

THE VOICE

OF



THE WORKING WOMAN

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International Women's Day 8th March 1983



**Stop
imperialist war policy**



International Women's Day — March 8

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THE Voice of the Working Woman sends its warmest greetings to women in India and all over the world on the occasion of International Women's Day and expresses full solidarity with their struggles for a better life.

Never was the status of women so low in independent India as it is to-day under the present Congress rule, where Harijan and Adivasi women are molested and their homes burnt daily, just because they are Harijans and Adivasies, where no woman is any longer secure, whether in her work, in the streets and buses, or even in her home. Our protest voice must be raised everywhere unitedly, by all women:

To demand equal status, equalwage, equal opportunities for working women in all the fields, stern measures to bring an end to bride-burning, rape, sale of women, and other heinous atrocities against them to highlight the continuing inferior social status given to women in our society; to mobilise women, first and foremost, to arise to defend themselves and fight for their rights and acceptance in society; to join hands with the other oppressed sections of society to break the chains that bind them.

March 8, 1983, will be observed by all the branches of the AIDWA and the Coordination Committees of Working Women in all the States by holding meetings, processions, exhibitions, etc.

This year March 8, is being observed at the time of the 7th Non-Aligned Summit from whom the women of all countries earnestly expect a call for peace and ban on armaments,

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In International Solidarity

ON the occasion of International Women's Day, the Secretariat of the Trade Unions International of Workers in Commerce sends its greetings to all active women members of its affiliated and friendly trade union organisations, and through them to all working women engaged in commerce and consumer co-operatives the world over.

In the 80s which started with gloomy forebodings for mankind, women, tireless fighters for life and peace, are increasingly joining the ranks of those who fight gallantly and with great determination for genuine equality of rights in production, in the family and in society.

The 2nd International Conference of Women Workers in Commerce, due to be held next September in Tashkent, USSR, will analyse the situation of women engaged in our industry, determine the lines of future activities and will give its support to women working in commerce. We call upon all women engaged in our industry to back the conference by their actions, in order to jointly find new forms of

(from page 2)

which they feel is vital for their development and that of their children. An appeal on behalf of twelve women's organisations has been forwarded to the Summit meeting to consider the issues concerning the unequal status of women, especially in the underdeveloped countries, and measures to improve it. A delegation consisting of the representatives of these organisations met the chairman Mrs. Indira Gandhi of the Non-Aligned conference and submitted the appeal to be given to the Heads of the Non-Aligned countries.

March 1, 1983

struggle against the manoeuvres of imperialism and of transnational corporations, and to enforce satisfaction of the most pressing demands of women workers in commerce.

On the eve of March 8, we wish women workers in commerce success and prosperity and urge them to reinforce their struggles everywhere in support of their full rights for an end to iniquity; actions for the cessation of the armaments race and for the safe-guarding of peace, for social progress, for the defence of their legitimate interests, so that they may fully occupy their position of women, wives and mothers.

Joint Meeting in Delhi

TWELVE women's organisations and groups in Delhi amongst whom were the AIDWA, NFIW, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, the AIWC, the Centre for Women's Development Studies, the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, the YWCA, and others, observed March 8 unitedly, holding a public meeting in which over 1000 women participated at the Agha Khan Hall. Together they voiced the demand for employment for every woman, and equal status in society, abolition of all types of discrimination against women, a special commission to be set up to go into women's problems, and an Appeal to the Non-Aligned Summit.

The meeting wholeheartedly greeted the fighting women in Pakistan, as well as expressed their firm solidarity with other women, of Palestine, South Africa, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Namibia, in their freedom struggles against their oppressors. The meeting also greeted women in the Socialist states who are achieving great successes one after another, on their road to complete emancipation.

Act Stubbornly — In Unity!

Women In Agriculture And Forestry:

LET US MAKE OF 8TH MARCH A DAY
OF EVERYDAY COMBAT!

On the occasion of 8th March, the International Women's Day, the Trade Unions International of Agricultural, Forestry and Plantation Workers sends warm greetings to all women working in agriculture and forestry.

The TUIAFPW wishes to pledge once again, its full solidarity with their struggles for equality and dignity, both at work and in everyday life.

Women have an important share in the labour force engaged in agriculture and forestry.

Although they constitute a determining force in rural areas, the capitalist society, however, keeps them apart from decision-making bodies and centres for elaboration of rural development programmes. They suffer from intolerable discrimination in every aspect.

Heavy prejudices and socio-economic and cultural backwardness make their difficult situation even more complicated.

Far from resigning, women have become ever more aware of their role and rightful place corresponding to them in society.

They take an ever-increasing part in the struggle.

Nowadays, when the world is threatened with nuclear extermination of the whole mankind, women play a remarkable part in the struggle to save the lives, their own and especially those of their children.

The TUIAFPW wishes to enhance this struggle waged for the liberation of rural women, for their full emancipation, the recognition of their role and place in society and in particular at work, for elimination of inequality, discrimination and attacks on their freedoms and dignity and, last but not least, to impose peace.

We call on rural women to take an increasing part in these struggles and to act in unity, unceasingly, stubbornly and with resolution.

The TUIAFPW appeals on rural women to make of the 8th of March an outstanding part of their everyday unitary struggles that are indispensable, so as to achieve profound changes in their status, and in society.

**LONG LIVE WORKING WOMEN IN
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY!
LONG LIVE INTERNATIONAL
SOLIDARITY!**

(Prague, February 18, 1983)

Trade Unions International of Agriculture, Forestry
and Plantation Workers.

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I, Vimal Ranadive, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/- Vimal Ranadive

Dated: 2nd March, 1983.

Publisher

Coir Workers on the March

SINCE January of this year, a most militant struggle has been going on among the four lakh coir workers, spread over 250 villages of Kerala. This of course is only the most recent of a history of struggles by these workers, a quarter of whom, or one lakh, are women.

Three different unions belonging to the CITU, AITUC and UTUC, jointly prepared and presented a 26-point charter of demands. For two months the unions prepared the workers, through jathas and village meetings, etc., for the programme of picketting and courting arrest which took place from the January 1-10. Over 7000 workers participated in the programme of whom no less than 5000 were women, over 1,500 were sent to prison.

The police wanted to let off the women workers straight from the police lock-up, because of no room in the jails, and also because of the near bankruptcy of the Congress(I)-led Government which has no money to feed prisoners. But the militant women did refuse to leave, so the Magistrate had to be called to officially release them. The rest, 1000 were sentenced to one month's imprisonment, and later released on bail. Meanwhile, as in previous struggles, arrangements were made to feed their families daily, though the meal could not be more than 'kunji' — rice-gruel — once a day.

Then the unions gave a call for continuous strike from January 20, but on the 19th, the Government came out with a statement, granting their demands. This is because the previous Congress Governments have had the experience of other strikes which have lasted up to even 50 days.

Main Demands

What were the demands of these desperately poor workers, for which they have been moved to fight so stubbornly?

Firstly, it should be known that with the wide dispersal of the industry, the only defence of the workers becomes workers' Cooperatives, of which there are in fact some 542, involving one and a half lakh workers, but they lack resources, and are hence unable to provide the

channel for relief of the coir workers. The major demands of their present struggle thus centre round this fact:

1. The State Government should match the Rs. one and a half crore allocation in the Central Budget to the Coir Board for co-operatives for this year, of the total Rs. 9 crore sanctioned. Unless this matching grant is there, the monies will not be released.

2. The Central Governments' ten per cent rebate on sales of the Coir Board, should be matched by the State Government.

3. The Minimum Wages Act should be made applicable to cottage spinning as well as the manufacturing sector.

4. To enable procurement of the essential commodities at reasonable prices so that the benefit goes to the grower and not the trader, the Husk and Roll Order should be effectively implemented.

5. More powers to the State to undertake monopoly procurement of husk at reasonable prices from the cooperatives.

6. The three factories for coir production proposed by the previous Nayanar Government, be set up. Earlier a number of factories had existed; the present decentralised and cottage-industry nature of production arose with the dismantling of these factories.

7. Nationalisation of the Export trade.

8. Implementation of the Welfare Scheme for which allocation was made in the Nayanar Government.

9. Implementation of the Purchase Price Enforcement Scheme of the Coir Board, by the Coir Board. The traders in fact are not paying the agreed price. As a result the worker, hired to supplement family labour, cannot be paid his full wage, and in fact has suffered a reduction of nearly 50 per cent.

This is further intensified by the private exporters underselling in the market, and thereby forcing a reduction in production.

The Coir workers have given a time limit to the Government to meet their demands. If nothing concrete emerges by then, the workers will again take to the path of struggle.

6000 Women Retrenched

A serious situation has developed in the tobacco industry in Andhra Pradesh where thousands of women have been thrown out of work due to the introduction of machines in the factories where more than 50,000 women were employed. Already 6,000 workers, among whom 4,000 are women, in the Chirala factory and Parachur depot have been dismissed. The women of Chirala factory are sitting on dharna at the factory gate, demanding a halt to such mechanisation, and the reopening of the factories.

The management of the ILTD, a branch of the multinational affiliate, Indian Tobacco Company (ITC), has been notorious for exploiting both the tobacco growers as well as the tobacco factory workers. It has been adopting dubious methods to deprive the workers of their wages and other benefits, by making benami purchases outside the depots, then bringing pressure to bear on the depot workers to accept reduced wages. The management has systematically closed a number of depots in Andhra Pradesh, and recently began installing these job-killing GLT machines.

All the unions in the industry are jointly campaigning against the closure, the recognised Andhra Pradesh Federation of ILTD workers (CITU), being in the forefront. Batches of workers are conducting relay-hunger strikes at various places protesting against the closure.

Readers of *The Voice of the Working Woman* will remember the joint meeting of different unions and women's organisations held on February 1, 1981, when the installation of the smaller machine which replaces 1800 persons, (the leaf-threshing plant machine) took place in Anarparthy. The meeting had demanded of the Commerce Ministry that licences to these big companies should be disallowed. A big delegation of 40, on behalf of the Unions and women's organisations had met the Prime Minister, who had promised that the women working in the factory would not be thrown out.

The Union Labour Minister at that time, Mr. Tiwari, had promised to Susheela Gopalan MP. and Secretary, AIDWA, leading the delegation that met him, that no machine would be used and licences would not be issued to these people. In spite of these promises the machinery was installed, throwing thousands of women on to the streets and threatening thousands of others with retrenchment.

Protest Actions

Already protest actions are taking place; at Guntur a protest dharna was held where hundreds of people collected. Susheela Gopalan addressed a meeting at Chirala where about 2,000 men and women turned up.

She told the meeting that unless there is a big movement, dharnas and protest meetings in all the centres, and a campaign at Guntur itself, at the headquarters, the retrenchment of women, wherever they are, will be continued. She appealed to the women and men to prepare for the big struggle against the mechanisation in the Match, Tobacco and other industries, to stall the present attack on women.

C.M. Must Intervene

You are perhaps aware that the management of India Tobacco Co. (India Leaf Tobacco Co. Ltd. Division) has closed down the Chirala Factory and Parachur Depot which were started about 5 decades back, on some frivolous grounds, thus throwing out about six thousand employees out of job. About 90 per cent of these displaced employees are Tribals and Harijans and 75 per cent of them are women, who are the weakest section of our society and need protection from the Government.

The untenability of the claim that the company is incurring loss, etc., is laid bare from the statement of the Chairman of the Company that the net profit of the company was Rupees 7 Crore and 42 Lakh last year. The company's export went upto Rs 42 crore and 46 Lakhs in 1982, from Rs 29 Crore in 1978-79. Besides this closure will affect the economy of the entire region, affecting ancillary jobs as well as the tobacco growers.

As you have openly advocated the right of women, and here the jobs of a large number of women workers are being taken away, I would request you to use your good offices with the Government of India to ensure that the retrenchment of the workers is stopped besides taking all other steps which your Government can take.

A Letter to P.M.

Railway Mazdoor women numbering 65 working under the PWI/North/Vijayawada, of South Central Railway, have, as a measure of desperation, submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister bearing their signatures and thumb impressions, a copy of which was sent to us. Strongly supported by their union, in their struggle many of these women are the bread-winners of their family, with none to support them. Apart from their right to employment, they must think ahead to provide also for their old age. The memorandum reads:

WE, Mazdoor women, numbering sixty five, working under the PWI/NORTH/ Vijayawada, of South Central Railway, submit the following few lines for favour of rendering us justice.

Firstly we submit that we are appealing to you, Madam, since all our efforts to get justice have been futile. Besides there is discrimination against us.

We were engaged initially as Mazdoor women under PWI/Vijayawada as early as in 1965 on daily wages. - We were sanctioned A.P. scales and temporary status in 1971. Since then we have been working as casual labourers under PWI/North/Vijayawada but enjoying all the privileges of temporary employees. Even though we have put in more than ten years we are still classified as casual labourers, and thereby we are not made permanent till now.

Secondly, we submit that during 1982, Mazdoor men who are casual labourers like us under PWI/North/Vijayawada, were screened for absorption as permanent employees. But we the Mazdoor women under the same supervisory officials were not screened, thereby discriminating against us, even though both of us were casual labourers.

Thirdly, we are told that there is no scope for us to be absorbed in view of our sex and we cannot be made permanent in Railways as there are not sufficient posts for us. This reasoning is nothing but denying us our rightful privileges in view of our long service. We may be excused for pointing out ways to solve this problem.

(a)The newly introduced Wagon Repair Shop, Gantupally requires sweepers in the

shops and these posts can be filled in by absorbing us.

(b) In the Engineering Department, each gang consisting of 20 gangmen, is provided with one gangman for bringing water for other gangmen. As the duties of this waterman can be managed by Mazdoor women, these posts can be set apart for Mazdoor women.

(c) In the Engineering Department itself, each PWI requires a miscellaneous gang consisting of 20 labourers who have to do miscellaneous duties like cleaning the yards, loading and unloading, etc. This work can be set apart for Mazdoor women.

FIGHTING TO RETAIN JOBS

Tenali junction is one of the centres of beedi manufacturing in Andhra Pradesh.

The women workers, the majority in this centre, are presently on a sit-in strike outside the factory gates, protesting the attempt of the management to replace them by male workers. The management has threatened closure, and brought goondas to abuse and insult the women.

The Labour Officers are refusing to intervene and the Union has warned both management and the Labour Officers that they must bear the responsibility for any consequences which may follow.

KAILA SAMRAJYAM from Mustabad, Andhra Pradesh, a woman Mazdoor worker in the railways has donated Rs. 50 for *The Voice of the Working Woman*. We are extremely happy and proud to receive this donation as a token of the support of a working woman to our—and her—bulletin, and doubly appreciate the gift knowing the sacrifice it must entail in these days of hardship for all the common people. On our part we pledge to continue raising our voice for the equal rights and equal status of all and particularly working women, together with our fellow-workers in the trade unions as well as the women's organisations.

The Editor

Women Losing Jobs

— From Uma Krishnan

THE number of women in the textile mills of Ahmedabad, the home of the Textile Labour Association (TLA) set up by Gandhiji in 1918, has steeply fallen from the once peak of 18 to 20 thousand regular workers to the present-day 3000 workers.

Then in 1935, the Textile Labour Association on the one hand, and Ahmedabad Mill Owners' Association on the other, conspired to retrench more than 10,000 working women, particularly in the Spinning departments, from all the 65 mills. The work of the retrenched women workers was passed on to the men workers which in fact doubled their workload. But their salaries were increased only one and a half times.

After 1935 began rationalisation and modernisation of the textile industry and retrenchment of working women became a regular practice. As a result, by 1975 there were only about 3,000 working women left in the textile industry at Ahmedabad. As a 'concession' to International Women's Year, the TLA and the Millowners' Association arrived at an 'amicable' settlement to maintain the existing strength of working women in the textile industry. In 1982 a further understanding between the TLA and the Millowners Association was again reached as a result of which it was decided to keep only women workers above the age of 35 years!

At present while the 3,000 women are employed on a regular basis, there are still about seven to eight thousand working women under contractors on a meagre salary fluctuating between Rs. 4 to Rs. 10 per day, without any of the regular benefits whatsoever.

This is despite the fact that there is an award by which millowners are bound to provide all the benefits and facilities of the regular workers to contract workers also. It is the duty of the recognised union, i.e., the

TLA, to get the award implemented, but unfortunately more than 20,000 contract labourers still remain outside the purview of this award.

In the last few years the CITU has taken up some of the problems of contract labour as a result of which some of the benefits are coming to them. For example the Ahmedabad New Cotton Mills No. 2, in coal carrying there were 18 workers of whom 16 were women. Payment to these women workers was only Rs. 5 to 6 per day and they were compelled to work right from 8 in the morning till 11 in the night, without any holidays or any

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No Bus-fare the Hike!

ON February 28, 1983 the Akhil Hind Janavadi Mahila Samiti, Ahmedabad projecting the public resentment on the issue of the recent bus-fare hike demonstrated at Lal-Darwaja bus-section.

About fifty women of the Samiti with placards and flags in their hands reached the bus-station at about 2.30 in the afternoon. They shouted slogans and demonstrated at the entrance of the bus-station bringing the bus service to a halt. The public at the bus station gave them sympathetic support.

Despite being a peaceful demonstration, the police mercilessly lathi-charged the demonstrators, removed them to the police van and took them to Karanj and Gaikwad Police Stations. The public vigorously protested the arrests and brutality of the police but to no avail. The demonstrators vigorously shouted slogans in the Police van on the way to the police stations. It is understood that the police has charge-sheeted the demonstrators.

Change the Old Ways

Foundation Conference—JMS

THE Foundation Conference of the Gujarat Janavadi Mahila Sangh, the State unit of the AIDWA, was held at Bhavnagar on January 26, attended by 583 elected delegates from all over Gujarat. The Conference venue was named Nalini Nagar in memory of the late Nalini Mehta, a dedicated and revolutionary fighter of Gujarat.

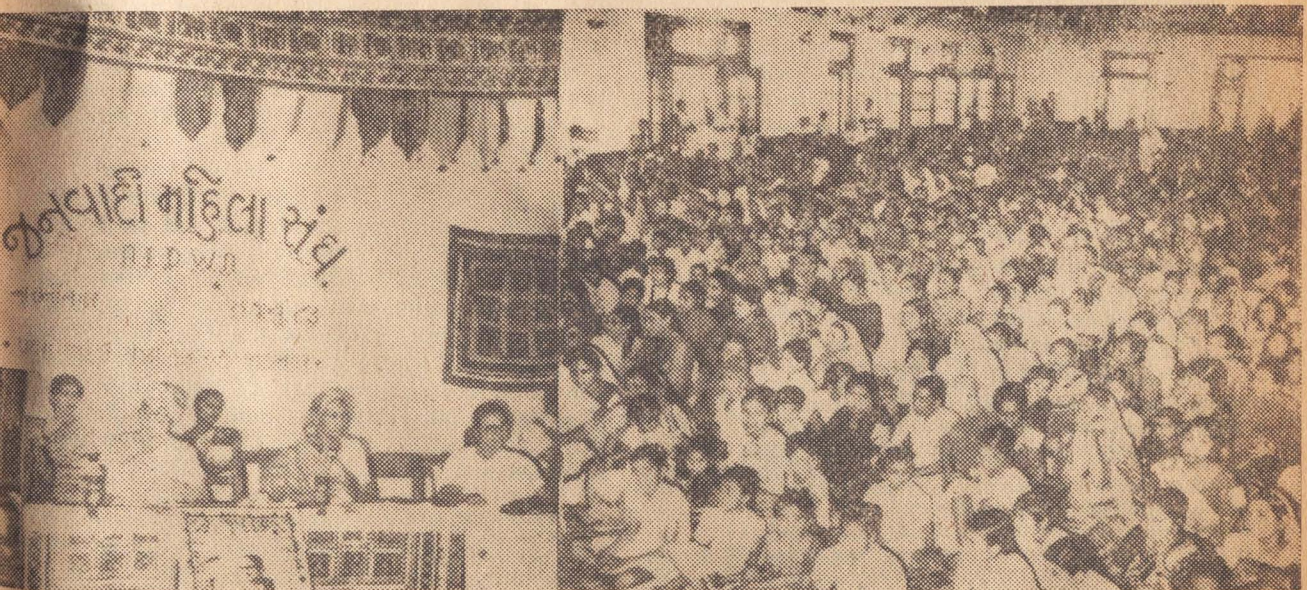
Inaugurating the Conference, Laxmi Sehgal, Vice-President of AIDWA, called upon the women to muster up courage and fight against the social oppression and inequalities against them. Apart from the discriminations with regard to education, employment, wages and other matters, the status of women in society is deplorable because of the feudal fetters prevailing in the country.

Atrocities go on being committed against women in much greater numbers than before, and the extent of degradation and demoralisation that has overcome our lives can

be seen from the fact that in Delhi, one woman is burnt to death every twelve hours for dowry. The Government administration instead of catching the culprits, is more often concerned in helping or covering up the atrocities.

Laxmi Sehgal warned the women against the so called philanthropic organisations which try to pit women against men and thus divert attention from the real causes. The only way to fight the social and economic oppression against us is to organise ourselves and march shoulder to shoulder with the working class and the mass democratic movements in the country.

The delegates' session was conducted by a presidium consisting of Uma Krishnan, Nalini Jadja and Meena Gadhvi. Niruben Patel placed the report on the women's activities in the State. There were lively discussions on the report, with the delegates taking an active interest in the proceedings. After the discussion
(Contd. on page 18)



Gujarat State Conference of Janavadi Mahila Sangh (AIDWA) held on (26th Jan. 1983)

Delhi Teachers Triumph

JANUARY 28, 1983, was a proud day for the teachers of Delhi University, when they brought a determined and long struggle in which unprecedented determination shown by the women teachers in particular, played a major part, to a successful conclusion. The education authorities, from the Vice-Chancellor to the Education Minister, had tried to impose a promotion scheme in the name of 'merit' promotion. This scheme by trying to discriminate in favour of some teachers tried to divide the teachers. The principled stand of the teachers that teaching experience itself constituted the most objective and relevant criterion of merit, and that merit could not be rationally contained within a quota, finally had to be conceded.

The duplicity of the authorities began to be openly paraded in early December, 1982, when they falsely claimed that they had met all the demands of the teachers. But they totally misread the determination of the teachers. This led them to issue an unspecified threat to pressurise the teachers to resume teaching by January 6. If the authorities had entertained any hopes of their threat working, they were effectively smashed, for on January 6, not only was teaching *not* resumed by the striking teachers, but over 3000 of them turned up in a massive demonstration before the UGC office where the full Commission was meeting.

Double Talk

It was on January 6, also that the double talk and double dealing of the authorities became a matter of public knowledge. A DUTA delegation had met Education Ministry officials on January 4. At this meeting, the Deputy Education Minister rebuked the UGC Secretary, and stated that it was unjust that lecturers should retire after 20 years of teaching, in the same grade in which they joined the service. But after the meeting on January 6, the Commission denied this.

Initially, the authorities had opposed the teachers' scheme for a promotion for all teachers, based on teaching experience and research qualifications, on the ground that the

cost would be astronomical. When the University, at the directive of the Ministry, worked out the cost of the DUTA scheme and the UGC scheme, the former was found to entail an additional cost of Rs. two lakhs, a paltry sum for the UGC. With the UGC's offer to raise the quota for promotion from 25 per cent to 33 per cent, the cost of the DUTA scheme worked out to be Rs 57,000 per year *less* than that of the UGC.

With these factors coming out in the open, the arguments of the authorities shifted quickly and now the teachers and the public alike fed with big talk of the 'philosophy' of promotions. For the teachers this philosophy was already clear in its most blatant form in the proposed Hospitals and other Institutions Bill. The teachers were fighting not just for one promotion, but for the very atmosphere of democratic freedom in which alone education and academic excellence can survive and grow.

Varsity Follows Suit

The University authorities now took the cue from their patrons and the Executive Council of the University resolved to apply, for the first time in the history of the University, the 'no work no pay' principle for the teaching community; the wage-cut was to be imposed from January 17 on all striking teachers.

The effect was electric, but, quite the opposite to what the authorities had expected. Not only did the striking teachers, not join duty, but Miranda House teachers who had resumed teaching, went again on strike, and students of St. Stephens College boycotted the classes of those teachers who continued teaching. A large number of Professors and Readers of the University openly condemned the action, calling upon the University to concede the just demands of the teachers.

The final blow to the so-called 'prestige' of the University authorities was dealt by the Governing Body of the Jesus and Mary College which firmly reminded the University that as the Governing Body was the actual employer

of the teachers, the very least that the University could have done, was to have consulted them before embarking on such a course of action!

In the meantime, the Delhi High Court had taken up the issue under Chief Justice, Prakash Narain. At the outset the Chief Justice accepted the legitimacy of DUTA demands, the DUTA strike and the DUTA scheme backed by their Academic and Executive Councils, as a more objective and fair scheme for promotion the UGC scheme as he characterised 'arbitrary and a tall order'.

Evaluation Scheme

A 'working arrangement', in consultation with, and with the consent of the legal counsel of all the affected parties was worked out. It stated that teachers with ten years teaching experience and a Ph. D., and those with 15 years' experience, would be promoted to the next higher (Readers') grade by a process of evaluation to be decided by the Academic Council, the aim of the evaluation being to give and not to deny promotion. A more liberal and comprehensive assessment of the contribution of teachers not promoted should be undertaken, with a view to removing stagnation.

For those lecturers who have eight years' experience and a Ph. D., selection according to the UGC scheme and those who have already served ten years as Readers or in the Reader's grade, according to norms laid down by the University A.C/E.C would be made to place them in the next higher grade. All other demands of the DUTA should be tackled in a three-month period during which time the Court would remain apprised of the matter.

Although the 'working arrangement' fell short of the teachers' demand that one promotion for all teachers should be time-bound and the other demands had not been resolved, they expressed their agreement, by and large, with the proposals.

The decisions of the DUTA and the University's highest bodies were placed before the Court in its special hearing on January 23. It is then that the UGC and the Educational Ministry counsels appeared in their true colours.

About Face

In that hearing the UGC and Education Ministry in a complete *volte face*, questioned the jurisdiction of the Court to interfere in such matters (after the hearings had continued for ten days!), accused the teachers of being gangsters and terrorists who had taken the agitation to the streets and resorted to violence (a blatant lie), and finally accused the Judges of undermining the authority of the Government!

They topped this up with the arrogant demand that the teachers teach for two weeks before their demands could be considered.

Greater Unity

The united teachers, now joined by others who had not been on strike, prepared to intensify the struggle and face the consequences with plans for a big court arrest programme. The Co-ordination Committee of Central University Teachers's Associations called for a day's token strike on January 27, and all the Central Universities remained closed on that day.

This general upsurge of anger reached a climax on January 27, when a big demonstration by DUTA outside the UGC premises, was joined by a few hundred students, undeterred by rain or cold. Within hours the settlement was reached, the UGC retreating on all its philosophies while the principled stand of the teachers, so consistently and courageously fought for, triumphed. The same UGC which could not find the time to talk to the DUTA was now 'on its knees' before the teachers.

Attention of Subscribers and Agents

The General Council Meeting of CITU held at Hind Motors from January 21 to 23, 1983 decided to increase the number of pages of The Voice of the Working Woman to 24 pages. In view of the increased cost of newsprint, printing charges and postage, it was also decided to increase the price of the journal to Re 1/- each. The increase will be effected from the next issue. The yearly subscription will be Rs 6/-

Considering the importance of the journal from the point of conducting ideological campaign among The Working Women in particular and the working class in general we hope that the subscribers and agents will continue their unhindered co-operation with us.

Women Stand UP

YET another founding Conference of the JMS has taken place, this time in Gwalior on February 1, 1983, in which came 200 delegates, mainly from the working class.

After the flag-hoisting by Vimal Ranadive, a Presidium consisting of Gayatri Saroj, Bhagirat and Ramkatori was elected. Condolence resolutions were adopted on the death of Pankaj Acharya, and Shipra Bhowmik, the women leaders of AIDWA and the West Bengal Mahila Samiti.

Women from different organisations greeted the Conference; the first was Madhuri Shukla, a member of the Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, Gwalior. Madhuri spoke on the price-rise in essential commodities, coal, wheat etc., on the dowry deaths, in Gwalior and appealed to the delegates to unite and raise their voice to change the present laws regarding women, as a first step. In Gwalior as elsewhere, the security of women is in danger when they travel, a problem particularly faced by working women. The Co-ordination Committee, she said, is working among women to ameliorate their conditions, and help them to raise their demands, mobilise, and fight for them.

Smt. Kehtar of the National Federation of Indian Women, stressed particularly the low level of education among ordinary women and the need to work to raise this. And Rashmi, a well-known poetess, sang one of her songs on dowry deaths. She later appealed to women who are mothers-in-law and mothers, to save their daughters.

Harsh Lives

Then came the turn of the delegates who spoke of their harsh working lives, and the miserable wages they receive — Rampyari working in a Bakery recounted the working conditions in their factory, and the Rs. 100 she gets after working for 10-11 hours every day. Parvatibai who works in the Water Department of the Municipality was under

(On page 19)

Regularise Our Service

Morena in M.P. became famous for Kamala who was sold to a brothel and eventually returned to her home through the intervention of a newspaper correspondent. But Morena is also the centre for a new and rising mobilisation of women including working women. Nearly 300 of them, most of whom are working in dal and oil factories, met together under the banner of the AIDWA, to discuss their problems and draw and up their demands. These women workers who have been working for more than twelve years in these factories, have not yet been made permanent despite their long service. They are naturally not getting any medical facilities or maternity benefits, etc.

Saroj Gaytri, Vice-President of the M.P. AIDWA, and Kanti Singh, Secretary, were present on behalf of the M.P. Committee. Kanti Singh reported on the campaigns the Gwalior Committee has taken up on price rise, and the dowry deaths. Vimal Ranadive, spoke on the status and demands of women throughout the country, and the aims and organisation of the AIDWA, which now counts a membership of more than 14 lakh women. She also pointed out the record of the Left Front Governments of West Bengal and Tripura in relation to meeting the needs of women, such as pensions for widows, employment and training facilities etc.

After discussion a Committee of 29 was set up as a constituent unit of the AIDWA, Madhya Pradesh, with Pratima Tomar as President, Sharada Varma as Secretary, and Vanguridevi Gangil as Treasurer.

Following the meeting a procession was taken out to the District Collector's Office for submitting a charter of demands. The Collector himself came out to receive the demonstrators and the delegation. One of the main demands was for pensions to widows, and regularisation of the service of the women in the oil and dal factories. The Collector promised to look into the demands sympathetically.

Both the meeting and the procession received wide publicity in the local press.

Creche Demand Won

AFTER nearly two years of struggle the Working Women's Welfare Association has succeeded in getting the Gruha Kalyan Kendra (GKK) to hand over the creche at Shastri Bhavan in Madras. The Association took over the creche from January 1 of this year. Immediately following this the Association made an announcement that the rate per month per child would be reduced from Rs. 80 which the GKK was charging, to Rs. 40 as per their earlier commitment. With this reduction in charges it is expected that a larger number of children will be enrolling.

The assets handed over to the Association work out to approximately Rs. 3000, only. Mr. Joginder Pall, the officer previously in charge of the GKK at Delhi, had agreed to give a grant of Rs. 10,000 less the value of assets, at the time of handing over, which should have meant a total of Rs. 7000. If as expected, about 15-20 children join the creche with the reduction in charges, the Association would require additional resources to purchase necessary equipment, etc., for the creche. Therefore the Association feels that whatever grant was promised to them by the GKK should be handed over to enable proper running of the creche.

Grant Refused

In a meeting with Shyamvir Singh — Deputy Secretary (Welfare) GKK, held on January 29, in Delhi the latter pleaded his inability to grant Rs. 7000 as promised by his predecessor, Mr. Pall. He maintained that though unaware of what transpired during that time, the GKK would be agreeable to consider the matter when the number of children reached 20.

Dipen Ghosh, M.P. and leader of the Central Government Employees, also wrote to Shyamvir Singh requesting him to give the grant as promised earlier. The GKK however refuses to sanction the grant on the plea that there are only six children at present in the creche and unless the number rises to 20, they cannot entertain the request. Interestingly, the GKK runs a number of creches all over India. It is to be regretted that it is not prepared to

give any special consideration to the case of working women in Government service and to their children.

Working women and their Association will now have to fight to wrest the necessary grants required for the care of their children.

Women's Central Rally — March 15

FROM January 20 to February 10 the AIDWA, Tamilnadu, organised padyatras, signature campaigns, meetings and demonstrations all over the districts to mobilise women on the question of atrocities against women, the water scarcity, the power cut and the drought situation, which is very grave. Different squads of women visited the various areas collecting signatures on these demands.

The campaign is continuing in various forms and will culminate in a big demonstration and rally to be held on March 15 in front of the Tamil Nadu Assembly at Madras, where the Charter of Demands will be handed over to the Chief Minister.

At Madurai and Trichy, there were joint demonstrations of the AIDWA and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW).

The economic situation in Tamil Nadu is extremely serious. The public distribution system is unable to supply the needs of the people, consequently rice in the open market has gone up to Rs. 6 per kilo. One of the demands in the Charter is supply of rice through the Fair Price shops at Rs. 1.75 per kg. There is also acute shortage of drinking water.

At such a time unemployment is also increasing with the growing number of lay-offs in the factories.

It is to demand stronger Government steps to meet this distress that the AIDWA has undertaken the campaign.

The Tamilnadu AIDWA has also sent a telegram to the Pakistan Embassy in protest against the flogging of women, their general illtreatment and the denial of their democratic rights by the military regime in Pakistan.

No Slums Here

by Vimal Ranadive

THE Fifth Conference of Kuchi Basti Federation was held on February 6, 1983 to commence at 12 noon. Already half the conference pandal was occupied by women by 11.30 while the other half meant for the men delegates was yet to be filled! This is the first time I have observed women present in full strength earlier than their menfolk. They were also in the procession in good numbers, shouting political slogans against the misrule of the Congress Government, and for the demands of the Kuchi Basti.

Crucial Role

This initiative and political awareness of women in the Kuchi Basti was something rare to see. On enquiry I was told that all through the struggles fought here during the last four years, women were always in the forefront — whether for holding a dharna or demonstration, or for facing bullets and lathicharges made by the police while destroying the structures built by the workers.

Mumtaz Shaikh, the newly elected President of the Udaipur branch of the AIDWA, and Khatun, were very badly injured in one of the incidents. Mumtaz showed me the injuries inflicted on her head by the police. But one can still note her initiative in organising the women for the procession and meetings. Another woman, Prabha, elected Secretary, was also in the forefront in all the struggles.

Decisive Role

The conference began by twelve midday with greetings by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, the Secretary and others. While submitting the Report of the work done, the Secretary made specific mention of how women played a glorious role in all the struggles fought by the people in Udaipur.

The Report pointed out: "When the three-day dharna in front of the collectorate was staged by thousands of people, when Udaipur was completely closed during the January 19 strike-call given by the national Campaign Committee, women's participation was signi-

ficant. The women very bravely repulsed the attacks made by the Congress goondas. In every lane of Udaipur processions were taken out by both women and men.

"Those who witnessed the grand rally at the October-4 Peace March in Delhi, will remember the large number of women from Udaipur wearing red saris and vociferously shouting slogans." The report also rightly stated that but for the participation of women in all the struggles fought under the Kuchi Basti Federation, "we would not have achieved what we have. They played a decisive role, standing shoulder to shoulder with the men..."

Striking Contrast

I had an opportunity to visit a few of the 12 to 13 small colonies built with the available welfare amenities, on the initiative of the Federation. Due to their organised strength and their struggles, they were able to get the electricity connections and water through tube wells. The slums we see in Bombay and Delhi without any welfare amenities, stand in stark contrast to this planned housing, though on a small scale. The colony where the Conference itself was held, is one more addition, built with a hall for meetings, and gatherings of the Kuchi Basti Federation.

At a time when land prices are going up sky high, when the rents of even one-room tenements have gone beyond the reach of the common man, the small two-room housing colonies in Udaipur, with public amenities, are something to be proud of for the people. This was expressed every now and then by the people — Hindu, Muslim, Christian, all alike, who attended the conference, and who talked to me while I was visiting the colonies.

Committee Reorganised

At the convention held at Udaipur attended by 200 women on February 7, 1983 the AIDWA was re-organised with Mumtaz Shaikh as President and Prabha Rajkumari as the Secretary. The organisation now has a mem-

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On to Greater Strength

THE West Bengal Gantantrik Mahila Samiti the strongest State women's organisation in India, held its 7th Conference at Mursheedabad from January 22 to 24, 1983. Kanak Mukherjee, M.P., and Vice-President of the AIDWA, hoisted the flag and flowers were put by all the delegates on the martyrs' column.

A presidium consisting of Kanak Mukherjee, Madhuri Dasgupta, Manjari Gupta, Nirupama Chatterjee, Sandhya Chatterjee, Surat Rai, Mumtaj Begum, Savita Murin and Prabha Chatterjee, was elected by the delegates, and Steering Committee formed. The delegates to the conference numbered 619, with 11 observers. Out of these 28 were agricultural labour, 59 kisan women, 36 working women from other sectors, 20 tribal women, 32 scheduled Caste women and 507 middle class working women.

A condolence resolution was passed on the deaths of Pankaj Acharya the General Secretary, and Shipra Bhowmik, Promod Dasgupta, the Secretary of the West Bengal CPI(M) and a steadfast and old supporter of the womens movement in West Bengal.

Manjuri Gupta, President, of AIDWA, while welcoming the delegates emphasised that though the membership of the GMS was over five lakhs there were still lakhs of women remaining outside the movement. Still further strengthening of the Mahila Samiti is necessary by enrolling members from all sections, and all parts of the State, so that the Samiti could better carry out its responsibilities.

In the absence of Shymali Gupta the report was placed by Bonani Bishwas. The report drew particular attention to the organisational weaknesses of the Mahila Samiti in various districts, especially the lack of full-time workers and the lack of patient explanation on the development in the State and elsewhere, education on the causes of the inferior status and oppression of women etc., for workers of the organisation.

Different committees were formed to work on various problems including amendments to

the Constitution, which were later adopted by the Mahila Samiti.

Twenty two delegates participated in the discussion. Apart from speaking on the resolutions on various issues, the delegates contributed on how to strengthen the Mahila Samiti by widening its base and how to bring women workers, peasants and other sections into the movement. In this connection the delegate from West Dinajpur pointed out how out of 10,000 women members in that area they were able to enrol 3000 from the Muslim community.

Just in the midst of the conference, the sad news of the death of Shankar Gupta, Minister for Power reached the Conference and the session adjourned after mourning the death, while sending heart felt condolences to Shymali and her son.

Of the many resolutions passed on different issues: equal rights, right to education and employment, against dowry, against child labour, decadent culture and obsolete traditions, greeting the Left Front Governments of West Bengal and Tripura, for national integration, against authoritarianism, and also the Programme of Action, an unusual one was on the rights of woman share-cropper to a share in the land even if her husband is alive. At present a woman does not get a share along with her husband. So while a woman works in the field in every way like a man, when it comes to possession she becomes invisible.

A council of 151 members and an Executive of 61 women were elected, with Kanak Mukherjee as President and Shyamali Gupta as the General Secretary.

The GMS mobilised over 500 activists who worked for two months to prepare and mobilise for the conference putting up posters, holding meetings and discussions, collecting funds, etc. During the three days of the conference, 2000 women volunteers worked day and night to ensure that the conference ran efficiently and successfully.

For Freedom and Dignity

From Our Correspondent

AFRICAN women whom the South African regime labels as 'superfluous appendages', are the most vulnerable among the Black workers. Whether employed in industry or elsewhere, we are placed at the bottom of the scale and remain there, with 'supervisors' — younger and less experienced — overtaking.

The majority of working women are employed on the farms and in domestic service, where untold hardships and cruelties have to be faced. Some, however, manage to find employment in the manufacturing industries as unskilled workers receiving extremely low, unskilled rates of pay.

Just as the colour of our skin is used in an attempt to divide us, so the bosses use women to maximise profits and to undercut the standard of living of all workers. Women are paid less for doing the same jobs as men.

Black women are primarily employed in the food, beverages, liquor, tobacco, textile, clothing and footwear industries. In these industries patterns of employment have changed dramatically in the last 30 years. White women have moved into managerial jobs or, because they can afford it, out of work altogether. Today, the workforce is largely Black. By 1970, only 4 per cent of the women involved in the manufacturing industry were white women, whereas 50 per cent were coloured and 31.4 per cent were African.

Jobs in the manufacturing industry are covered by 'minimum wage agreements' which are not uniform throughout the country, and this makes it difficult for our unions to bargain on a national level. Although under the new Industrial Conciliation Amendment Bill these minimum wage agreements must be the same for men and women, women will still be classified in lower-paid job categories (irrespective of work they actually do), and will only be paid the minimum wage. Thus women can and will continue to be paid less for doing the

same work as men. We also know, from long experience, that bosses tend to ignore 'minimum wage agreements' altogether. And who decides on these wages which are contained in the agreement? It is not us. It is the bosses, the regime, representatives of White workers and stooges who make these decisions, not us!

Minimum wages gazetted in East London, a 'border area', were found to be one-third lower than wages offered for the same jobs in Port Elizabeth. Clothing workers at Babelegi started at Rs. 5 per week in 1975 and by 1979 their wages were still the same.

Apart from wage discrimination, Black women are subjected to other forms of discrimination on the factory floor. They are personally and sometimes physically abused and bullied by male foremen and whenever such treatment is brought to the attention of the bosses, they always side with the foremen.

Black women who are employed fear falling pregnant, because pregnancy will almost certainly mean dismissal, which for African women means both the loss of a job and deportation to the bantustan. After all, the system is only interested in 'single labour units'. In order to ensure that these 'labour units' do not get pregnant whilst in employment, the bosses are actively collaborating with the regime's population control programme.

This programme is not aimed at helping women to plan when they want to fall pregnant and when they do not. Instead it is deliberately aimed at preventing Black women from ever being able to give birth to children again. So while no other medical service is provided for us on the factory floor and the conditions in which we are expected to work are far too dusty and dangerous, the bosses permit these mobile birth-control clinics to operate on their premises, and sometimes even

provide permanent 'Family Planning' clinics at the factory site.

We are further confronted with further problems of acute housing shortages as well as the constant danger of being arrested under the Pass Laws.

In 1968, the regime introduced a series of measures designed to reduce the number of African workers employed in the urban areas. As a result, industries which use less machinery and instead employ many workers to do the work, were subject to new controls. These industries (for example, the clothing, textile and food-processing industries) were prohibited from employing over a certain number of African workers in the urban areas. In this way the regime hoped to force certain factories to move to the 'border area'. This came as heavy blow to African women workers — many were forced out of jobs altogether. In the clothing industry in the Transval, until 1979, no African women could be employed. Recently this was changed to allow only those workers who already qualify under 'Section 10' to take these jobs. From 1968-1972 alone, 52,000 African workers were refused permission to be employed in one or another urban areas as a result of these measures. At the same time thousands of White immigrants were enticed into South Africa.

Because of the large number of unemployed workers in the area, factories in the bantustans and the 'border area' resort, much more than in the urban areas, to all types of schemes and tricks to reduce our wages and extend out working hours so as to squeeze the maximum profit out of us. Workers are hired often not knowing how much they will be paid. They are paid irregular amounts after long intervals and there are occasions when they are not paid at all!

For example, in Dimbaza, newspaper reporters exposed how Range Carpets refused to pay workers at the end of the week because, according to the bosses, they had not produced enough! Workers are often dismissed and rehired at unskilled or starting rates. There is always the constant fear of being dismissed. So many are out of work. When one vacancy

was advertised at the local foundry in Dimbaza, 1,500 workers applied for the job.

Whilst restrictions on trade union activity apply throughout the country, workers in the bantustans and 'border areas' are prohibited from organising. The bantustan authorities openly collaborate with the bosses and regime in controlling us: they try to prevent our union organisers from getting to us; when we demand improvements in our conditions, they bring truck-loads of unemployed workers to take our places.

Although the penalties for organising fellow workers are high, women have shown that they are prepared to pay the price in our struggle to defend our right to live in freedom. Not only in those manufacturing industries which employ high numbers of women, but in all areas and in every industry, women stand at the forefront of our struggle.

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other benefits for overtime, etc. The CITU-affiliated Mahagujarat Mills Mazdur Union filed a case in the Labour Court and the mill-owners were compelled to provide all benefits to the workers. As a result arrears amounting to Rs. 1,60,000 had to be paid and now these workers receive more than Rs. 35 per day.

In the same mill seven other workers in the Garden department of the mill, were also given the benefits of regular workers and they also received about Rs. 35,000 against their arrears. Out of these seven workers, two are women. Now in many textile mills, contract labourers are coming to join the CITU-affiliated union to get their rights, but the managements have also started taking revenge. Many mills have removed women working on a contract basis, including the Rohit Mills, the Patel Mills, New Swadeshi Mills, Saraspur Mills, Sarangpur Cotton No. 2, Ankur Mills, Ahmedabad New Cotton No. 2, etc. In the Arvind mills 125 working women were removed for raising their demands.

Pakistan Women

(from last page)

The Islamic fundamentalist and communal Jamat-e-Islami party, has mobilised its female student wings to condemn the Lahore women lawyers and threaten a counter protest. Begum Afifa Mamdot, Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare, dubbed the Lahore march as a publicity stunt of westernised women who "deserve to be punished for treason."

Later in the same week, male religious students held a noisy demonstration in Lahore, warning they would never 'tolerate' another female protest in the city!

Nonetheless, no barrage of words can hide the fact that unprecedented brutality was committed on the women lawyers on February 12. In the words of one newspaper, "Never had there been a greater violation of the norms of civility, decency and morality."

Number of Struggles

This of course has not been the only protest by Pakistani women. Over the past year they have staged several rallies against the threat to their status. They forced the cream of Pakistan's men athletes to retreat before their wrath during a departure ceremony for the Pakistani contingent to last November's Asiad Games in Delhi.

The women were incensed at the inclusion of only one woman in the contingent and the ban on women sports teams playing abroad.

Street protests by women also led to the state-run television service dropping a programme by a controversial religious scholar who believes women should not be seen outside the four walls of their homes.

The Women's Action Forum, grouping a number of women's organisations have disputed this recent interpretation of the Quran, and the All-Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) has pointed out to a recent judgement of the Federal Shariat Court which states that there is no prohibition in Islam on the appointment of women as qazis, judges or magistrates. Further, that "what is not prohibited by the Holy Quran and sunnah (traditions) is permit-

ted, and the burden of proof about anything being prohibited is on the person who claims it so."

At that time the Government-controlled *Pakistan Times* hailed this judgement. Over the Lahore incidents it has maintained a conspicuous silence. But another paper, *The Muslim*, calling February 12, "Lahore's day of infamy", recalled that the last time women were maltreated in Lahore was on April 9, 1977, against election-rigging by former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto showing their alertness and vigilance. We may be sure the Pakistani women will continue their struggle, supported by democratic opinion all over the world.

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sions a charter of demands was formulated to be pursued through struggles.

The conference also adopted a number of resolutions on atrocities on women, the dowry problem, on the Women's Welfare Bill brought forward in parliament by Sushila Gopalan; on celebration of March 8; on the communal riots at Baroda and other places; on drought and cyclone in Gujarat, on world peace.

The conference elected a Working Committee with Naliniben Mahendle, and Niruben Patel as President and General Secretary respectively.

At the open session held at the conclusion of the Conference, there was a massive gathering of about three thousand women filling the Town Hall to capacity from all walks of life reflecting the urge of the women in Gujarat to struggle against their burdensome living conditions.

The function terminated with an excellent cultural show, and the play 'Aurat' staged by the Kala Manch.

Messages of greetings to the conference had been received from Sushila Gopalan, M.P., General Secretary of AIDWA, Vimala Ranadive, Secretary All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women, Kanak Mukherjee, M.P., H.K. Shah, General Council member of CITU, the President and General Secretary of the Gujarat Kishan Sabha, Ilaben Bhatt, General Secretary of SEWA and many other organisations.

Women Stand UP

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economic strain because the water works have started cutting their wages. Benubai, a beedi worker who has four daughters to maintain, earns only Rs. 200 per month. She appealed to the delegates to think how could they live on this meagre income. Her conviction was that "Unless we all fight together, no change will come". Another beedi worker, Kalabai, also said how the 25 per cent "chat" affects the 2000 workers who are living on beedi making. She also complained that even after bringing home the money, her husband beats her.

On their social conditions Munibai narrated how she was threatened by her husband and mother-in-law with burning with kerosene for not bringing adequate dowry, and how she has come back to stay with her mother. She wanted immediate help to stand on her own feet. Kanti Singh spoke on the present problems of women and how they are bound by house-work and children. She appealed to the women to come out and organise so that the present situation would change.

Snehalata, a teacher, narrated her experience in her school and the bad treatment she was getting from the senior officials because she was a Harijan.

The mother of Madhu Sharma who was burnt by her mother-in-law and husband on September 26 last year was also present at the conference. Nearly 150 women of the JMS had gheraoed the Maharajawada where the in-laws were staying, and because of the pressure of the movement they were arrested.

Among the highlights in the report of activities submitted by the Secretary, Saroj Shaikh, were the campaigns run last year on the water shortage, price rise and atrocities on Harijan women. The JMS also had held a one day dharna in support of the Steel Foundry workers strike. Another notable fact was the participation of 200 women from Gwalior in the October 4 peace March in Delhi.

The AIDWA, Gwalior has formed three District Committees, and conferences were held under these committees. Stress was given in the report to educating women on their problems and the development in the State

and outside. Resolutions were passed on the education of women, on dowry deaths, on the demands of working women, on Harijan women, on price-rise and in support of the Bombay textile strike.

Vimal Ranadive, while summing up, gave a picture of the all-India movement, its membership and the activities carried on under their aegis. She congratulated the delegates for sending such a large contingent of women for the Peace March, and asked the delegates to organise on a wider scale so that the present political situation could change for the better.

There is now a new committee of 25, including 11 office bearers with Gayatri Saroj as President and Usha Raghavanshi as General Secretary.

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bership of 800 and has been working in the city for the past one year.

Kidnapped and Sold

FROM the village of Undari, Geeva tehsil, Udaipur, three young tribal girls, just entering their teens — Naujaki aged 13, Murki aged 13 and Hakari aged 11 — but already at work at Kasaron Ki Aul have been kidnapped. On December 2, 1982, they were taken in a truck by one Kamala and Heeralal Salvo, residents of Kasaron Ki Aul, on the pretext of visiting the goddess of patchnagar. Somewhere they were sold to some person or persons.

When they failed to return, a complaint was lodged with the police on December 4. But four days later, on December 8, Hakari returned home, having managed to escape from her captors. It was she who was able to give the police the explanation behind the girls' disappearance.

Kamala and Heeralal then met some political leaders, requesting protection from the police, and the leaders then took the case before the District Magistrate. Whether the Court was provided with full and correct information or not is not clear, but following this representation, the police did not pursue the case and Kamala and Heeralal managed to escape.

The Udaipur Committee of the AIDWA has taken up the case with the authorities and addressed a letter to the same District Magistrate.

PAKISTAN WOMEN

Stubborn Resistance to Islamisation

THE police used batons and tear-gas to break up a march by about 200 women lawyers marching to the High Court in Lahore on February 12, 1983, protesting against proposals to Islamise women's role in Pakistan society, in particular, the Draft Law which gives only half or no weight to female witnesses, making the testimony of one man equal to that of two women. They marched chanting anti-martial law slogans and demanding restoration of democracy and press freedom.

Women police who had been supervising the demonstration, were joined by several truckloads of male riot police who charged into the demonstrators after a salvo of tear-gas was fired.

The lawyers replied with a hail of stones and for several minutes they wrestled with the police, both men and women. They were beaten up, dragged on the road and kicked by the police. At least 13 were injured and as many as 30 women, including wives of former officials, were lifted off the road, thrown into police vehicles and driven to the police station. They were let off after a few hours. The entire incident was virtually blocked out by the official media.

The proposal on the law came from Pakistan's Council for Islamic Ideology, set up by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, to oversee the Islamisation of Pakistan.

Police Action Condemned

Two days later there were protest rallies by students and women all over the country in solidarity with the Lahore Protest. In Karachi about a hundred women met outside the mausoleum of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Here the police peacefully accepted their note of protest.

There was wide criticism of the police action. Even General Zia's nominated Majlis e-Shoorā (Federal Advisory Council), though the handful of women members failed to get even a full-scale debate on it, a Council member, Begum Qamar Isphahani, widow of a

former Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S., condemned it as an "unparalleled and shameful incident. You don't even beat donkeys like that". The mood of the nominated house became apparent when thunderous applause greeted a member's suggestion that the demonstrating women were opposed to Islam.

Threat of Marriage Ban

The Lahore demonstration has aroused the great anger of the *Ulema* (religious teachers). They have actually threatened to declare those women crusading for their rights 'apostates', through a *fatwa* (religious decree), which would *dissolve their marriages, and single women would remain spinsters as no Muslim can marry a Kafirā (apostate)*.

The *Ulema* had no word of sympathy for the women who were baton charged and tear-gassed. Instead, they asked them to repent and seek Allah's forgiveness, that too not directly—too 'unclean' perhaps to approach God directly?—but through their parents and relatives.

Backing the native ulema, in the demand for punishing the "traitors" of Islam, were, interestingly, eight *American* Muslims, who are ostensibly conducting research on Islamic jurisprudence at a religious school in Lahore.

These American 'ulema and muftis', describing Pakistan as the citadel of Islam, and its army as the arm of Allah, called upon the Pakistan people to support the military President Zia in his 'mission' to enforce an Islamic order in the country.

Law Challenged

But three former judges of the Lahore High Court took these "orthodox religious elements" to task for never having bothered to interpret martial law as repugnant to Islam, or condemn usurpation of fundamental rights and detention of citizens without reason. They challenged the authority of a non-representative and nominated body like the Majlis, to discuss such a basic and controversial law, which they maintained was un-Islamic.

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