

THE VOICE OF THE WORKING WOMAN

Vol VI No. 3

May 1986

Re. 1



Women Workers also were participants in the struggle for 8 hour work in New York in 1886.

May Day Greetings

ON the occasion of the May Day Centenary, the CITU send its greetings to the Working Women of India. The year that has passed has seen greater awakening in relation to the rights of working women. More trade unions are now taking up the questions affecting women workers. More women are coming forward to participate in their union's activities. The year has also seen a big awakening among Indian women who are now determined to end their unequal status. The great protest lodged by women's organisations against the reactionary Muslim Women's Bill constitute a sign of women's urge to fight against injustice. The CITU welcomes this awakening.

The Centenary year will be a Year of Struggle against plans of Nuclear war against the USSR hatched by U.S. imperialists. Women from all countries will raise their voice of protest against this act of insanity and destruction. The working women in India should join in this protest to save the world from nuclear destruction.

B. T. Ranadive
President CITU
10.5.1986

(Contd. from page 4)

"It is a fact that women are generally not promoted to take up office in various unions. There are some deficiencies in this respect. But we do not agree to the comments made by the Director Labour Bureau in Para 33 because that would take the women workers out of the mainstream of the movement and may divide the workers.

"The CITU is of the firm opinion that the trade union movement has to espouse the cause of the working women. Not to do so is a deviation which has to be corrected, the earlier the better. With this aim in view the CITU has held three all India Conferences of Working Women and many in the states. A national level-coordination committee and state-level committees are already functioning. We have also encouraged many unions to form sub-committees or women's cells besides promoting the women workers in trade unions. However, the attention of all our state committees would once again be drawn to this".

In This Issue

May Day Greetings	2
Popularise May Day Demands, AICCWW	3-4
Should we opt For Exclusive Trade Unions For Women Workers?	4
Women In Industry—Women Home Workers	5-6
I Find the Bill Totally Anti-Islam No To Black Bill	7-8
Formation of Women's Rights Protection Committee Report From Rajasthan Sorry, the 21st Century is For Men Only	9-10-11
Charter of Demands Presented by WWCC	12
Newsletter from Andhra Pradesh	13
Equal Remuneration Act to be Amended? Report from Punjab	15
The 'Unmarried' Mother won the case of Maternity Benefit	16
Women in National Seeds Corporation	17
Bhopal Gas Tragedy, More Lady Traffic Staff Rostered For Night shift, Maternity Benefits and Child care	18
Big Pay Rise for working women in U.K., Tortures of Com. Roghieh Under Shah of Iran	19-20
Japan's Industrialisation and Women Workers	21-22
CITU Denounces Naked US Aggression on Libya Solidarity with Libyan Women And children, WIDF	23
U.S. Condemned on Nevada Explosion	24

Popularise May Day Demands

A meeting of the AICCWW held on 2.4.86 at Calcutta with the following comrades attending took a few decisions after discussion.

Laxmi Saigal (U.P.) Ishwari and D. Saraswathi (Tamil Nadu), P. Gangamma, Sibani Sengupta, Gargi Mukherjee, Lila Das and Arati Dasgupta (W. Bengal) S. Kamath, M. Sharada (Kerala), Ranjana Narula (Delhi), Surender Kaur (Punjab), Punnyavathi (Andhra Pradesh) and Vimala Ranadive (Centre). Bina sen and Sakuntala were invitees.

Com. B. T. Ranadive, President CITU was present during the discussions. There were two sessions on the 2nd April. Com Vimala Ranadive the Secretary AICCWW presented the report. In her report she explained the decisions taken at the meeting at Trivandrum held on 2nd June 1985. After the detailed report given she placed a few suggestions with regard to observing of May Day Centenary and the task among women while speaking on the future programme.

Comrades from States then reported on the activities in their States. Com. D. Saraswati from Tamil Nadu stated, it would be better if the meeting of AICCWW is held for one day so that the full discussion could be held and the meeting should take place one day earlier before the General Council meeting. Out of 16 districts the units were formed in 8 and a convention of unorganised women was held.

RBI formed a women's wing in Madras. She suggested the subcommittees should be formed under the Federations and Associations. The demands for Creche and other facilities be made, and a day should be observed for that. The question of child labour should be popularised. With regard to May Day, gate and lunch hour meetings be organised, a day for badge wearing be observed, and DWA should help to take up this programme.

Com. Gargi Mukherjee from West Bengal reported about the various activities in West

Bengal. They observed 6th August Demands Day, and held a Muslim Women's convention on 14th February 1986. A jatha was taken out on 18th March '86 and a Beedi workers conference held on 19th March, with 2000 women attending.

There are industrywise women's sub-committees and demands on creche, provident fund, etc., are raised. Work among the women in the unorganised sector is being done. In jute industry, women are compelled to retire at the age of 50 when men are retired at 55 and a protest is made. She also agreed that one day should be observed as working women's day in May by holding seminars, conventions, etc.

Com. Ishwari from Thiruppur, Tamilnadu reported about the conference of women held there which was successful. While describing the working conditions in mining and other small factories, she reported the management employs less than 20 women to evade all the protective legislations. Wages are reduced. When an agitation was launched for 4 days it resulted in getting the demands. Many women are hesitant to join CITU perhaps organising them first in WWCC would be better.

Com. Ranjana from Delhi said WWCC was able to move with middle class women. We need sub-committees in the unions. Without more cadres for WWCC, to work among working women is not possible. She reported about work being done in LIC because of women cadres and we were able to hold lunch hour meetings with good attendance. V.W.W. also was being sold to these women. She reported about contacting the teachers and nurses.

Com. Punnyavathi from Andhra expressed some difficulty in functioning of the committee because of the centre being Hyderabad while she is staying in Vaizak. CITU is taking interest and proposals of convening the state-wise and districtwise conventions are being

discussed. We had to work among middle class women under DWA. We also have to go with CITU in the unorganised sector.

Com. Surender Kaur from Punjab, said there are 40,000 women in the Education Department, while 40% are in the telephone, Govt. Offices, schools, textiles, agricultural operation, etc. Because of the present situation in Punjab we are not yet able to organise the working women. But we plan to organise them now, in industries. Women can be militant though they are few in the unions. The common demands like creche, no night work in P&T, Health, more maternity leave, seniority issue should be taken up.

Com. Vimala Ranadive requested to send reports on the activities regularly so that the bulletin will be lively one. With regard to May Day centenary she said as everybody agreed to observe it in a befitting manner, the common programme emerged from the discussion was: (a) Conventions of working women in the unorganised sector; (b) Lunch hour meetings, gate meetings on the demands of working women; (c) Seminar and hall meetings on May Day Centenary, its importance and working women's role; (d) poster, handbills and exhibition on working conditions of women in the unorganised sector prepared by J.M.S.

Com. B.T. Ranadive while addressing the members, said the meeting of the committee is held for the convenience of the members at the time of the General Council meeting. It can be held one day earlier to give sufficient time for discussion. Regarding questions raised here, whether the work is being done through AIDWA or CCWW, the main question was how to reach working women.

If we can reach them through AIDWA, we should do that. Only problem will come if she continued in that only and does not join her union. Women have 3 aspects, one as women, as worker and as citizen. We are fighting against the feudal tendencies in our unions, where leadership does not have interest in working women's membership or leadership. We want both. She is attracted to AIDWA as a women, the consciousness is not yet of a worker. Our goal is to make them reach class consciousness also. CCWW is only a device, we want subcommittees of women and CCWW is a means to get them. One part of the struggle is Shah Bano, the other is working class

problems. The CITU leaders are not giving the direction they should. There is an upsurge among middle class women and we should go to them in whatever form are acceptable to them, whether as individual, AIDWA or CCWW. CCWW should be as wide as possible, with unorganised women wherever women work. The main goal is that the working women should fight for their own rights in their own Association. The task is to rouse their class consciousness, and make her work in her own union.

Should we opt for exclusive trade unions for women workers?

The Union Labour Ministry has circulated some excerpts from a Report on the subject "Social Economic Conditions of women workers in manufacture of chemicals and chemical products, Food Products" drawing our special attention to para 32 & 33 of the report. Portions of Social and Economic conditions of women workers in the manufacture of chemicals and chemical products food products etc. will be produced in our next issue.

The para 32 and 33 of the report, are quoted below for your information with the reply by the Secretary-CITU Com. N. Chakrabarty on 5th April 1986.

Para 32: "No sampled woman worker in the selected factories was found holding a post of an office bearer or any other responsible position at the decision and policy making levels of the trade unions. Lack of proper representation of women in the trade union activities is in some cases, responsible for the non-espousal of the feminine cause".

Para 33: "It is felt that unless and until women workers actively participate in trade union it may not be possible for them to fight for and protect their interests. They must be made to realise the usefulness of trade unionism. They must also be encouraged to form trade unions exclusively for themselves which, inter-alia can resolve their special problems more effectively".

The reply given by the Secretary CITU: "Stated that,

(Contd. on page 2)

Women Home Workers

A two day Dialogue on "Problems of Self-Employed Women" was held on 17-18th March 1986 at Regional Centre, Lucknow on behalf of National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development. AICCWW was represented by Com. Ranjana Nirula. The following paper on "Women Home Workers" was submitted by her in the conference:-

Today, both in advanced capitalist countries and in the developing countries 'homeworking' is growing in the traditional industries as well as the new technological industries; in both manufacturing and service industries. It is being promoted by multinational companies in South Asia and parts of Latin America. Both international and domestic capital are increasingly in search of homeworkers in order to reduce overheads and thereby mobilise resources, to prevent trade Union organisation, avoid Labour laws, minimum wage regulations and laws regarding health and safety. In India lakhs of women are involved in this sweated labour and more and more of them are being forced into ranks of homeworkers. Studies and research over the past few years have brought out the common features of work in such industries. They are, the low wages, piece rates, long hours of work and its seasonal and sporadic nature, its isolation in combination with household responsibilities, the involvement of children and other members of the family and the lack of any form of trade union organisation. The organisation of home based productions is done through chains of subcontractors, or middlemen, who take in work from wholesalers, retailers or component producers or service suppliers and put it out to the homeworkers.

Our experience of work among the unorganised sector of women indicate three broad tendencies within home-based production in India. These are :

(1) The crisis in the traditional industries such as coir, cashew, tobacco is increasingly

leading to home-based production. Besides, the growth of trade union organisation in these industries (these industries have witnessed the most militant, intense and heroic struggles by women workers) has led the capitalists to look for cheap labour in home based production. In handlooms, for instance, where lakhs of women are involved in home-based work, because of the installation of highly sophisticated machinery and powerlooms and the New Textile Policy, women have been losing their means of livelihood in large numbers and more are likely to do so. This has taken place despite the Government's Ten Point Technology policy which includes the protection of traditional industries.

(2) Another aspect of homeworkers is their increasing concentration around new technology. This is particularly so in electronics. A glaring example is the putting out work in public sector establishments like Keltron, HMT. With the new economic policy of the present government and its orientation towards high technology, concessions to multinationals, this type of work is bound to increase. In fact, this process has already begun. The STC has started to put out work to produce beedis with Japanese collaboration in Bangalore.

(3) The above tendencies, however, do not represent the full range of homeworking. A survey of home based work in select areas in Delhi's resettlement and working class colonies indicated the diversity of products and services which use home based labour. The survey also brought out two aspects of the exploitation of women involved in such work, namely the intense and long hours of work and the low rates earned. For example, women involved in the extraction of wire strands earn Rs. 1 for unwinding 600 wires, each with 15-17 strands. Peeling 25kgs. of almond bring them only Rs. 10 or 40 ps per kg. The extraction of tyre rubber brings in Rs. 1.50 per kg. Packing and sticking bindi brings in Rs. 2 for 144 packs. Packing 1728 naphthalene balls in 144 packs brings them Rs. 11. Safety pins made by machine maintained by the workers brings, in

Rs. 2 per kg. Knitted vests made for export bring them Rs. 2.50 per piece whereas four/five years ago the same work brought them Rs. 10 per piece. Here it may be noted that the increasing number of unemployed women's and the competition for work among this reserve pool of labour, facilitate the lowering of wages rates. These low wage rates among women workers also lead to a lowering of the male wages rates, therefore, the issue of wage rates has an impact on the working class as a whole.

The basic necessities of our life are produced wholly or in a part by such labour and these include garments, food, toys, etc. Assembling and packing of a wide range of goods are also carried out. These goods and services, of many levels of quality are taken in by firms into their final products or marketed through retail outlets in high class stores and shops, or by market traders. They also feed the restaurants, preserving and pickling plants, even local government services (e.g., the Social Welfare Board Employees), to name only a few. There are also cases of links with international capital, e.g., in garments, lace-making, as studies have indicated.

The tendencies discussed above indicate that the issues involved in organising this large, invisible section of women go beyond the issues of working conditions, protective legislation, making the invisible visible in government statistic, although these are also the issues which concern us immediately. Therefore, in order to bring out the basic issues involved we must ask certain questions. These are :

(1) *Who are these homeworkers?* They are the large majority of women who are caught in a various circle of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, rising inflation and therefore in desperate need for any work which will bring some income to support their families. The need for such work has become greater with large-scale retrenchment and displacement mainly through mechanisation and closures.

(2) *Why is this happening?* To us this question is of crucial significance as many studies do not go beyond the *manifestations* of women's oppression and ignore the integrations of these manifestations with the social, economic conditions in which the exploitation of women takes place. Another

approach—the market segmentation approach considers only constraints on *eradicating differences* between male and female workers. Others discuss problems of rural development without spelling out the essential causes of underdevelopment. According to us, the need to identify the basic features of the position of women in our society is the central problem of analysing the problems of women *in their totality*. This leads us to ask another question, *What is the core of the problem?* Clearly, the issue is that of the survival of feudal forms of oppression, backward social relations, low levels of technology and the generally accepted low Status of women in our society. Two trends can be seen to be linked to this, (a) The still-born nature of the development process in India has led to the prevalence of the contract system of labour recruitment. Under this system the employer does not come into direct contact with the workers, accept no responsibility for their welfare and in times of dispute refuses to recognise them as 'Workers'. It is not accidental that the majority of women workforce in India are hired under this system. Whether in the engineering firms of Faridabad, cotton textiles in Kanpur, to matches and beedi industries, this is the system, and it dates back to the first labour recruitments made in the Bombay textile mills where only a small number were regular permanent workers. Linked and allied to this is (b) the issue of women from the self-cultivating households. Petty production in agriculture characterise the large sections of the peasantry. These are also the households from which large section of women in the domestic, cottage and small-scale industries are drawn. It needs to be noted that the source of extreme exploitation, contract labour, low wages, inhuman conditions of work, and even sexual abuse, lies in this condition of petty production. The link between the continuance of these forms of production in agriculture and the non-agricultural industrial sector has to be considered. The perpetuation of semi-feudal relations in agriculture has imposed constraints on capitalist development and industrialisation. Even today, the pauperisation of the peasantry and low wages has led to a shrinking home market and also kept the working class chained to almost the colonial wage conditions.

In our view, these issues need to be kept

(Contd. on page 20)

I Find the Bill Totally Anti-Islam

Nadira

IN an unprecedented display of their total opposition to the Black Bill, about 1500 Muslim women from eight states assembled in Delhi and marched to the Boat Club on April 17 and held dharna. They came from Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, U.P. Madhya Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Delhi to voice their protest against the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, 1986.

The women marched under the banner of the All India Democratic Women's Association, the three Committees for the Protection of the Rights of Muslim Women Kerala, West Bengal and Delhi, the National Federation of Indian Women, Muslim Satyashodak Mandal (Pune) and Tarakkipasand Musalman (Bombay). They raised slogans in many languages but their demand was one: No to the Black Bill, No to the Government's surrender to fundamentalist forces, No to the attempts to divide women before the law.

Anti-Women Bill

Speakers at the meeting included Susheela Gopalan, General Secretary of AIDWA, Vimala Farooqui (NFIW), Zoya Hasan, Reshma Arif Khan, Shahnaz Sheikh. Many Muslim women recounted their own experiences and protested against the government's move to pass such a Bill without taking their opinion into account at all. Some recalled the experiences of the freedom struggle and pointed out that the rights that Indian women enjoy today are the rights which were won after years of struggle and that they would fight to the last for protecting them. Denial of the right of maintenance for Muslim women was both anti-women and against all humane values they said.

According to Susheela Gopalan this was the first time that the government itself had moved a Bill to curtail a certain benefit enjoyed by women in India to satisfy the reactionary elements in a particular community. The formulation of laws in consultation with the so-called religious leaders is a dangerous precedent for a state which claims to be secular. The speeches, were heard in rapt silence and attention by the women.

Firm Determination

In striking contrast to the officially sponsored rally of Muslim women (April 10, Delhi) which had as its main slogan "Islam is in danger", and in which most participants were unaware of the Bill, the AIDWA-organised march and dharna consisted of women who were conscious of their own rights and prepared to fight till the end for the same. This was firmly expressed by Subaida and Sulekha from Kerala who said that they would fast unto death before the Prime Minister's house if the Bill was passed.

Grim Experiences

Members from the newly formed Committee for the Protection of Women's Rights (Calicut) recounted how they had been fighting legally and otherwise against the injustices meted out to Muslim women. Jamila was thirteen when she was married off to a man who came from a poor family. Her father financed her husband's travel to Dubai to work. Her husband became prosperous and after two years, he sent a divorce notice from Dubai by post. However, Jamila is not a person to submit meekly to 'her fate! "My main task is to work in the Committee for Protection of Women's Rights in Calicut. I will fight to the end".

Rahmat Bano from Udaipur, said, "My parents are poor, they are in their seventies. I had four children of whom two girls aged 13, and 11 are living. My husband beat me and threw me out of the house. Soon he sent a talaqnama by post. I returned the talaqnama and filed a case against him. I won the case for maintenance in 1982. A year ago, I started receiving Rs. 350 per month as maintenance. I spent a large part of my earnings for this case and we have often had to starve. Now I sew sacks which gets me about Rs. 150 per month and my mother sells vegetables. I heard about the Shahbano case three months ago and this is being discussed among Muslim families. Now, the women's organisation in Udaipur is campaigning for us and I am very much a part

of this campaign". She replied,

17 year old Nadira, an undergraduate said, "My eldest sister is victim of divorce. Her husband is a landlord and so she has been able to win the case of maintenance and now gets Rs. 1000 per month. Today, all four of my sisters are involved in the campaign and the Committee for the Protection of Women's Rights in Calicut." What is her response to the Bill, She said, "Every woman is against the Bill although many cannot come out in the open and say so. Almost every family will have a divorced woman. Marriage for Muslim women is like a lottery and we will not play this game. For young Muslim girls, the idea of marriage is a nightmare and if this bill is passed thousands of Muslim girls will remain unmarried. I have studied the Koran and I find this Bill to be totally anti-Islam". Did she face any threats from her community? Threats are there. Of course, but we are doing a lot of underground campaign and we are receiving a great deal of encouragement from our Muslim sisters and mothers. In fact my sisters and my mother have come for this march without informing our father. He thinks that we are on a pilgrimage. Only my brother-in-law and sister know the truth.

According to Susheela Gopalan, General Secretary AIDWA. "We are daily receiving letters from Muslim women. They say: "Please protect us. This Bill will ruin us." Many Muslim women have written that their husbands have started harassing them after hearing about the Bill. There have been cases of destitute divorced women committing suicide also."

Memoranda to the President and the Speaker

On behalf of the women participating in the April 17 march, a delegation met the President and the Speaker and handed over a separate memorandum to them.

Meeting with P.M.

A delegation of women which met the Prime Minister on April 18 included Susheela Gopalan, Kanak Mukherjee, Lakshmi Saigal, Sumitra Swamy, Subhashini Ali, T. Devi, Begum Nafeesa (AIDWA), Gita Mukherjee, Pramila Loomba (NFIW), Zoya Hasan (Committee for Protection of Rights of Muslim Women, Delhi) Dr. Mumtaz (Committee for Protection of Muslim Women's Rights, West Bengal), Shaban, Zulekha and Zubaida (Muslim Women's Rights Protection Com-

mittee, Calcutta), Mehrunnissa Dalwai (Muslim Satyashodak Mandal, Pune).

The delegation repeatedly urged the P.M. not to exclude Muslim women from the purview of Sec. 125 and to leave open for Muslim women the option of approaching the court to seek maintenance. The P.M. reiterated his earlier stand that equal rights and maintenance was a western concept. He, however, remained silent when asked whether democracy and Parliament were also western concepts. For the P.M. secularism in India meant "all religions" and not "no religions". He was silent when asked whether the state should dabble in religious affairs.

Muslim women from all over the country had participated in the rally because of difficulties they were facing in their day to day lives and if the Bill was passed it will be end of justice for them, the delegation stated. Women's struggle for equal rights has had to face many onslaughts from fundamentalist forces, be it Christian, Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and the government's willingness to ally with these forces will undermine national unity.

No to the Black Bill

About one hundred women with their hands linked and locked in iron chains demonstrated in front of Parliament in a novel way in protest of the Muslim women's protection Bill which was being discussed inside furiously, on 5th May 1986. The police strength was completely paralysed and did not know what to do and how to arrest the demonstrators. The demonstrators were wearing black banners with slogans like "Kala Kanoon Wapas Lo" (withdraw the Black Bill) The traffic came to halt when women chained themselves and locked. No women police were available for some time and confusion became worse. After an hour or so, women police and home guards and a squad of wirecutters arrived at the scene! There was a melee between demonstrators and police while the chains were being cut. They were ultimately arrested and taken to Mandir Marg police station and released.

The Bill was passed with a brute majority of Congress-(I) at 2.30 A.M. on 6th with a whip on their heads while, making the issue of personal prestige for Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the P.M. But Muslim Women along with others will continue to fight for their just demands.

Formation of Women's Rights Protection Committee

A. Nazimunnisa, Kerala

REPRESENTATIVES of the Women's organisations met on 14.12.1985 and formed a 'Women's Rights Protection Committee' with Smt. Lakshmi N. Menon as Chair person and Com. Suseela Gopalan as convenor. The committee consists of the representatives of the following organisations:

All India democratic Women's Association, Working Women's Co-ordination Committee, Forum for social Justice, University Women's Association, Sasthra Sahithya Parishad, Women's Muslim Association, Y.W.C.A., Kerala Mahila Sangham and Lioness Club. A resolution requesting the Prime Minister to desist from the move to amend Section 125 Cr P.C. was passed and sent to the Prime Minister.

As decided in a subsequent meeting of the committee a mammoth convention of women was held at Trivandrum on January 13th.

The committee observed 25th February 1986 as 'Black Day' in protest against the introduction of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill in the Lok Sabha on that day.

Observance of 'Black Day'

25th February 1986, the day in which the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill was introduced in Parliament was observed as 'Black Day' in Trivandrum at the call of Women's Rights protection Committee. Hundreds of women with black flags marched to the Raj Bhavan and held demonstration. Com. Suseela Gopalan, Smt. Lakshmi N. Menon, Dr. Rachal Mathai, Dr. Pushpitha John, Com. J. Saradamma, Smt. Supriya Cheriyan, Smt. Remla Latheef, Com. Girija Bai and Com. Nazimunnisa led the procession. The leaders then presented a memorandum to the State Governor. The day was observed in other districts also by AIDWA and Working Women Co-ordination Committee. Telegrams, demanding the withdrawal of the Bill were sent to the Prime Minister and Lok Sabha

speaker by all the organisations in the committee.

Impressive Women's Meet at Trivandrum

Under the auspicious of newly formed Women's Rights Protection Committee a massive women's convention was held on 13th January '86 at Priyadarsini Hall, Trivandrum. More than 500 participants from all walks of life attended the convention. Mrs. Mary Roy who challenged the Travancore Christian succession Act in the Supreme Court, inaugurated the convention. In her inaugural speech she narrated the sad plight of christian women in the matter of right on property. She accused the rulers of denying the status of equality enshrined in the constitution and succumbing to the pressure of the fundamentalists to change the existing laws.

Smt. Lakshmi N. Menon Presided over the convention.

Former supreme Court justice, Justice. V.K. Krishna Iyer who was the main speaker on the occasion, spoke at length about the constitutional aspects of the issue of maintenance to divorced women. He condemned the move to overcome the Supreme Court ruling in Shah Bano case.

Other speakers included Prof. Nabeesa Ummal, Smt. Nabeesat Beevi, Prof. Meenakshi Thampan, Smt. Sugathakumar, Dr. Rachal Mathai and Smt. Indira Ramakrishna Pillai.

A good number of women took part in the discussion. The presence of Muslim women was conspicuous by their participation in large number. Com. Suseela Gopalan earlier welcomed the gathering.

The convention passed resolution demanding the Govt. of India not to amend Sec. 125 Cr P.C. It was also decided to send telegrams and postcards to the Prime Minister by each and everyone on the above demand.

Resolution Adopted by the Women's Conference

The Muslim Religious Fundamentalists have come out with an outcry to amend the article 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code so as to prevent the Muslim divorced woman from seeking alimony, following the historic verdict of the Supreme Court upholding the validity of article 125 of the Cr. P.C. to seek such redressal for the Muslim divorced women. These people raise the same argument of Mr. Mohammed Khan who refuse to respect the Supreme Court verdict. The argument rightly rejected by the Supreme Court was that under the Muslim Personal Law, a husband had no liability towards a wife who had been divorced by him. The criminal Law of the land is applicable uniformly to every Indian citizen. It would be contrary to social justice if a section of the population is exempted from the purview of such a law on religious grounds.

The Directive Principles enshrined in the Constitution declare that the State should aim to introduce a uniform civil code to cement national integration. However it is a tragic truth that even after 38 years of independence, we could not achieve that goal.

It is the women of India who suffer the bitter consequence of such absence of uniform code. In matters of marriage, divorce, property right, adoption, alimony etc. highly contradictory situations prevail, today. The right of equality of women in society still remains a distant dream.

When we look back after the Women's Year, the condition of women is seen to have worsened on all the five target sectors according, to the statistics published by the Government. In such a situation, the Prime Minister's recent statement only proves that the attempt is to deny even the general benefits now available to women, not to speak of the urgent steps needed to ensure equality to women in society. The Prime Minister made this point clear before the representatives of five organisations of women.

The statement of the Prime Minister to provide help at Government's cost for the divorced women, if the enhancement of 'Meher'

for the divorced women after codifying the Muslim Personal Law was found to be not an adequate solution, is quite unfortunate. We do not approve the approach of the Prime Minister to set apart govt. help for a particular religious community, obviously after succumbing to the pressure-lobby of the religious fundamentalists. The steps taken by the Government to appease the pressure groups of each and every religion or caste, have only helped to strengthen the hands of the disruptionist forces who rouse religious and casteist passions. All these led to the tragic culmination marked by the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. We must be ready to learn lessons from these experiences. We should not do anything which would endanger the unity and security of India.

The Indian Women cannot be silent spectators to any step which take away the protection available to Muslim Women under article 125 of Cr. P. C. We demand that the government and the Prime Minister should retrace its steps in such dissection and that article 125 of Cr. P.C. should not be amended.

A Report from Rajasthan

Madhu Sethia

THE CITU State Committee meeting held on 18th March 1986 decided to form a Co-ordination Committee of Women activists in trade unions in order to carry forward the work. A meeting of women from trade unions has been called on 28th March for this purpose.

Although there is no proper committee in Rajasthan, yet some attempt to highlight the problems of working women and day to day struggle against them by women workers have been going on in some parts of the state.

In January 1986 the CITU union of Jaipur Glass Factory launched a slow down to demand that whenever a women worker retires her place should be given to a new woman and not to a man, to check the declining number of women workers in the factory. The demand has been conceded by the management of the factory.

In Forest department, Nursery labour union where the overwhelming majority is of women workers the government refused to declare Republic Day as a paid holiday on the ground that for casual workers no such rule is applicable. A deputation of the union met the Secretary, Forest Department and the Chief Conservator of Forests and demanded restoration of Republic Day as a paid holiday. The workers boycotted the payment of wages and threatened to intensify the movement. Finally the Govt. agreed to pay wages for Republic Day, like the previous year.

In Ankur, a small scale pharmaceutical factory of Jaipur where only women worked, a CITU union had been formed. After some time the management closed the factory on the plea that women workers were not required any longer. The women workers started a dharna at the factory gate which continued for more

than two months. At last the management has agreed to reopen the factory, to take back all the women and to make full payment for the closure period.

In January the Bidi workers of Beawar lead by CITU went on a strike to demand increase in the payment rate and to get passbooks issued to all the bidi workers. The women participated in demonstrations in large number, on 20th Jan. actively took part in 'Rasta Roko' movement and went from shop to shop in markets to impose Bharat Bandh on 26th February. Finally an agreement has been reached with the management of bidi factories and almost all the demands have been won.

In Jaipur and Kishangarh the CITU women actively participated in 'Rasta Roko', Bharat Bandh' and also courted arrests in the movement lead by Kisan Sangharsh Samiti.

Sorry, The 21st Century is for Men Only

When the Prime Minister appeared on TV two months ago and was questioned by six women on a variety of issues relating to women's states, he gave well-rehearsed replies in his best drawing room manner. Yes, of course, we will look into this, but certainly we support that, etc. Therefore with some basis for their hopes, the All India Democratic Women's Association called on our "modern" Prime Minister on April 18 in New Delhi, pleaded for equal rights for women, maintenance for divorced women and requested him to withdraw the Muslim Women Bill.

Unluckily for them, this time Rajiv Gandhi did not make the right noises. Equality? Maintenance? He reportedly told them that these were "western" concepts, "not Indian". Naturally the women were taken aback. Could this be the same person who talks constantly of super computers and high tech, neither of which are "Indian"? Or was this perhaps a hint that perhaps even "parliamentary democracy", a decidedly "Western" concept, would soon be thrown overboard and our "desh ka badshah" (the PM was introduced as such during his recent televised visit to villages in Rajasthan) would become the sole monarch?

It is not known whether the PM did anything to assuage these fears. What is known, however, is that when Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP Kanak Mukherjee suggested that the issue of maintenance could be resolved by guaranteeing jobs for women, the PM made some incredibly dexterous mental calculations on the fallout of such a policy and pronounced: Give women jobs and there will be mass divorce! At which point a stunned group of women were seen emerging from his office. (Indian Express Sunday Magazine May 4, 1986).

Charter of Demands Presented by WWCC

Shanti Chaterjee Durgapur

A Second conference of Steel Workers Federation of India held on 18th May, 1985 at Rourkela, was attended by seven members of working Women's Co-ordination committee of SWFI of Durgapur as delegates and took active part in this conference. On behalf of the W.W.C.C. a resolution was adopted in the conference. On 29.1.86 the W.W.C.C. of Durgapur has placed its charter of demands to the Managing Director of Durgapur Steel Plant in a Mass Deputation. The Same charter of Demands has been placed to the Executive Director of Alloy Steel Plant on 4.2.86.

On 8th March, 1986 the International Women's Day has been observed by W.W.C.C. with due enthusiasm. Working Women's Co-ordination Committee and Mahila Samity of Durgapur Steel Plant jointly observed this day. W.W.C.C. hopes that they shall be able to achieve some of our demands from the authorities of D.S.P. and A.S.P. in the long run.

The following charter of Demands was submitted to the managing director of D.S.P. and A.S.P.

"Even at the end of the women's decade declared by the U.N.O. economic and other conditions of the working women in SAIL Organisation do not show any improvement. On the contrary, women employees here are facing various kinds of discrimination and injustice in their service life.

This committee expresses its concern at rapidly diminishing employment scope. Ban on Recruitment policy taken by the Central Government and implementation of advanced technology are decreasing the opportunity of employment.

This committee observes that after the death or retirement or disablement of the male bread earners of the family its women members

get no means for their livelihood. The whole family stands on the brink of ruin.

There is no training facility for young female jobseekers in Durgapur Belt. No new avenues of employment is open before them.

Working women's Co-ordination committee of SWFI is much agrieved to know that women Contract Workers are forced to work on temporary basis for year after years.

This committee finds that there is no provision for creche for the children of working mothers.

Women employees working in Contractor's Firm get no medical or educational aids for their dependant children. Maternity benefit is not available to them.

This committee thinks that three month maternity leave is not sufficient for all working mothers.

Inadequacy of accommodation is a major problem of working women. Women employees residing at hostels do not get suitable and sufficient single room accommodation even after a long tenure of service.

Women working at hospital and health centres have to face embarrassment for want of changing room and conveyance during 'B' shift and night shift duty. They are deprived of full dress allowance which is their due.

This committee expresses grievances to know that women workers are not drawing medical aids for their minor dependant brothers and sisters, lady teachers are also victims of such kind of inequality. In case of transfer of one of the member of a family sometimes the whole family have to face much inconvenience for injudicious transfer orders.

This committee places the following demands to the Managing Director DSP/ Executive Directors, ASP with the request to take expeditious action for the settlement of these demands.

1. No retrenchment of women workers due to implementation of advanced technology or any other reason.

2. Immediate arrangement of employment for female members of a dead or a disabled employee of DSP/ASP.

3. Provision of Training suitable for women in Industrial training institutes.

4. Permanent post for contractor women workers.

5. Opening of new avenues of employment for young jobseekers.

6. Educational and medical aids for the children of women contractor workers.

7. Provision of creche for the children of all women employees.

8. Four months maternity leave for all women workers.

9. Rest cum changing room for hospital staff.

10. Proper dress allowance for hospital staff,

11. Provision of transport during night shift and 'B' shift duty for women workers of hospital.

12. Equal medical aids for minor dependent brothers and sisters of married women employees. Radical facility for parents and dependent brothers and sisters of the lady teachers residing at hostels.

13. Appropriate single room accommodation for women employees residing at hostels.

14. If necessary judicious and suitable transfer orders for women employees — with the suggestion of Trade Unions and working Women's Co-ordination committee.

15. Toilet and rest-room for contractor women workers.

16. Educational and medical benefit for workers of Mahila Karmodyog.

Newsletter from Andhra Pradesh

by Punnyavathi

Andhra Pradesh seeds farm workers union was formed in December 1985. About 200 women and 100 men are working on that farm. Even though it is State Govt. farm, the management is not implementing minimum wages Act and other statutory benefits. There is no guarantee for their employment. In addition to that the office staff and other officials are used to illtreat female workers. On many occasions the higher officials forced the female workers to work at their residence. When the workers refused to do according to their whims and fancies, they used to victimise them.

Later, they formed their union, which was affiliated to CITU; demanded for implementa-

tion of Minimum Wages, to stop victimisation and atrocities on women, protection for employment etc.

Taking revenge on the workers who formed the union; they colluded with police. The management attempted to arrest all the union leaders. Then the female workers struggled militantly. They did not allow the police to arrest union leaders; and insisted that they may be arrested instead of their leaders.

At last the Joint Director came and gave assurance to solve their problems like minimum wages, victimisation, etc. In their union committee 50 per cent seats are occupied by women workers.

Chicago May 1, 1886. A workers' strike for an eight hour working day



became
history.



a revolution that created
A history written in the sweat

of toiling men
A history of an



the world over.
international workers'



solidarity.
the Left Front



Today,
Government

salutes all persevering mortals.

Let us raise
echo the



our voice and
words of Karl Marx :

'Working men of all countries unite !'



Government of
West Bengal

The Left Front Govt's tribute to a hundred years of struggle

Equal Remuneration Act to be Amended ?

THE following news item was published in the Indian Labour Journal in the month of March 1986. We are reproducing it for the benefit of our readers. Due to the pressure from Trade Union Movement, women's organisations, co-ordination committees of working women and also from the International trade union movement, perhaps the Government was thinking to bring the amendments to the Act. Whatever it may be the pressure of our movement must continue till the actual changes favourable to working women come into practice. **Editor**

"The Government may soon amend the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, to make the violation of the provisions of the Act cognizable by courts on receipt of complaints from institutions notified by the Central and State Governments. The Act may be amended on the lines of the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act, 1984, according to which courts can take cognizance of the offences. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, enjoins equal payments to be made to men and women for doing similar work and there can be no discrimination between sex in recruitment. Under the provision of the Act, only inspecting personnel of the government are empowered to report offences covered by the Act and initiate proceedings. Despite blatant violations of the Act on a large scale, the number of

cases detected since the Act came into force over ten years ago has been negligible. Inadequacy of inspecting staff, it is pleaded, is a major constraint in bringing the violations to light and offenders to book. Another reason is the large number of labour enactments, which the staff has to ensure enforcement with the result that the laws relating to women and children receive low priority. The government appears to be seized with the problem. It proposes to amend the law enabling recognised institutions also to report the gross violations. The amendment may increase the number of prosecutions and thus become a deterrent. The Act covers employments most of which fall under the state sector. Uttar Pradesh appears to be the lone state to report violations of the Act during the last one decade.

According to available figures, in employments under the Central sphere the number of prosecutions launched during 1982, 1983 and 1984 was 15, 58 and 67 respectively. The respective number of convictions for the three years was 8.25 and 38. With a view to speeding up and increasing detection of offences under this Act, creation of a separate machinery, which will forence the legal provision relating to women and children, in each state is also under consideration."

(The Economic Times, 9th Feb., 1986)

Report from Punjab

by Surinder Kaur

In Punjab, women are employed on a large scale in the Central Government and the Semi-Government services. A major section of working women are employed in Education, constituting about 40,000. 40 per cent are employed in Health, and a large number in post and telegraph, as clerks and telephone operators. At the call of their organisation women teachers participate in the struggle, but they are not much active in the day to day trade union activities.

For further extending our work we are putting up the following demands on which we will organise working women in different sections, in Punjab.

No night shift for women, Accommodation

for the nurses in the hospital premises, 6 months Maternity Leave, Working women should be kept on the same job after they join duty, Seniority should be kept after she is transferred.

Bimala Bibi who has been working as peon in Guru Nanak Girls College Ludhiana since long has been discharged from her job without her knowledge. Smt. Surinder Kaur, Convenor of Punjab Coordination Committee of Working Women have in a letter written to the principle, strongly condemned this act of harassment meted out to a poor-illiterate employee & demanded immediate payment of all due wages to her and allow her to work peacefully.

The 'Unmarried' mother won the Case of Maternity Benefit

WORLD under capitalism is a strange world indeed! What is professed in theory is denied in practice. The Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi proclaims from the house tops about the equality and development of women emphasising that without this no country would progress. At the same time, he issues the whip to the Congress(I) MPs to vote for the Muslim Women's protection Rights Bill depriving Muslim women divorcees from maintenance and thus leading them to the form of destitution and prostitution!

Here is another example. One Asha Raghavji Someshwar, a telephone operator from Bhuj, Gujarat got married in 1980 and after a few years or so applied for maternity leave when the baby was to be born. Surprisingly she was refused point blank on the ground that "she was unmarried". The Ahmedabad telephone officials even went to the extent of describing her as a case of "moral turpitude"! The Union Home Ministry which is very much concerned about the 'morality' of their women operators issued circulars to General managers of telephones all over the country that they should not entertain maternity leave applications from unmarried female employees. Some of the telephone departments went to the extent of issuing instructions to their women operators to change their names (to put their husbands names) otherwise they would loose their maternity benefits! The feudal attitude of these Government servants would be noted here! Also the ignorance and petty mindedness of these people could be observed as it was clear that they are totally ignorant about the various customs in different States. In Kerala for instance, no woman would get the maternity benefit if such rules are implemented because they never change their maiden names after marriage. Is the general manager of telephones in Kerala not aware of this? Many women in parts of our country do not carry the husband's name after their marriage. Should the Home Ministry consider them as cases of "moral turpitude"? Every person, man or a woman, has the inalienable right to chose whether to continue the same name or change it.

It is a shame that the Home Ministry,

oblivious of the situation and representing decadent and obscurantist ideas given birth to in the feudal set up, went to the limit of describing these operators as 'bad characters'. Can any self-respecting woman tolerate such insults?

The Bhuj woman operator, a courageous woman, continued her fight, legal and otherwise with determination duly helped by trade unions and women's organisations and won the same at last compelling the Home Ministry to withdraw their first circular. The Ministry had to eat an humble pie and issue another circular by informing the directorates in all the States that 'unmarried women' are entitled to and should be given maternity leave when applied. The trade union rightly argued that neither the ILO convention of 1952 nor the Maternity benefit Act lays down marriage as the qualifying condition, while women's organisations based their arguments on equality and social reality in our country.

The Home Ministry, it seems, has forgotten that "motherhood" has been described as sacred in the chapter Directive Principles of State Policy in our Constitution. The child is a child, whether it is born out of a legal wedlock or otherwise. Under the present bourgeois landlord set up it is the unmarried woman who suffers and not the father of the child. The social responsibility to bring up the child falls only on the mother's shoulders. The Government and the society must consider this point and reverse this. She must get the maternity benefit and leave. Actually the society and the Government should protect these vulnerable mothers so that motherhood is treated as sacred by the society.

Whatever harm is done by issuing the first circular by the Home Ministry, whatever 'damnation' is done to the women operators by describing them as "moral turpitude", the Government of Rajiv Gandhi, should do justice to the "sacred motherhood". Let us hope, Asha's fight to get justice for all other operators in telephone will make the Rajiv Gandhi Government concede the demands of other exploited sections in our society. To move into the 21st Century with Hi-technique and computerisation will remain only a slogan unless our oppressed women are liberated from feudal bondage.

Women in National Seeds Corporation

THE following letter was addressed to Shri H. G. Bhawe, Joint Chief Labour Commissioner, Labour Ministry, New Delhi on the sudden transfer of women workers, by Ranjana Narula, Secretary Delhi Coordination committee of working women.

"We wish to draw your attention to a complaint received by us from the National Seeds Corporation Workers Union (CITU) regarding the totally unjustified and illegal transfer of 18 women employees of the packing department of the National Seeds Corporation, from the Janakpuri office and Beej Bhawan, Pusa Institute to Nangloi. Kindly note the following facts :

1. That the concerned employees have been given no written notice regarding this transfer and on 5th May 1986 when they came to work they were suddenly told to move to Nangloi.

2. That the work site at Nangloi is a tin-roofed shed which is not yet complete, and is unfit for habitation even by animals. There is no clean drinking water, no toilet facility and no adequate provision of fans or even proper seating arrangement for the workers. The Nangloi site is far away from the place of residence of the women and it will cost them Rs. 100-150/- extra per month for conveyance.

3. That the women were threatened by officers of the National Seeds Corporation that they will be thrown out of work at the age of 50. Furthermore, these officers also threatened the women with a transfer to Agra if they refused to accept the transfer to Nangloi.

4. That these women employees were previously working at the Beej Bhawan, Pusa Institute, but in 1980 they were transferred to Janakpuri, along with some office staff. Now the entire office staff has been moved back to the Beej Bhawan, but the women in the packing department are being sent to Nangloi.

5. That for the past six years the union has been raising the demand for the entire Janak-

puri unit to be shifted back to the Pusa Institute site, where there is ample space to accommodate it, but for reasons best known to the NSC management, it had adamantly resisted this demand.

It is evident from the above stated facts that the management of the NSC, a public sector enterprise, is bent upon harassing these women with the intention of compelling them to leave their jobs. It is indeed shocking that such practices are being resorted to in a public sector enterprise while the government proclaims loudly its intent and schemes to promote the interests of women, and especially working women.

We protest vehemently against this victimisation and harassment of the women employees of the packing department of the National Seeds Corporation, and we urge you to take immediate steps to ensure that they are shifted to the Beej Bhawan, Pusa Institute, without further delay, or to ensure that all facilities are provided at the Nangloi site and arrangements made for their conveyance."

(Contd. from page 20)

In the prison at Evin, she shared a room with two other women comrades, including Ashraf Dehghani, another heroine of the armed struggle, and helped her escape from prison. Com. Roghieh was released only after the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979. It was the struggle of women prisoners during 1971-79 that led to the influence of their organisation among women outside. Their unity and bravery, in the face of the long imprisonment, opened up a new chapter in women's movement in Iran. It is, therefore, not surprising that 33 per cent of its membership are women and 50 per cent of the youth organisations also consist of women. Women members were equal participants and this was ensured not only in their Constitution but was a reality in all day-to-day activities. This role and position of revolutionary women has struck a blow to reactionary beliefs propagated and practiced by the Khomeini regime.

Bhopal Gas Tragedy—Women are the Worst Sufferers

THE Indian Council of Medical Research which made a study of some of those who survived the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy is not sure how long they will live.

The 15-page report released this month says survivors in large numbers still exhibit a wide range of respiratory, ocular, behavioural and other morbidities. All these symptoms have enforced the country's premier research organisation to ask: How long will they last? What permanent disabilities can be expected? What is the outlook for these victims? What of their off spring?

These questions have arisen because many of the survivors suffer blurred vision, deafness, tremors and vertigo.

Approximately 22 per cent of these screened suffered from mental disorders. The commonest diagnosis was neurotic depression, followed by anxiety.

Among the worst sufferers were women, resulting in spontaneous abortion of 24 per cent out of 2,566 women who were pregnant at the time of the gas leak. This rate of abortion was said to be almost three times higher than that of the national average of 7 per cent to 8 per cent.

There were 33 newborn with congenital malformities a rate of 15.3 per 1,000 deliveries. Of the 480 newborn babies weighed 17.1 per cent were found to be underweight.

Of the organs affected by the leakage of gas from storage tank containing tons of methyl isocyanate (MIC) the most prominent were the lungs—their weight increased three-fold.

In most cases the lungs were waterlogged and had the characteristic cherry red colour. The major findings were those of ample bronchiolitis, bronchopneumonia, pulmonary haemorrhages and several other complicated symptoms. Due to exposure to the toxic gas, lung tissues were damaged, highlighting the need to follow-up the patients for a long time.

The liver in a number of cases showed varying degrees of fatty change. The kidneys showed congestion in most cases and tubular necrosis in some. The heart muscle showed generalised oedema without obvious necrosis.

More Lady Traffic Staff Rostered for Night Shift

At a time when the Union is protesting against the lady traffic staff being rostered in the night shift by replacing men from the roster, the Manager, Bombay Airport through a Notification rostered more lady staff in the night shift. The Regional Director of Indian Airlines had earlier communicated to the Union that only 'Volunteers' will be rostered in the night shift. However, the manager, Bombay Airport thought that such commitment on the part of his own Director did not apply him. When one Union official informally talked to the Manager, his reply was that this time he had ensured only unmarried girls have been rostered in the night shift.

Maternity Benefits and Child Care Services to Women Workers

The women workers are at present entitled to maternity and certain other benefits under either the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 or the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. The coverage under the two Acts is, however, restricted to factories and certain other specified classes of establishments. The Labour Minister's Conference held in May, 1985 had, therefore, recommended inter-alia extension of the coverage under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, to new classes of establishments/Employments where women workers are working in substantial numbers. The Government is accordingly considering the question of enlargement of the coverage under the Act.

(The Lok Sabha Unstarred
Question No. 135.

Dated the 18th November, 1985).

Big Pay Rise for Working Women in U.K.

THE Equal pay legislation in U. K. came into effect in January 1984. The wages of women have gone up to £40 a week as a result of the change in the equal pay legislation. A ruling by European Community that the U. K. laws must allow claims for equal pay "where work could be shown to be of equal value to that of their higher paid workers" benefitted a number of women working at various places in England. Due to the changes in the law, pay increase of upto 28 per cent have been won by women.

Thousands of others now are submitting their claims to Industrial Tribunals with the help of their union. In some cases the threat of going to tribunal was enough to concede the demand by the employer. While the legislations is sometimes complex for individuals seeking the claims, there were many successful cases. Those included like comparing the work of a cook to a painter, female fish packers with male labourers, sewing machinists with other skilled manual workers, industrial nurses with labourers. One union alone had 24 equal value claims before Tribunals with another 114 cases covering nine companies in the course of preparations.

A special conference to consider the gains due to the change in the equal pay legislation was held on March 8th at TUC headquarters in London.

Equality in Trade Unions

An increasing number of unions are changing their structures to give women a greater voice in the way they are organised, according to a report which will be presented to the TUC Women's Conference.

The report, Equality for Women within the Trade Unions, updates details of unions responses to an earlier TUC questionnaire which sought information about the action unions had taken to follow up the 1979 TUC Charter.

The report states : "The responses showed that there had been steady progress in some areas, particularly in the establishment of

equal opportunities/women's committees, the training for women-often culminating in women-only courses-both in relation to work within the unions and on policy issues".

Among examples quoted is one of a union which has established more than a hundred local working groups on equal opportunities.

At least two unions are reported to be co-operating with academic institutions on research into the position of women within their own unions.

The report points out that there are now more unions with full time women's officers, and that women's conferences are becoming much more common practice.

Childcare facilities at union conferences and meetings are now said to be widely recognised as an important factor in encouraging mothers with young children to take a full part in union activities. The timing of union branch and workplace meetings is also recognised as having an important effect on whether women with childcare responsibilities can attend.

The report comments : "It is apparent that TUC affiliates are now increasingly conscious of the need to encourage and assist women members. For many there is a positive commitment to equality of opportunity for women members, and initiatives taken reflect this commitment".

Tortures of Com. Roghieh under Shah of Iran

Com. Roghieh Daneshgiri, a woman member of the Central Committee of the Organisation of Iranian People's Fedaian (Majority) visited the office of AIDWA on 19th March and narrated her experiences during the Shah regime.

Emphasising that her life and her experience could not and should not be isolated from the history of women's struggle in Iran and the general struggle of the people, Com. Roghieh said that she came into contact with revolution-

nary intellectuals while studying for M Pharm in Tabriz in 1966. When the OIPF was formed in February 1971, she became its member. She had to leave her family ("It was not a political family") and within four months of her arrival in Teheran she was arrested in 1972 from her brother's house. She was subjected to barbarous torture but with revolutionary determination and fortitude, she endured it all and revealed nothing. She was whipped, her nails pierced with a kind of punching machine, her toes were burnt with a heater, floodlights directed at her eyes. After undressing her, an electric truncheon

was applied to parts of her body and the door of the room in which she was being tortured was kept open for others to see her naked body—an old barbaric practice of combining physical and mental torture. Also, Com. Roghieh continued, "I had long hair, like all of you present here. They would pull my hair and bang my head against the wall and my bleeding head was put under a cold shower. I was tied to a bed for five months and was untied for two hours each day, once to go to the toilet and once for a meal".

(Contd. on page 17)

(Contd. from page 6)

in mind while discussing the government's policies towards the question of employment, particularly in recent years and today. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, despite evidence in the document itself, the policy thrusts have only led to distorted priorities and the strengthening of those very forces responsible for the present exploitation of women. Their recommendations are aimed at better training facilities and greater investment in "Women preferred" industries and at directing the government's programme to the *household unit*. Today the government's basic thrust is towards self-employment and home-based work. With consciousness regarding labour laws emerging among the working people, the government now seeks to mobilise resources at the cost of the millions of women seeking employment and their solution is home based labour where no labour legislations are applicable and the incomes of the employers invisible. The government in its desperation seeks to make this the alternative to full employment. Also emerging in the mass media are the highly romanticized versions of home work. This is not surprising since the governments overall policies towards women (as in the case of the Black Bill affecting Muslim Women) is retrogressive. Another point to be noted is the fact that the govt is increasingly shifting its own responsibility for providing employment to the hands of the voluntary organisations. It has even closed its own shop i.e. the ban on further recruitment in its own establishment.

In the above context, the demands around

which women homeworkers can be mobilised are:

1. The right to full employment. Inclusion of the right to work as a fundamental right.
2. Training in skills necessary for modern industries as well as for other occupations.
3. Recognition of homebased work in the official statistics.
4. Rates for home-based work to be fixed in every branch of work and these rates should in no case be below the minimum wages.
5. All statutory benefits applicable to workers in factories and the organised sector should cover homeworkers also (Maternity Benefits, ESI, HRA, Factories Act, etc.)
6. A system of registration of homeworkers. This will provide records of employment and the employers cannot avoid taxation. The record of the terms and conditions of work to be specified in this.
7. Authorised Labour inspectors to be aided by representatives of trade unions, women's organisations.
8. Legal aid centres to aid women homeworkers.
9. Day care and child care centres in areas where women homeworkers are concentrated.

Japan's Industrialisation and Women Workers

ON May 17th 1985, the Equal Employment opportunities Law was passed in Japan Parliament. It was pushed through with no acknowledgement of women workers' demands. The new law will permit night work for women and change other articles concerning maternity protection, etc. that were guaranteed in the Labour Standard Law. Furthermore, the new law has no enforcement power to check on companies violating the provision on equal opportunities in employment, training and promotion. The Government has made many attempts previously to revise the Labour Standards Law. The reason for the women's defeat this time is the decline of the power of the labour movement. Women workers who have fought against this revision have also voiced their anger at the expansion of Japanese cooperation into Asian countries and their exploitation of other Asian women. They recognise that they were the same victims thirty years ago. The main feeling is one of frustration coupled with the realisation of the need to find the means to fight and build solidarity with women in other countries.

High Economic Growth and Increasing Diversity of Female Labour

Industrialization brought with it a revolution in consumption. There was a tremendous increase in national income, and spending power further stimulated economic growth. With the change in the industrial structure came a change in the women's labour market. The number of women engaged in the primary production industries, primarily agriculture, that had taken up 60 per cent of all women workers, was now on a rapid downswing and by 1980 only 13.7 per cent of women were working in the primary sector. Development of post war Japan was dependent on rapid industrialization rather than on agriculture. This development strategy demanded cheap, qualified labour in large quantity-people from the rural areas.

An important feature of the post war employment structure was the movement of women into office jobs; by 1980 these women formed the majority of the female work force,

even more than factory workers.

Women graduates of high schools and two-year colleges were now in demand for the middle-level office work.

By the 1960's, so-called 'part-time' workers, mainly housewives, were to replace the young workers from the rural villages in the factories. Part-time workers could be home in time to cook dinner. They were paid much less than contract workers, and were denied insurance, annuity and retirement benefits. A factory could employ two part-time workers with the wage of one full-timer.

1974 and '75 saw the most acute depression suffered by the Japanese economy since the war, with negative growth of GNP at 2 per cent. Then began the slow-growth period when a steady growth rate was maintained at around 5 per cent. Export-oriented industry was to replace the investment in heavy industry as the spearhead of economic growth.

The oil crisis affected severely the manufacturing industries that had been so dependent on cheap fuel to supply the huge facilities, particularly of the steel, petrochemical and aluminium industries. These industries have cut back on energy consumption, stream-lined their facilities and invested in overseas relocation, while the assembly industries, including automobile and electrical industries, continued to flourish with a boost in exports. High tech industries now form the centre of industrial activity and competition. The information and service industries are geared to the needs of this technological onslaught.

Women's labour was again proved to be a flexible force used to support these dramatic shifts. 430,000 women were retrenched in the 1974 recession from the manufacturing industries. First the part-timers, and then the middle-aged full-timers were forced into 'voluntary retirement'. They would later join a part-time force somewhere else. The manufacturing industry which traditionally had employed the largest number of workers fell to the third place in employment. With some

of the retrenched women gone into part-time jobs, women employment decreased by a total 20,000 in this period.

Mechanisation and computerisation has resulted in more and more retrenchment. Cheap part-time women replace the regular workers in simple and repetitive jobs. Office automation has meant the displacement of many women and a big drop in recruitment of new high school graduates.

Despite these cutbacks, the number of women workers has increased as a whole since 1975 with an increase in part-timers in the tertiary sector, e.g. super-markets, and the advances by women into the specialized or technical fields.

By 1982 part-time workers exceeded 20 per cent of the work force. A part-timer is ostensibly one who works a maximum of 35 hours a week. Many work much longer hours than this but face the same insecurity of low pay and no benefits. One in four women work as part-timers. This situation is reflected in the wage gap between men and women though the gap has narrowed during Japan's high growth period. In 1960, the earnings of women was 42.8 per cent the wages of men; in 1978, it was 56.2 per cent. The gap was to widen again in 1983 to 52.2 per cent with the increase of part-time women workers.

Subsequently, as more women turned to part-time employment, the rate of organised women workers declined from 30 per cent in 1960's to 23.1 per cent in 1983. Part-time employment and the low unionisation among women have rendered the livelihood of women workers progressively more unstable.

But the number of women wanting to work is increasing. Women now constitute 35.5 per cent of the total Japanese employees in Japan. The decline of their husbands' wages has forced many women to work as part-timers which form a peripheral labour force.

The Japanese employment system is characterized by corporations employing senior high school graduates and offering them life employment, a wage system based on seniority and company based union. The simple and

repetitive work was done by junior high school graduate women. As these women declined in number they were replaced by middle-aged married women—the part-timers.

In the seventies, coupled with the increase of part-time workers has been the employment of women before marriage and then after their children grew up. This situation allows wages of women to be kept low and provides a safety valve during recession periods.

Despite the fact that women were nominally granted equality after the war, there have been consistent attempts to take away the protective measures concerning maternity, night work and overtime work. Women were fighting at the front of the labour movement after the war particularly for the right to maternity leave. Although the voice is still weak, the women's movement is beginning to question the part-time system, the assumed duties of women to raise the children for the future work force and taking care of their tired husbands, and forced "voluntary retirement" of married women.

Women's sections within labour unions have been fighting hard for "the same number of nurseries as mailboxes". In Tokyo the number of nurseries increased sevenfold between 1960 and 1976. But nurseries are still severely lacking.

The movement for equality in employment had lagged behind the struggle for maternity protection until 1965. One problem here was the lack of support by the male-oriented unions which meant that women had to confront the issues on the court. Some victories were won in the realms of discrimination in retirement age, unequal payment in banks, and discrimination in employment by broadcasting and publishing companies.

Government and corporate retaliated by opposing maternity protection as against the equality. If you want equality, in their view, protective measures should be withdrawn. This is what has been offered in the new law which the government feels qualified to ratify the UN Convention Against Sexual Discrimination. The impact of the new law is completely against the spirit of the Convention.

(Contd. on page 23)

CITU Denounces naked U.S. aggression on Libya

Com. B.T. Ranadive, President Centre of Indian Trade Unions has issued the following statement:

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions denounces the naked aggression and premeditated brutal bombing of civilian targets including Presidential palace in Tripoli throwing to winds the entire world opinion. This act of war just on the eve of the proposed discussion in the security Council of the United Nations tantamounts to a political brigandage with the aim of policing all the countries of the world and reveals the evil designs of US imperialist for global domination.

The CITU welcomes the declaration of the Non-aligned Foreign Ministers condemning the aerial piracy and war of attrition.

The CITU expressing firm solidarity with the people of Libya calls upon the State Committees and the unions affiliated to it to raise a powerful voice in protest against the US war mongers and in support of the Libyan people.

US Aggression against Libya

Although the world public had been protesting for some time against the US preparations for aggression against the sovereign Arab state of Libya, a member of the United Nations, and demanding that the USA respect the United Nations Charter and the generally recognized standards of international law, and although the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had officially declared on 14 April 1986 that Libya did not want confrontation with the USA and would do nothing to provoke such confrontation, but wanted the Mediterranean to remain a sea of peace and co-operation among the littoral countries, including the countries of Southern Europe, US imperialism has committed a further crime of state terrorism, gravely endangering world peace and international security, by attacking Libya. In the night from 14 to 15 April 1986,

18 F 111 bombers stationed in Britain and 15 fighter-bombers from the aircraft carriers Coral Sea and America bombed Libya with 250 and 1000 kilogramme bombs, including laser-guided bombs. In a series of carefully planned strikes against the cities of Tripoli and Benghazi, the residence of Muammar el Ghaddafi, leader of the Libyan Revolution, several diplomatic missions including embassies of France, Iran, Japan, Switzerland and Romania, residential areas, schools, centres for the handicapped and the mission-house of the Franciscan nuns were bombed and heavily damaged.

These barbaric raids claimed the lives of more than 100 people, including many children, and many more were injured. On 16 April the U.S. Air force again attacked residential areas, schools and hospitals in Tripoli, Tarhunah, Wheelus Field and the Tripoli International Airport, claiming further civilian victims.

(Contd from page 22)

Women will work increasingly either as 'part-time', cheap, disposable and unprotected workers or they will have to work the long hard hours presently suffered by the men.

In the face of the new employment laws, many demonstrations and hunger strikes were held throughout Japan and protests were sent to the Labour Ministry but still on a very weak basis. The women argue that sexual division of domestic labour and child-rearing does not support the government's ideology of "equality without protection". In order to bring about equality, protection should be extended to men, and not to be taken away from women.

The new laws have been passed however and Japan has fooled international opinion and ratified the UN Convention. The women will carry on their struggle, the main obstacle facing them the cute, diffident image demanded of potential wives.

[From the Article by Tono Haruhi — appeared in Women's Journal, Committee for Asian Women, No. 4 September 1985]

U.S. Condemned on Nevada Explosion

THE Presidium of the Soviet Women's Committee expresses profound indignation and wrathful condemnation of the nuclear explosion that the United States carried out in Nevada on April 10.

Millions of Women all over the world welcomed the meeting of the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States in Geneva in November 1985 and hoped that it would open up an opportunity to save humanity from nuclear catastrophe.

But the actions of the US administration since the Geneva meeting have demonstrated to the whole world that, contrary to the Geneva spirit, the United States continues to escalate the nuclear arms race and is forcing through the militarisation of space.

The US administration's course is countered by the peace initiatives of the Soviet Union outlined in the Statement of Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, on January 15, 1986. They constitute a concrete and comprehensive programme to rid the planet of nuclear, chemical and other weapons of mass destruction by the year 2000.

Considering that nuclear weapon tests are a starting point for a continued arms race, the Soviet Union on August 6, 1985, imposed a unilateral moratorium on nuclear explosions and called on the United States to follow suit. Subsequently the Soviet government made another constructive step, despite continued nuclear tests by the United States, and extended the moratorium until March 31. In response to an appeal of the leaders of Argentina, India, Mexico, Tanzania Sweden and Greece, the Soviet Union again demonstrated its good will and stated readiness to refrain from nuclear explosions even after March 31, until the first nuclear explosion in the United States. The Soviet Union's unilateral restraint bears out its preparedness to use all possibilities to

prevent move as well as with the force of example to influence the position of the other side.

The Soviet proposals have met with widespread support not only among the Soviet people but among millions of women and all progressive people throughout the world.

The nuclear explosion in Nevada on April 10 literally blew up the unique chance of stopping the nuclear arms race. In these conditions the Soviet government had to state that from now on it considered itself free from the unilateral pledge not to conduct any nuclear explosions.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union remains of the opinion that an end to nuclear weapon tests would be an effective step towards the destruction of nuclear weapons provided the United States reciprocates. The Soviet government has also renewed its proposal to open talks immediately about banning all nuclear tests. The Soviet Union is ready for any form of these talks — bilateral, tripartite or multilateral — only they should lead to agreement.

Realising that a nuclear weapons test ban is one of the most urgent problems of our times, Soviet women are determined to continue working for a total and complete ban on nuclear explosions to help bring about international security and a reliable peace without nuclear weapons.

To preserve our planet and secure a future for our children, Soviet women call on women all over the world to step up efforts for curbing the arms race and eliminating the threat of nuclear catastrophe.