Vol. 35 No. 11 July 2005 Price: Rupees Four

THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU



Headload Workers' Struggle

NO TO DISINVESTMENT !

It is nothing but Backdoor Privatisation

AIFAWH PETITIONS RAJYA SABHA COMMITTEE

The All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers has been agitating on the demands of the anganwadi workers and helpers in the country for more than a decade. Though the anganwadi employees could achieve a few benefits like some enhancement of their meagre honorarium, maternity benefits, opportunity for appointment as supervisors, group insurance etc, still many of their demands, particularly that of regularisation remain unsolved. While continuing its efforts to develop joint movements and intensify struggles, the AIFAWH has also decided to utilise all the existing opportunities to bring these to the notice of the rulers. One such effort has been to petition to the Petition Committee of the Rajya Sabha. The rules of the Rajya Sabha permit all citizens of the country to petition Rajya Sabha in respect of any bill that has been introduced or is pending in the Rajya Sabha or any matter of general public interest relating to Government of India (except matters which are subjudice or for which remedy is available under the existing laws, rules or bye laws made by or under the authority of the Central Government). Utilising this provision, in January 2005 the Federation submitted a petition, which was countersigned by Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary of CITU and MP, Rajya Sabha, to the Petitions Committee. The Petitions Committee has accepted the petition.

The petition pointed out that the services provided by the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme are essential for the development of a healthy nation, as it is aimed at the physical, mental and social well being of children, who are the future of any nation. Pregnant and lactating mothers are also looked after as the health of children depends on the health of the mothers. The Scheme, which was started around 30 years back, has been evaluated by several prestigious agencies including UNICEF, NCAER, Planning Commission etc, which have observed that it has been one of the well implemented schemes of the government of India. In spite of this, ICDS continues to be only a scheme and the key functionaries of the scheme, the anganwadi workers and helpers are not recognised as government employees. They are paid only a meagre honorarium. They do not have any social security benefits. They have nothing to fall back upon in their old age.

The petition noted that it is time to up grade the ICDS into a regular part of the Women and Child Development Department of the Human Resources Development Ministry and regularise the services of the anganwadi workers and helpers as Grade III and Grade IV employees. It demanded that:

- ICDS should be institutionalised by converting it into a regular department under the Human Resources Development Ministry
- The anganwadi centres should be developed and strengthened to effectively carry out the activities for the overall development of children and women in the area
- The anganwadi workers and helpers who are already involved in providing multifarious services from the anganwadi centres should be regularised as Grade III and Grade IV employees of the department and provided all the benefits and facilities due to them. Pending this, they should be paid wages at par with Grade III and Grade IV employees.

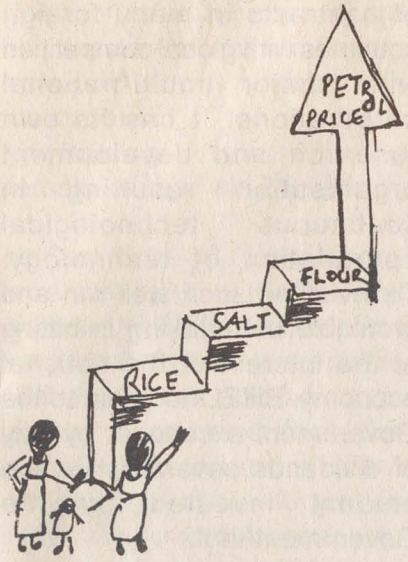
ON OTHER PAGES

	Page
1.Disinvestment- Backdoor privatisation M K Pandhe	284
2.Consumerism - Chittabrata Majumdar	286
3.Move to change Pension Scheme	288
4.M K Pandhe The revolutionary Leader - P R Krishnan	290
5.Pension Rights-Historical Background - N M Sundaram	292
6.Economy Reality Checks	294
7.No FDI in Retail- S DevRoye	296
8.Reports and events	298
9.Price Index	306
10.Cuba-9th Congress of Construction Workers Union	307
12.Sponsoring Committee Convention	Back Page

THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

JULY 2005



EDITORIAL BOARD
M K Pandhe
(Chairman)
W R Varada Rajan
(Working Editor)
Chittabrata Majumdar
Tapan Sen
K Hemalata
Ardhendu Dakshi

EDITORIAL

WILL GOOD SENSE EVER PREVAIL?

The UPA government is headed for a collision with the very people who brought it to the seat of governance.

The pro-people commitments in the National Common Minimum Programme are left in cold storage.Anti-people measures are following in quick succession. No matter if the NCMP itself is negated in the process! The Manmohan Singh regime has locked itself up in the rigid frame of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management legislation and takes a scornful view of every demand that seeks the government to commit resources for implementation of pro-people measures.

The UPA Finance Minister perceives that providing any additional allocation for social sector spending by the government is not his job. He will refuse to step up resource mobilisation despite the decline in the tax-GDP ratio. While bailing out the foreign creditors of the Dabhol power plant, left in dire straits by the willful default of ENRON, is a priority, any effort to revive or rehabilitate a potentially viable public sector unit must await mopping of funds through disinvestment of profit making 'Navratnas'! Special Purpose Vehicle can be floated with the moneys forced out from the NTPC, GAIL and other PSUs for the 'noble' cause of resurrecting Dabhol; but even after collection of the education cess, the setting up of Special Fund to finance expenditure on primary education will be kept lingering.

Take the case of petrol price hike. The UPA regime has shown itself to be immune to reasoning. The Left parties are credited with having put forward sensible alternatives, even by the reforms savvy media and habitual Left-baiting columnists. But, there is no word from the government on why those options could not be explored. People have to bear any amount of burden heaped on them, so that the 'caravan of reforms' can move on.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, of the Planning Commission, is yet another reformer who never tires. He has declared : *'no free water for agriculture'*! While common sense would dictate that the government strive to convert the huge household savings, held as liquid assets with the banking system in the country, into investments, Ahluwalia would prefer taking the easy route: "*It is not necessary to generate funds domestically as there is enough capital available in the world to invest*". His vision is to allow the world to invest and reap profit with no let or hindrance. One wonders if the Planning Commission under such a 'visionary' is at work for India or against the interests of India and Indians.

It is the anti-people pro-corporate vision that guides those at the helm of affairs to dump '*Inspector Raj*' and instead pitch for a '*Regulator Raj*', putting in place any number of regulatory authorities to flag off all measures which are soft on the global rich and affluent and harsh on the people of this country.

There is no point is expecting that good sense would prevail on this UPA governance. People will have to rise to resist the anti-people approach of the government. Working class will have to take the lead. The all India convention of the Sponsoring Committee of trade unions on July 9 will surely sound the bugle. The CITU General Council meeting in Alleppey, later in July, will concretise our tasks. On to intensified struggles!

DISINVESTMENT - A BACKDOOR PRIVATISATION

M K Pandhe

The UPA Government had given a solemn commitment to the people of India that the Navaratna companies in Public Sector would be strengthened to make them world class undertakings. However, the recently announced decision of the Central Government to disinvest 10 per cent equity of BHEL is a blatant violation of this commitment. Despite opposition of the Central Trade Unions and the Left parties Dr. Manmohan Singh Government non-chalantly went ahead with the proposal and showed utter disregard to the fact tht the Central Government is surviving due to the solid support given by the Left parties on the assurance that it would adhere to the commitment given in the National Common Minimum Programme.

Already 33 per cent of the BHEL equity was sold by the Government to private parties and two representatives of the foreign companies are on the Board of Directors of BHEL. They have access to all secret information about BHEL which is now available to the competitors of BHEL. This puts BHEL in great disadvantage in a period of global competition. Adding disinvestment of 10 per cent of equity will further reduce the government's share to 57 per cent from the current 67%.

A statement of policy of public sector, prepared by the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises has clearly noted, "The National Common Minimum Programme has brought the public sector policy to a defining moment where it has to articulate and roll out an implementable road map to emerge as a competitive, productive and efficient component of the national economy".

The disinvestment decision about BHEL is a total violation of this commitment. By diluting the equity of the public sector, the Government is only weakening the public sector and permit penetration of the private capital in the public sector undertakings for its own selfish ends. These valuable assets are being sold only to meet the budgetary deficit of the Government. The so-called assurance that part of the sale proceeds of public sector equity will be utilised to revive the sick public sector undertakings is only a device to hoodwink the gullible.

BHEL has been earning good profits since its inception and its performance has been remarkable throughout the period of its existence. Its highly qualified officials and skilled manpower have greatly contributed in developing capacity of BHEL as a premier producer of power generation equipment - thermal, hydal and nuclear. It has recently developed a capacity to produce photovanttic power generation equipment. In all parameters of management BHEL has shown its superiority over managements of several private sector undertakings manufacturing power generation equipment. It has won number of contracts in many foreign countries with global competition with major multi-national corporations. It has its own research and development organisation resulting in continuous technological upgradation of technology. Disinvesting such well run and profitable undertaking is hitting at the interest of the national economy. BHEL had paid to the Government exchequer by way of dividends several times the amount invested by the Government in it.

FORMATION OF JOINT SECTOR

The process of disinvestment of public sector fails to keep its character as a public sector undertaking. It is converted into a joint sector company when its equity is offered to the private sector companies. Private sector shareholders continuously pressurise the management of such joint sector undertakings to give up the policy of economic growth with social justice and only seek more

and more profits so that they can get better yield to their investment. The representatives of private sector on Board of Directors in such disinvested companies have opposed giving any concession to trade unions during the dispute after the commencement of process of disinvestment. Several trade unions have noted this experience and had to fight a long drawn battle to overcome the opposition of such private sector representatives on the Board of Directors. These private sector tycoons quite often create obstacles in taking decision about additional investments of such undertakings to suit the interests of their co-investors.

The Committee of Public Sector Undertakings (COPU) of Parliament in its reports on disinvestment of shares of public undertakings has pointed out on several occasions that the Central Government lost thousands of crore rupees in disinvesting without assessing properly the sale value of assets of pubic undertakings. The private investors who obtained these shares at much cheaper prices managed to make a quickbuck by re-selling them at a higher value after some days. The disinvestment has thus been made a device by the Government to help the private sector investors at the cost of public sector undertaking.

During Arun Shorie's regime, as a Disinvestment Minister of NDA Govt, the process of disinvestment reached scandalous proportions. A thorough inquiry into the whole gamut will reveal the true character of the disinvestment policy. The UPA Government is reluctant to have a thorough probe into these affairs since it would expose the true nature of the policy of disinvestment as a means to look the public sector assets for the benefit of the private sector investors.

Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram's announcement to sell 49 per cent of the equity capital of the profit making undertakings is therefore a clear cut method to partially privatise the public sector undertakings. His statement that keeping 51 per cent of the equity capital in the hands of the Government retains the character of the undertaking as public sector is totally unacceptable. At a later stage the Government will require to sell only 2 per cent shares to make the undertaking a dominant private sector undertaking. The experience of Maruti Udyog clearly shows how the dominant shareholdings of Government were gradually handed over to Suzuki company with a view to ensure the full control of a Japanese multi-national company over Maruti. The Maruti experience further shows how in spite of minority shareholdigs it could remain control over all technical aspects of working of the Joint Sector undertaking.

The disinvestment is thus nothing but slow poisoning of the public sector undertakings. It is a measure towards privatisation step by step with a view to pass on the control of the entire undertaking in the hands of the private sectors. This policy is in total conformity with the World Bank dictate that the Government should gradually withdraw from economic activity and leave it entirely in the hands of private sector undertakings.

Chidambaram and other official spokesmen of UPA Government who are repeatedly claiming that disinvestment of shares of public sector upto 49 per cent is not privatisation is a crude attempt to cover up open violation of the commitment given in the National Common Minimum Programme.

The budget for 2005-06 provides raising of Rs.10,000 crores through the process of disinvestment. At times, Finance Minister goes to the extent of saying tht he would require more than Rs.10,000 crores through disinvestment to meet the commitments given in the NCMP. It indicates that after BHEL, other Navratna companies are likely to be affected by the policy of disinvestment.

The processes of disinvestment of Navaratna and other profit making public sector undertakings must be stopped if the self-reliant development of national economy is to be ensured. The attempts of the UPA Government to violate the NCMP must be halted if the process of globalisation is to be defeated on the soil of India.

CONSUMERISM CAN ONLY PAUPERISE THE COMMON MAN

Chittabrata Majumdar

People are increasingly being advised to go for more spending on luxury and enjoyment. All out drumbeat has been on to drag the people in the market of consumerism with what ever they are earning. Media on behest of the big corporations while is the forerunner; the intellectuals, the prophets of neo-liberalism as well as the helmsmen shaping the economy of the countries are not lagging behind in working hard to pursue the people to plunge in the market, with least thought of future and social security. Paths have been adopted to make the people averse of savings.

Globally, attempts are on to sell the concept of consumerism, spreading across the globe, so that the people adopt it as philosophy of living. Full-swing efforts have been given to counsel the common man to have fun and to enjoy by spending his income without bothering for the future. We have seen how desperate even the US economy was in the recent past during the phase of slump, till its present recovery through huge public spending on military to boost the demand. Citizens have been asked to spend more on consumer goods to prove their patriotism.

The contemporary global economy has been facing the continued recession, with a huge installed productivity unmatched of sluggish demand caused by significant decline in purchasing capacity of the toiling mass that resulted by the ceaseless exploitation of labour by the capital. The closing down of the industries, downsizing of manpower and casualisation of workforce in industries all over the world to trim the cost aiming at reduction in the price of the products are nothing but the fallouts of lull in the effective market demand.

In fact, after successfully driving away the small manufacturers from the market, the big corporations are engaged in fierce battle among themselves for mere survival with the unutilised capacity to produce, without having sufficient buyers. Service sector, experiencing the sluggishness, is also not free from the anxiety, since the capital for the new market is vivid from the continuous pressure on the third world for opening up its market for their outputs. The import liberalisation and ongoing attempts of opening the retail sector by foreign direct investment in our country are aimed to penetrate the domestic market for the first world and their multinational corporations. The influx of foreign products in the Indian market of consumer durables and in FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) segment, besides other areas speaks of strategy of the first world to capture it. The indigenous capital facing the acute crises also prefers to go in collaboration with the foreign capital for its own existence, rather to confront the former.

The successive class biased governments of our country are keen to convince the people to spend more and more on consumer goods and luxury and shaping the policies in this direction. The official figures published by Central Statistical Organisation - Industrial Statistical Wing also corroborate the same capitalist design. The index of industrial food production declined to 152 in 2001-02 from its previous year index of 154.5, whereas production index of beverages, tobacco and tobacco products reached at 312.1 in 2003-04 compared to the figure of 200.4 in 2000-01, with a continuous upward trend during the interim period, to manifest the growth's tilt towards consumerism. Also there was an impressive rise in the index of industrial production of wool, silk and man-made fibre textile from 145.1 of 1996-97 to 240.5 in 2003-04. Thanks to the affluent and elite section of the Indian society. Multinationals in FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) sector are spending exorbitantly to woo the market. As per the report of the results of consumer goods major Hindustan Lever Limited for April-June 2001, it's spending on advertising and promotional support was up by 43.3 per cent (Source: Hindu Business Line of 25th July, 2001). The commercial banks public or private, indigenous and foreign are offering the consumer

loans at so-called easy terms. Loans for enjoying the overseas holiday trips at apparent soft and affordable terms have been designed for the middle class. And least to say these are all for the mutual interest of capital employed in industrial sector, service sector and for financial sector as well to rob the people.

Mutual funds have been projected as the investment avenue with the allurement of quick and fatty return, followed by deliberate successive reductions in interest rates on savings in banks and other traditional public saving scheme. But the uncertainty in return from and insecurity in the investment in mutual funds remain untold. Thus all are set to allure the middle class to opt for the speculation with desire for luxury, ignoring the future social security aspects.

During a period of just less a month from May 18 to June 7, this year Rs.1 lakh crore was generated in the capital market, leading the investors wealth to Rs.17.96 lakh crore, due to the spurt in trading of shares of FMCG along with the technology, banking and pharmaceuticals (Source: Economic Times of 8th June, 2005). The ongoing events and developments have exposed that the capitalists, being frightened by the continued crises and shrink in the market, have adopt the policies to bring the common man in the market to pauperise the latter. Policies are devised and adopted to ensure the flow of money to be spent on consumption as well as to be laid in speculation.

But despite of desperate attempts there is hardly any impressive manifestation of turn around. The discussed measures to stimulate the market economy however have a little and short-lived impact in the process of economic recovery. In fact the capitalism has entered into the phase of crises, without any permanent escape. The boosting of demand in short-cut process can at best bridge the persisting gap between the supply and demand in short term, without creating any sustainable effective demand for a long, in absence of real growth of purchasing capacity of the toiling mass.

The withdrawal of states from the demand management at the dictates of global capital has stalled the growth of effective demand, which is essentially pre-condition of long-term economic growth. The global finance capital enjoying the higher real income in the deflationary economy is obstinately opposed to public expenditure, out of fear of decline in profit in a demand push inflationary situation caused by addition in public expenditure. The aspect of national capital formation needed for strong and sustainable self-reliant economies of the third world countries like ours has been deliberately and continuously undermined. The official figures of apparent consumption of finished steel and pig iron also tells of inadequate attention to the desired development process of the country. During the period from April to December 04, the apparent consumption in this segment was 26.9 million tonnes compared to figure of 26.08 million tonnes during the corresponding period of previous year, (Source: Central Statistical Organisation - Industrial Statistical Wing), with a meagre growth of 3.14%. The reduction in the interest rates on the bank deposits and for other traditional public saving schemes is indeed the integral part of global capitalist-designed programme in curtailing the ability of the governments to perform and corollary to fast declining contraction of states' role in economic direction.

Coupled with this, the reduction of rate of interest on employees provident fund, alteration in the pensions schemes with the objectives of doing away the concept of social security and safety net etc., have made the future of the salaried people, millions in number, more vulnerable. The heavy dose of continued spending on consumer goods and luxury, in the capitalist driven path, without augmentation of purchasing power of the society in general cannot be proved to be the saviour to bring the global capitalist economy out of ongoing vicious crises. But in meantime, delude by the media hype and allured by the bewitching market attraction the large section of middle class has been rushing for instant luxury and comfort spending their hard-earned money leaving nothing to save. The capitalist intrigue to enthuse the people to embrace the consumerism, as their lifestyle is only to pauperise the millions of salaried, petty businessmen, technocrats, doctors, teachers and others rushing unconsciously to join the mass living below the poverty line.

RETROGRADE MOVES TO CHANGE PENSION SCHEME

The Government of India launched the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 (EPS '95), by diverting 8.33 per cent of the employers' contribution to the Provident Fund account. The CITU had consistently been demanding Pension as a third retirement benefit; but the government was stubbornly resisting the demand. When the EPS '95 was under formulation, the CITU demanded that the benefits under the EPS '95 should be on par with the pension scheme for government employees, including the provision for indexed linked dearness relief. The government only made certain cosmetic changes in the scheme proposed by them and introduced it by way of an ordinance. It inserted the Para 32 in the EPS '95, providing for annual actuarial valuation of the Pension Fund, promising that the benefit package under the EPS '95 would be improved during such annual valuations .Unfortunately, there was no unanimity amongst the central trade unions over the EPS '95. While the CITU and several other unions opposed the Scheme and challenged it in judicial forums, a few other unions fully backed the government move at that time.

The first four annual Actuarial Valuation Reports of Employees' Pension Fund revealed a projected valuation surplus and recommended adhoc payment of relief as under:

Valuation	Rate of Relief	Granted w.e.f.
I	4%	16.11.95
II	5.5%	1.4.98
III	4%	1.4.99
IV	4%	1.4.2000

However, in all these valuation reports the amount of surplus kept on decreasing year after year.

Only other change effected in the EPS '95 was to increase the wage ceiling from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 6500 per month from June 2001.

The 5th, 6th and 7th annual actuarial valuation reports as on March 31 of 2001, 02 and 03 respectively projected valuation deficits running up to Rs. 19291 crore! The reasons cited by the Actuary were softening of the interest rate (deliberate lowering of the administered rate of interest by the government of India from 12 to 8 per cent) and increase in wage ceiling from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 6500 resulting in a heavy impact on the pension liabilities. These valuation reports on the one hand ruled out grant of any further relief (not even the adhoc 4 per cent relief) but on the other doled out prescriptions to effect several adverse changes in the EPS '95.

The EPF Organisation, after examining these valuation reports with the inputs provided by the Consultant Actuary, placed the following proposals to Central Board of Trustees:

i) To control withdrawal under the scheme, to increase contribution rate suitably or the benefit under the scheme reduced suitably. (An amendment to para 14 of EPS '95 was suggested.)

ii) To revise table B and D

iii) Increase in reduction rate from 3% to 5 % in early pension cases

iv) While determining pensionable salary linking corresponding service period to the corresponding wage/wage ceiling for all periods in-between various wage ceilings.

v) To increase the superannuation age from 58 to 60 years

vi) Need to take up requisite measures in case of future increase in wage ceiling.

The above proposals were termed as very important to ensure sufficiency of Employees' Pension Fund and sustainability of Employees' Pension Scheme, 95 in the long run.

The CBT noted that the changes proposed were of far reaching consequences, adverse to the interests of the workers and recommended that the Ministry of Labour convene a meeting of the central trade unions for a comprehensive review of the EPS '95 itself.

The Secretary, Ministry of Labour, convened two meetings on April; 21 and June 21, 2005 for the purpose.

But, the first meeting was confined to the issue of amendment to Para 14 of the EPS '95. The

amendment envisaged that in all the exit cases before attaining the age of 58 years where the eligible service is less than 10 years on date of exit, Scheme Certificates would be issued to such members, which will be valid till the age of 58 years.

The fact is that non-pensionable exits (from the coverage of EPF Act) are eight times more than those of pensionable exits. The reason for the steep increase in the non-pensionable exits from EPS, 95 is more due to involuntary non-employment of workers as a result of the methods adopted by the employers like retrenchment, outsourcing, downsizing, VRS, closure, etc. and not due to employees voluntarily changing their jobs frequently.

Paragraph 14 of the Employee's Pension Scheme, 1995 gives the employees, (leaving the EPS '95 before the stipulated minimum period of 10 years) the option of availing either withdrawal benefit or the scheme certificate. Taking away this option will make the scheme certificate compulsory, which the workers will have to carry up to his completing the age of 58, even if they are not employed in a coverable establishment for the rest of their career-life. This is a totally unjust proposition and all the central trade unions urged the Ministry of Labour/EPFO to drop the proposal altogether.

At the second meeting held on June 21, 2005, the EPFO placed the other proposals, which are intended to slash down even the limited benefits now available in the EPS '95. But, there was no review of the operation of the EPS '95 as suggested by the trade unions at the first meeting. The EPFO did not place a status paper even on the EPS '95 at the meeting.

The CITU representatives pointed out that the Supreme Court of India had validated the EPS '95 only on the basis of the benefit package as contained in the Scheme. Any move to tinker with the benefit package to the detriment of workers' interests would tantamount to a violation of the apex court judgement itself. There was a general consensus against any hasty move to change the EPS '95 and that all the required data should be placed for an in depth consideration. The Secretary, Ministry of Labour, agreed to convene yet another meeting after furnishing all the data and information, but the threat to undermine the pension Scheme very much looms large. The working class must remain vigilant and act unitedly to protect and further improve the EPS '95.

PROTEST AGAINST PETROL/DIESEL PRICE HIKE

There were spontaneous demonstrations and protest actions all over the country just after oil price hike was announced by the Central Government on 20th June, 2005.

CITU, along with other central trade unions viz. AICCTU, AITUC, HMS, TUCC, UTUC and UTUC-LS, through a joint statement on June 20, 2005, called on the working class to put up a stiff resistance to the government move and demand roll back of the hike.

There were massive actions all over the country on and after 28th June demanding withdrawal of this price hike. In West Bengal all the transport workers went on for a day's strike against the government decision.

CITU also took the lead to refute the hollow argument behind this price rise, which puts the onus squarely on the rise of price of crude in international market. CITU has punched hollow this argument by analysing that cost of petrol is only Rs 17.50 while taxes per litre is Rs 23.00 and citizens have to pay Rs 40.50 for a litre. This is unfair, unjust and an enforced burden on common people.

Again the system of global price parity system for petroleum product is giving the stand-alone refineries, specially the giant Jamnagar Refinery of Reliance, a windfall profit. The more the rise in international crude price, the greater is the profit. Again the Reliance and other private refineries are getting duty drawback on exports. This is another mechanism through which they are earning a concession of more than Rs 1200 crores while common people are to bear the burden. There have been widespread revulsions against the government decision to raise the price and the unjustified unethical benefit being given to the private refineries.

M K PANDHE,THE REVOLUTIONARY LEADER

P R Krishnan

M K Pandhe, President of CITU and member, Polit Bureau, CPI (M) will be 81 on July 11, 2005.

Madhukar Kashinath Pandhe was born on 11th July, 1925 at Pune. Pandhe grew up partly in Pune, Solapur, and Khandesh in Maharashtra. He had his school education at Haribhai Devkaran High School in Solapur and passed his matriculation examination in 1943. His father, Kashinath Pande, and mother, Anandibai Pandhe, had a social background of having worked for the welfare of the poor people in Pune as well as in Solapur. This made an impact on Madhukar and his entire life has been integrated in the work for the downtrodden in India.

After passing the matriculation examination in 1943, Madhukar had his college education in DAV College of Solapur. This was under the Bombay University then. He was soon attracted to the students' movement and subsequently towards the trade union movement. During this period he had read many writings of Sane Guruji, the great social reformer of Maharashtra,and of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. These readings made a big influence in the mindset of young Madhukar during early 40s.

But soon afterwards, he was attracted to Marxist literature and communist movement. He used to take small meetings of students in Solapur. Pandhe became a member of the Communist Party of India as early as in 1943. Soon he also became secretary of the Solapur Students Union, which was then affiliated to the All India Students Federation (AISF). It was the late Ranga Vaidya of Solapur with whom he began working in the students' movement . Pandhe became a whole-timer in the trade union movement in 1948. He also worked as secretary of the Solapur Committee of the Communist Party in 1948. Arrest warrant was issued against Pandhe at that time. Hence, he had to carry on the party activities and trade union work by remaining underground for 27 months. He lived in the houses of workers in Solapur city.

It was in 1948, the All India Conference of the AISF took place. A pubic rally was to be held after the delegates' conference at Kamgar Maidan at Parel in Central Mumbai. The delegate session was in the Khalsa College. The police was determined not to allow the students to hold the meeting at the Kamgar Maidan. But the students were also equally determined to hold the rally in the Maidan. Breaking the police cordon, the students started militant procession and entered the Kamgar Maidan, Madhukar alongwith his brother Prabhakar Pandhe was in the forefront. Soon the police resorted to lathicharge and tear gas shelling. Many fell down injured and bleeding. Many of the residents in the nearby buildings came to rescue them.

Madhukar had already become very active in the trade union movement in Solapur, where two unions were functioning, one was led by the communists and the other by the Peasants and Workers Party of India (PWP). Both these unions got merged in 1952., with R K Khadilkar was the president of this unified union and Pandhe became its joint secretary. Pandhe played a significant role in this unification. When the then Bombay Presidency Government appointed It is significant to state here that while a student in the college at Solapur, Pandhe collected information and data on the working and living conditions of the handloom workers.

Though active in the movement, Pandhe continued his study and obtained Masters Degree in economics in 1953 from the Pune University. Pandhe continued his study and worked on his thesis "Labour Organisations in Solpaur - Structures and Functions". He opted for a special subject on the "Structure And Functions of Trade Union Movement', which was examined by V V Giri. Pandhe thus was bestowed with PhD doctorate in 1960.

It was during the period when he was preparing for his PhD, Pandhe happened to meet Pramila Limaye. Pandhe was in close contact with the Limaye family in Pune for a long time.

Vasant Limaye was a prominent communist leader of Pune. His two other brothers Dattatrava Limaye and Dinkar Limaye were also members of the Communist Party. Being a woman activist, Pramila was participating in the underground communist movement as a courier during the 1948 repression period. However, her engineer husband Dattatraya Limaye passed away. Time passed and this acquaintance later resulted into their wedlock on 14th July 1957. Pramila Pandhe has been a leader of All India Democratic Women's Association.

During mid-50s, the struggle for emancipating Goa from Portuguese rule was taking place. The communist party had a prominent role n this agitation. Pandhe took a very active part in organising this struggle in 1956. There was a committee functioning at that time in Solapur to coordinate the work connected with enrolling volunteers and sending people to Satyagraha for liberation of Goa. This was 'Goa Vimochan Samiti'. Pandhe was secretary of this committee in Solapur. During that period he also worked as secretary of Solapur Paatrakar Singh. The CPI was publishing a Marathi weekly, Ekjut. Pandhe worked as the editor of this weekly.

In 1958, the party drafted him to work in the central office of the All India Trade Union Congress at Delhi, where he worked for 12 years from 1958 to 1970, with S A Dange as general secretary and S S Mirajkar as president.

1960s was a very trying period for the communist movement in India. Serious differences began surfacing in the undivided CPI due to the revisionist policies pursued by the dominant section of the leadership headed by Party chairman S A Dange. Dange was also then vice president of the World Federation of Trade Unions. These differences culminated in the formation of CPI(M). Pandhe had to wage a bitter struggle within the AITUC against the revisionist line. In the CPI (M), Pandhe worked in the Party centre and was in charge of the Parliamentary office.

In 1968, Pandhe was involved in Modingar textile workers struggle during which police resorted to firing on workers killing 6 workers and injuring about 140 workers. He was implicated in a murder case and an arrest warrant was issued. He remained underground for 13 months, when the Allahabad High Court acquitted him.

However, despite the Party split and serious differences inside the AITUC, Pandhe was elected as one of the national secretaries of AITUC in 1966, which post he held till 1970. While in AITUC, Pandhe was a member of the Central Board for Workers Education for 4 years from 1966 to 1970. He also conducted the struggle against the Index fraud.

The formation of CPI (M) in 1964 and the founding of CITU in 1970 proved to be a turning point in the history of the communist and trade union movement in India. In 1970, Pandhe was elected as Secretary of CITU, when B.T. Ranadive and P. Ramamoorti were the founder President and General Secretary respectively. This brought several responsibilities on Pandhe. . He was elected General Secretary of CITU in 1991 and was elected president of CITU in Chennai conference in 2003. Pandhe became the CPI(M) Polit Bureau member in 1998. Pandhe is also the editor of CITU journal "The Working Class" since its inception in 1970. Amongst his books are "Social Life in rural India", Bonded Labour in India, and "Child Labour in India." Besides, he had written a number of booklets.

Pandhe had been leading a number of all India federations in different sectors. He has been the CITU nominee in several government tripartite bodies and committees.

Pandhe had represented CITU in several international meetings, visited 35 countries and has taken part in 52 international conferences. He had significantly contributed in cementing the Indian working class solidarity with the international working class movement.

Pandhe has been playing a crucial role in the united movement of the working class. Pandhe has assiduously implemented the CITU line of forging issue-based unity to advance the struggles and defend the interests of the working people. He has also steered the CITU in the National Platform of Mass Organisations, which has been in the forefront of anti-globalisation struggle.

PENSION RIGHT: A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

N. M. Sundaram

In India, pension at least in so far as civil servants and military personnel are concerned has a strong historical continuity and foundation.The 1986 report of the Fourth Pay Commission chaired by Justice P.N. Singhal of the Supreme Court, enunciated the principles in its justification . It traced the 'custom' of providing pensions for aged employees who were no longer able to discharge their duties efficiently to the nineteenth century in Europe that spread to other parts of the world thereafter.

'A RIGHT'

Coming to the aspect of pensions the report categorically declared: "In so far as these employees are concerned, pension is not by way of charity or an ex-gratia payment, or purely social welfare measure, but may fairly be said to be in the nature of a 'right' which is enforceable by law." The report also drew sustenance from the judgment of the Supreme Court in the 'Deokinandan Prasad Vs State of Bihar and others' (1971-Supp. SCR 634) which held that "pension was not a bounty payable on the sweet-will and pleasure of the Government and that on the other hand, the right to pension is a valuable right vesting in a Government servant." The court also held that the right to receive pension "is property under Article 31(1) ..." and under Article 19(1) (f) and it is not saved by sub-article (5) of Article 19." Though right to property is no longer in vogue as a fundamental right the validity of the right to pension is well substantiated.

Having firmly laid the legal basis of the right to pension, the Fourth Pay Commission Report went on to trace the historical background of this right as it developed in India. The report recounted: "As a result of the recommendations of the First Central Pay Commission, the Liberalised Pension rules, 1950 were notified on April 17, 1950, with option to those who had entered permanent pensionable service before October 1, 1938, to come over to those rules or continue under the earlier regulations and orders." There was continuity in that these were in the nature of "modifications to the earlier Civil Service regulations and instructions and implementation of later pay commissions. Ultimately, a single set of rules called the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules 1972 were issued and came into effect from June 1, 1972. The Civil Pension Commutation Rules, 1925, were replaced by the Central Civil Services (Commutation of Pension) Rules, 1981, and came into force from July 1, 1981." The option as stated above notified allowed employees hitherto covered by contributory provident fund to come over to coverage of pension. And the option continued thereafter, so much so the Pension Rules of 1972 referred to employees to whom these rules applied simultaneously listing out exclusion from pension of "persons entitled to the benefit of Contributory Provident Fund."

SOCIAL BENEFIT

It would be interesting to note that the Fourth Pay Commission did not merely deal with the legal basis of provision of pension but also dealt with the philosophical and moral basis too to buttress its recommendations. The Commission postulated: "but the concept of 'pension, however old in its origin, had the latent and real desire to provide for an eventuality - known or unknown. The known eventuality was old age and probable reduction in earning power, while the unknown eventuality was disability by disease or accident or death. Its real purpose was security, even though the beginning was oblique, undiscernible and faint. But the germ of an effort to provide security ran through the provision and it is natural that it should have grown and flowered with the development of human understanding and desire to look after and provide for those who deserved it, for man has constantly been seeking means by which to enhance his economic security... Some benevolent employers go to the extent of regarding pension as an absolutely indispensable complement of wages - as a terminal benefit. That, however is apart from another aspect bearing on pensions - the social benefit...."

CONSTITUTIONAL BASIS

The report goes on to declare: "the political philosophy to which the State has committed itself is also a relevant factor. Thus in a country like ours where the Preamble to the Constitution itself declares that the people had solemnly resolved to constitute it into a 'socialist' democracy and to secure to all its citizens 'justice, social, economic and political', it will be quite reasonable to hope that an honest effort will be made to achieve that objective. ... The political philosophy of the State is also a relevant factor in determining what will be a proper and suitable scheme of pension."

Pensioners constitute a class under Article 14: The Commission has made one other factor clear that the pensioners constitute a class by themselves (upheld in the Punjab and Another Vs. Iqbal Singh and D.S. Nakara (1976 - 3 SCR 360 & D.S Nakara Vs Union of India AIR-1983 SC 130) and there could be no discrimination among them on the basis of the date of retirement (for that matter their date of appointment as well).

From all this certain things are crystal clear:

1.Pension is not a gratuitous payment;

2.It is a social, moral and legal commitment;

3.It is enjoined that the State should expand the scope of its coverage and not abridge it.

4.That includes protection of the class of people who are already entitled to it, like the Government employees who constituted a class by themselves. Any differentiation such as the one sought to be made as between those who were appointed on or after April 1, 2004 and others would be discriminatory on moral and ethical grounds as well.

5.For the Government employees pension was in substitution of the contributory provident fund and it is not as if the Government was paying pension from out of taxes.

6.The scheme of pay-as-you-go is by no means an irrational concept and is in vogue in many countries. Be that as it may, pension for Government employees is in reality, in lieu of Government's contribution to provident fund.

7.Merely because the Government did not fund its contribution along with those of its employees and constitute a pension trust (as is done in many countries including in respect of Federal Social Security in the US, its character does not change.)

8.The Government should make public what would be the value of the fund if such funding had taken place and not beguile the general public into believing that it is paid out of the revenue. (In respect of Social Security in the US, where the Trustees park the funds in US Treasury bonds whose worth, it is estimated, is a whopping $4.5 Trillion. This is what the Federal Government must borrow in the first two decades, to substitute social security with private accounts - vide afore said article by Paul Krugman)

9. The central theme of providing pension is to ensure certainty of defined and adequate payment when the contingency of old age, disease, disablement or death occurs. The central idea therefore is certainty. The pension reforms as contemplated by the Government and as per the change brought about arbitrarily for Government employees appointed on or after April 1, 2004, militates against this principle of 'certainty' as it would be based on the future value as dictated by the stock market.

10. All along the Government did not contribute to the Pension Fund as it would have done in respect of contributory provident fund. As per the new dispensation, it has to physically set apart a matching contribution to the pension fund. Has the Government considered how much it would cost if it starts making the contribution and funding it and that too without the certainty of pension payments to the beneficiaries?

ELEMENT OF CERTAINTY

The pension reform as mooted by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Bill is precisely to introduce the serious element of uncertainty in an area where certainty has been held to be the salutary characteristic. A benefit like pension that requires to be expanded in scope and coverage is being left to chance and vagaries of the casino world of stock market.

What the Government wants the people to do is to speculate on their retirement benefits and hope. This is madness. This must be opposed resolutely.

OECD COUNTRIES CONTINUE TO OFFER HIGH FARM SUBSIDIES

Developing countries exporting agricultural products may have a say in the ongoing WTO farm trade talks for the elimination of the profligate farm subsidies by the rich world to its farmers. But the developed countries have their own way to persist with high subsidies to produce surplus grains that all but goes to distort the global grain prices to the dismay of third world farmers.

The evidence to this apparent paradox emanates from two latest reports of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued in Paris.

The OECD Agriculture Outlook on the farm sector paints a disconcerting picture that stiffer competition, coupled with higher productivity, would result in a further drop in real prices for most basic food commodities, thereby aggravating the adverse terms of trade for farm good exporters of the poor countries.

The inter-Governmental think-tank of 30 rich countries in its Monitoring & Evaluation Report of farm practices of its members found "little" change in the level of producer support in 2004 since the late 90s for all the OECD countries.

The average level of support to farmers remained unchanged in 2004 at 30 per cent of overall farm receipts, most of which continues to be given through trade-distorting measures such as the propping up of market prices.

OECD reckons that in 2004 the value of support to producers was an estimated $279 billion or 226 billion euros.

Including support for general services to agriculture such as research, infrastructure, inspection and marketing and promotion, and total support to the agricultural sector was equivalent to 1.2 per cent of the OECD GDP in 2004.

For the OECD as a whole, transfers to agriculture as measured by the Total Support Estimate (TSE) amounted to $378 billion or 305 billion euros in 2004.

Within the OECD, support to producers in 2002-04 was below 5 per cent of farm receipts in Australia and New Zealand but averaged around 20 per cent in Canada, Mexico, and the US and 25 per cent in Turkey.

At 34 per cent, the level of support in the EU was above the OECD average of 30 per cent, reflecting the ill effects of the costly common agricultural policy (CAP) of the community.

Support to producer in Japan and Korea averaged 60 per cent and around 70 per cent in Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.

OECD contends that since most farm support extended to producers is still either output- or input-linked, a high share of support goes to larger farms.

Such price support to larger firms can increase rather than reduce farm income disparities not only within the OECD but between developed and developing countries, as the latter have no pronounced larger farms.

OECD hoists the warning signal that "Government intervention continues to be significant creating important spill-over effects on production, trade, and the environment. The current level, composition, and spread in support levels across commodities in OECD countries still create distortions that demand further attention from policymakers."

This should bestir the G-21 agriculture alliance spearheaded by India, Brazil, and China to demand action in the form of removal of domestic support and export subsidies ungrudgingly being doled out by the rich world to its farmers, according to trade policy experts.

(Business Line, Saturday, Jun 25, 2005)

ECONOMY : REALITY CHECKS

"NO WATER FOR FREE" - MONTEK SINGH (!)

Free water for agriculture may not be sustainable in the years ahead.

According to Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, the agriculture sector has deteriorated after 1996 and its growth rate has slipped from 3 per cent to less than 2 per cent. The reason for this is the lack of policies encouraging investment in agriculture and irrigation. "The notion that water should be supplied free is completely mistaken. We are not putting in place the policy needed to ensure the optimum use of a resource that is becoming scarce," he told newspersons on the sidelines of a lecture organised by the Indian Institute of Bankin, and Finance here today.

... For infrastructure, it is not necessary to generate funds domestically as there is enough capital available in the world to invest. The special purpose vehicle (SPV) for infrastructure funding is most likely to be operational by the second half of the year. It will allow additional borrowing for build, operate, transfer (BOT) road projects and privatisation of airports. The SPV will have Rs 10,000 crore funds to begin with. The real constraint would be to have viable public-private participation in projects, Ahluwalia said.

For the economy to achieve 8 per cent growth, the industrial and manufacturing sector must have double-digit growth. However, last year this sector saw just 8 per cent growth. There has also been an absolute decline in employment in this sector.

(Business Line, Saturday, Jun 25, 2005)

WITHOUT COMMENTS

End consumption, nurture savings

R. Vaidyanathan*

We are becoming a saving society, which is the main driver of the economy. Because of this, the dependence on FDI and FII is significantly lower.

It is at this juncture, we find experts and corporates in India suggesting that the middle-class should consume more. Shopping is made a virtue and a lifestyle statement.

The hidden persuaders (advertising) are in the open. Plastic credit cards are offered for the asking (many times without even asking!) and consuming is made the modern mantra. It is consume or perish which will slowly turn into consume and perish!

The Government is discouraging savings by keeping many a rate low and removing tax breaks for saving. But the Indian middle-class needs saving much more than anyone else in the world. We do not have universal medical care and, hence, during old age the cost of healthcare has to be borne by the middle-class.

We do not have universal social security. Of more than 400 million workforce in the country, only some 20 million government employees (Central plus State and local governments) and around 40 million private employees (who are covered by Employees Provident Fund - EPF - schemes) have retirement benefits. Large number of middle-class and poorer segments are not covered by any social security schemes.

The social security coverage of most of the agricultural and non-industrial workers is inadequate.

The greed-based market economy may not offer solutions to the problems of multitude if the focus is only on consumption-driven society.

The fear-based totalitarian systems such as communism have also failed. It is necessary to evolve a third way, which is environment-friendly and takes into account intergenerational equity not by the fiat of the State but by the suasion of social norms.

Time to move away from consumption-driven economy to savings nurturing society.

Otherwise, we will prove that the only lesson we learnt from the economic history of the plastic-addicted debt-ridden western society is our refusal to learn any lessons at all.

*(*Professor of Finance and Control, Indian Institute of Management-Bangalore)*

NO TO FDI IN RETAIL, NO TO WAL-MART

Swadesh Dev Roye

The craze for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been constantly heightening even under the changed political regime in the country.

Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, speaking on the occasion of the Mid Term Appraisal of the tenth Five Year Plan announced that his Government has been considering permitting FDI in retail sector ostensibly to attain the target of employment generation! Certain facts prior the Prime Ministerial statement and also the subsequent developments are revealing.

The US retail giant Wal-Mart has been pushing for opening its retail chain throughout India. The company has done everything to see that the Government of India becomes inclined to liberalise FDI in retail sector. The retail MNC has been employing all kinds of powers at their disposal to accomplish their mission.

The President of Wal-Mart John B Menzzer visited India in the second week of May 2005. To prepare the ground to Menzzer's visit, David Mulford, Ambassador of the United States in India, met the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and the Commerce Minister. Thus even before the arrival of the Wal-Mart President in India, the Government of the day came out publicly with their intent to liberalise FDI in retail sector.

A report published in The Financial Times, London said: "Prime Minister Mr. Manmohan Singh said the country would soon allow foreign direct investment in an industry still dominated by small family-owned businesses." The newspaper has quoted the prime minister, "There are many fears particularly among small traders and small shopkeepers, but I believe we can soon move forward." Again the paper noted: "the cabinet might lift the foreign direct investment ban before Mr. Singh flies to the US for meeting with President George W. Bush in July."

In the meantime, the confident Wal-Mart chain has swung into action to rope in an Indian partner. For this, the names of the business houses doing the round, are Anil Ambani, Mahindra group, Godrej etc. Such developments only testify as to how swiftly but silently things are moving.

WAL-MART PROFILE

The debut of Wal-Mart was as a "tiny variety store" in Arkansas, in the southern United States in the 1962. However, within a surprisingly brief period, the company amassed so much of fortune that today Wal-Mart the No. 1 of the fortune 500 companies in the world. It is the top retail chain in the world and even bigger than the giant MNCs like ExxonMobil, General Motors and General Electric. The sky-high profit lust of the company can be imagined from the report that in Canada Wal-Mart "earns three times as much revenue per square foot of store space as Zellers Inc., its nearest competitor"

The huge multinational retail chain has got around 5000 retail outlets throughout the world. It operates in more than a dozen countries. More than 138 million customers per week visit Wal-Mart stores worldwide. The monstrous monopoly stature is revealed by the fact that "It is America's largest employer with nearly 1.5 million workers ... The company accounts for 9 cents of every US retail dollar and sells around 20 per cent of the nation's groceries and pharmaceuticals. Last year 82 per cent of American households bought at least one item at a Wal-Mart" (Times News Network). The experience with Wal-Mart in Canada is, "since entering the country 11 years ago by buying the failing Woolco chain, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. now takes 52 percent of the retail market share in Canada."

UNION BUSTING

"Wal-Mart has built up an expertise, like a Labour Relations team, whose entire job is to frustrate registration of trade union and employ terror with employees not to join trade union." The "skill" of blocking formation and busting of trade unions has been a crude curriculum for training schemes for the managers of the company. In the company's parlance it codified as "A Manager's Toolbox to remaining union free"

In the USA itself, trade union is totally prohibited

in Wal-Mart stores. Out of 3,600 stores with 1.5 million workers not a single trade union exists. 'The Washington Post Foreign Services' reported: "The world's largest retail chain has fiercely and successfully resisted unionisation attempts at its 3,600 stores in the United States" However, the report further continues to say - " The Food and Commercial Workers is mounting a fresh campaign to organise Wal-Mart workers in the United States, a push, it says, has been given impetus by recent legal action and a former company vice president's confession that he surreptitiously organised anti-union activities"

How powerful foreign multinational companies can force the government of a country into submission is demonstrated by Wal-Mart in Canada. At the instance of the company the Canadian Labour Law has been amended to deny trade union right to the workers. These changes, often referred to in Canada as, "The Wal-Mart amendment', imposed severe restrictions on registration of trade unions and stripped the registrar of trade unions of its official authority drastically. Tom Coughlin Wal-Mart's former Vice President admitted that on behalf of Wal-Mart, he used company funds for undercover union-busting operations and for paying informers who report on pro-union workers.

In a letter dated 19th May, 2005 addressed to the Premier of Ontario, Toronto, the president of National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) has, inter-alia raised two very shocking questions - (a) "Wal-Mart's ability to influence the rewriting of Ontario's labour laws to suit themselves is an affront to all Canadians." (b) "But what is in question, and what all citizens of Ontario have the right to know, is whether there is a connection between Wal-Mart, the former Premier's office and the change in the Ontario Labour Relations Act to make it easier for Wal-Mart to engage in the wholesale denial of workers rights."

"Trade union free company" is the corner stone of Wal-Mart's business strategy, pushing it to the top. Extreme cost cutting credo is the tool for grabbing the customers at the shortest possible time, wherever the chain opens their outlets. "Cut costs (read wages of labour)) to the bone and keep cutting, so you can offer the competitive prices". In Canada Wal-Mart paid to the workers US $ 6.20 per hour against the "union wages of US$21 to $35 an hour found in the paper and aluminum plants." The consequence was, "In an area built on union jobs with higher wage scales, it wasn't long before some employees tried to organise." Soon 51 percent of the workers of the given retail outlet of Wal-Mart signed the union cards and the authorities declared the legal existence of the union in that store of Wal-Mart. But how can Wal-Mart tolerate a trade union. They campaigned that the store is incurring loss and ultimately closed down the stores throwing the workers on to the street. The media reported, "... the chain sacrificed the store to make a point to its employees across Canada and the United States, where union organisers are involved in dozens of organising drives and court battles."

The US House Committee on 'Education and the Workforces' prepared and published a review report on Wal-Mart's labour practices in 2004. The report noted: "Wal-Mart's record on the right to organise recently achieved international notoriety ...Wal-Mart's labor law violations range from illegally firing workers who attempt to organize a union to unlawful surveillance, threats and intimidation of employees who dare to speak out." It concluded: "Wal-Mart's success has meant downward pressures on wages and benefits, rampant violations of basic workers' rights and threats to the standard of living in communities across the country. The success of a business need not come at the expense of workers and their families. Such short-sighted profit-making strategies ultimately undermine our economy."

STOP FDI, STOP WAL-MART

The moot point is that FDI in retail sector shall harm and not help the economic interest of the country.

Retail markets in our country are dominated by small business. The entry of Wal-Mart will have bull-dozing effect on our retail market. The vast numbers of self-employed small owners run retails shops shall be perished. Lakhs and lakhs of people shall become jobless. The entry of 'Wal-Mart' in the retail sector in the country must be stopped. Such a suicidal step will be the beginning of another dark chapter of the imperialist onslaught against our economic sovereignty.

TRIPURA: RIGHT TO WORK CONVENTION

A state level convention on "RIGHT TO WORK" was held on 5th June, 2005, at Town Hall, Agartala participated by all the democratic mass organisations of the state, like workers, peasants, agri-workers, student, youth, women, state govt. employees, state and central PSU employees etc. 1588 delegates were present in the convention. Large scale of pestering was done and sufficient number of leaflets was distributed throughout the State. Manik Dey, President, CITU was the main speaker. Pijush Nag, General Secretary, CITU placed a report on the perspective of the all India Convention. 17 mass organisation leaders took part in discussion on the report.

It has been decided to hold sub-division level joint conventions within 15th July, 2005 and after that organisational level conventions, unit level GB meetings, processions, campaign programmes up to grass root level will be organised within the month of September, 2005.

The convention was presided over by a presidium consisting of Chitta Chanda, Ashesh Deb Roy, Sunil Ch. Das, Biswamani Debbarma, Rama Das, Pran Krishna Acherjee, Madhu Sengupta and Dinesh Sinha.

(Report from Pijush Nag)

TAMIL NADU

ELECTRICITY BOARD CONTRACT WORKERS' STRIKE

More than 20,000 electricity workers working in the distribution circles of Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) conducted a successful strike all over the State for 14 days. Though these workers are considered contract workers, they are paid by the TNEB through chit agreement, local receipts, etc. and provisions of contract labour legislation are not followed.

These workers were organised under the banner of Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees (COTEE), an affiliate of CITU. This union having regular and contract workers as members had conducted continuous struggles and could get more than 20,000 workers regularised in generation and distribution circles. Contract system in generation circles were abolished but continued in distribution circles. COTEE was continuing the struggles for these workers and an agreement was reached in 1998 for payment of daily wages equal to the daily workers in PWD. But, this was not implemented. Various struggles were conducted for its implementation and the State government and TNEB was refusing even the High Court orders for its implementation.

In a massive demonstration in front of the TNEB Head Quarters on 29.3.2005, COTEE announced the decision to go on strike to press for regularisation of contract workers. This became an urgent task because the TNEB had made its intention of abolition of more than 20,000 posts. There are more than 42000 posts lying vacant as on date. COTEE served strike notices and decided to go on strike from 28th May. The discussions with the management were not fruitful and the vague assurances were not accepted by the union.

The strike by contract workers began on 28th May. It was a complete strike all over the State and even the management could not deny the fact. Discussions were held on 28th and continued on different dates. But the TNEB refused to give any concrete assurances.

While the strike was going on, regular workers, who are members of COTEE held solidarity demonstration. Various

CITU unions and district committees organised support demonstrations. CPI (M) district committees organised a demonstration in front of TNEB Head Quarters

It was in these circumstances J Hemachandran, MLA and A Soundararajan, the President and General Secretary of State CITU met the Electricity Minister on 7th June and held discussions in the matter. Discussions between the Minister and COTEE General Secretary, S Pancharatnam and other office bearers continued on 8th June.

The assurances given by the Minister to take immediate steps for absorption of contract workers was reported to the contract workers in meetings all over the State on 9th morning and decision was taken to report back to work on 10th June. The union in a communication to the minister on 9th evening, informed him of the decision to discontinue the strike expecting immediate steps to implement his assurances. This successful strike by more than 20,000 contract workers has strengthened the morale of the workers and has also shown that the workers are solidly behind the CITU union.

(Report by A K Padmanabhan)

FEROZABAD

POLICE REPRESSION AGAINST CITU LEADERS

The district administration and the police in Ferozabad, U.P have been resorting to unprecedented repressive measures against the trade union functionaries and activists, who have been organising the workers in the glass and bangles industries in the area. The 'Kanch Udyog Kranthikari Mazdoor Sangh' affiliated to the CITU had been spearheading the movement of the workers in Ferozabad forcing the managements to stop extracting work for 11-12 hours daily from the workers and stick to 8 hours working shift. To quell the rising resistance of the workers to the horrifying exploitative conditions prevalent in these industries, the employers and the local administration had jointly been unleashing terror and repression for the past several months now. 89 workers had been imprisoned for nearly three months. Scores of false case have been foisted on the trade union activists. On the midnight of June 7/8, 2005, the police deployed an 800 strong contingent around the residence of Dilip Kumar Yadav, a prominent leader of the CITU, arrested him and took him to jail. Earlier, the police had announced a reward of Rs. 2000 each on Dilip Kumar Yadav and Sanjay Jain, top leaders of the CITU in the area.

The police action met with an immediate protest strike in all the units of glass and bangle industry in Ferozabad on June 7th and 8th. While taking him in custody, the police had brutally assaulted Dilip Kumar.

Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, in a statement issued on June 9, 2005, strongly condemned the arrest of Dilip Kumar yadav and the reign of terror unleashed by the U.P. Police and the district administration in Ferozabad and demanded his immediate release. He congratulated the workers for their valiant protest strike. The CITU demanded the Chief Minister of U.P. to take immediate steps to end the repression on the workers and trade union leaders in Ferozabad and ensure strict implementation of labour laws in all units of glass and bangle industry in Ferozabad.

READ & SUBSCRIBE

THE VOICE OF THE WORKING WOMAN

Monthly journal of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women
Single Copy Rs. 5
Annual Subscription Rs. 40

REPORTS & EVENTS

JHARKHAND

14 LIVES LOST BECAUSE OF NEGLIGENCE

Utter negligence and reckless breach of safety rules have cost 14 lives of coal miners in Central Soundha Coal Mine near Hazaribag under Central Coal fields Ltd.

This mine was just below a water filled abandoned Hathidari Mines and the Director General of Mines Safety ordered not to resume mining there without dewatering the pits above. The CCL management not only ignored the warning but resorted to "green", mining of the walls between the two seams. As a result water seepage started a week back which was a clear signal of danger. One day before the disaster the roofs started leaking which in the mining parlance is "Chandi Garam" or the "Scalp has become hot". Written reports were placed by overmen. Again those were ignored. The Mines Manager never went down the pit to check the condition but ordered for mining to go on.

The inevitable had happened. Hundreds of millions of gallons of water rushed in as walls collapsed, and all 14 miners were downed in the deluge. Even all the bodies could not be recovered so far. Rescue operations are slow and thoroughly inadequate.

A Similar accident took place in nearby Gajli Taand three years back. One dangerous trend is now visible in Coal Mining area in recent times. Now Safety norms are flouted with impunity, slaughter mining is rampant, a good part of coal raised is looted by the Mafia who decide how and where coal is to be mined and they care nothing for the workers lives. Jibon Roy Secretary CITU visited the site and demanded:

1) punishment of the irresponsible and guilty, 2) compensation and job for the family and dependent and 3) strict adherence to safety norms.

VISAKH STEEL PLANT CONTRACT WORKERS STRIKE

About 8000 contract Workers of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant went on strike demanding enhancement in wages and other demands including payment of bonus, provision of health facilities etc. In the 20 years history of the steel plant,this is the first time workers went on strike unitedly under the banner of CITU, AITUC, and HMS. The strike went on for 15 days from June 2nd to 16th.

Though the management initially took a stand that it had nothing to do with the wages of contract workers, it had to ultimately relent to the struggling workers. Support of the people was also solicited and complete bandh and observed in Gujuwaka town, in support of the strike.

A settlement was signed on 16th June before Deputy Labour Commissioner. The salient features of the agreement are:-

1. Immediate adhoc enhancement in wages by Rs.300 per month.

2. A committee was formed with a representative from each contract workers union, one member from contractors and two members from Visakhapatnam steel plant to examine the issue of rational wages and submit a report within two months.

3. Establishment of ESI dispensary and implementation of the ESI facility is agreed.

4. Bonus payment is assured by the contractors for 2004-2005.

PUNJAB

12TH MAY DHARNA AT CHANDIGARH

In protest against the pro-employer policy of the Punjab government and non-registration of unions of cycle industries workers of Ludhiana, protest Dharna was held at Chandigarh in front of the office of Registrar of Trade Union Punjab. About 3000 workers from all over the state joined this dharna. This dharna was addressed by Comrade Basudeb Acharya and Comrade Deepankar Mukherjee apart from Balwant Singh, Reghunath Singh and other state leaders of CITU. Then the procession was taken out to the civil secretariat Punjab where again rally was held in the scorching in which was addressed by Brinda Karat of AIDWA. Apart from state level mass action the CITU fought several local agitations and got achievements. The agitations of brick kiln workers all over the state have been successful and will result in the increase of CITU membership.

UNITED TRADE UNION STRUGGLE

To mobilize the toiling masses of the state a united front have been formed by the Federations of Punjab government employees, Teachers' unions of Punjab, Para-Medical workers and workers of various other govt. and semi govt. department like PWD, Public Health etc. United front has also been formed by the PSEB employees. The joint fronts of these organizations have held state level conventions on 15th May and 22nd May and organized several district level and local level mass actions against privatization and unemployment involving about 50000 employees in these action.

SUCCESFUL STRIKE IN BALCO

In Balco the contractor workers are continuously on struggle against the anti-workers policies of the Sterlite management. In recent past two workers died and many workers were wounded during working. Initially the management was not ready to give any compensation to the affected workers and their family members. But after strong protests ultimately the management agreed to give compensation to the workers and their family and also job to one member of the deceased workers' family. Recently the Sterlite managementstarted directly attacking CITU union leaderships. The management suspended B.L. Netam, President of the union and issued showcause notice to. S. Ghosh, Asst. Secretary of the union on false charges. The workers went on spontaneous strike on 18th and 19th April 2005 against the action of the management. The strike was total. AITUC, HMS, BMS and NORMS union supported the strike. But INTUC union openly joined hands with the management. Ultimately looking at the mood of the workers the management withdrew the suspension order and show-cause notice. It was a great victory for Balco workers after the historic 67 days strike.

LOCK-OUT IN JUTE MILL

In Visakhapatnam in the Chittivalasa Jute mill the management unilaterally reduced the daily wages of Badli workers from Rs.160.00 only Rs.85.00. CITU gave a strike notice which was supported by other unions. The strike started by 5th May and is still continuing. Meanwhile the management has declared a lockout.

The workers arre undeterred by the action of the management. They ahave decided to carry on with the struggle under the leadership of CITU.

ORISSA: DEMAND TO HALT LOOT OF RESOURCES

Trade unions have demand a halt to the loot of the natural resources of Orissa. In the last 2-3 years price of iron ore in the world market has shot up to unprecedented level mainly because of strong demand from China. The result is that Orissa has become a paradise for looters. Iron ore has become gold. Daily more than 10,000 trucks are plying towards Paradip Port and a big part of the cargo is illegally mined or stolen ore from the state.

Corruption also has reached an unprecedented level. Many domestic and some international companies are signing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to build steel plant in future and taking lease of iron ore deposits to be exploited now mainly for the purpose of exports. How many MOUs are genuine and how many of them are fictitious, only time will tell. Meanwhile plunder of Orissa will go on. CITU has demanded a total halt of iron ore exports. CITU also demands that value addition, i.e. making steel and steel products by using the iron ore, has to be done in the country only. Mining lease can be awarded to the big companies only after they set up Steel Plants, and before setting up steel plants as per the MOU no company should be allowed to start mining of iron ore. Normally it takes 5-6 years to set up a steel plant and iron ore is not required before the plant comes up in full.

KERALA: STRUGGLES AND CAMPAIGNS

Plantation Workers in Kerala went on an indefinite strike from 15th June.

Discussions held by the Plantation Labour Committee were failed. On 14th June Labour Minister and then Chief Minister conducted separate conferences to settle the dispute and it was also failed.

The revision of the wages and other conditions were due from 1-4-2002. During the last three years (i.e. from 1.4.2002 to 31.3.2005) the Variable DA was curtailed by the employers. During this period a portion of the Variable DA was paid and the balance amount is to be paid.

Almost three lakhs of workers are engaged in Plantation Sector. INTUC, CITU, AITUC, BMS etc. unions unitedly has given the call for the indefinite strike. AITUC union in the Munnar tea company has betrayed and withdrawn from the strike struggle.

Kerala Govt. is bent upon handing over the responsibility of the rural water supply schemes to the private agencies in the name of NGO's and they want to undermine the water authority as an advisory body. Protesting against the move for privatization all unions including INTUC organized a human chain on 20th May around the water authority headquarters.

The Sponsoring Committee of the Kerala state has given a call for one-day general strike on 5th July demanding 1. Public sector should not be privatised. 2. Protect the traditional industries. 3. To settle all issues raised by trade unions in various industries.

As part of campaign four regional vehicle Jathas will conduct meeting through out the state from June 23rd and 24th. CITU requested the service organisation of the Govt. employees to join the strike in order to make the General Strike total and complete.

The Govt. employees organizations agreed with the sponsoring committee to join the General Strike to be conducted on 5th July, thus it should be total.

CITU OPPOSES DISINVESTMENT OF NALCO

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has expressed shock to note tht even before the protest against 10% disinvestment of BHEL has died down, Govt. has proposed 20% disinvestment of NALCO, another extremely well run highly profit making basic industry.

The statement of Ministry of Mines and NALCO Management clearly shows that without any consultation, Finance Ministry is taking overenthusiastically proactive interest in disinvestment of profit making PSUs which is not at all an agenda in NCMP. Paradoxically the revival of sick PSU, which is one of UPA Govt.'s task in CMP, is being ignored because of lack of initiative and negative approach by the Finance Ministry.

CITU strongly feels tht as disinvestment has been officially delinked from the budgetary exercise, Finance Ministry should recluse itself from such exercises which comes under the domain of the concerned Ministry and the PSU. CITU urged upon the Minister of Mines to adhere to his stand of non-disinvestment of NALCO. Even if he relents, CITU is confident that employees of NALCO and people or Orissa who had foiled the attempt of privatisation of NALCO by NDA Govt., would also give a fitting reply to the process of creeping privatisation by UPA Govt.

CITU WELCOMES SAIL IISCO MERGER

Centre of Indian Trade Unions and Steel Workers Federation of India (SWFI) are happy that finally, after a long delay, Union Cabinet has decided to merge Indian Iron and Steel Company (IISCO) with Steel Authority of India Ltd.(SAIL).

IISCO is the richest steel plant in India with its vast reserves of best quality iron ore and good quality coking coal. Still for more than 30 years it has languished almost to death by the neglect of the Government and SAIL. The workers of Burnpur-Asansol in particular and people of West Bengal in general, even the peasants of Burdwan, have fought heroically for its revival. Steel workers all over India have lent their moral and material support for IISCO for revival and for its retention in Public Sector.

After merger, it should come out of BIFR and there should be no impediment to build up a 2 million tonne capacity plant at the earliest as has been promised in the perspective planning of SAIL till the year 2012.

CITU believes that IISCO can be built as a 10 million tonne plant as that will be much more cost effective than those 5 or 12 million tonne capacity plants are being planned in Orissa or Chattisgarh or elsewhere, because of the existing infrastructure, better logistics, experienced officers and work force.

It is hoped that the officers and workers who have suffered loss of earnings, reduction of wages and benefits, bonus etc, over the years because of sickness will be fully compensated after this merger specially when this unit has started making impressive profits.

ASSAM PSU COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING HELD

The Coordination Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions of Assam, as coordination committee of central and state PSU's and their contract labour unions met on 16.06.05 at Numaligarh Refinery Township. Representatives from oil PSUs (BRPL, IOCL, NRL), Gas, Transport etc. attended the meeting. From CITU centre, Com. S. Dev Roy attended the meeting and spoke on the public sector policies of the UPA Govt. He stressed the need for support from the permanent employees' union to the contractors' workers' Union.

Out of 45 representatives, 10 participated in the discussion. Com. N. Chutia, convenor of the committee submitted a written report with some concrete suggestions. After detail discussion, the meeting decided to public a booklet on PSUs in Assam comprising technical and labour related matters. This meeting also decided to hold its next state convention by the end of this year and to organize a high level seminar on 'Synergy in Energy' at BRPL in the month of September 2005. This meeting also decided to participate in the Trade Union Convention to be held in New Delhi in the month of July 2005. The coordination Committee will sit after two month at Guwahati to finalise the future course of action.

{Report from N. Chutia. Convenor, coordination committee of public trade unions of Assam }

BHEL EMPLOYEES PROTEST DISINVESTMENT

Workers, employees, even engineers in some plants have unanimously condemned the UPA Government's decision to divest 10% of the shares of BHEL. There were demonstrations, protest rallies and burning of effigies on 27th May 2005, all over the country. The workers demanded that the decision to be withdrawn.

Meanwhile CITU has protested that after the earlier trenches of disinvestments of BHEL a majority part of the disinvested shares have been cornered by foreign institutional investors and some of the competitors of BHEL. They want to take full control of BHEL through this process.

The workers have condemned that such disinvestment is nothing but creeping privatisation and the UPA government, like the previous NDA government is going ahead with this single point agenda.

DHABOL BAIL OUT

While there is a serious concern over the power crisis in Maharashtra which has brought out what can only be considered as a deliberate policy of not adding new capacity as if to invite power crisis to justify the Enron-Dabhol fiasco.

The conflicting and disquieting reports about revival Dabhol, undertaken by a Group of Ministers at the Centre appears to be totally opaque and the negotiations on the issue with the stake holders is shrouded with secrecy. The Dahol Power Project has been shut down for 4 years on a commercial dispute between MSEB and Dabol. Meanwhile the liabilities of Indian FIs and banks have gone up to more than Rs 4000 crore. There are reports that the same FI and banks are again being called upon to settle the claims of Rs 3500 crore of offshore lenders and foreign equity holders and Navratna PSUs like NTPC and GAIL are being asked to bail out Dabhol without proper due diligence. In the national interest, the government should immediately bring a white paper on the "Enron-Dabhol" issue as a whole along with its plans of revival, if any, with due diligence report on its future viability and ownership pattern.

DUNCAN'S PANKI FERTILISER PLANT TO RESTART

The 7 lakh tonne/annum urea producing fertilizer plant at Panki, Kanpur is scheduled to restart from 8.7.2005 after 3 years of illegal lay off declared by the Duncan management. The restart is the result of a protracted struggle of the CITU led IEL Employees Union of the Panki Unit, which had been relentlessly putting pressure on the management, the State Government and Government of India, through series of movements and agitation. The issue was raised in Parliament also by the left MPs. Ultimately when government owned banks and state government owned utilities agreed to give significant concessions to the company to facilitate the reopening of the unit, the management tried to impose some anti-labour measures as pre-condition to restart the plant. This was resisted by the union and public opinion was mobilized in and around Kanpur to force the management to see reason and the restarting of the plant was announced after a joint meeting between the management and CITU union, giving new lease of life to the plant and its 1500 employees.

Re-opening of this unit will go a long way in meeting the state's need of fertilizers and food production.

PAY PARITY: AFTER 21 YEARS

For 21 long years, women employees of the Super Bazaar in New Delhi have been fighting a battle against discrimination, demanding wage parity with their male peers . They have finally won a significant victory. The Delhi High Court has given a ruling which is expected to bring women employees on par with their male counterparts vis a vis pay structure. The ruling has held that if the nature of work of both sexes is the same, there should not be any discrimination with regard to their pay scales.

The division bench of Justice Mukundanam Sharma and Justice Rekha Sharma rejected the appeal of the Cooperative Store Limited, stating "Designation cannot be held to be the determining factor for fixing pay scales if the nature of work is the same, which is more important than the designation".

They said that designation is immaterial and irrelevant if it is proved that both the categories of workers are doing similar work.

The administration of the Super Bazaar, The Cooperative Store Limited, had filed the appeal against the order of a single judge upholding the request of women employees of Super Bazaar who alleged gender bias by the administration. According to the women employees, while the pay scale of male workers was between Rs 185-305-440, the women, who were doing the same work, were kept in the pay scale of Rs. 150-240-360, thereby violating the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act 1976.

According to the counsel for the women employees, "Prior to October 1984, employees of both sexes were paid equally. But their pay scales dipped after they were regularised in October 1984." He gave the example of a woman employee who was wrongly designated as a male worker, and when the administration became aware of their mistake, her remuneration was reduced.

The Super Bazaar has since closed down, some of the women of the women are no longer alive to gain any benefit from the judgment, and many are old and ailing. But the courageous struggle and tenacity of the women employees of the Super Bazaar is truly commendable and exemplary. It has resulted in a judgment, which exposes the blatant discrimination against women in the matter of payment of equal wages and can be of use to lakhs of other women workers and employees who are discriminated against in the same way, in their fight for equality and justice.

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

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Mar.' 05	Month Apr.' 05	State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Mar.' 05	Month Apr.' 05
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	504	500	Maharastra	38	Mumbai	617	619
	2	Guntur	501	506		39	Nagpur	542	542
	3	Hyderabad	517	519		40	Nasik	569	570
	4	Visakhapatnam	513	514		41	Pune	586	591
	5	Warangal	534	534		42	Solapur	531	526
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	441	451	Orissa	43	Barbil	464	471
	7	Guwahati	521	523		44	Rourkela	459	464
	8	Labac-Silchar	403	407	Punjab	45	Amritsar	482	490
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	443	445		46	Ludhiana	498	507
	10	Rangapara-Tezp	423	431	Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	532	540
Bihar	11	Monghyr	497	501		48	Jaipur	483	485
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	466	469	Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	557	564
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	505	509		50	Coimbatore	504	506
	14	Bhavnagar	528	531		51	Coonoor	499	502
	15	Rajkot	480	491		52	Madurai	500	506
	16	Surat	485	491		53	Salem	475	482
	17	Vadodra	484	486		54	Tiruchirapally	569	562
Haryana	18	Faridabad	538	545	Uttar	55	Agra	503	502
	19	Yamunanagar	508	518	Pradesh	56	Ghaziabad	548	547
J & K	20	Srinagar	635	641		57	Kanpur	510	505
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	492	497		58	Saharanpur	491	499
	22	Jharia	426	431		59	Varanasi	554	556
	23	Kodarma	451	456	West	60	Asansol	493	506
	24	Noamundi	475	477	Bengal	61	Darjeeling	421	425
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	480	484		62	Durgapur	581	593
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	519	521		63	Haldia	614	618
	27	Belgaum	575	571		64	Howrah	599	611
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	528	531		65	Jalpaiguri	438	437
	29	Mercara	491	492		66	Kolkata	570	578
Kerala	30	Alwaye	533	538		67	Raniganj	459	466
	31	Mundakayam	506	508	Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	599	603
	32	Quilon	537	536	Delhi	69	Delhi	635	643
	33	Thiruvananthapur	601	586	Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	570	566
Madhya	34	Balaghat	452	454					
Pradesh	35	Bhopal	549	552					
	36	Indore	526	535					
	37	Jabalpur	529	528			ALL-INDIA	525	529

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State		Centre	March 2005	April 2005
Andhra Pradesh	1	Kethgudem	535	526
Himachal Pradesh	2	Himachal Pradesh	499	505
Rajasthan	3	Bhilwara	522	522
Madhya Pradesh	4	Chhindwara	459	467
Tripura	5	Tripura	446	469
Goa	6	Goa	628	625

(The 9th Congress of Cuban Construction Workers Union (SNTC) was held at Havana on 19th & 20th of May. The President of the Construction Workers' Federation of India R.Singaravelu and T.K. Achuthan, Vice President, visited Cuba from 14th May to 21st May and participated in the Conference. R.Singaravelu greeted the congress on behalf of CWFI & CITU. Here is a report from Singaravelu - Editor)

CUBA: 9TH CONGRESS OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS UNION

Cuban visit has given us an occasion to understand the socialist transformation process and how Cuba is withstanding US sanctions and other aggressive polices. The disappearance of the socialist market in USSR and Eastern Europe created lot of difficulties but Cuba had successfully faced this challenge and made all efforts to protect the interest of workers. Recently trade agreements were signed with Venezuela and China, which are mutually beneficial.

Venezuela under Chavez has agreed to supply oil to Cuba, which in turn has sent 20,000 doctors, 10,000 sports instructors and 20,000 other workers to Venezuela for its development. Every year one lakh blind / semi-blind people of Venezuela are being treated free of charge in Cuban hospitals. Venezuela will bear their transportation costs alone.

8500 Latin American students are getting free education in Havana University. Cuba has installed 35 medical schools in the most impoverished countries. Cuba has the best medical system in the world. In 1959, at the time of revolution there were 6300 doctors only. 3300 of who fled away from Cuba. Now Cuba has 70,000 Doctors. There is a 32 storied International Clinic in the heart of Havana. In USA, the Infant Mortality Rate for the white race is 9 while it is 17 for the black race. But in Cuba the death rate is just 6.2 only.

The average life expectancy is 75 years for men, and 79 years for women. Cuba has found out medicines for treatment of Lung Cancer. A North American company has singed agreement to utilise the new medicine, violating US sanctions against Cuba. The medicine Helagenina plus, a medicine for white leucoderma is invented in Cuba, which completely cures the disease.

The 1200 million dollar trade agreement with China is for development of Rail / Road Transport system in Cuba. Both have ventured into new projects in Bio-Technology.

New oil fields are discovered now. Because of such favourable factors, Cuba has started reform process in salaries. Minimum wages have been enhanced 125% Pension amount is trebled.

All the Cuban people are employed as per ILO records. However Cuba admits that unemployment does exist but it is below 2 %. Health & Education are totally free for all. Workers pay 10% of their basic salary as House Rent. 85% people live in rented houses provided by the government. After 1990, housing activity was stopped. However, it is planned to construct one lakh new houses in 2006. 98% of Cuban people get electricity at subsidised rates.

Private sector is not encouraged in Cuba. Joint Ventures with foreign companies on Cuban terms and conditions are allowed. They have to follow Cuban labour laws and have to bring in hard currency and raw materials. Use of US dollar is banned in Cuba. It is clear that in spite of not being a member of WTO or getting any 'structural adjustment loans' from the IMF or the World Bank, Cuba is advancing.

The service conditions of Working Class

Right to work is a fundamental right in the constitution. There are 35 lakhs workers, 48% of whom are women. Women constitute 65% out of technical workers and scientists.

Men retire at 60 years and women retire at 55. After retirement, on the average, 70% salary is paid as pension.

Cuba has one of the most advanced maternity leave laws in the world. Current law guarantees fully paid leave of 18 weeks with option of an extended leave at 60 percent pay until the child is one year old, with the right to return to the same job at the end of the leave.

Wherever, we went, we saw all the people were happy. They love music and dance.

Licensed to post without prepayment under License No. U(C-39)/2003-05
Postal Regd. No. DL-13016/2003 - 05 Delhi RNI 18560/71

Posted at Eastern Court P. O New Delhi
July 1 & 2, 2005

Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions

ALL INDIA CONVENTION ON JULY 9, IN DELHI

A meeting of the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions (comprising the Central Trade Unicn Organisations viz. AITUC, AICCTU, CITU, HMS, TUCC, UTUC and UTUC-LS and all India Federations/Associations of employees and workers in Bank, Insurance, Railways, Central and State Govt. offices/ departments, Telecom, Postal, Defence, Petroleum and other sectors), held in New Delhi on June 10, 2005 decided to launch a countrywide campaign and movement on the pressing demands of the working people of the country.

The meeting adopted 16-point charter of demands on which there will be a nationwide intensive campaign. The meeting also decided to hold an All India Convention of workers and employees in New Delhi on July 9, 2005, where the programme of sustained struggle, including a countrywide general strike, to realise the demands would be decided. The meeting appealed to all trade unions, irrespective of affiliations, to join in the campaign and mobilise their full strength to make the July 9 Convention, and the action programmes to follow, a success.

DEMANDS

1. Enact comprehensive legislation on service conditions and social security for unorganised sector workers and agricultural workers with adequate government funding and effective monitoring system.
2. Suitably amend/change the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill to ensure employment guarantee for the rural and urban unemployed within a time frame in line with commitment made in NCMP.
3. Halt moves towards downsizing of work force and lift ban on recruitment; stop contractorisation.
4. Strengthen inspection and enforcement machinery to ensure strict implementation of all labour laws including statutory minimum wages in all sectors including SEZs and EPZs; no pro-employer changes in labour laws in the name of flexibility.
5. Enact legislation to prevent sexual harassment of women at work place and ensure full protection to women against atrocities.
6. Stop privatisation and disinvestment of profit making and strategic sector PSUs including nationalised banks, telecom, airports etc; no privatisation of public services and utilities; stop merger of banks; no corporatisation of defence production units.
7. Take urgent measures for revival of sick/loss making but potentially viable PSUs.
8. Rescind measures raising FDI cap in telecom sector and permitting FDI in defence sector; drop proposed raising of cap on FDI in banking and insurance sectors; halt step to allow FDI in coal, retail and pension sectors; withdraw amendment bills on Banking Regulation and Reserve Bank of India Acts.
9. Review Electricity Act, 2003 and the National Electricity Policy (announced on February 3, 2005); repeal provisions against cross-subsidisation and on unbundling and privatisation of SEBs; eliminate rural-urban divide; ensure supply to rural areas, agricultural sector and urban weaker sections.
10. Undertake immediate legislative measures to ensure right to strike for all workers and employees including in Govt. services.
11. Constitute Sixth Pay Commission for the Govt. employees.
12. Remove ceilings on eligibility and calculation in Payment of Bonus Act.
13. Raise interest rates on EPF, GPF, CMPF, PPF and small savings instruments by raising the administered rate of interest; scrap New Pension System and the PFRDA Bill; restore the pre-2004 pension scheme for the new entrants in Govt. services.
14. Carry out land reforms and step up public investment for irrigation facilities.
15. Strengthen public distribution system.
16. Take stringent measures for recovering NPAs and unpaid tax arrears from the defaulters in the corporate and big business lobby.

Note: The all India convention will be held at the Mavlankar Hall, in the Constitution Club campus on Rafi Marg, New Delhi.

Printed and published by M K Pandhe on behalf of Centre of Indian Trade Unions and printed at Progressive Printers, A-21 Jhilmil Industrial Area, Shahdara, Delhi - 95 and published from B T Ranadive Bhawan, 13-A Rouse Avenue, New Delhi - 110 002.
Editor: M K Pandhe