages, in Nasik district. Women came walking, climbing hills more than 25-30 kilometers to hear the leaders of Shramik Mahila Sangh (AIDWA). The conditions of these villages can be described by the fact that till recently no bus was plying on this road, and with the CPM MLA's effects bus was started. No Panchayat elections are held in last 10 years. Women have to bring drinking water from far off places from 5-6 kilometers distance. Despite the decree of giving land to the tillers no land is still distributed to them. There is no school for their children. In spite of sending the estimate to repair the 150 wells which are dry now no notice has been taken yet by the Government. No work is being given by the Government under the "Rojgar Hami scheme" declared by the Government.

Rural Adivasi women, numbering about 222 from 26 villages attended the conference at Rakshas Bhavan after trotting 10 to 30 Kelo-meters to reach the conference place held on 18-19. January '86. Com. Prema Oak addressed the gathering. The enthusiasm of the conference can be noted from the 16 year old girl, the only one knowing reading and writing, who took signatures of all the women with their names and addresses in the villages before the meeting started. 70 women participated and demanded two things. One, No more starvation and give jobs and the other, a school for their children.

Com. Prema Oak spoke on the importance of International Women's Day pointing out the present situation in World and in our country, including the gains made by our left Front Government with regard to land to the landless, employment for rural women widow pensions ect. At the end she told the gathering unless Rajiv Gandhi Government is thrown out there was no other way to improve the condition of the common people. A Committee of 39 women was elected, one from each village. The Conference was over with songs and slogans.

REPUBLIC DAY PLEDGE

A pledge to consolidate the unity amongst the various Religions, Castes, Language Groups and Communities, towards thwarting the conspiracy to disintegrate the country.

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

Comments on the Maternity Benefit Amendments Act 1987

[The following comments are made on the Maternity Benefit Amendments Act 1987, by the Secretary AICCW. Please send your suggestions before the Bill is introduced in Parliament. Editor]

THE Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill 1987 is to be introduced in Rajya Sabha possibly in the next session. There are three important amendments which should be considered by us.

1. Amendment to the section five of the Principal Act 1961 is as follows :—

(i) Subject to the provisions of the Act every woman shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit at the rate of the average daily wage for the period of her actual absence, that is to say, the period immediately preceding the day of her delivery, the actual day of her delivery and any period immediately following that day.

(ii) In the explanation, for the words “or one rupee a day, whichever is higher” the words “the minimum rate of wage fixed or revised under the Minimum wages Act 1948 or ten rupees, whichever is the highest” shall be substituted.

(2). In sub-section (2) The qualifying period for grant of Maternity Benefit is being reduced from 160 days to 80 days, of actual work in the preceding 12 months. The amendment made in the Act is the following :

(i) For the words “One hundred and sixty days at both the places where they occur, the words “eighty days” shall be substituted.

3. In Sub Section (3)

(3) (i) The maximum period for which any woman shall be entitled to maternity benefit shall be twelve weeks of which not more than six weeks shall precede the date of her expected delivery.

(ii) “Provided further that where a woman, having been delivered of a child, dies during her delivery or during the period immediately following the date of her delivery for which she is entitled for the maternity benefit, leaving behind in either case the child, the employer shall be liable for the maternity benefit for that entire period but if the child also dies during the said period, then, for the days up to and including the date of the death of the child.”

4. In section 8 of the Principal Act for the words “Twenty-five Rupees” the words “two hundred and fifty rupees shall be substituted.” This is an improvement to an earlier clause of Rs. 25/- in the Act.

5. (i) If any employer fails to pay any amount of Maternity Benefit to a woman entitled under this Act, or discharges or dismisses such woman during or on account of her absence from work in accordance with the provisions of this Act, he shall be punishable with imprisonment which shall not be less than three months, but which may extend to one year and with fine which shall not be less than two thousand rupees but which may extend to five thousand rupees.

(ii) If any employer contravenes the provisions of this Act or rules made there under, he shall if no other penalty is elsewhere provided by or under this Act for such contravention be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to five thousands rupees or with both.

6. 23 (1) Any aggrieved woman, an office bearer of a trade union registered under the trade unions Act, 1926 of which such woman is a member or a voluntary organisation registered under the societies Registration Act 1960 or an inspector, may file a complaint regarding the commission of an offense under this Act in any court of competent jurisdiction and no such complaint shall be filed after the expiry of one year from the date on which the offence is alleged to have been committed.

7. The Act is extended to shops and establishment employing ten or more persons.

These are important amendments suggested by the State Labour Minister in the Maternity Benefit Act 1961.

The positive change as the qualifying period for grant of the Maternity Benefit is reduced from 160 days of actual work in the preceding 12 months to 80 days of actual work in the preceding 12 months. With this amendment many more women should be covered for the benefit under this Act.

We have been demanding Rs 500/- as medical bonus since our first convention in Madras, in 1979. Rs. 25/- allotted in the Act was just an hoax. No treatment can be done in such a small amount. The amount of Rs 250/- suggested in the amendment also is not sufficient for the anti-natal care for the woman who was delivered the child.

The quantum of Maternity Benefit available for the woman worker as per the Act is very low since it is based on the daily wages. It was at the rate of the "average daily wage or one rupee a day whichever is higher." The amendment suggested is the average daily wages or the minimum rate of wages fixed or revised under the minimum wages Act or ten rupees, whichever is higher. Even this quantum in fact is comparatively less when the prices of all essential commodities are very high.

For the wrongful discharge or dismissal for demanding maternity benefit and leave, a new provision is made in the amendment that an office bearers of a registered trade union of which such woman is a member or a voluntary organisation can file a complaint on behalf of the aggrieved woman besides the inspector. Thus some powers have been given to the unions by the amendment. Formerly the inspector was the sole authority to complain and the inspector being in league with the management was not interested in filing the case in the court thus depriving the woman of the Maternity Benefit and the leave.

The penalties prescribed in the amendments for the defaulting employer has been increased to one year imprisonment or with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees. It was

only three months imprisonment with Rs 500 as fine in the Act.

These are the amendments suggested in the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 1987. On the whole these amendments further strengthened the earlier provisions in the interest of women workers. Even if these are implemented, women will be the beneficiaries. The question is implementation of any act depends upon the organised strength of the Union. If the union is strong, it can fight to implement the provisions of the Legislation.

To a deputation led by AICCW to Mr. Sangma in the month of December 1987 he told that maternity leave of 12 weeks will be now given according to mother's choice. Many women prefer to have the leave after the childbirth.

Some more Amendments to the Amendment Bill 1987

(a) Considering the health of a woman worker and the double burden in the house and in the factory, 4 months leave is very necessary.

(b) Our demand as Medical Bonus, is Rs 600.

There was a talk of application of maternity benefit to agriculture women. The Government should consider the possibility of covering the agricultural women under the Maternity Benefit Act.

Another very important point is many are deprived of maternity benefit and leave if they have miscarriages, abortions, premature deliveries and so on in spite of the rules in the Act. The nurses in AIIMS under Central Government are denied medical leave, and benefit when they had miscarriages even after so many representations. In Chandigarh, UT a certificate is necessary to get the Maternity leave and benefit, by a civil surgeon. Therefore, it is very important to make this point very clear and the rules and regulations should be applied to those women who have abortion, miscarriage or prematured deliveries.

Solidarity with the Arab People and Their Central Cause—Palestine

THE International Secretariat for Solidarity with the Arab people and their Central Cause Palestine held its first session for 1988 from 12 to 14 January in Tripoli. The participants in the meeting saluted the Libyan Jamahiriya, its leadership and its valiant stand and expressed their gratitude for hosting this vital meeting. The participants were unanimous in their view that the popular uprising in the occupied territory constitutes one of the most important political developments in the present Arab situation as it reiterates futility of the attempts made by imperialist, Zionist and reactionary forces to neglect the rights of the Palestinian people, to deny the independent Palestinian representation and to ignore the role of PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The Participants in the meeting also unanimously decided to demonstrate their active solidarity with the armless heroes from among men, women and children in their uprising and confrontation with the bloody Zionist suppressive machinery. They also expressed their utmost condemnation of what reminds of the darkest and most barbarous phases of the history. The flagrant violations of even the minimum human rights as well as international norms and conventions, the legitimacy of the human rights committed by the forces of occupation against the people of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon in the occupied territories and which were condemned by the UN Security Council, the vast majority of national and international forces and organisations, has put the Zionists and their strategic allies — the USA — in extreme seclusion while exposing their aggressive racist nature hostile to all liberation and progressive forces not only in the Arab region but also in the whole world.

The participants noted that what the Arab Palestinian arena has been witnessing, is taking place in the present international situation marked by the intermediate and short range missiles limitation treaty between US and USSR. They drew attention to the fact that the imperialist and reactionary forces are out

to frustrate the treaty and escalate tension in other region of the world so as to proceed with the arms race and prevent the oppressed people from advancing towards independent development and elimination of backwardness and colonial heritage. The participants warned that the forces of war and aggression will continue to plot against the liberation movements. They asserted that the path of the imperialist Zionist terrorism, which led to the aggression against Jamahiriya in April 1986 as well as against Lebanon, Syria and others, constituted a naked threat to all forces of peace, freedom and progress in the world.

In this context the participants called for solidarity with the Lebanese national resistance and the Lebanese masses in their confrontation with the Israeli occupation forces. They also called for the solidarity with the Syrian people in the occupied Golan Heights and all groups of the Arab liberation movements. They expressed their solidarity with all democratic forces and peace movements in the world. They stressed the importance of the immediate cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war that has been draining the energies of two peoples and two countries which should have played a significant role in struggle against imperialism and Zionism. They called for immediate withdrawal of the US Atlantic forces from the Gulf.

The participants agreed upon a solidarity action programme and forming an international popular committee to support the uprising of the Arab Palestinian people and also to send a cable of salute and solidarity to the Leader of the Libyan Revolution Col. Muammar Al-Qadhafi.

[People's Bureau of the Socialist People's
Libyan Art Jamahiriya]

Free Trade Zone—A fertile ground for the Multinational exploitation

Vimal Ranadive

BOMBAY, Kandala, Vishakhapatnam have been declared 'Free Trade Zones' by the Central Government. Thousands of women try to get employment in the FTZ. The Multinationals with the help of Indian employers in Textiles, garments, electronics and in many other industries have factories here. The Nairobi Conference report noted this development with seriousness. Women in Agriculture become redundant on a large scale and they are migrating to the cities for some kind of employment. The significant feature of the employment in Free Trade Zone is terrible low wages, long hours of work, unhealthy and hazardous working conditions and no trace of any legislation! Another feature is, the girls working in these FTZ are between 15 to 20-22 years old. These young girls are hired preferably because they are willing to accept low wages, since no other alternative job is available. Secondly, they are "reputed to be dextrous and skilled," painstaking where the electronics, assembling digital watches and so on is required. Thirdly, and most important reason is there is no provision of Maternity Benefit and neither provision of creche. In fact if they are found to have babies, they are fired! No employer is under obligation to implement any rules concerning women! What more do the Multinationals and Indian employers want? They can treat women as they wish, can continue to exploit them as much as they can, they can earn profit as much as they could on the cheap labour of these young, hardworking girls, and yes, not yet unionised! In fact, the aim of these employers is not to allow any union minded person inside, no talk of unity to fight the demands is allowed!

Central Govt. Responsible

It is reported that in Bombay, near the Airport Santacruz a zone called SEEPZ has been created twelve years ago named as "Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone" various kind of Electronics items are produced in 54 Factories situated in this zone and exported from the airport directly. It is learned, the Central Government has

given hundreds of acres of land after acquiring and given to the industrialists operating there. It is under Central Government jurisdiction.

The raw material brought to these factories is tax free. No export duty on the export products. No labour laws are binding on the employers. The area is so much protected by high walls, that even a car can not pass without a permit inside!

Exploitation Extreme

It is reported that the girls, aged 18 to 30 numbering 15 to 20 thousand are working in these 54 factories in Bombay majority of course are unmarried. The girls start with Rs. 125 per month. Unskilled work get only Rs. 75/-. The Government pays the unskilled workers Rs. 100/- per head to the factory owner for first six months only for training. The services can be terminated any moment when the contract is finished. The salary of a girl can go only up to Rs. 500/- per month. As soon as the girls get married they are asked to leave. There are two shifts one begins from 6 in the morning to 2 in the afternoon, and second begins from 2 to 10 P.M. Besides the security involved for the girls to travel in the night, to employ them beyond 8 P.M. also is illegal.

The ILO report points out the seriousness of the Free Trade Zones and their conditions with regard to the vast concessions given to the owners of enterprises when the production is only for export. It also said that in such zones female labour is chiefly employed on very low wages without any legal protection. It has named Kandla port where women are even employed on Rs. 7 to 8 per day.

No Union is allowed in Sri Lanka

The report from Sri Lanka appeared in "Asian Women Worker" (Sept 1987) has pointed out that to form unions in such Free Trade Zones are almost impossible. Sri Lanka established its FTZ in Katunayake in 1977. The zone employees a labour force of 27,000

workers of which 85 per cent are women. Although there is no law prohibiting organisation in the zone, the formation of unions is made virtually impossible. As soon as the "management comes to know about the existence of a Trade Union or even some form of agitation, it would promptly withdraw the gate pass of the worker. "Thus preventing her from entering," and also loosing the job. "Any attempt to organise some action would be met with police harassment and threats,"

the report quotes. "The problem of organising women workers is further made difficult by the fact that a substantial proportion of the women workers in FTZ are from rural areas.... Most of these women workers are very young, aged between 18-25, and have come from rural to urban areas to get some employment." The report ends with "Together with the repression measures instituted by management, unionisation is made impossible for the women workers in Sri Lanka's FTZ."

Anganwadi Women to Demonstrate in Patna

Rampukari Devi, Bihar

THE department of Social Welfare, government of Bihar, runs an Aanganwadi programme, aimed at all round development of children and pregnant women. The programme includes imparting of education to the children, taking care of the health of mothers and children and imparting knowledge released to it, and providing nutritious food to the under nourished children. To carry out these tasks some women are employed as Aanganwadi Sevikas and Aanganwadi helpers. However, they are not considered government employees and are not given any salaries. Instead, a helper gets Rs 110 and a sevika gets Rs 275 per month as stipend. The minimum qualification required for the job of a Sahayika is 'praveshika' while several of those working as such, are graduate or educated upto intermediate. Similarly, many women working as sevikas are educated upto 'praveshika' while the qualification required is only non-matric.

There is a provision that houses will be rented in by the government to run Aanganwadi centres. However, the Government either does not sanction rental money or, it is sanctioned, amounts do not reach in time, and whenever the allocated amount comes down, welfare officers are not lagging behind in bungling. All this creates problems for the sevikas concerned in running their centres. Added to this, nutritious food items too are not adequately allocated, and of whatever comes in reality, a good part is taken away by those sitting at various levels of the administration. The centres have no lighting arrangement, nor sweeper for maintaining cleanliness. Even water is lacking in their nearby areas.

The Aanganwadi Sevikas and helpers are now striving to get organised in some of the

districts of Bihar. Following are the demands :

1. Since Aanganwadi programme is a governmental programme and the sevikas and helpers working in them are carrying out governmental job, they must be declared to be fulfilled government employees. To make them work on stipends is tantamount to exploitation of these women by the government, and that must be henceforth stopped.
2. Pending their being declared as government employees, these women must be paid their stipends in time, without fail.
3. The provisions required for running an Aanganwadi centre must reach the centres concerned in time.
4. Handpipes must be immediately installed for the centres.
5. Every centre must be provided proper lighting facilities.
6. Each centre must have a sweeper.
7. Village level committees must be set up to ensure cooperation in running the centres.

In Bihar, the Aanganwadi sevikas and helpers together number about fifty thousand. To press for the demands listed above, the sevikas and helpers of the Masaurhi block in Patna district are going to demonstrate before the concerned welfare officers on February 23, 1988. A decision to this effect was taken by a general meeting of the Sevikas and helpers concerned, held on January 26, 1988.

Convention of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers in Punjab

Surinder Kaur, Punjab

AS per decision of the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women held at Chandigarh on 30.11.1987, the Istri Mulazam Co-ordination Committee Punjabi organised a State level Convention of Anganwadi workers/helpers in Desh Bhagat Yadgar Hall Jalandhar on 14th February 1988. About 700 women Anganwadi employees from all over the State participated in this Convention. The Convention was presided over by three member Presidium comprising of Smt. Surinder Kaur, President and Smt. Surinderjit Kaur Gill, General Secretary, Istri Mulazam Co-ordination Committee and Smt. Darshan Kaur, an Anganwadi leader.

While conducting the proceedings Smt. Surinder Kaur noted and stressed the importance of the Convention as this was a major step towards organising the lowest paid of this section of women employees in the state. She added that the strong organisation guided by Scientific Principles of organisation can only be the guarantee for better wages, facilities and security of service. She told that the (AICCWW) has taken in its hand the task of organising Anganwadi employees on the All India level. The Convention was addressed by Darshan Kaur, Gurshinder Kaur, Piar Kaur, Sanjogata Rajwant Kaur Anganwadi leader and Jagjit Kaur, Jagir Kaur, Sarabjit Kaur, Talwandu Kaur, and Smt. Surenderjit Kaur Gill, Istri Mulazam Co-ordination Committee PB. All of them highlighted the Demands and problems of Anganwadi employees and stressed the need for a strong organisation of theirs. The Convention was also addressed by Shri. Harkanwal Singh, General Secretary, Government Teachers Union and organising Secretary, Punjab. Subordinate Services Federation who congratulating the Anganwadi employees for successful Convention, assured the full support to their cause from teachers and employees organisations of the state.

The Convention Decided to form organisation of Anganwadi workers/helpers named as "Anganwadi Mulazam Union Punjabi" and unanimously elected eight member State Committee with Smt. Darshan Kaur from Hoshiarpur District as State Convenor. Other

members of Committee are Dharamjit Kaur, (Jalandhar), Darshan Kaur, (Kapurthala), Gurshinder Kaur, (Amritsar), Rajwant Kaur, (Gurdaspur), Payal Kaur, (Ropar), Satya (Ludhiana) and Gurmeet Kaur, (Patiala) the Convenor was authorised to nominate three other members.

The Convention adopted a Demand Charter which include, demand for equal pay scale for equal qualification as given to Government employees, Regularisation of Service, Security of Service, Leave, Pension and other benefits as per Government employees—right to transfer (as there is no provision for transfer), starting of this scheme in remaining 75 Blocks of State, as this scheme is only in 43 Blocks out of 118 etc.

The Convention decided that the Union will be organised in All twelve districts of State and in 43 Blocks where this scheme is already working. It was further decided that the signature campaign will be started on demand charter and these signatures will be submitted to the Secretary, Social Welfare, Punjab in the end of march, 1988.

Stop Repression on Women And Men In Tripura

THE Assembly election in Tripura once more brings in the light the authoritarian character of Rajiv Gandhi Govt. With whatever methods, foul or dishonest, terror and killing, the Left Front Govt. is to be defeated. That was the motto! On the counting day, all types of terror tactics were used on the counting centres, disregarding even the communication of the Chief Election Commissioner not to change the result once declared. The declaration of Tripura State as disturbed area and deployment of army itself was a manoeuvre by Congress Government. The whole machinery of the Congress was used for terror tactics, not allowing even the Left Party candidates to be present at the counting centre.

After the elections and formation of the Congress-TUJS Government again the reign
(Contd. on page 22)

Ratify the INF Treaty

WIDF open letter on the occasion of International Women's Day 1988

THE WIDF is sending this letter to women all over the world as an appeal to mark International Women's Day this year with concerted women's actions in support of the ratification of the INF Treaty.

This first disarmament treaty in history, signed at the end of last year but still to be ratified by the United States and the Soviet Union, is crucial for us all. It not only eliminates a whole category of weapons of mass destruction but also sets the stage for further agreements on the road to total disarmament, such as a 50 per cent reduction in strategic nuclear weapons, the abolition of chemical weapons and the reduction of conventional weapons. Many of you were present at the World Congress of Women in June, where we heard clearly expressed the desires and the struggles of women on every continent for disarmament, for a world without war and without the threat of war. The motto of the World Congress — Toward 2000 without nuclear weapons — For Peace, Equality and Development was a reflection of our conviction that Peace and Disarmament are very much women's issues, and that progress and justice for women can only fully be realised in a climate of peace. We women need to use every possibility to transform the inhuman waste of resources and potential which go into producing weapons of mass destruction, into meeting *our* needs — for Peace, Equality and Development. The INF Treaty is an important step along this road.

However, we have witnessed how difficult the road to disarmament is, and how powerful are the opponents to this treaty and to the process of disarmament in general. This demonstrates how important the continued pressure of public opinion is, not least the millions of women peace activists all over the world, whose actions helped bring about the signing of the treaty. This pressure needs to be intensified so that the INF treaty is both ratified and implemented, and not left to become an agreement on paper only. The debate in the US Senate on ratification begins in the middle of January, with the final vote taking place at

the end of March or beginning of April.

We would suggest therefore that March 8th, International Women's Day be a high-point of women's activities, all over the world, for the ratification of the INF treaty.

For example, delegations of women could visit or lobby the US and Soviet embassies in their countries. Such visits could be organised in conjunction with signature-raising campaigns and petitions. Letters could be sent to US Senators urging them to vote for ratification of the Treaty. Human chains and other such demonstrations before the embassies could be organised by women, urging that the treaty be ratified. Similar activities could be directed towards your government, asking them to add their voice to the call for the treaty to be ratified. We believe that the numerous activities and events which take place around International Women's Day could be an occasion when women's voices are heard all over the world expressing their desires for genuine disarmament, for Justice and Equality.

Let us act together to achieve the objectives put forward in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the advancement of women till the year 2000: Equality, Development, Peace and let's see the INF Treaty ratified as a first step towards a nuclear free world.

Shahida Parveen Released on Bail

News comes from Pakistan that Shahida Parveen, 25 year old, sentenced to be stoned to death by an Islamic Court in November 1987 for adultery is released on bail by Karachi Court. The joint women's committee and the progressive people in Pakistan launched struggle against this inhuman sentence. (Refer VWW January issue). The news heartens the Indian women. Our congratulations to Shahida for her courageous fight against the Islamic State, Pakistan.

A Shame for the Nation

EVEN an ossified society like ours is at times shocked to reality by tragedies caused by social evils. One such ghastly incident was last week's suicide by three sisters in Kanpur driven to desperation by the evil of dowry. Though the initial reaction of those who saw the photograph in newspapers of the bodies of the three girls hanging from a ceiling fan was one of revulsion, some must have thought of the plight of the girls who remain unmarried mainly because their parents are not in a position to offer adequate dowry. The Kanpur tragedy denotes a form of dowry death, different from the usual one of bride burning which takes place after the marriage. No doubt, in the case of the three girls, they themselves brought about their end and others had no hand in it. Nevertheless the tragedy is also a sad reflection on the social milieu in which girls are driven to suicide on account of the inability of their parents to arrange dowry. Had these girls not been emotionally weak, they could have boldly waged their battles but occasions do arise when individuals lose their courage. The eldest sister was a post-graduate who knew shorthand and typing. The second one was studying MA (education) and the youngest was in BA (final). By no reckoning can they be considered social weaklings because on the strength of their educational qualifications they could have chosen a professional career. But social taboos do make cowards of us all. The very thought that they could not get married in the customary way of arranged marriages in which dowry is essential made them take the fatal step. It is thus clear that even if girls find themselves in a position to stand on their own feet, they are afraid to go against social norms however obsolete and repressive they may be.

Dowry is still a social evil which cannot be fought by mere legislation. According to a voluntary organisation, there were 306 victimisation cases in Delhi in 1985 and the Capital's Jayaprakash Narayan Hospital alone admitted 381 married women with third degree burns. Some of the dowry deaths go unreported. In several northern states, women continue to die or suffer when they fail to satisfy the greed of their parents-in-law or husband. The Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act of 1986 with its punitive measures is very much on the

statute book but mere legislation alone cannot suppress a social evil.

— Hindustan Times, 8.2.1988

Bagpat Maya Tyagi Awarded Justice After 8 Years

Six police officials were on Saturday sentenced to death in the Maya Tyagi case by the additional district and sessions judge, Mr Vishnu Dutt Dubey. Mr Dubey also awarded life imprisonment to four police officials. Delivering the 81-page judgement, the judge described the case as "the most shameful and savage."

The judge awarded different punishments to the accused in addition to fine for various offences. The judge directed that half of the fine money, if realised, would be paid to Mrs Maya Tyagi by way of compensation. It may be recalled that on June 18, 1980, Mrs Maya Tyagi was publicly humiliated by policemen in broad daylight in Baghpat. The trial of the accused lasted for more than a year in the court of Mr Dubey who found them guilty on Friday. However, the quantum of punishment was announced only on Saturday.

(Contd. from page 20)

of terror is let loose on men and women supporters of the left parties, more than 100 people were killed and many were hospitalised including MLAs.

Muslim and Tribal women were harassed at Jalaibari on 2nd February and houses were raided by the hoodlums. The aftermath of the Tripura election reminds us something like semi fascist terror used in West Bengal during 1971 onwards. Whenever the authority of the Congress rule is threatened by the democratic opposition, the total machinery is thrown against the people and the left. The democratic and elected bodies are being dissolved by the Congress Government.

Tripura election showed that despite all the attempts, the CPM and Left Parties got 50.58 per cent votes while Congress and TUI together got 47.60 per cent. The unity of Tribals and non Tribals remains intact. The Rajiv Gandhi Govt. is condemned by all democratic forces for the undemocratic; dishonest tactics, he used, while the common people in Tripura are congratulated for their courage and conviction.

The First Conference of JMS Shahadol

The first conference of Shahadol district in MP was held on 29th of Jan in Amalai. The area, being tribal and Adivasi and also from the coal belt, the holding of the conference here gave added significance. Vimala Ranadive, Vice President of AIDWA and Anagha Shinde, General Secretary of MP AIDWA were present. After the flag hoisting and offering flowers to the Martyrs column, the presidium with Mrs. Mithilesh Singh, Shymadevi Misra and Sandhya Tripathi was elected. After the introduction of the chief guests the condolence resolutions were passed. The conference was attended by 200 women. The venue of the conference was decorated with flags and buntings. Vimala Ranadive while inaugurating the conference explained the work of AIDWA all over India. She gave instances of how women fought against the Dowry, atrocities, Muslim Protection Bill and against Price rise. She also told about the problems of working women, especially in coal industry where most of the women were now retrenched. She attacked the ideology of feminists who try to divide the women instead of bringing them all in the mainstream of the struggle, against the feudal landlord system of the present Govt. She asked women to fight against war preparations of Reagan and for peace.

Greetings from fraternal organisations were given by Com. Agrawal, MP Kisan Sabha President, Com. B N Misra CITU President, Com. R Yadav DYFI President, and Babulal Soundhia SFI President. Com. Anagha Shinde also greeted the conference.

A report was placed by Sandhya Tripathi on which 10 women delegates spoke. Most of the women spoke on the problems of shortage of water, electricity and house shortage. Everybody said that unless they unite, no problem would be solved. Com. Vimala Ranadive intervened and replied to all the questions raised. The report was placed for acceptance and passed. The resolution on equal wage, on price rise, national integration and resignation of the Prime Minister demanding a mid term poll was moved and passed.

A new committee was elected with Mrs Mithilesh Singh as president and S. Tripathi as General Secretary.

Congratulations to Rekha Dixit

Rekha Dixit, a young, new entrant in the judicial profession of a magistrate at Lucknow Divani Court created a history by giving a judgement in favour of Fahima a divorces woman. Fahima a postgraduate had married Shafat Ahmad, a Lieutenant Commander in the Indian Navy. After announcing the divorce for 3 times in August 1987 he promised to pay maintenance to Fahima of Rs. 500/- per month, till she gets married again. But he failed to keep his promise even after repeatedly requesting him under the Muslim Protection Act. He maintained that he was not bound to pay the maintenance.

Rekha Dixit took up the challenge and fought for Fahima under the same Act. She ordered Shafat, the husband to pay Rs. 85,000 a total amount as maintenance, Meher etc to Fahima, his former wife. It was the first case, after Shah Banu, which was settled under the Muslim Protection Act.

It was sheer the labour, conviction of Rekha with which she fought the case despite tremendous pressure from the Muslim Fundamentalists. Rekha said, "actually, under the Act, we are supposed to dispose of cases within a month of applications being filed. Therefore, was no sense in delaying the hearing. It should not have taken us even this long to decide the case."

But how many lawyers will follow this advice? Rekha could understand the injustice made against the Muslim divorcee women who are refused maintenance by their first husbands!

WFTU Grooms Working Women the World Over

On the occasion of 8 March — INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY — the World Federation of Trade Unions greets working women in all countries, reiterating its determination to promote unity, solidarity and worldwide action against discrimination, for equal rights for women as an integral part of the people's struggle against all forms of exploitation.

Let this 8th of March be a great day of worldwide celebration and action for the rights of working women — and a day of unity and internal solidarity, for peace and social progress.

Revolutionary Greetings to Women in Struggle for Peace on March 8th

WE send our warm and fraternal greetings to the fighting women all over the world on the occasion of the 8th March International Women's Day. This year's 8th March comes in the wake of the INF treaty signed by M. Gorbachov, leader of Soviet Union and President Reagan on 9th December 1987. All the peace loving men and women welcome it knowing fully well that the treaty is only for the elimination of short and long range missiles, and does not touch yet the huge destructive weapons. It is only a beginning to that end. We are sure that the increasing pressure of the peace movement all over the world will defeat once for all the conspiracies of Imperialists to unleash world war and war in space. We are proud to send our fraternal greetings to our Soviet sisters, who had gone twice through bitter experience of war, sacrificed everything, lost their kith and kins to save their country and help others to establish Socialism. Our greetings go to our Chinese Sisters, on this day, who have fought imperialism and built their country from such a back ward condition to socialism. Women have progressed in China in every field, though India is still many steps behind despite getting their independence earlier. In small nations like Vietnam and Kampuchia, the position of a woman is high today.

We greet our sisters in Palestine, Chile, Nicaragua and El Salvador and others in their difficult period when they are repeatedly attacked by stooges of imperialism. Nicaragua women had to take up arms to fight the American imperialism. The massacre of women and children by Israeli in West Bank and Gaza strip is continuing for years together. We assure our sisters who are fighting for the Independence of Palestine that we will continue to support their cause.

We express our firm solidarity with the just cause for women, men and small children in South Africa fighting against the inhuman system of Apartheid perpetrated by Botha. The beloved leader of the African people, Nelson Mandela is in jail for more than 20 years, while Winnie Mandela continues to fight for the people despite continuous attacks on

her. Since the imposition of Emergency, 20,000 people have been detained, out of these, 10,000 are small kids. We send our revolutionary greetings to Winni Mandela and others promising them to stand in their struggle against Apartheid. We along with all the peace loving people condemn the recent imposition of ban on 17 anti-apartheid organisations including the United Democratic Front by the Racist regime of South Africa.

Women in Bangla Desh are challenging the rule of Ershad, the participation of women in struggles is exemplary. Despite so many odds, repression and killings, women and men are launching huge struggles and Bundhs under the leadership of two fronts. The women in Pakistan slowly but surely are joining the common struggle against the religious fundamentalists who sentenced Sahida Parveen by stoning to death under the 'Hadod' ordinance. Such cruelty could take place only under the Military rule of Pakistan. The position of women is the lowest in Pakistan and Iran.

Women in our country, are fighting against all the evils under the present Rajiv Gandhi Govt., when dowry deaths, murders of Harijans and Adivasi women are on the increase, when the prices of essential commodities have gone beyond the capacity of ordinary women. Women in Punjab, Tripura, and Darjeeling are falling victims at the hands of stooges of imperialist. The struggle continues with vigour against Khalistan, Gorkhaland and TNV extremists to safeguard the unity of our people despite such repression. We send our revolutionary greetings to all of them.

For all of us, peace is very valuable, and is an urgent necessity to save our country from the imperialist conspiracies to divide it once again. In any war, women and children are the first victims. Huge sums are being spent on the arms race which could be used for food for our hungry children, for education, for employment for millions in our country and world over. The humanity can be saved from the war horrors if peace can be achieved.

For every advance for women today one slogan is raised all over the world "Save our future" "No More Wars."