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THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU



FURY OF NATURE: DEATH AND DESTITUTION
DUTY OF MANKIND: RELIEF AND SUCCOUR
RUSH AID TO HELP TSUNAMI VICTIMS

URGENT RELIEF FOR THE TSUNAMI DISASTER VICTIMS

You are aware of the horrifying devastation of human lives and properties caused by one of the worst ever natural disaster, called Tsunami (tidal waves) in the South Asian coastal region, due to quake beneath the Indian Ocean off the coast of Indonesia. As per media reports, around two lakh people have lost their lives and scores are missing.

In India, the States mainly affected, in the order of the extent of devastation, are Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. So far, estimated death toll in India has been put around 20,000. The loss of properties is to the tune of several thousands crores of rupees. The sufferings of the survivors also are unimaginable. Apart from post-devastation trauma and physical after effects, they have to encounter severe economic-miseries as well. The victims are mainly the poor people residing in the coastal belt and a large segment among them is toiling fishermen.

At this hour of national disaster, the working class movement of the country must rise to the occasion. The CITU, therefore, appeals to the working people all over the country to express total solidarity with the Tsunami affected people and lend a helping hand in the rescue and relief operations, by contributing generously towards their rehabilitation. We urge all our unions to organise collection of funds for providing relief to the victims on urgent basis and send the same to CITU centre at the earliest. Appreciating the urgency to rush immediate relief, we also request the State Committees, Federations and Unions to send their initial contributions from their own funds, pending collections. In many public sector units, it is noted that initiative has already been taken to raise one day's wage from the workers and officers, towards relief fund. The CITU appeals to all public sector workers to respond to those calls wholeheartedly.

Please note to send remittances in this regard to the CITU Centre by way of Demand Draft drawn in favour of " CITU TSUNAMI VICTIMS' RELIEF FUND", at the earliest. Meanwhile, the CITU Centre had sent in an initial remittance of Rs 1 lakh each to Andaman and Tamil Nadu State Committees and Rs 50,000 each to our Kerala and Andhra Pradesh State Committees for immediate relief work.

CHITTABRATA MAJUMDAR
General Secretary

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EDITORIAL

STOP TOEING THE NDA LINE RESPECT PEOPLE'S MANDATE!

The Finance Minister of the UPA government has promised another 'Dream Budget'. Earlier budgets hailed as 'dream budgets' by the media had turned out to be nightmares for the workers and the common people. Whatever the Finance Minister has to offer in the budget 2005, one thing is clear that the government is inherently being subjected to pulls from different interest groups. On the one hand, the big business lobby, with the support of the international lending agencies like the World Bank and the IMF, is mounting pressure for increased tax concessions, greater liberalisation and anti worker amendments to the labour laws. On the other, the Left parties, trade unions and other mass organisations are rightfully insisting that the government must not carry forward the agenda of the defeated NDA regime and instead implement the pro-people commitments laid down in the National Common Minimum Programme.

The track record of the government in implementing its own promises, during the last eight months of its existence is not quite reassuring, to say the least. The same policies of levying users' charges, of withdrawing subsidies, of resorting to backdoor privatisation through disinvestment, which were decisively rejected by the people are being pushed through. The same attempts to follow the mirage of development through foreign investment and to bend backwards to appease the Multi National Corporations continue. It is by now well established that this paradigm of job-less growth has only led to widening disparities and increasing destitution to larger and larger sections of the people. The amendment to the Patents Act through the ordinance route ignoring the interests of our own industry, agriculture and the people, the decision to increase FDI in banks, insurance, telecom and civil aviation, green signal to the private airliners to operate international flights, ushering in the Pension Fund Regulatory Authority, again through the ordinance route, to channelise pension funds to the stock market and corporate bonds etc. testify to the persisting tendency of the Congress led UPA government to succumb to the pressures of the big business lobby, both domestic and foreign.

This pull from the big business can only be checked by a stronger pull from the working class and the other toiling sections of the society. The UPA government should be prevailed upon not to drift away from even its modest commitments in the National Common Minimum Programme and to respect the mandate given to it by the people. The trade unions and other mass organisations must gear up for bigger united struggles and actions to ensure that the people are not robbed to keep the greedy corporate lobby happy.

(The annual pre budget consultation meeting wit the trade unions was held on January 12, 2005, wherein M.K.Pandhe, President and Chittabrata Majumdar M.P. General Secretary, represented the CITU. We reproduce the text of CITU Memorandum presented to the Finance Minister on the occasion - Editor)

Pre Budget Consultations: 2005 - 06

CITU URGES 'SHIFTING OF GEAR' IN FISCAL PLICY

While welcoming re-initiation of pre-budget consultation process last year, we expressed a hope that the practice of holding a post-budget discussion with the Central Trade Union Organisations (CTUOs) would also be resumed. Then, the Finance Minister also responded positively, but unfortunately it was not held. We sincerely hope this practice will be resumed at least this year.

We also urge that the Finance Minister, as part of budget presentation, should also bring out a compendium of the suggestions made during the pre-budget consultations last year, indicating the manner in which the Ministry had responded thereto. This will help establish the purposefulness of the pre-budget consultation process itself and revitalise the same.

The first budget of the present UPA Government highlighted the following seven clear economic objectives spelt out in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP): (1) Maintaining a growth rate of 7-8 per cent per year for a sustained period; (2) providing universal access to quality basic education and health; (3) generating gainful employment in agriculture, manufacturing and services, and promoting investment; (4) assuring 100 days' employment to the breadwinner in each family at the minimum wage; (5) focusing on agriculture and infrastructure; (6) accelerating fiscal consolidation and reform; and (7) ensuring higher and more efficient fiscal devolution. For a good measure, the last year budget emphasised: 'The Government has to shift gears.' Unfortunately, we have not witnessed any 'shifting of gear' in respect of macro economic and financial policies, which would have served as necessary tools for achieving the first five of the above noted objectives. Here, it is necessary to bear in mind that the NCMP promised "to ensure that the economy growth at least 7-8% per year in a sustained manner over a decade and more and in a manner that generates employment so that each family is assured a safe and viable livelihood." Disappointingly what we have witnessed is only a pursuit of the very same anti-poor fiscal policies of the previous NDA regime, which led to its downfall. We urge that it is imperative that at least the budget 2005-06 should be marked by a clear 'shifting of gear' that can give credibility to the solemn commitments made in the NCMP and win people's confidence.

During the consultation last year, we had dealt with in detail the issue of resource mobilisation, giving ample suggestions. The fact that those had not been taken into account is testified by the candid admission in the Mid-Year Review presented by the Ministry of Finance in December, 2004 as follows:

"Asian countries in general have low tax-GDP ratios compared to OECD countries. India's tax-GDP ratio is even lower than that in many Asian countries ... that requires to be addressed to correct the persistent stress in central government finances."

In this backdrop, it is beyond comprehension how the much needed fiscal correction can be brought in by continued conferring of largesses on private, domestic and international, corporates in the name of tax rationalisation and by way of duty exemptions, which has marked the approach of the government so far.

On the expenditure side, the only head under which there had been a decrease, in non-plan expenditure to the tune of Rs. 4444 crore, is 'food and petroleum subsidy'. Needless to point out, both of these affect the common public. Similarly, widening the tax net downwards

affecting the common people, leading to further compression of demand, instead of targeting the rich and the affluent for raising the tax-GDP ratio is also not desirable.

While the NCMP stated the UPA Government commitment 'to a strong and effective public sector' and that 'profit making companies will not be privatised', the Finance Ministry is seeking to redefine the 'public sector companies' from the present definition of 'wholly owned undertakings of the Government of India' to those where the 'government holding will be restricted to 51 per cent'. In the name of encouraging the public sector companies and nationalised banks to 'enter the capital market to raise resources', the government is diluting its stake in these companies, by putting their shares on sale, instead of taking recourse to the 'debt market' route, even where there is excess liquidity in the financial system. We are opposed to such redefining of the public sector concept and indiscriminate disinvestments, riding piggyback on IPOs, which is contrary to the commitment in the NCMP. We demand measures to strengthen the public sector in order to equip them to effectively discharge their social objectives.

Here, we also record our resentment over the unilateral move towards 'mega-merger' of the nationalised banks, without even having a dialogue with the unions of bank employees and officers, despite the NCMP having promised 'tripartite consultations with trade unions and industry on all proposals concerning them.' Similarly the recent policy pronouncements, intended to permit foreign investment in private sector banks up to 74 per cent paving the way for they being gobbled up by foreign banks, are also deeply flawed and detrimental to the interests of the financial sector of the country.

We had raised several issues arising out of the proposals mooted in the budget for the last year. We deplore that the Finance Ministry had chosen to persist with those proposals, ignoring the sensitivities of the trade union movement. They relate to increasing the Foreign Direct Investment ceiling in civil aviation, telecommunication and insurance sectors, lowering of the interest rate on the EPF, GPF and small savings, refusal to raise the income tax exemption limit and instead resorting to a clever manoeouvre that failed to respond to the expectations of the salaried class, continuing the recourse to subject the welfare related perquisites of employees to taxation, continuing with the removal of quantitative restrictions on imports to the detriment of indigenous producers, de-reservation of 85 items from the list reserved for small-scale sector, giving a final shape to the switchover to defined contribution pension system for the new recruits in government service and the like. Most of these are the legacies of the previous NDA government, which the present government has chosen to carry on its shoulders. We urge that the next budget should make due amends in these areas.

Our specific demands in these areas are:

- Rescind/drop the move to enhance the FDI ceiling in civil aviation, telecommunications and insurance sectors.
- Enhancement of the interest rate on EPF, small savings, GPF, PPF, etc to 12%
- Raise the exemption limit of Income Tax to Rs 1 lakh (with standard reduction) or Rs 1.5 lakh without standard reduction.
- Withdraw the taxation on welfare related perquisites of workers like medical benefits, leave travel concession, education, housing loans at concessional interest rates, transport, canteen facility, availing quarters and related amenities etc.
- Extend the benefit of standard deduction to pensioners, retirees and self-employed.
- Withdraw the Ordinance on the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority and hold discussions with the trade unions on their pension and other social security related matters.
- Review the list of items reserved for small-scale sector with a view to restore the items dereserved in the past.
- Re-impose quantitative restrictions on import of goods, particularly those produced by small scale and rural sectors.

We had, during consultations last year, urged speedy

enactment of the Employment Guarantee legislation as per the promise contained in the NCMP. We are dismayed at the complete dilution of the NCMP commitment in the related Bill that had been introduced in the winter session of the Parliament. We demand a drastic restructuring of the legislation, covering all rural and urban households, with appropriate financial allocations from the central budget.

While the NCMP had committed to undertake a review of the Electricity Act, 2003, the government had done practically nothing in that direction except extending the deadline of June 10,2004 for unbundling and replacing the state electricity boards. We take exception to the steps that are presently under way, as noted in the Mid-Year Review, for preparation of a National Electricity Policy under the provisions of the same Electricity Act, 2003, without undertaking the promised review. We urge immediate steps to honour the NCMP commitment for review in this regard.

Citing the continuous increase in international oil prices, the government had hiked the prices of petro-products, which is a direct attack on the common people, attendant with high inflationary potential. We demand a roll back of these hikes. We also demand drastic measures to check the rising prices of essential commodities and the run away inflation.

We had urged steps for speedy enactment of Agricultural Workers' Bill, providing employment regulation, minimum wages and social safety, and unorganized sector Workers' Bill in line with the unanimous conclusions drawn from a tripartite workshop thereon. The first one has not been taken up for consideration even, while on the second one this government seeks to traverse the same path of the NDA regime, which resorted to an election-eve gimmick with a bogus scheme of social security for unorganised sector workers. We demand speedy steps be taken on both these legislative measures, in line with the NCMP commitment to 'ensuring the welfare and well being' of these totally unprotected and destitute sections of the working population.

Besides the above, we reiterate the following suggestions, which we raised during last year consultation:

" Land reforms and bringing rich farmer/farmhouse owners under tax net.

" Strengthening of Public Distribution System; augmenting supply of kerosene through the PDS.

" The Government should set up a separate department for Industrial Reconstruction to monitor sickness at incipient stage and take preventive and predictive measures. It should also look into re-utilisation of assets of closed units for industrial purposes, wherever possible.

" Creation of an appropriate mechanism for protection of small scale industries against unfair competition with large units of MNCs, along with concessional credit facilities.

" Import duty on Coal should be restored to 1998 level.

" Evolving of a national social security policy to provide a comprehensive scheme covering all sections of workers and extending relief to those who are involuntarily unemployed for early implementation.

" Appointment of new review committee, with due representation to the CTUOs, to devise a transparent mechanism of compiling the cost of living indices.

We are conscious that implementation of suggestions like the above need a substantial resource mobilisation effort. For this again we had suggested steps like ensuring better tax compliance, curbing tax default, realising the outstanding bank loans and tax arrears, augmenting direct tax revenues by broadening the tax base and incidence on the vastly affluent and rich landlord sections, mobilising domestic resources by launching long term development bonds etc.

In this regard as well, we note that the amount of outstanding dues on income tax, corporate tax, custom duty and excise duty continues to record unabated increase. The amount of tax arrears, which was Rs. 47,000 crores in 1997-98 and Rs.87,000 crores in 2001-2002, has gone up to Rs. 99183 crore as on September 1, 2004, as per the above cited Mid-Year Review. The defaulters, who mainly comprise the corporates, industrialists and super rich,

have been taking recourse to raising of disputes on assessment as an easy route for deferment of tax dues for years together. We had suggested and reiterate again that as in the case of common man using electricity, telephone, etc., the disputants in such cases should also be compelled, through appropriate legislation, to pre-pay the tax amounts as assessed as a condition precedent to consideration of their disputes. Similarly, stringent measures should be taken for recovery of unpaid loan from defaulters in nationalised banks, with specified target set out in the budget. We also urge taking up a rigourous and coercive drive towards tapping of black money.

We also wish to record our strong resentment at the attempts to target the subsidies that have been providing at least some relief to the poor and common people as a sole arena for resource mobilisation effort. We urge for a change in the mindset that the poor and middle class have themselves to make 'sacrifices' and shell out moneys for even such welfare measures that are direly needed.

The defeat of the NDA regime and assumption of office by the UPA government at the center after the last general elections is a mandate for a pro-people change in the economic and fiscal policies, besides rejection of the politics of hate and communal frenzy pursued by the previous ruling dispensation.

We only wish that this government correctly imbibe the meaning of the mandate of the people and take steps to meet their genuine aspirations. Viewed from this angle, the last budget and subsequent steps had been a total disappointment. We hope that the ensuring budget will mark a departure from this path and urge the same.

COMRADE NRIPEN CHAKRABORTY

Comrade Nripen Chakraborty, veteran communist and a former member of the Politbureau of CPI (M), died on 24 December 2004 in Agartala, at the age of about 100. He was a former Chief Minister of Tripura.

Nripen Chakraborty was a legendary figure in communist movement in India. Very few comrades have such a chequered life. At a young age he joined freedom movement and was jailed. Later he also joined trade union movement and proved to be an outstanding organiser. In this period he became interested and was attracted to Marxism and he joined the Communist party in the mid thirties and soon became the target of British Police. Off and on he used to be in jail but his organisational skill helped him to rise to leadership position very soon in Bengal.

Journalism was his favourite passion. He was for quite some years the de facto editor of Swadhinata, the organ of the Communist party, in its golden period. He was guru to many eminent journalists who rose to fame later on.

In 1950 he went to Tripura and his success not only to build the party but also to forge tribal and non-tribal people's unity is the greatest achievement for democratic people of Tripura and the rest of the country. He won State Legislative Assembly election seven times, and was the Chief Minister of 10 years. He was the spirit of courage and inspiration to all political and trade union activists after the semi-fascist terror unleashed by the Congress Party in 1988. He had great interest in literature, science and philosophy besides Marxism.

He spent in all 18 years in jail. He died at a mature age of about 100 years. Rarely can a comrade be found who spent almost the entire life in party office or commune and whose door remained open to everybody, to every comrade. Nripen Chakraborty will be remembered with reverence as a dedicated communist, great organiser and an eminent administrator.

The CITU Secretariat and 'The Working Class' pays homage to the memory of Comrade Nripen Chakraborty.

EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE BILL:

GUARANTEE OR MIRAGE?

W.R. Varada Rajan

The National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) had, inter-alia, committed as under: "The UPA Government will immediately enact a National Employment Guarantee Act. This will provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment, to begin with, on asset-creating public works programme every year at minimum wages for at least one able-bodied person in every rural, urban poor and lower middle class household. In the interim a massive food-for-work programme will be started."

This is the singular commitment that roused huge expectations among the youth in the country, who were feeling frustrated at the 'jobless growth' paradigm of economic development adopted since the economic-reforms years.

This was followed up by a similar promise held out in the first budget of the UPA Government presented by the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram. But, instead of giving a start to a 'massive food-for-work programme', envisaged as an interim measure in the NCMP, it merely pooled all the existing rural employment schemes under different headings for implementation, without any additional financial allocations.

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of the UPA, engaged itself in preparation of draft legislation to fulfill the commitment on employment guarantee. The draft was put up on the website of the Government of India during August 2004. This draft itself narrowed down the scope of the proposed legislation by confining itself only to 'providing employment in rural areas' only, leaving out the urban households.

During the concluding phase of the winter session of the Parliament the Government of India had completed the formality of introducing 'The National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill, 2004' on December 21, 2004. This satisfies nothing of the commitment in the NCMP, to say the least. Jean Dreze, who was associated with the drafting of the legislation as a member of the NAC, could not conceal his disappointment and curtly commented: "Unfortunately, the Bill is so watered down that it defeats the purpose of an Employment Guarantee Act". He also termed the Bill as a 'travesty of the NAC draft."

The Bill, even going by its nomenclature, totally excludes urban areas and households. It cannot be the case of the government that unemployment problem is a phenomenon confined only to rural India. The unemployed youth crowding out the labour market in urban areas seeking desperately for jobs for their survival and livelihood, in fact, comprises a large segment of those who had been forced to migrate from rural areas due to penury and dearth of agriculture related jobs. Leaving this section of urban unemployed out of the purview of employment guarantee legislation, for the entire tenure of the UPA regime itself, is nothing but subversion of the mandate of general elections. 2004. In that sense, the Bill excludes a sizable section of rural poor too.

Even for the rural areas, there is no definite time frame for extending coverage of the legislation to the whole country. The statement of objects and reasons appended to the Bill only states: 'it has to be implemented in phases so as to eventually cover all the rural areas of the country, subject to the economic capacity of the Central and State Governments'. The Bill only provides: 'it shall come into force on such dates as the Central Government, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint; and different dates may be appointed for different States or different areas in a State.' Which area of the country to be covered by the legislation and when is left to the executive decision and thus the legislation loses its teeth to be made enforceable universally and is destined to be on paper for greater section of the poor in the country.

The Financial Memorandum accompanying the Bill estimates that "if the legislation is extended to 150 districts, where the National Food for Work Programme is being implemented, the

requirement of central funds will be approximately Rs. 8984.70 crore". For the rest, the employment guarantee may remain only on paper, as it has been estimated that if the whole country is covered under the legislation, the total requirement of funds (central share) would be of the order of Rs. 34780 crore.

The usage of the language 'to safeguard the right to work' in the NAC draft has deliberately been avoided in the Bill. The preamble of the Bill only talks of 'enhancement of livelihood security'.

The Bill prescribes an eligibility criterion of 'poor households in the rural areas', which is a deviation from even the NAC draft. It defines poor households as those below poverty line in the relevant financial year. As we have witnessed in the case of Public Distribution System, this eligibility criterion and definition would only result in excluding large sections of even the impoverished rural households from the purview of the legislation.

This Bill is essentially meant for enacting a central legislation, in line with the commitment made in the NCMP, which is a policy document adopted by the UPA Government at the Centre. It is, therefore, natural to expect the Government at the Centre to fully fund implementation of the legislation. But, the provisions in the Bill are worded in such a way to make the financial responsibility flowing from it to be a concurrent liability of the centre and the States. Nay, the Bill is designed so as to devolve more financial obligations on the States rather than on the Centre. The Bill imposes several obligations on the state Governments, including bearing 25 per cent of the material component of the wages, unemployment allowance, and a whole lot of benefit package of welfare benefits, et al. In the context of the current financial condition of the State Government finances, no state government can be expected to provide funds from its own resources, which are meager and scarce, to implement this legislation. Ultimately, this legislation could become a subject of a heated centre-state controversy and a matter of 'passing the blame ball game'.

This type of scheme for employment guarantee throughout the country must have a dedicated fund with dedicated fiscal arrangement for generation of funds through various means like taxing the rich, the big business and the landlords, cess on corporate tax or turnover etc. The Bill is completely silent over this crucial aspect, which raises doubt about the real intention behind the exercise.

Another significant dilution in the Bill is in relation to the wages payable under the legislation. The NCMP mentioned 100 days of employment 'at minimum wages'. But, the Bill only provides: "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the central government may, by notification, specify the wage rate for the purpose of this Act: Provided that different rates of wages may be specified for different areas." There is conspicuous failure to even specify that the wage rate should not be below the national floor level minimum wage. But, the Bill makes a mention of statutory minimum wage for the agricultural workers, despite the fact that in many states there is no provision of statutory minimum wage for agricultural/rural workers. There is no enforceable commitment to ensure payment of statutory Minimum Wages prevalent in respective states.

Another significant failure of the Bill is to address gender sensitive issue of extending the benefit employment guarantee to women by making specific provisions under the legislation.

A clever attempt to circumvent the obligations arising from this legislation is the incorporation of the 'minimum features' of the employment guarantee scheme and 'conditions' and 'minimum entitlement of labourers' under the scheme in two separate schedules appended to the Act. The omission to incorporate these as a part of the Act itself is deliberate as the schedules could be modified at will by the Central Government, to the detriment of the beneficiaries, without having to seek the approval of the Parliament.

Thus, the National Employment Guarantee Bill is just a symbolic exercise to hoodwink the people and an act of deceit. The trade union movement and other mass organisations will have to mount severe pressure through organised action programmes on the ground to force the UPA Government to make the intended legislation a meaningful one, conforming, without dilutions, to the solemn commitment made in the NCMP.

PATENT ORDINANCE - WHY DO WE OPPOSE IT

Ardhendu Dakshi

The Patent system has a long history. Patent system has come into existence in European countries at different times beginning from Italy in 15th century and then spreading into other countries like France and England and then to America and Japan etc. Initially patent rights were awarded to individuals in recognition of the inventors, innovativeness and service to the society as a whole. There were patents on designs or products of outstanding quality and speciality and on a particular specific method of artistic creation and as a protection against fraud. The Patent rights in that period went to the inventor more as a matter of honour than a great commercial benefit.

Then with the beginning of industrial revolution Patent system became more common and the incidence of Patents went up both in number and in areas of application. Patenting became important as simultaneous technological development took place in many countries all over Europe. This was an era when granting Patent rights also became a big source of revenue for the rulers who, in turn, used the power of the state to oversee that nobody dared violate the Patent rights, or copy to the products without authorisation. In the process commercial interests of the patentee and the state became interlinked and both the operators in the system started supporting each other to extract maximum financial benefits through the mechanism of Patents. But throughout this period we find that the system of Patents existed only in the powerful states because enforcement of the Patent laws was possible only by the state power with a strong police and military force to support it. Patents granted by weak countries were meaningless. Enforcement needed an international surveillance system. Some systems developed later on in the colonies but those were in the broad framework of the imperialist economy.

One basic fact must be recognised that gradually Patent system became another mechanism of exploitation of the poor countries by the more powerful. In the last decade of twentieth century, particularly after the breakdown of Soviet Union, the Patent area has been picked up by the superpowers not for their great love for international order and propriety but simply to impose their own laws over the weak countries to maximize their profit and exploitation. In recent times we find many an erudite columnists sing in praise for a Patent system and the necessity for adherence to international law but the least that can be said is that they are out to create a smoke screen to hide the real issues.

LOGIC AND REALITY

The usual argument forwarded in favour of the Patent system is that the inventor should get a "fair" return for the money, time and energy spent by him or her for the invention which has come to the service of mankind. This is an innocent statement and not without logic. But this logic is oblivious of the fact that the present system under WTO and TRIPS is trying to impose a uniform system in a world which is grossly unequal and it is simply beyond our means to fall into a uniform system with so highs and lows in the world economic order. This system does not suit our purse and our desire to broaden the service to our people. Only one instance will exemplify the situation. The average price of good tea exported from India is roughly 2 US dollars per kg, and in New York only one cup of tea costs 2 dollars or even more. With this kind of "order," in the system India will never be benefited in anyway by the patent regime as directed by TRIPS and WTO. The ordinance has to be judged from this fundamental position of economic reality. In this context what is meant by a "fair" return to an inventor in United States or Europe is bound to prove to be an unbearable burden for the country and people of India. This is particularly true for medicines, agricultural inputs

and chemicals. So this system will invariably exclude a majority section of people from the benefits of Science and Technology.

'FAIR': HORRIFYING TRUTH

Again, the "fair" return is a grossly misleading term. Normally it should mean a complete recovery of the cost of research plus some profit as an incentive to undertake such arduous task. In the first place the American or European level of cost is so astronomically high that itself is a huge burden for us. But invariably the cost of research is magnified manifold and in the name of recovery to extort the helpless people of the developing world at their sweet will. The pharmaceutical industry in United States brings home hundreds of billions of dollars as profit every year and a part of which goes to the political management of that country. They together want not only to perpetrate the system but to tighten it further through dubious international agreements like one India signed in 1994. This is not a fair system by any logic. This is an imposition by the more powerful. It is not a mystery that 97% of the Patents are held by advanced countries. And 90% of all the Patents held by the advanced countries belong only to the giant MNC's and most of them are in United States. The stranglehold of the MNC's can be understood by their cycle of operation. They earn huge profit, spend a part of it in research work domestically, another part to buy up any work being done overseas, even sometimes they steal others' work by dubious means and they spend the rest part of the profit for the political managers of United States and other advanced countries who protect their interests and perpetuate this cycle. Blocking is another part of the MNC's dirty game. Prof. Walden Bello of University of Philippines has said, in the Bangkok meet on AIDS in 2004, that only super profit is the main interest of the pharma MNC's. Only 13 out of 1233 patented new drugs which were meant for tropical diseases were marketed between 1975 to 1997, because these medicines do not earn that profit which Viagra does. They do not allow others to produce the patented low earning drugs without paying huge royalty. India will fall into the firm grip of these dominant MNC's from where it will be extremely difficult to come out. This is a case of total monopoly on Patents by the MNC's. We have to fight the most fierce battle against this trend with the support of the people.

The Government of United States follows a system by which the big industrial, business houses take a leading role in formulating domestic and international policies. The issues to be incorporated in the TRIPS agreement were sent to various business houses years in advance and the TRIPS document was practically drafted by them, particularly the pharma industry. Government of India signed the TRIPS agreement even without a discussion in the Parliament in 1994. Successive governments at the centre failed to discuss the issues in details and again the ordinance was promulgated on 26th December 2004 without discussion in the Parliament which was in session only 2 days back. We are right in opposing it because the UPA Government did not try to find out time to discuss other options in the Parliament.

QUESTIONS BEFORE US

The pro-imperialist interested parties are trying to play down the effects of the new Patent regime by giving misleading informations.

It is being told that a major part of medicines in use today are out of Patent regulations. This relief is short lived because every 5 to 7 years a completely new set of medicines or medicines with a changed formula come to market and old medicines turn obsolete and disappear. In fact, the whole medical treatment system in our country is tuned in that direction. Hereafter, all new medicines will charge royalty and domestic production of generic (similar formula) medicines will have to stop. Not only that, there will be sharp rise in the price of drugs that will be granted patents from 1-1-2005 and are already being produced in the country. As per an estimate, in immediate term such disastrous impact of phenomenal increase in prices will effect 30 such essential drugs which are being produced in the country and are poised to be patented out to MNC's control under the new product patent regime. This will lead to a dramatic rise in the price of medicines in the future years

beyond the affordability of common people.

The claim that our domestic R&D will increase and India also can be a global player in future is a myth. We must note that over 3 lakhs patent applications are now being annually filed in USA, China and elsewhere. The MNC's will jam the Indian Patent office. We must note the unscrupulous game being played by the MNCs under the shelter of product-patent regime. A patent remains usually valid for 20 years. Many pharma MNCs have been making minor and materially insignificant changes in their patented drugs by the end of 15th or 16th year of patent-period and get the patent for the same drug with minor changes renewed for another 20 years. In this manner the MNCs will continue their stranglehold on all essential and basic drugs to reap enormous profit at the cost of illness and distress of mankind.

There will be endless litigations, some of which will be dragged to American or European courts forcing astronomical expenditures. The MNC's have direct interest in killing India's independent domestic pharma industry. First they killed IDPL and now others will be the target if any one is able to put up a real challenge. The ordinance puts our domestic industry to great disadvantage. Some worthies brush it off by saying that only for 5% of the medicines the price will increase. They are playing down the reality. Two instances are sufficient to prove what it really means to patients who will have to buy the medicines of the 5% group as at present. This 5% will go on increasing with passage of time.

Glivec, a medicine for cancer was costing only Rs.1100/- per ampoule, now it will cost Rs.22000/- per ampoule. For HIV patients the cost of Anti-Retroviral drugs will jump from Rs.7000/- to nearly Rs.2 lakhs for one year's course. Not even 1% of cancer or HIV patients can afford this, they have no other option but to die. So the millions of those poor victims of this new Patent laws are expendable to the Govt. of India. The unkindest cut is that Indian producers can export cheaper anti-HIV drugs to sub-Saharan Africa on a special permit subject to international supervision but they cannot sell the same drug in India! This was decided in the WTO Ministerial meeting in the presence of representatives from India. Immediately about 39 important drugs will be withdrawn from market which were being produced by Indian companies. Hereafter those will be available only at international price which is extremely high for us.

The other area which will be the hardest hit is the agricultural sector. Revolutionary changes are taking place in genetic engineering and in the field of bio-technology. But today such developments or discoveries are in the hands of MNC's. During the seventies of 20th century the world has seen one green revolution in food production through high-yielding rice and wheat variety which solved food problem in our country also. The technology, process or even actual foundation seed was transferred from country to country without paying any royalty. Today everything is being patented and MNC's are set to make huge profit by monopolising research, distribution and also by selling terminator seeds that force peasants again and again to the MNC's and pay a hefty price every year. This is commercialisation of the worst kind. Greed of the MNC's of Western world rules over all other humanitarian considerations. That is why there is so much pressure on developing countries, particularly India, to fall in line to suit their super profit motive. Our government has meekly surrendered ignoring the fact that soon our agriculture will face devastating consequences because of internal hike in costs and from cheap imports from advanced countries. The whole essence of WTO and TRIPS agreement is to garner higher and higher profits by the MNC's by pushing a Patent regime that is unbearable to us.

GRIM BATTLE AHEAD

The Indian Patent Act 1970, to a great extent had put the country's interest and people's interest above the multi-national corporations interest. That's why medicines were far cheaper in India than in Pakistan or Sri Lanka. In India the process could be patented not the product. Same medicines could be produced in a different process or with some changes in the process. This helped Indian drug industry to grow and produce medicines without

paying royalty. After the ordinance the product can now be patented and thus wholly monopolised and production of the same medicine with a different and cheaper process will be banned. The result will be disastrous. There was pressure on India to change the Patent Act but we resisted it. The MNC's could not force India to submission as long as Soviet Union was there. Today the situation has changed, but the hard fact is that India is a country of 100 crore plus population and is by far the biggest market for pharma, chemical, bio-technical and software market. We firmly believe that we cannot be pushed off if we stand resolutely against all the negative provisions of the Patent Ordinance. The working class of India shall have to take a lead to educate the people and carryout the struggle from the front.

CITU DENOUNCES ORDINANCE ON PENSION FUND REGULATOR

The Government of India issued an ordinance, on December 30, 2004, paving the way for setting up of the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority. The CITU denounced the PFRDA ordinance and called upon all workers to stage emphatic protest actions and rally to resist the planned erosion of even the present social security arrangements. The text of the CITU statement issued to the media on December 31, 2004 is appended:

"The promulgation of an ordinance for setting up a Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) clearly demonstrates that the UPA government is determined to carry on its shoulders all the anti-labour and retrograde measures of the earlier NDA regime. After the end of the winter session of the Parliament, the government had taken recourse to the ordinance route, as in the case of the Patents legislation, which is ill conceived and against healthy democratic norms.

"It is deplorable that the present UPA has decided to go ahead with the establishing of a pension fund authority, in pursuit of the NDA government move to switch over to a defined contribution scheme for the employees recruited since January 2004. This departure from the earlier defined benefit scheme had met with opposition from not only the organisations of the central and state government employees but also the Central Trade Union Organisations.

"The basic thrust of the new defined contribution pension regime is to channelise pension fund contributions to the equity market in varying proportions under three different options of risk bearing. While several reports during the NDA regime had doled out such prescriptions, in the name of 'pension sector reforms', mainly as a voluntary tier, the new scheme had been made mandatory. This new scheme has no provision for any minimum pension payable and the government will not stand guarantor for the scheme.

"The very fact that the Securities and Appellate Tribunal will be the appellate body over the PFRDA clearly reveals that the new scheme is only share market centric and intended to give a boost to the Mutual Funds. Thus, it will lead to handing over the social security contributions of the employees to the speculators in the share market, with the government abdicating its responsibility towards social safety for its own employees.

"The UPA Government had, in its National Common Minimum Programme, committed firmly 'that labour-management relations in our country must be marked by consultations, cooperation and consensus, not confrontation' and to actively pursue 'tripartite consultations with trade unions and industry on all proposals concerning them'. The present ordinance on PFRDA, resorted to without any consultations with the trade unions, is a blatant violation of this commitment.

"The 'reforms-lobby' in governance has been taking recourse to putting in place a series of 'Regulatory Authorities', which only seek to promote private corporate interests in the respective fields of business and heap burdens and deprivations on the common public. The claim that the PFRDA has been empowered to curb fraudulent and unfair practices in pension funds and protect the interests of the subscribers is no more than a cosmetic decoration".

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF TRADE UNION

Chittabrata Majumdar

Market has been essentially the driving force, on which the capitalism, since its infancy, has heavily relied upon for its survival and growth. Exploitation of labour being its essence, the capitalism could move with sheer patronisation of growing market so far. But the continuity of mounting exploitation has curbed the capacity of such market to grow, rather led to contraction of market, resulting in crises of over productivity, where the demand for the produce has fallen far short of the capacity to produce. The capitalism has turned to be no longer dynamic, incapable as a system to result any social progression. Because of such resultant incapacity to push the development forward and the stagnation it faces, the capitalism has turned to be reactionary with hostile tendencies and thus has emerged as imperialism, being the greatest threat for the humanity. The successive two world wars, apart from the numerous invasions by the imperialism here and there, have exposed how the monopoly imperial capital got desperate to take the control over the global market for survival. But despite all such desperate moves, capitalism fails miserably to put even a pause on the process of erosion of the global market, as has been evident from history. Post World War II, capitalism has been compelled to concede the state-intervention in demand management for a short while, which work in boosting the market to a certain extent. And, on being rehabilitated with the benevolence of the states, the monopoly capital did not waste time and initiated hard bargaining to establish its hegemony over the economy worldwide. Since the mid-seventies, global capitalism has started experiencing the crises again in a renewed mood. The crises accentuated further, as the time passes, and its complexities further aggravated with the full dominance of the capital on the phenomenal technological developments, the world has ever tested.

The capitalist class, having the ownership on that technologies by their enormous money and mussel power, have been continuously waging attacks on working class, to get rid of its own crises.

The statistics of GDP growth has been tooled to project revival of capitalism. But how can we ignore the ever-increasing distress of the toiling people across the globe? The growths and the market are simply to cater a handful of rich only and have been capable to eradicate neither the poverty nor it can cater the needs of the poverty-stricken toiling mass. Thus, this miserable incapability of contemporary capitalism has made the boast of revival untenable and a fallacy. Further with the declined scope of profit and erosion in investment opportunities in industries and services, the emerging international finance capital has glowingly inclined to speculative investment with profit-lust. At the same time the monopoly capital has been pushing hard its globalisation agenda across the third world to firm its dominance on global market.

Globalisation process has been designed by the monopoly capital to grab the control over entire global wealth. The ongoing closure and privatisation, liberalisation of investment policies in favour of foreign investment, removal of import barriers etc. are essentially the elements of the globalisation process. The attacks on the livelihood of the working class, downsizing of manpower through retrenchments, curtailment of employment opportunities and trampling of labour rights have been obvious ingredients of the process. At the same time the growing opposition and resistance by working class to defend itself from the burnt of globalisation process, from the countrywide general strike in 1991 have been consolidated further to oppose each and every attack on the working class as well as on the national interest.

Working class being the worst victim of the imperialist

globalisation has also put effort in organising the toiling mass and others that are suffering from the menace of the globalisation and dictated liberalisation. Experiencing the stiff resistance, the ruling class has quickly identified the working class, its classical enemy to bulldoze, to make working class cripple in resisting the attacks on their livelihood for ensuring smooth sailing towards globalisation mission. Such desperation on the part of the capital has posed a worst threat and sometimes the working class fails to defend even the prevailing rights that secured through glorious struggles. Despite of the resistance, the toiling mass could not be protected from the rages like closures of industries, heavy retrenchment in various forms, massive casualisation, and infomalisation of even the urban labour force along with the curtailment of all benefits including economic rights.

This also has to be realised that, the attacks on the working class have been extended further to the ideological domain apart from its tangible form. Attempts are being made to convince that the trade unions are no longer able to serve the workers. Instead, the mushrooming of non-governmental voluntary organisations innately opposed to class struggle and patronised and nourished by the foreign funds flowing from the capitalist block have been projected as saviours. But the trade unions are the organisations of the working class. And it is the trade unions along the path of organised movements and struggles have been fighting for the rights of the working class. None other than trade union can look after the interest of the working class. It is necessary to realise that the moribund capitalist system rather no longer in a position to offer the working class anything but for suffering of acute unemployment coupled with distress and poverty. As Karl Marx & Frederick Engels in Manifesto of the Communist Party narrated:

" Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its lavish existence. The modern labour on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. And here it becomes evident, that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon the society as an overt-ridding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society."

In a capitalist form of production, while the capitalist class has been struggling to keep the system intact and un-hurt, the working class, need to hit the system itself, be it on the issue of securing the rights within the existing system or to uproot it. Evidently the capitalists has been desperate to disarm the working class of its ultimate weapon namely strike, by any means.

The global capitalism with the accentuation of embedded crises has been rapidly moving towards inevitable destruction, and bound to be replaced by better form. In an era of globalisation, the working class with its credibility as vanguard again has been in the forefront to fight globalisation everywhere, despites of all adversities. Historically the working class movement does not necessarily follow a linear line of progression; rather its movement has been a zigzag. A retreat for the time being neither can't be looked as regression, nor does it negate the relevance of trade union since in ultimate term it is the working class that always upholds the torch of the revolution to set the humanity free from the exploitative capitalism.

Reality reaffirms the relevance of the trade union in the contemporary regime, as it was in the past. Situation also demands firm commitment of trade unions in organising the toiling mass fighting for their own right as well as to uproot the exploitative system. And these all are to the utter disappointment of those who have been howling to the contrary.

ECONOMY: REALITY CHECKS

WHO WILL BEAR THE BURDEN?

The IMF Deputy Managing Director Anne Krueger released his sermon on 14th January at New Delhi that the Govt of India must strictly adhere to the target of reduction of fiscal deficit. *(Business Standard, 15-01-2005)*

The Govt of India has no other go but to oblige the IMF. But the indications flowing from pre-budget consultation process as reported in print media reveal that there will be sizable cut in corporate tax rate in the ensuing budget of the UPA Govt. This is despite the fact that the corporate tax collections last year manifest lukewarm growth compared to growth in profit and turnover despite substantial concessions doled out to corporates. The Finance Ministry also did not conceal their intentions of further slashing down customs duty and augment concessions for wooing the foreign investors.

If such giveaways continue, who will bear the burden of augmenting revenue and bridging the deficit ? Is it the mass of the populace who has to pay for the giveaways and tax-cuts for the affluents and imports ?

OF NCMP BONDAGE -THE QUEST FOR THE ESCAPE ROUTE !

The National Common Minimum Programme says, "Generally, profit making PSUs will not be privatized.

The Airport Story

But any such commitment against privatization undermines the credentials of avowed reformers in the Governance. Hence the drive in quest of the escape route. The most profit making airports of Delhi and Mumbai under the Airport Authority of India Ltd (AAI) which is also a profit making PSU are already taken up for privatization through joint venture route. The logic, rather the devil's logic is that joint venture is needed to infuse fund for modernization of these two Airports. The Govt thus appointed a Global Advisor M/s Airplan which estimated the cost of such phased modernization of Delhi Airport at Rs 1496 crore in the short term and Rs 5133 crore in the year 2024. Fro Mumbai they are yet to come out with such estimate but similar fund requirement can also be presumed for Mumbai Airport given the existing standards of facilities in both the airports. The Airport Authority is at present having Rs 2500 crore surplus reserve at their command and RS 1000 crore as cash-excess. And with such a sound financial foundation will it be much difficult for AAI to garner Rs 3000 crore in the short term from the debt market (without disturbing the Govt budget) for modernization of both the airports or Rs 10000 crore till the year 2024. Does it require privatization at all ?

But it is not just modernization of airports but really the privatization of this sensitive infrastructure is the main requirement of the power that be. Hence the Civil Aviation Minister came out with a statement that the Govt requires Rs 20000 crore for modernization of the two airports which is more than double the estimate made by the Global Advisor appointed by his ministry itself. Somehow privatization has to be achieved,- in whatever means available -fair or foul !

And this will help the privatization lobby to kill two birds in one stroke. If the Delhi and Mumbai airports, two major surplus generating airports carved out of AAI for the joint venture company, the AAI will be left with comparatively less remunerative airports and under consistent threat of losing profitability, turning sick and being pushed towards privatization under distress.

For other profit making PSUs, route to privatization chosen in the face of hurdles laid down in NCMP is even more unscrupulous. The NCMP debars strategic sell-off. Hence the rulers of the day have taken the route of phased sale of shares and the target is set for selling out up to 49% shares of the PSUs and keep them ready for outright

privatization at opportune moment. The ambitious target has also been set for garnering Rs 25000 crore every year through sale of shares of highly profit making PSUs and companies like BHEL, NTPC, PGCIL, PFC companies in the Oil Sector etc have already been shortlisted for the purpose.

PRESS NOTE 18 SCRAPPED - WHO BENEFITS WHO GAINS...

The Press Note 18 was scrapped. The Commerce Ministry reportedly objected to such wholesale licence to foreign companies to ditch their Indian partners and prescribed certain minimal behavioural norms for the foreign partners of the Indian Joint Venture companies. But everything was bulldozed by the reform-puritans in the Government. And thus the foreign companies after gaining access to Indian markets through joint venture route can ditch their joint venture partner and set-up wholly owned companies in the same sector. Scrapping of Press Note 18 will also provoke the usually stronger foreign partner to render the existing joint venture "sick and defunct" to satisfy the revised guidelines and go for new venture deserting the extant one. "No matter, let the Indian partners go to hell, the foreigners must be pampered and FDI will shower on Indian soil." —is the ruling philosophy. This is the "most modern and forward looking approach" being preached by the Govt of the day and those who oppose the same are fools and obsolete.

TRAI FAVOURS PRIVATE TELECOM OPERATORS!

As Usual the Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRAI) jumped into the service of private telecom operators, which are operating mainly in the creamy remunerative areas. The TRAI is serving faithfully the interests of the private operators and also many more individuals involved in the process putting the public sector telecom companies into loss. Such favour to private operators is also going to cost expansion of rural tele-network, which is being undertaken by the public sector telecom companies from the revenue earned from the remunerative areas. The TRAI has drastically reduced the Access Deficit Charges to be paid by the private telecom operators to BSNL for accessing the wireline-network infrastructure created by public sector tele companies for long distance calls.

In a statement issued on 8th January 2005, Centre of India Trade Unions (CITU) condemns the decision of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), headed by Pradip Baijal, one of the conspirators in liquidating many Public Sector Undertakings in NDA regime, to reduce Access Deficit Charges (ADC) to help the private telecom operators and leading to loss of more than Rs.1250 Crores to BSNL, the Govt. owned telecom company. The statement observed, "This would in turn adversely affect the rural telephony and other socially desirable project of BSNL. There is also apprehension that charges of fixed line telephones may also rise thus affecting the common man using telephone for limited use. It is further deplorable that TRAI, under Baijal, is working against the interest of BSNL. All the steps taken by TRAI and also its refusal to act sternly against private operators when needed, prove that TRAI is working to finally de-stabilise BSNL only to the benefit of private operators. CITU calls upon the Govt. to order an enquiry as to why the TRAI, while remaining a silent spectator, when an errant private telecom operator i.e. M/s Reliance Infocom was robbing BSNL of thousands of crores by tampering with the code of incoming global calls to evade ADC, has now come to rescue such operators through reduced ADC.

CITU also demands the govt. to take immediate steps to rescind the TRAI order on ADC and to remove in public interest TRAI Chairman Baijal, a NDA Govt. appointee infamous for his actions in dismantling and destroying public sector entities.

TUs CAMPAIGN FOR PROHIBITION OF ASBESTOS

M. K. Pandhe

"There is no such thing as safe asbsestos" - A brochure published by ICEM.

Despite adoption of the ILO Convention No.162 the progress in the direction of banning and marketing of asbestos and asbestos containing material has been slow in the world, particularly in the developing countries.

Powerful asbestos lobby operating all over the world carrying misinformation campaign and manufacturers are creating impact even on policy markers of some countries. This is having some confusion among the public due to lack of adequate information on the dangerous consequences of this dreaded material.

The campaign material periodically released by the Asbestos Information Centre in India have been frequently trotting the following arguments:

" No studies have demonstrated or even suggested that high density and non-friable chrysotile containing products are real risk of public health.

" Almost all cases of asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma were caused by use of amphiboles and work practices of 20 to 40 years ago, which have long been abandoned;

" The responsible and controlled use of chrysotile does not entail unacceptable risk;

The asbestos lobby has close links in the governmental circles. As a result of this even after ban on asbestos by many countries, the Government of India has drastically reduced custom duty on import of asbestos and facilitated its entry in Indian market without any hindrance.

In the present socio-economic situation in India trade unions will have to encounter several problems in the campaign for banning asbestos. With the unemployment in the country reaching an alarming level of 150 million persons, there is a growing tendency among the workers to ignore the risk of health and life when they are offered a source of livelihood however dangerous it may be.

The employers take advantage of the ignorance among the workers of the dangerous consequences of the use of amosite, chrysotile, crocidolite, tremolite, actimolite, and anthrophylite.

Non-implementation of the ILO Convention on asbestos in India has resulted in lack of adequate protection to the workers working in the industry. The trade union movement has not played its required role in protecting the interest of the workers. As a matter of fact a small section even oppose the ban on asbestos in the country.

ICEM, an International TU Organisation of Chemical, Energy and Mining Unions, in a meeting of participants from asbestos and man-made mineral and vitreous fibres producing, processing and user countries that have banned marketing of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials and countries seeking to limit asbestos exposure, concluded on:

- the need for all ILO member countries to ratify ILO Convention No.162;
- a call to the workers group in ILO Governing Body to initiate a country-by-country progress review of ratification and problems encountered;
- the need to develop a coherent materials evaluation system to facilitate substitution based on principles of health protection for workers and the public;
- the pressing need to set up institution to help workers negotiate industrial restructuring and environmental groups.

The meeting further recommended: a)Widening the scope of the ILO Conventions on carcinogens and man-made mineral fibres, b) Setting occupational exposure limits for mineral fibres, and c) That the ILO should draw up and adopt a code of practice on insulating fibres (the most common fibre product).

No country-by-country progress review of the use of asbestos was made by International Labour Organization (ILO). As a result, detailed studies for all the countries are not available. Though ILO admits that about a hundred thousand workers die every year due to this silent killer the ground realities in various developing countries are still kept under the carpet. The producers of asbestos who are striving to get market for their product

find it necessary to promote under-estimation of the harrowing impact of this dreaded chemical.

Ban on use of asbestos by E.U. has resulted in asbestos manufacturers (South Africa, Russia, Canada) searching for markets in developing countries and making frantic efforts to through fair means or foul to influence the governments of the developing countries not to take cognigence of the asbestos-menace.

India consumes about 125,000 tonnes of asbestos every year of which 100,000 tonnes are imported from Canada, Russian, Brazil and Zimbabwe. Though the Government has prohibited asbestos mining, illegal mines are operating in the States of Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.

Forty two asbestos cement plants employ over 32,000 workers and the value of output is estimated at Rs.20 billion ($450 million). The total indirect employment in asbestos related industry is estimated to be about 100,000.

Asbestos is being widely used in India in the manufacture of pressure and non-pressure pipes used for water supply sewage and drainage, packing material, brakelinings and jointing used in automobiles, heavy equipment, nuclear power plants, thermal power plants among others. The total consumption is estimated to be 100,000 metric tones, only one fifth of which is produced indigenously.

Despite such widespread usage of asbestos, no epidemiological studies have been conducted so far. However one social activist claimed one thousand cases of asbestos related diseases in four months. According to Dr. Sudhakar Bhat, former Head Respiratory Medicine at King George Memorial Hospital in Mumbai, "Doctors are under pressure to interpret X Ray as TB or Bronchitis or other chronic conditions". Though Indian law provides compensation to victims most of the affected workers are denied the benefit due to lack of evidence.

Under these circumstances, TU intervention is of paramount importance to strengthen global campaign to ban the use of asbestos. In India all major TUs have demanded it but no positive steps has been taken by Govt. of India in the direction of ratification of the ILO Convention on asbestos. T.U. should join campaign to create awareness among workers and people as one of cardinal tasks so that the campaign receives a powerful momentum. Wherever such campaign is effective positive results have come.

Workers rendered jobless due to ban on asbestos should be provided effective social safety and alternative source of livelihood by the Government.

Alternative to use of asbestos should be developed and popularized among the consumers of asbestos products. T.Us should campaign for such products. Pending achievement of total ban on asbestos the trade unions. should strive for full protection to workers and consumers who are victims of the use of asbestos.

Exchange of International experience in the campaign against use of asbestos will strengthen the ongoing campaign all over the world. The ILO can be made more active to draw the attention on the Governments of developing countries about the dangerous consequences of the sue of asbestos;

International co-operation with social movements by the trade unions to educate people at large on the need for a global ban on use of asbestos can be of immense help in this noble task.

COMRADE D SARADA

Com D Sarada, a frontline leader of the trade union and women's movement in Visakhapatnam died in a tragic road accident on 17.12. 2004. She was only 51. A massive memorial meeting was held at the VUDA auditorium in Visakhapatnam on the 29.12.2004 to pay homage to the memory of D Sarada, General Secretary of the Visakha Dairy Employees' Union and a leader of the trade union and women's movement. Speaking on the occasion, Hemalata, Secretary of CITU and the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women told that Sarada, who hailed from a communist family, was a committed activist of the working class. Her father D V Subba Rao was one of the founders of the CPI (M) in Andhra Pradesh and her mother Bikshavati was a leader of the women's movement. As a young girl of thirteen, when her father died, Sarada wrote in her diary that she would follow his foot steps. She kept her word till the last. Leaders of CITU, AITUC, INTUC, BMS, AICCTU, as well as several political parties paid rich tributes to Sarada. Narasinga Rao, husband of Sarada and the President of CITU State Committee, thanked all for sharing his personal loss. It was decided to form a district level legal aid cell for needy women in the name of Sarada.

REPORTS & EVENTS

WEST BENGAL:

NPMO PLANS STATEWIDE PROGRAMMES

A meeting of the NPMO held at the Shramik Bhavan in Kolkata on December 30 had chalked out state wide programmes spread over next four months highlighting the important demands in the present context.

During this period, 400 cycle processions would be held in each block and municipal areas. On January 28, sit-in demonstrations will be organised in 38000 villages and in municipal areas for one hour. The workers, kisans, youth, women, and students will take part in the programme. The demonstrations to be held throughout the day will be organised at 1.2 lakh spots.

Plays will be enacted and songs will be sung during the programme. On women's day (March 8), women workers of the different mass front will demonstrate. Between March 11 and 17, jeep and van tableaux will be organised at all the markets places and townships where cultural troupes will perform. In view of the higher secondary examination scheduled, hall meetings will be held March 28 on the anti-unemployment day. Before the central programme of April 17 in Kolkata, jeep-borne tableaux will be taken around the districts of Coochbehar, Purulia, Midnapore west, and Birbhum and reach Kolkata. There will be a mass sit-in demonstration s over April 16-17 following which a mass rally will be held at the Shahid Minar maidan in the afternoon of April 17.

Two central meetings have taken place to commence preparations towards making the programme a success. Shyamal Chakraborty and Kali Ghosh (CITU), Rekha Goswami (AIDWA), Apurba Chatterjee (SFI), Pratim Ghosh (DYFI), and Chunilal Dasgupta (12th July Committee) addressed the meeting held at Shramik Bhavan, Kolkata. CITU, Kisan Sabha, AIDWA, DYFI, and SFI leaders addressed the meeting held at Siliguri.

(Report from B PRASANT)

Uttar Pradesh:

MASSIVE WORKERS RALLY AT FEROZABAD

The glass bangle workers' struggle at Ferozabad has been going on since last one year or so braving police repression and prohibitory orders. More than hundred workers and their family members and activists have been in jail of Mulayam Singh Govt which is acting at the behest of the factory owners to teach the struggling workers a lesson. The workers colonies have been raided, houses ransacked and even the women members have been manhandled by the police force. But the workers struggle is going on undaunted under the leadership of CITU.

On 30th December 2004 the Kanch Udyaog Krantikari Mazddor Sangh (CITU) decided to hold a mass rally at Ferozabad to pres for immediate release of all arrested workers and their family members from jail and halting of the police repression. A repressive administration always at the service of the factory owners announced a ban on mobilization and refused permission for holding mass meeting at Ferozabad. But the union decided to hold the meeting defying the order. Members of Parliament, Dipankar Mukherjee and Mehboob Jahedi who have also been the nationa secretaries of CITU and All India Kisan Sabha respectively reached Ferozabad in the morning to address the meeting. The local adminisration at the instance of the State Govt acted so vindictively that they refused to accommodate the members of Parliament in the Govt Circuit House there.

From late noon onwards on 30th December 2004, workers strted thronging in thousands in the maidan. Meantime the CITU leadership conveyed their protest to district administration for denial of permission for the meeting and in that process to avoid embarrassment, the district

administration has been compelled to allow holding the mass meeting. The meeting has been a mammoth one, the maidan overflowed with people while several thousands had been on the surrounding roads blockading the entire area.

Rajji Devi, leader of the Kanch Udyog Krantikari Mazdoor Sangh presided over the meeting. The meeting was addressed by Dipankar Mukherjee MP, secretary CITU who criticized the state govt for refusal of permission of the meeting and ridiculed themselves as the people ignored the administration by their militant mobilization. He warned the Govt that they should take lesson from this militant expression of peoples' mood and concede to the just demands of the workers. The meeting was also addressed by Daulat Ram, General Secretary of UP State CITU and other leaders viz., Mukut Singh, Nawal Singh, Mohammad Bashir etc. It was announced in the meeting that their will be massive demonstration before the office of the Assistant Labour Commissioner on 19.12005

Bihar-Jharkhand:

ELECTRICITY EMPLOYEES CONFERENCE

The 23rd Conference of Bihar Jharkhand State Electricity Board Field Kamgarh Union was held on 13-14 December 2004 at MLA-Club Hall at Patna. 500 delegates from all over the states of Bihar and Jharkhand took part in the conference.

The conference was conducted by a presidium comprising Ram Prasad Singh, Vishnu Kumar Verma and Hariram Paswan. 30 delegates took part in the deliberation on General Secretary's Report. The conference was inaugurated by Chandi Prasad, President, Bihar State CITU and was also addressed by Arun Kumar Mishra, General Secretary, Bihar State CITUAND Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Secretary, Bihar State CPI (M). The conference resolved to carry on struggle for review of the Electricity Act 2003 and removal of the retrograde clauses from the same.

The conference elected the new working committee of the union with Ram Prasad Singh as President, Amarendra Prasad Mishra as General Secretary and Dhirendra Jha as treasurer.

RAJASTHAN:

VICTORIOUS PEASANTS' STRUGGLE

Peasants raised their voices in several thousands demanding more water for irrigation. They came for urging upon the State Govt to release more water for irrigation as per commitment. They received bullets. Thousands of peasants rallied before the divisional offices in Gharsana, Rawla, Anupgarh and in many other places at Sriganganagar district of Rajasthan on 26th October 2004. In return, the Rajasthan police opened indiscriminate fire on the peaceful demonstration of peasants and agricultural workers. Three peasants were killed at Gharsana. At Rawla, eight have received severe bullet injuries. And this led to much more widespread outburst of anger of the people in the form of spontaneous demonstration throughout the district. The Govt declared virtual curfew in all the three town at Rawla, Gharsana and Anupgarh and army has been called for.

It was agreed by the Gehlot Govt in Rajasthan earlier to release 5.23 cusec water per 100 acre land for irrigation. But after BJP's coming to power, the new Govt drastically reduced the water to be released to only 3.5 cusec which is totally insufficient. The peasants organization have been organizing deputations to local administrations in Bikaneer Jaisalmeer, Hanumangarh, and Sriganganagar etc during last few months but in vain. And that culminated to the

joint demonstrations by the peasants organisations.

But police barbarity could not tame the movement of the peasntry. Rather the struggle got much broadened beyond the Sriganganagar District and the broadbased Sangharsh Samity got even broader support from the people in the struggle against the BJP Govt.

During early December again there have been flare up of massive demonstration and blockading of the administrative offices by sea of people spreading over even broaders areas in the state centering round the Sri Ganganagar district. On 3rd December there have been massive and militant mobilization peasantry and agricultural workers and curfew was declared by the State administration to combat the same. Ignoring the curfew order demonstration and mobilization gathered momentum in the following days. Mass scale arrests was resorted to take hundreds of the activists of the Sangharsh Samity in custody. Hetram Beniwal, President of Rajasthan State CITU was arrested under National Security Act. Police continued lathicharge and firing on the peasants' mobilization in desperation injuring many and killing three others. But nothing could deter the upsurge of people determined to carry forward their struggle.

Ultimately the BJP Govt has to retreat. The Rajasthan Govt conceded all the demands made by the peasantry including release of all the leaders and activists arrested under National Security Act. The Govt also agreed to appoint a three member judicial commission to look into the excesses committed by the Govt officials and the police force against the peasantry. CITU congratulates the peasant movement in Rajasthan for their heroic and victorious struggle braving atrocities and making immense sacrifice.

(Note: The CITU working Committee had been in session at Agartala, Tripura on 3-5 December 2004 when the information of police firing on the peasant mobilization killing three peasants and arrest of leaders of Sangharsh Samity including State CITU President, Hetram Beniwal under NSA was received. On 5th December from the meeting venue, CITU sent a protest telegram to Chief Minister of Rajasthan denouncing police firing and arrests of leadership and demanding immediate fulfillment of the just demands of the peasantry. The CITU working Committee also adopted a resolution.)

Andhra Pradesh:

SUCCESSFUL HUNGER STRIKE BY APSRTC WORKERS

The APSRTC staff & Workers Federation staged an indefinite hunger strike led by its General Secretary R Laxmaiah and other office bearers from 10th December 2004 onwards demanding concrete remedial action by the State Govt to defend and promote the state transport corporation and curb the unscrupulous operations by the private operators. Their concrete demands were: 1) Reduction of MV tax on RTC to 2%, 2) Reimbursement of the cost of concessions granted to commuters by the State Govt, 3) Levy of sales tax on diesel purchased by APSRTC at 4% on par with Railways, 4) Arrest and curbing of illicit operation by private transport operators.

The Hunger strike continued till 18-12-2004. During this period, besides indefinite hunger strike by 5 office bearers of the federation, relay hunger strike by other workers and activists also continued. Throughout the state, the RTC workers organized rallies at district levels and road-blockades were also organized at several places while the hunger strike was going on in the capital. On 16th December 2004, 3000 workers were arrested at different centers of the state while participating in massive road-blockade programmes. K K

Divakaran, General Secretary, All India Road Transport Workers Federation, Shyamal Chakraborty, Vice President CITU and Subhas Chakraborty, Transport Minister Govt of West Bengal also addressed the camp of the hunger strikers and addressed the gatherings of workers there.

The indefinite hunger strike was called off only after the state Govt took concrete action on the main demands of the workers and assured of urgent steps on the rest. On 17th December 2004, there have been meeting of the Chief Minister and also with the transport Secretary of the State with the leadership of APSRTC Staff & Workers Federation on the demands of the workers. The State Govt has granted Rs 125 crore loan to APSRTC and Rs 67 crore towards reimbursement of cost of concessions granted by the State Govt for the commuters. The Govt also assured to issue Govt Order authorizing the police authority to curb the illicit operation by the private operators. The Govt also agreed to to take the views/ suggestions of the union into consideration before fianlising the Report of the High Level Committee constituted on APSRTC.

The programme of indefinite hunger strike by the APSRTC workers was concluded on 18th December through an impressive gathering of workers at the camp site. The gathering was addressed by Santosh Reddy, Transport Minister, Narshima Rddy, Technical Education Minister, M A Gaffoor, MLA and Dy Leader CPI(M) in State Assembly, R Laxmiah and M N Reddy, General Secretary and President of APSRTC staff & Workers' Federation.

KERALA:

ROAD TRANSPORT WORKERS' STRUGGLE

To save the state owned transport sector in Kerala, The Kerala State Road Transport Employees Association (CITU) took initiative for joint struggle against the govt policy of ruining the state transport sector by discriminatory tactics. A Joint Action Council of Transport Workers comprising unions affiliated to CITU, AITUC, BMS and other independent unions was formed. The Joint Council gave a call for indefinite strike in the state transport sector from 15th December 2004 and in preparation to that statewide intensive campaign and agitation was launched. The main demands were more financial assistance to State Owned Transport Undertaking, more investment for improvement of fleets and services and settlement of long pending demands of the workers including Dearness Allowance. Unit level, zonal level and district level meetings, rallies and dharnas were organized throughout the state. On 8th December a massive hunger strike was organized before the State Govt Secretariat at Thiruvanatapuram which had drawn the participation of huge number of workers. The gathering was addressed by M K Pandhe, President CITU, V Achyutanandan, leader of the opposition, Keral Assembly, P K Guridasan, General Secretary, KeralA State CITU, K K Divakaran, General Secretary, All India Road Transport Workers' Federation among others. The campaign created high tempo for the indefinite strike action. In this background the Transport Minister, Govt of Kerala had to call a meeting of the trade union leaders and negotiate on their demands. The Govt agreed to sanction Rs 20 crore assistance to KSRTC and 5% DA for the workers and consider other demands favourably. In this background, The indefinite strike programme from 15th December has been called off.

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REPORTS & EVENTS

ANGANWADI FEDERATION PLANS CAMPAIGN

A meeting of the working committee of the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers was held in Delhi on 8-9 January 2005, with its President Neelima Maitra in chair. The working committee discussed the developments after its last meeting in Thiruvananthapuram and decided the future tasks to be taken up by the Federation.

Members coming from all over the country reported that there was very good response for the signature collection demanding regularisation of the ICDS. Campaigns for collection of signatures were held in all the states. In some states tents were set up in public places and the importance of regularising ICDS was explained through mike, distribution of leaflets etc. Group meetings of the beneficiaries were held in the villages. More than 26 lakhs signatures have already reached the all India Centre while many more lakhs have reached the project and district centres but could not yet be reached to the all India Centre. The working committee decided to complete the campaign by the end of February. The working committee decided to submit the around 2 crores signatures expected to be collected to the HRD minister Arjun Singh after a mass convention to be held in the second part of the Budget

INTERIM SETTLEMENT IN CEMENT INDUSTRY

At the conciliation proceedings before the Joint C.L.C [C] on January 7, 2005, the understanding reached between the representatives of the five Central Trade Unions Organisations (CTUOs) and the Cement Manufacturers' Association (CMA) during the bilateral discussions at Mumbai on December 16, 2004 was further discussed. An interim settlement, under Section 12 (3) of the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, was arrived at for the period between 1.4.2004 and 31.3.2005. As per this:

The settlement on the common charter of demands that would be arrived at will be effective from 1.4.2005.

A lump sum of Rs. 2580 will paid, linked to attendance, for the period between 1.4.2004 and 31.3.2005. This will be disbursed in two instalments, the first instalment of Rs. 2150 on or before 8.2.2005 and the second instalment of Rs. 430/- on 10.4.2005.

An amount of Rs. 215/- per month as allowance will be included in the package of benefits under the new settlement.

This understanding will cover all categories of workers covered by the Second Arbitration Award for the cement industry and employed in companies, which have authorised the CMA to negotiate on their behalf.

The unions conveyed their disappointment at the large number of companies sought to be excluded from the coverage of the interim settlement itself and urged the CMA to make special efforts to bring all the companies for the national level settlement. The CMA assured that efforts will be made to include for the national level settlement as many of the companies, which have so far not authorised the CMA to negotiate.

The bilateral negotiations on the common charter of demands were held on January 12, 2005 at Mumbai, where the CMA outlined their approach to the next settlement. The representatives of the five CTUOs also gave their initial reactions. The next round of negotiations will be held in Mumbai on February 9, 2005, where the five CTUOs will meet in the morning at 10 a.m. and meeting with the CMA will be held from 2 p.m.

Session of Parliament in April 2005. It has decided to mobilise thousands of anganwadi employees from all the states in this convention.

Hemalata, General Secretary of the Federation placed the report. She also reported about the meeting with Syeda Hameed, member, Planning Commission who gave a sympathetic hearing to the demand for regularisation of the anganwadi workers and helpers and their recognition as government employees.

The working committee decided to hold the 5th Conference of the Federation in Bangalore in September with around 500 delegates, on the basis of the 2004 membership. A seminar on the importance of ICDS for the welfare of children and women in the rural areas and urban slums will be held in Bangalore on the occasion of the Conference. A booklet on the struggles of the anganwadi employees in the country will also be released on the occasion. It was decided to hold the sector, project, district and state conferences on the basis of membership and with elected representatives, before August 2005. It also decided to conduct a wide campaign on the occasion of the Conference through leaflets, posters, group meetings, conventions, seminars etc.

F.C.I. MAZDOOR FEDERATION MEETING

The All India F.C.I. Mazdoor Federation had not been properly functioning for quite some time now. The CITU Centre had initiated some steps to step up our work and activities among the workers of the Food Corporation of India. A meeting of some of the leading comrades working in the unions in FCI was also held. It was decided, as a first step, to convene a meeting of the working committee of the captioned Federation, from where further organisational steps can be initiated.

The General Secretary of the Federation, Com. Bijoy Bhattacharjee had since issued a notice convening the meeting of the Working Committee of the Federation. The meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, the 15th February, 2005 at the CITU Central Office, B.T. Ranadive Bhawan, 13 A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110 002.

Both the President and the General Secretary of the CITU will attend the meeting

COMRADE P. K. TANDON

Comrade P.K.Tandon, an outstanding leader of the peasant movement in India and a former Joint Secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha for over two decades died in Lucknow on January 4, 2005, at the age of 81. He was a pioneer of the kisan movement in U.P. He gave up his job as a mechanical engineer to work whole time for the cause of the toiling people. The CITU Secretariat and 'The Working Class' pays homage to the memory of Com. Tandon.

A condolence meeting was held at the office of the All India Kisan sabha in New Delhi on January, 2005. S.Ramachandran Pillai, President, AIKS, presided. M.K.Pandhe (CITU), Atul Anjan (Kisan Sabha-CPI), Suneet Chopra (AIAWU), P.Tyagi (DUFI), Kallol Roy (SFI) Ashalata (AIDWA) and Nirmal (BKMU) spoke paying rich tributes to the memory of Com. P.K.Tandon. A condolence resolution was also adopted with the partipcants observing silence in homage.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX NUMBERS FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS ON BASE 1982=100

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Oct.' 04	Nov.' 04	State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Oct.' 04	Nov.' 04
Andhra	1	Gudur	498	501	Maharastra	38	Mumbai	612	613
Pradesh	2	Guntur	515	513		39	Nagpur	542	537
	3	Hyderabad	519	517		40	Nasik	572	569
	4	Visakhapatnam	509	509		41	Pune	584	582
	5	Warangal	534	536		42	Solapur	534	534
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	440	442	Orissa	43	Barbil	463	463
	7	Guwahati	525	525		44	Rourkela	467	465
	8	Labac-Silchar	419	419	Punjab	45	Amritsar	466	462
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	445	453		46	Ludhiana	486	487
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	447	442	Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	529	527
Bihar	11	Monghyr	496	488		48	Jaipur	478	476
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	471	470	Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	559	563
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	521	514		50	Coimbatore	500	511
	14	Bhavnagar	538	532		51	Coonoor	499	512
	15	Rajkot	475	474		52	Madurai	494	511
	16	Surat	506	498		53	Salem	474	484
	17	Vadodra	501	490		54	Tiruchirapally	550	562
Haryana	18	Faridabad	547	541	Uttar	55	Agra	494	491
	19	Yamunanagar	502	505	Pradesh	56	Ghaziabad	534	536
J & K	20	Srinagar	609	607		57	Kanpur	505	503
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	491	488		58	Saharanpur	491	487
	22	Jharia	430	425		59	Varanasi	550	542
	23	Kodarma	451	452	West	60	Asansol	504	496
	24	Noamundi	474	474	Bengal	61	Darjeeling	439	443
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	493	490		62	Durgapur	600	590
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	510	516		63	Haldia	626	619
	27	Belgaum	568	569		64	Howrah	626	610
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	531	532		65	Jalpaiguri	455	448
	29	Mercara	500	498		66	Kolkata	591	578
Kerala	30	Alwaye	521	524		67	Raniganj	463	462
	31	Mundakayam	501	511	Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	576	575
	32	Quilon	533	539	Delhi	69	Delhi	618	613
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	569	583	Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	571	587
Madhya	34	Balaghat	470	466					
Pradesh	35	Bhopal	544	542					
	36	Indore	532	526					
	37	Jabalpur	524	522			**ALL-INDIA**	**526**	**525**

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State		Centre	October 2004	November 2004
Andhra Pradesh	1	Kethgudem	526	523
Himachal Pradesh	2	Himachal Pradesh	500	498
Rajasthan	3	Bhilwara	516	516
Madhya Pradesh	4	Chhindwara	470	468
Tripura	5	Tripura	473	483
Goa	6	Goa	617	618

(On the occasion of the visit of Shri Juan Somavia, Director General, ILO to India during late November 2004, a meeting was organized jointly by five trade union centers and ILO regional office on 27th November 2004 at Scope complex, New Delhi. The theme of the meeting was on organizing the informal sector workers. The excerpts from the speech of Mr Somavia is given below-Editor) .

"ON GLOBALISATION, WE NEED A PARADIGM SHIFT" - DG, ILO

Globalisation is not producing enough jobs that people want-where they live. They judge globalisation on how it affects them and not from an ideological perspective. If it produces precariousness, which is not offset by new jobs, people say, " you cannot ask me to be for globalisation when it is affecting me in this way." The problem is not open economies or open societies-if the rules are fair. But problem is that the rules are not fair. The problem is not about the connectedness of the World today but has to do with the rules of how things are connected. These considerations led to constitution of World Commission on Social Dimension of Globalisation. The Report of the World Commission has been critical. It recommended change to the way things are happening. It does not accept that the path of globalisation is unstoppable. Technological development and so on is there to stay but the financial, monetary and trade policies for example can change. The Commission made 57 recommendations for policy change. We now need to establish the capacity to change policies. From the ILO's perspective-we want to integrate the needs of the people in what we do. They say, "give me fair chance at a decent job." People want to be able to educate their children, they want rights at work, — and rights bring responsibilities, they want some basic protection, they want their voiced to be heard.

I must also react when I hear that decent job is distant dream. I disagree with this. Decent work will not happen tomorrow but if you don't know where you want to go, you will never get there. "Grow first, distribute later" does never work. We must set out our goals. This is how the course of history has been changed. Take apartheid for example, or colonialism in India, or voting right for women. Every social struggle begins with something that seems impossible... We have a right to decent work and it will happen one day. But it will not simply happen because we want it.

Decent work is a concept created by ILO.... We have to look at the link between the globalisation and decent work. What notion of success for economic and social policies are we using? It is economic growth. The view is that a country is doing great if it is growing at the rate of say 6%. But people know that a country can grow at those levels and have jobless growth. This is happening worldwide. We cannot continue believing that growth is the criterion of success. We need to use job creation and better social protection as measures of success. With the present global model, the relationship between growth and employment is not good. We can more decent work as a criterion of success. Then we can see what to do about macro economic policy, and so on. We can ask of every policy what it does for job creation. We need a paradigm shift. The number of workers in the informal economy is growing. At the same time, formal economy workers are feeling increasingly insecure. The situation affects trade unions in the traditional areas.

Historically trade unions have been the form of organization of workers. The moment you find mechanism to link trade unions with the different energies of informal economy-when you create the link, it will be a powerful social movement. For all of you for whom organising is a tradition, you can share this capacity for organizing with all those in the informal economy. The creativity that resides in the informal economy is linked to subsistence. If you put some support behind that creativity, it becomes more productive. Public policy must facilitate organization. You can play an important role.

They realise that the only way to move forward is to organise. They have to think as trade unions and see how to connect their knowledge, experience etc with the new organisations. If the connection is made and it is successful, you will create a social movement that the world needs.

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"STENGTHEN WORKER - PEASANT ALLIANCE":

WORKERS' MARCH TO VENMANI

A. K. Padmanabhan

Venmani - a tiny village in the present day Nagapattinam district was brought to the attention of the whole world, on 25th December 1968, with the cruel killing 44 dalit agriculture workers family members - Women, Children and Old men. These 44 people were locked up in a small hut and burnt to death by the landlords of the area, for the sin of demanding increase of wages by half a measure of paddy.

This area, which was part of the Old Thanjavur district, had witnessed successful struggles of agricultural worker demanding human dignity, wages and land reforms. These workers under the red flag have been resisting the cruel and brutal attacks of landlords. These struggles were always combined struggles against social oppression and on economic demands for wages and land.

The agricultural workers and other toiling people from the present day districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam assemble at Venmani village on 25th December every year to pay homage to the martyrs, at the martyrs' memorial erected by them. Every year it is a programme, which begins with flag hoisting in the morning and concludes with public meeting late in the might.

CITU JATHAS

This year, CITU Tamil Nadu state committee, decided to organise jathas to Venmani and conduct extensive campaign among the rural people of the three districts.

It is a fact that the present generation in the state and especially in the Thanjavur belt are not fully aware of the atrocities of the landlords of the area. Vested interests amongst some of the dalit organisations have been distorting history and going to the extent of attacking the red flag movement as anti - dalit. These forty-four people had taken shelter into the hut when the goondas under the cover of policemen had entered the village to attack the people who were on struggle. The landlords of the area had formed on Association of paddy producers and they led the attack. The result of the struggles by the red flag movement in this area is there for all to understand that the practices of untouchablity and other oppressive practices are not dominant in these areas, while it is rampant in other areas of Tamil Nadu. More over, this granary of Tamilnadu in the Cauvery delta has been facing continuous drought for the last 3 years and this year, when the agricultural work started, it was heavy flood damaging almost all that the peasants had.

It was in this background, CITU as part of a campaign during the BTR Centenary, decided to open up a new chapter, by organising Jathas.

HUNDRED SQUADS

One hundred squads of men and women workers representing all the sectors, organised, unorganised and service sectors from all over the state, participated in the campaign. State and district office bearers and leaders of state level federation including T.K.Rengarajan, A.Soundararajan, R.Singaravelu, P. Marimuthu, T.N.Nambirajan, Malathi Chittibabu led these squads. Of these, 24 were from state transport workers and 16 from electricity workers.

All along the route, covering more than 3500 villages and 5000 kms, the people and various organisations, including the AIKS and AIAWU, gave enthusiastic reception to these volunteers.

On 25th morning, thousands of men and women had assembled near the martyr's memorial. N. Varadarajan, State Secretary, CPI (M), hoisted the flag at the martyr's memorial. Secretary, Nagapattinam district CPI(M) presided. While thousands and thousands of people from all the districts have been assembling there to pay homage cultural programmes and seminars were continuing.

In the evening various leaders of CPM, CPI, CITU and other mass organisations from the 3 districts, including N.Varadarajan, R. Nallakannu (CPI -TN), T.K. Rengarajan, A.Soundarajan, Sudha Sundararaman (AIDWA) V, Thambusami addressed a public meeting. A book containing the details of agricultural workers struggle from 1940 to 1968 - a collection of oral history - was published.

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