



Vol. 28 No.8-9 June, 1998 Price: Rupees Four
(Issued with a Supplement)

THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU



**CITU
GENERAL
COUNCIL,
CHENNAI,
Mass**



Photo Courtesy : J Ballab

All India Working Women's Coordination Committee in Session. Chennai,

CITU GENERAL COUNCIL MEETS AT CHENNAI

The CITU General Council meeting at Chennai, on 22-25 April 1998, called for stepping up efforts to build a united movement against disastrous policy of economic liberalisation casting gloom on the national economy and also the life and living of the common people. After a thorough review of the pre-election developments and the post-poll scenario, the General Council resolved to unleash a wide spread campaign against the communal forces exposing their dangerous game plan.

Tamilnadu State Committee of CITU had made elaborate arrangements to facilitate the General Council carry on its four day long deliberations effectively and meaningfully. The meeting dias was named after Late Com. Leelavati, Vice-President of Tamilnadu Handloom Workers Federation and a Municipal Corporator, who was murdered by the ruling party gangsters at Madurai on 23rd April 1997.

The meeting condoled the death of Com. EMS Namboodiripad, the great leader and ideologue of the struggle of the toiling people. The condolence resolution paid homage to Com. Bimal Sinha, Vice President of CITU who was killed by the extremists in Tripura, weeks before the General Council and Com. Malabade, (Maharashtra) among others was also adopted. E Balanandan in his presidential address outlined important international and national developments, both in eco-

nomie and political arena.

TOWARDS UNITED ACTIONS

M K Pandhe placed the General Secretary's report before the General Council.

Forty comrades deliberated on the General Secretary's report for two days and detailed their experiences and made important suggestions.

M K Pandhe, replying to the debate, stressed the urgent need to take active initiative at the grassroots level to unite the common workers and other sections of the masses in the struggle against the economic policy. At the national level, the process of consultation with other Central TUs and mass organisations has already started both at the level of Sponsoring Committee of Indian Trade Unions and National Platform of Mass Organisations. It is proposed to draw programme of countrywide agitation and our initiative at the grassroots level would help greater mobilisation. The urgent need to carry on intensive campaign against communalism for defence of the unity of the class and the people was also emphasised.

R Umanath, Vice President, intervened to draw the attention to the urgent task of rousing the workers against the danger of communalism.

Balanandan, in his concluding address, called upon all the affiliates to take up in right earnest the tasks to build up widest unity of the working class in the struggle

against exploitation and in defence of the unity of the people.

SPECIAL SESSIONS

The General Council also discussed in two separate sessions the issues relating to the movement of unorganised sector workers and the working of the ESI.

P K Ganguly, Secretary, placed the discussion paper on unorganised sector. He outlined the concrete organisational task to expand CITU in this vast sector employing 73% of the urban non-agricultural workforce, after a thorough review of the past experience, and the shortcomings.

Twenty comrades took part in the discussion. It was identified that concrete initiative has to be taken at the state level to identify and prioritise the area/sector of work in the unorganised sector in all the states. All the State Committees should constitute sub committees within six months with the sole task of monitoring the work in the unorganised sector. State level co-ordination committees shall be activated. The unions in the organised sector should also take initiative to organise the unorganised workers within the organised sector, mainly the contract workers whose number is increasing every day due to mass scale off loading and farming out of jobs.

Kali Ghosh, Secretary, placed the discussion paper on ESI scheme. He brought forth the fact that over the period the workers' contribution towards ESI scheme has increased only to inflate the corpus of ESI fund at the disposal of

the government and that the benefits to workers have not improved in the least, rather marked a decline.

Twelve comrades deliberated on the subject and suggested for a countrywide struggle seeking drastic improvements in the ESI scheme and its administration. The idea of handing over ESI to respective state govts mooted by the Central authorities recently, has been opposed by all concerned.

It was decided to observe a protest day on 18.6.98 against unsatisfactory working of the n ESI Scheme through mass mobilisation/demonstration before the ESI offices all over the country.

RESOLUTIONS

The General Council also adopted a number of resolutions. Notable among those are (1) On police firing on Haryana Textile Workers (2) Struggle on pension scheme (3) Against the govt's move to introduce a new series of price in

dex (4) on public sector employees' movement (5) On recognition of trade union through secret ballot (6) In support of the struggle of electricity workers in AP (7) In support of the struggle of the workers at Tamilnadu (8) Against sexual harassment of women at work place (9) on the precarious condition of peasantry in AP, Karnataka, and the incidence of suicide demanding remedial steps etc.(10) Against move to open up insurance sector (11) Against Narasimham Committee recommendations on Banking Sector reforms.

The General Council also passed a resolution unanimously condemning the ploy to apply article 356 against the Tamilnadu Govt by the Centre. In another resolution it congratulated the left, led Governments in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala.

The General Council also called upon all its units to initiate vigorous education and

ideological campaign among the activists and workers to raise the level of consciousness to prepare for a vigorous struggle against the twin dangers of communalism and economic liberalisation and globalisation. General Council also resolved to observe the 150th anniversary of the communist manifesto and called upon all its units to celebrate the great occasion through intensive ideological campaign and trade union education activities.

MASS RALLY

On 25th April 1998, after the conclusion of the four day session of the General Council of CITU, the Chennai city witnessed a massive rally of workers in tens of thousands. The rally was presided over by A Soundarajan, CITU leader and chairman of the Reception Committee, E Balanandan, President, M K Pandhe, General Secretary, R Umanath, Vice President, CITU, T K Rangarajan and A K Padmanabhan.

From CITU Centre

COM. BIMAL SINGHA

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions is shocked to learn that the extremists in Tripura has laid an ambush and killed Com. Bimal Singha, Vice-President of CITU and Health Minister of Tripura at his home-town at Kamalpur on 31.3.1998. The brother of Bimal Singha who accompanied him has also been done to death. The CITU condemns this brutal killings by the extremist elements.

The CITU, the working people and the left forces in Tripura have been putting up a heroic and valiant resistance to the designs of the divisive and extremist forces. Com. Bimal Singha has become yet another martyr in this valiant fight for defending the unity of India.

The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay tearful homage to Com. Bimal Singha and convey heartfelt condolences to the comrades and the bereaved family.

COM P G K KRISHNAN

We record with profound grief the sudden demise of Com. P G K Krishnan, a founder-leader of CITU in Tamil Nadu and Chennai city, at Chennai on 7th May, 1998. Com. P G K Krishnan was a member of the Tamil Nadu State Committee and former Secretary of Chennai District Committee of CITU. He has been leading a number of unions in and around Chennai. His work among the unorganised workers was very commendable.

The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay respectful homage to the memory of Com. P.G.K. Krishnan and convey heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

CAPITALISM : ENEMY OF OPEN SOCIETY

E. BALANANDAN

The new captions appearing in the print media about the capitalist system are noteworthy. To quote some: "vulture capitalism", "canibal capitalism", "capitalism is the enemy of open society" etc. These articles and comments are from bourgeois economists and business experts. According to them, the capitalist system is facing very serious crisis, which is shaking its foundation.

Europe: The European 'Common Currency' is coming into existence by next January according to the decision of European Commission, comprising Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Luxumburg, Netherland, Portugal and Spain. Britain and Denmark have decided not to be among the first wave of entrants. The common currency is supposed to boost European economy as a whole, increase gross domestic product, and ensure more employment. These countries will decide the rate at which the existing currencies be converted into the European currency. They also claim that by developing a Euro currency they will reduce inflation, ensure high profitability of investment, sustain external demands so that the economic recovery will be a continuous process, and compete with United States in the field of commerce and trade and boost their industrial production. However, the other side of the picture also needs to be noted. The

European workers in general have coined a slogan "A social Europe". In France, Italy and Germany, this has become a catch phrase for growing demands to set aside the fiscal austerity that has been a hallmark of the drive towards economic and monetary union. The leaders of European Union are worried about the increasing awareness shown by the working class throughout Europe around the demand of social Europe which means "higher wage cost and higher unemployment benefits". Huge demonstrations are taking place in Europe in the recent weeks.

Tens of thousands of workers have marched in many cities of Italy. The government was forced to announce certain concessions because of the pressure exerted by the workers under the leadership of Communists. The government have agreed to bring a legislation which would cut the work-week from 40 to 35 hours. In France, the government introduced a legislation mandating a 35 hour work week and they had to agree for increased unemployment benefit. In Germany, like France and Italy, the unemployment is more than 12% and the trade unions are demanding action to curb unemployment. The pressure of the workers is on the increase and the austerity measures which are part of the European Union exercise is confronted with the demand of "Social Europe". Already 18 million workers are unemployed to

day in Europe today. The conditions agreed for launching the new Euro currency will only aggravate the unemployment in these parts and finally it seems that the workers are preparing for a direct confrontation.

MODELS IN CRISIS

The south and south east Asian economies were projected as the models for capitalist development. Dr. Manmohan Singh and others, to justify their World Bank dictated new economic policy, were citing the example of these very countries' economic resurgence. The World Bank too was all in praise for these economies and projected them as models.

But now the new currency crisis put these economies in doldrums. From the first week of July till the first week of December, Thailand's Baht has been devalued by 42%; Indonesia's Rupaiah by 36%; Malaysia's Ringgit by 30% and South Korea's Wann by 28%. The currency devaluation in these countries is accompanied by severe economic crisis. Many industries have been forced to close down. There is large scale job cuts leading to unemployment. Several banks and financial institutions have been declared bankrupt and prospect of negative growth looms large in horizon.

The currency devaluation has forced most of the East Asian countries to seek bail out packages from IMF. Thailand's package is for 17 million dollars, Indonesia 23 billion and Korea 60 billion.

These packages are with strict conditionalities which include reduction of budget deficit, curtailment of public spending, reduction of subsidies, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and easing restrictions on foreign investment. These conditionalities mean loss of economic sovereignty and the total administrative policies will be controlled by IMF. The net effect is that tens of thousands of factories are being closed down and millions of workers are going to lose their jobs. Many economic experts world over are questioning the efficacy of these World Bank prescriptions.

This crisis-ridden South and South East Asian countries will begin aggressive exports to United States at dead cheap cost and they will become main competitor in the American market. This will affect the total industrial production in United States. Also these countries will drastically reduce the imports to their countries which will also have adverse impact in the developed economies of the world including United States. Thus, though the crisis is termed as an Asian Phenomenon it has its impact on the World Economy as a whole.

IMF NOT A REMEDY

Mr. George P Shultz the secretary of the State under President Reagan, William E. Simon the secretary of treasury under Nixon and Ford, Walter B Writson the chairman of City Corporation and City Bank, these three have jointly written an article in the Wall Street Journal(3.2..1998.) They have strongly criticised the functioning of the World Bank

and stated that after the Asian crisis, the continuance of the World Bank is unnecessary.

They contend: First, the IMF infringes upon the sovereignty of a nation state, i.e., they are dictating terms, dos and donts to the countries who are the recipients of IMF loans.

Secondly, the IMF induces the illusion that they will come forward for rescue in case of economic difficulties; this leads to careless financial transactions and complete opening up, encouraging investors to seek out risk portfolios.

Thirdly, the IMF prescribed tax increases and austerity measures are inflicting pain on the people of Asian countries. They will finally endorse resentment against the western nations and they will treat this as a conspiracy.

Fourthly, in comparison with the gigantic currency market, the turnover of which today is two trillion Dollars a day, the IMF's largest bail out programme for Asian bail out was 118 billion. The second was the Mexican rescue package of 30 billion dollars. India's IMF loan of 20 billion dollars in 1991, pales into insignificance. Therefore, they argue that the IMF cannot be a remedy for sustained economic development.

Japanese economy is also facing difficulties. They have lost a big market in this Asian crisis-ridden countries which affects them badly. Besides, the total economic development is also seriously coming down.

The working class is the most affected sections due to the new conditions imposed by IMF to bail out these countries from ruin. It is

estimated that in Korea, the job loss is about 1.5 Million, in Indonesia it is about 2 millions and in Thailand over 1 million, in Malaysia 1.5 lakhs, in Philippines 1 lakh and 20 thousand in Singapore. These are rough estimates. Job security is the first casualty together with cuts in wages and cut in amenities enjoyed by the working class. Naturally against this working class resistance is developing in Indonesia and Korea and in other countries. In Korea, the independent trade unions having membership of 5,50,000 has called upon the working class to fight against the new policies being implemented under the dictates of World Bank and IMF, In Japan also pressure is on the government for the relaxation of labour protection laws and for the abolition of the so called life-time employment system prevailing there. Thus the working class is faced with very serious problem. For us in India, many experts have come out with complete facts that the policy of liberalisation is finally going to push us in the debt-trap.

Many bourgeois economists are openly coming forward to say that "the capitalism is the main enemy of open society".

DEMOCRACY AT STAKE

The eminent French economist Jacques Attali and former President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development — the West's principal lending institution to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union - said: "Unless the west, and particularly its self appointed leader, the United States begins to recognise the

shortcomings of the market economy and democracy, western civilisation will gradually disintegrate and eventually self-destruct". Attali enumerates several "inherent contradictions" between the free market and democracy. While democracy enshrines individual rights and majority rule, the market views the individual as dispensable and interchangeable. Whereas democracy seeks to assure equal rights and opportunities to all citizens, capitalism by its very nature intensifies inequality and concentrates wealth in the hands of the few. Democracy is most effective, most local and decentralised, but capitalism tends inexorably towards centralisation, globalisation and monopoly. Finally, democratic institution can

only function in societies where individuals view themselves as citizens with responsibilities to one another and the common good, whereas capitalism ignores or overrides individuals by treating them solely as consumers whom it seeks to make dependent on its products and services. An another powerful critic of post-Communist capitalism from within its own ranks is the eminent mainstream American economist Lester Thurow of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). "To put it in its starkest form" Thurow writes, "capitalism is perfectly compatible with slavery Democracy is not compatible with slavery." Indeed, fascism fits disturbingly well with capitalism, whereas

democratic principles and processes are largely an impediment to the efficient operation of unbridled capitalism. Thurow argues that citizens in successful societies need "to unite around a powerful story with a sustaining ideology ... But what is the story that capitalism tells the community to hold the community together when capitalism explicitly denies the need for community?" In fact, capitalism not only denies the need for community but effectively destroys it, as has been painfully witnessed by countless towns and cities the world over. *(Excerpts from the Presidential address to the CITU General Council meeting at Chennai, 22-25 April, 1998)*

COMRADE K.L. MALABADE

We record with profound grief the death of Com. K.L. Malabade, member of the CITU General Council and Vice-President of Maharashtra State Committee of CITU at Ichalkaranji on 16th April, 1998. He was 64. He was also a member of the CITU Working Committee for some time. Com. Malabade was also a former MLA representing Ichalkaranji constituency in Kolhapur District of Maharashtra. He was also the President of the Municipal Council of Ichalkaranji for two terms. Com. Malabade started his life as a municipal worker and later became a union leader. He led several militant struggles of the powerloom workers of Ichalkaranji. He braved imprisonment for two years in the process. The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay their tearful homage to the memory of Com. Malabade and convey heartfelt condolences to bereaved family member and Comrades.

INTERIM WAGE INCREASE FOR COAL WORKERS

Seven lakh workers in the coal industry will get an interim relief ranging from Rs 232 to Rs 460 per month, under an agreement reached between the Coal India management and the five Central Trade Unions on 19th May 1998. The wage increase agreed to by the two sides provide for payment of 12% of basic wages and fixed dearness allowance with effect from 1.7.1996. The interim payment is subject to adjustment against final wage revision. The workers will benefit to the tune of Rs 400 crores inclusive of arrears. The CITU, AITUC, BMS, HMS and INTUC have jointly arrived at this agreement in the discussions held yesterday before the Minister of State for Coal. The CITU congratulates the 7 lakh workers in the coal industry who have displayed total unity and backed up the Unions' efforts by joint actions.

THE NEW SITUATION, DANGERS AND TASKS AHEAD

M.K. PANDHE

Recent events in the country have long term repercussions on India's political and economic development. Even the national unity and integrity will be at stake. A review of the new situation in the country and our immediate tasks arising out of it is extremely important for us to-day.

The country was thrown into turmoil by the Congress Party after withdrawing its support to the United Front Government on the plea that the interim report of the Jain Commission on Rajiv Gandhi Assassination case has castigated the DMK Government for their role in Rajiv Gandhi murder. The announcement of withdrawal of support was made even before the report was submitted to the Parliament. The country was forced to go for polls due to the obdurate policies of the Congress Party.

The country was faced with 3 groups of combinations, first one led by the Congress Party, second by the BJP and the third the United Front. The BJP in its anxiety to grab the power at the centre by hook or crook, made all types of opportunist alliances. This unprincipled alliance at various states brought to the fore the fallacy of the BJP's tall talk of value based politics.

BJP IN POWER

A powerful section of the big bourgeoisie and multinational companies backed BJP fully in the electoral battle. The print and the electronic media also boosted BJP

with massive coverage about the possibility of its electoral victory. The media was specially focussing attention on Valpayee as the prime minister in waiting and practically endorsing him through wide publicity to his speeches.

BJP's election campaign was better financed than any other political parties in India due to the backing it received from big business, both Indian and foreign. Several aeroplanes and helicopters were engaged throughout the election campaign while road vehicles were liberally used during the campaign. Money power and media contributed greatly in BJP's electoral victory.

The Congress with its declining morale was finding it difficult to face the electorate but got some relief when Sonia Gnadhi entered the electoral fray and mobilised support for the Congress Party. The faction ridden party with its candidates tainted with charges of corruption failed to attract the masses during the election campaign. Defection of several ex-Congressmen to BJP camp further eroded the mass base of the party in the election.

The UF entered the fray with several defections in the Front. The UF parties could not come to an understanding seat adjustments. The continuation of the economic policy of liberalisation by the UF Government and its disastrous consequences on the people of India alienated the mass of people from the UF policies. The UF

could not inspire the people and create a favourable atmosphere for defeat of Congress and the BJP in the electoral battle.

The election results, however, showed a big boost to the BJP strength maintaining strength by Congress Party and a drastic reduction in JD strength. The Left Front as a whole was weakened both in terms of votes and number of seats won in the elections. There was anti-incumbency atmosphere everywhere except left led states W.Bengal, Kerala and Tripura.

The emergence of BJP as a dominant party was not an ordinary threat to political development in India since the BJP cannot be considered like any other bourgeoisie party due to its RSS background. In short, the BJP resorted to all clandestine devices earlier used by the Congress Party in coming to power. The downgrading of values in politics by the BJP governments has brought shame to the parliamentary democracy in India and BJP lost every right to speak about value based politics.

COMMUNAL AGENDA OF RSS, BJP

However, once in power one should not underestimate the dangerous role the RSS is likely to play behind the screen. Its penetration in administrative apparatus, in the army and various other organisations, including media has a sinister implications even after the Government collapses after some period. The caucus has al-

ready developed close links with multinationals which have developed vested interests in keeping BJP in power. A strong section of Indian big bourgeoisie has shifted its loyalty for the BJP while the overwhelming landlord lobby is already siding with BJP's policies. The National Agenda published with fanfare by the BJP is a bundle of vague promises which do not convey any meaning. For working class it has practically offered nothing. Even the assurances of ensuring recognition of trade unions through secret ballot which was mentioned in the BJP Manifesto was not included in the National Agenda of Governance. There is no mention of overcoming the sickness of industrial undertakings both in Public and private sectors. Though it talks of generation of more employment, it does not spell out how employment will be generated after continuation of the policy of liberalisation and globalisation. Despite tall talk of Swadeshi, the BJP welcomed investments by the multinational companies which has made mockery of the Swadeshi movement initiated by Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom movement. There is no wonder that World Bank and IMF has correctly understood the meaning of Swadeshi of BJP and welcomed the National Agenda. The National Agenda does not speak about land reforms and advocated continuance of feudal domination in rural land relations. Though the National Agenda does not mention the question of dropping Article 370 from the Indian Constitution or question of con-

struction of Ram Temple at the disputed site at Ayodhya or Common Civil Code for all religion, it is only a ruse to cover up their real intentions. The BJP seeks to implement this agenda through the agencies of RSS, Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Durga Vahini etc. and create an atmosphere all over the country to implement this agenda through gangster methods. In sum, the national agenda, is an out and out a reactionary programme to protect the interests of multinationals, Indian big business houses and the rural rich and hit the working and living conditions of the common people of India. Top brass of the BJP have expressed thein favour of Presidential form of government.

In the name of appointment of Constitution Commission the National Agenda seeks to make constitution more reactionary. This will have dangerous consequences for the unity and integrity of the country.

When the poverty in the country is increasing, elementary needs of human existence are not available for majority of the people of the country, the National Agenda talks loudly about the Nuclear option which practically threatens to manufacture the Atom bomb to divert the attention of the people on the wrong channels. Apart from rousing national jingoism, the National Agenda seeks to intensify tension in the sub-continent in order to divert the attention of the public from the urgent economic issues facing the country.

It is, therefore, necessary to ex-

pose the economic and political policies of the BJP Government and involve larger and larger number of people in the struggle against these policies.

The working class of this country must understand the significance of this dangerous development and we must educate the working class and the masses about these developments. The CITU must campaign among the working class that the present government is just not like any other bourgeois government but the government with sinister motives which will threaten the very existence of democracy within the country.

The meaning of communalism and fundamentalism in the Indian political situation is yet not properly understood by our working class. There is, therefore, a need for ideological education of the working class on these issues so that they realise the gravity of the situation.

EDUCATE, UNIFY FIGHT

However, in the new political situation, we have to see the feeling among the workers and move in a planned manner so that the workers participation is properly ensured in various programmes when chalked out. There is, however, an urgent need of intensive political education of the workers about the impact of the economic policies and the difficulties faced by the working class.

To prepare background for bigger mass mobilisation on common issues facing the working people the CITU must lay stress on our independent mass mobilisation. Without our initiative at local and na

PSEUDO SWADESHI STANDS EXPOSED

W R Varada Rajan

The motley coalition in Government at the Centre had promised in their National Agenda for Governance that in the sphere of economy they "will continue with the reform process, give it a strong Swadeshi thrust to ensure that the national economy grows on the principle that 'India shall be built by Indians.'

Both during the elections and after the new Government assumed office, the big business in the country as also the financial circles of the advanced capitalist countries brushed aside the 'Swadeshi' cry of the BJP—the leading party of the coalition—as something not to be worried about. The first thing the new Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha declared, soon after assuming office, was that 'the multinationals have nothing to fear from our Government.' The message was sound and clear: "foreign capital is welcome, no matter whether computer chips or potato chips."

REFORMS ACCELERATED

The first ever foreign trip Yashwant Sinha undertook as Finance Minister was to the United States. In this first international mission, he spoke to the American and NRI investors in Washington to assert: "We are committed to broadening, deepening and accelerating the reforms." He also claimed that his party, the BJP was the, earliest proponent of liberalisation even during the halcyon days of socialism." The Industry Minister, for his part, reaffirmed the

Government commitment to the World Trade Organisation and declared that India will sign the joint Paris convention on the patents issue. Of course, it is another matter that when BJP was in the opposition they supported the Left in stalling the amendments to the Indian Patents Act during Narasimha Rao regime. But then they are no longer in the opposition! When already the 'Basmati' rice is patented in the USA endangering rice exports from India, this surrender to WTO on patent rights will have very adverse implications for the country. But then, they are there only to continue in power, somehow. If it calls for pleasing the WTO regime Vajpayee Government is all smiles doing it!

Not to be outdone by others, the Commerce Minister, announced a new Exim Policy. This policy has accelerated the pace of import liberalisation by moving 340 items from the restricted list to the Open General Licence (OGL) Category. The Government has also announced its decision to shift a further 300 items from the Special Import Licence (SIL) category to the OGL list, very soon. Ramakrishna Hegde sought to justify this unprecedented move stating that this was necessary "to stimulate sustained economic growth by providing access to essential raw materials, intermediaries, components, consumeable and capital goods required for augmenting production."

But the list of items freed from import control belie the statement. It includes a whole range of consumer goods —fishery-products, dolls and toys, toilet articles, soaps, bottled drinking water and what not. None of these are essential goods. This will allow free dumping of all sorts of consumer goods, which are readily available from domestic sources. It will only lead to a further drain of precious foreign exchange and adversely affect indigenous industry and agriculture. All the while, chanting of 'Swadeshi' goes on!

Double speak, unlimited! PM's AGENDA AT CII

The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee excelled in this uninhibited propitiation of big business and foreign capital. Addressing the annual conference of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the Prime Minister took pains that continuity will be the hall mark of his governance in the realm of economic reforms. He assured that whatever be the changes in the political arena, the economic agenda will not be impacted. He also outlined a 13 point programme at the meeting which include, *inter alia*:

* The Government will withdraw from the economic production sectors and adopt the role of legislator, facilitator and regulator

* The structural changes will be carried out downwards to the states and local bodies as well

* All laws and regulations gov-

erning trade and industry will be reviewed, radically simplified and wherever need be scrapped.

* A transparent and non-discriminatory and non-discretionary policy will govern the Foreign Direct Investments.

* Proposals involving Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will be cleared within a maximum time limit of 10 days.

* Foreign Exchange Regulation Act will be replaced

* Pension and insurance funds will be utilised to finance infrastructure development

* Agro industries will be modernised

* Urban land ceiling laws will be repealed

* Immediate steps will be taken for imaginative restructuring, disinvestment and reduction in losses of the public sector.

* All electricity boards will be restructured. By showering unequivocal praise on the Andhra

and Orissa Governments, for their 'bold' reforms in power sector, the PM has set the direction — privatisation and profit-motivated operation.

(The Ministry of Power has faithfully acted in post-haste to resort to issue of ordinance for the setting up of electricity regulatory authorities. Even some of the allies in the ruling coalition could not digest this move and the PM had to assuage them by promising some amendments at the stage of bringing up a Bill to replace the ordinance).

TO DECEIVE MASSES

R K Kumar, the State Minister for Finance had already announced that enactment will be made to open up the insurance sector and establishing the Insurance Regulatory Authority. No wonder the BJP Government has pushed beneath the carpet, the fact that the predecessor PM, I K Gujral, had to withdraw the IRA Bill at the

stage of voting, in the face of stout opposition from the Left, with BJP also backing up! Kumar has also declared that the financial sector reforms would also be speeded up. As to the bold talk of 'India shall be built by Indians' the recent announcement of the Government spokesmen offering counter guarantees in power sector for the non-Indians building power projects, calls the bluff.

All these point to one blatant fact 'Swadeshi' is just a slogan to deceive the gullible masses of the country. The target of the BJP led coalition is to make the performance of Narasimha Rao, Manmohan Singh, Chidambaram, etc to pale into insignificance and show themselves up as champions of liberalisation, globalisation, privatisation, 'miracle'!

The Indian working class must be vigilant and step up efforts to fight the 'pseudo-Swadeshi' economic policy of this Government.

CAPITAL MISERY

Nearly two years after the Supreme Court ordered the closure of 168 polluting industries in Delhi, the workers in the affected units remain high and dry.

A Supreme Court order of July 8, 1996, which directed the relocation from Delhi of 168 industries that were classified as "hazardous and noxious" under the Master Plan of Delhi, 2001, has disrupted the lives of thousands of families of workers. The workers were promised continued employment or reasonably good compensation, but in the majority of cases they

have been denied both. The order was in response to a public interest petition filed by Magsaysay Award-winning Supreme Court lawyer M C Mehta.

The Master Plan that became operative in August 1990 does not permit "heavy and large industrial units" in Delhi. The Court ruled: "Hazardous and noxious industries classified as H(a) are required to be shifted within a maximum prescribed period of three years. H(a) industries should have been shifted by the end of 1993." The Bench, which comprised Justices

Kuldip Singh and Faizan Uddin, held that "the H(a) industries are operating in Delhi illegally and in utter violation of the mandatory provisions of the Master Plan."

The industries were directed to be relocated in view of the growing pollution in Delhi. The Court observed that the city had become "a vast and unmanageable conglomeration of commercial, industrial, unauthorised colonies, resettlement colonies and unplanned housing. There is a total lack of open spaces and green areas. Once a beautiful city, Delhi now

presents a chaotic picture." The Court held that the only way to relieve Delhi from its huge additional burdens and pressures was to de-concentrate the population, the industries and the economic activities in the city and relocate them in various towns in the National Capital Region.

Although polluting industries have been monitored under the direction of the Supreme Court since January 1995, a decision on their relocation was delayed because industries that were to be relocated had not been identified. On March 24, 1995, the Court directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to issue notices to 8,379 industries that were operating in certain areas in violation of the Master Plan.

The case dragged on until July 1996 when the Court ordered closure of 168 identified industries with effect from November 30, 1996. The order was unconditional. The Court stated, "Even if the relocation of industries is not complete, they shall stop functioning in Delhi...."

Delhi is rated among the most polluted cities in the world. According to "Slow Murder: The Deadly Story of Vehicular Pollution in India," a document prepared by the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, vehicular emissions are the largest contributor to air pollution. According to the Delhi Pollution Control Board, 64 % of the air pollution in the city is caused by exhaust from vehicles. In Mumbai, vehicular pollution accounts for 52 % of the total air pollution. The corresponding figure

for Calcutta is 30 %.

In Delhi, 29 % of the air pollution is caused by industrial sources, of which industrial units account for 12%. The major share of industrial pollution is contributed by the three thermal power plants located within the city.

Statistics compiled by the CPCB show that while Delhi's population grew four-fold between 1961 and 1991, the number of vehicles increased 51 times in the corresponding period. On the subject of water pollution caused by industrial waste, the Supreme Court observed that industries were responsible for most of the effluents discharged into the Yamuna. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the New Delhi Municipal Council discharged sewage directly into the river.

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has another perspective of the situation. It says that the poor have become targets in the crusade for a clean Delhi. The 50,000-odd workers employed in the 168 units were assured comprehensive terms of compensation and future employment. However, only a very small percentage were redeployed after all the "H" category (highly polluting) industries were closed down on November 30, 1996, the CITU said.

Workers were promised employment in the relocated industries. The Court had stated that the terms and conditions of their employment should not be altered to their detriment. Until they were redeployed, the workers were to be considered to be in active employment and were entitled to full wages with continuity of service.

In addition, all workers who agreed to shift were to be given shifting bonus to help them resettle in new locations, the order said.

However, the Court also held that all workers employed in units that failed to relocate as well as those workers who declined to shift to new locations would face retrenchment with effect from November 30, 1996. They would be paid the retrenchment compensation as well as one year's wages as additional compensation. The managements were also ordered to pay gratuity to the workers. On December 4, 1996, the Court directed the industries that had decided against moving to new locations to pay their workers compensation amounting to six years' wages, by April 30, 1997.

In a report titled "The Day After," published in July 1997, the Janwadi Adhikar Manch, an organisation that has campaigned on behalf of the workers, observed that only the Ayodhya Textile Mills, a public sector unit, had paid compensation to workers as per the court directive.

The CITU and the women's and students' organisations of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) participated in a "Save Delhi" convention on January 28, 1998. The convention noted that more than a year after the closures, the workers had "received virtually no compensation" and were reduced to "starvation."

The CITU sent a delegation of lawyers to Baddi in Himachal Pradesh—where Birla Textile Mills claimed its factory had been relocated. The team found that

there was no factory there, only a shed without any machines. Delhi CITU General Secretary, Surajbhan Bharadwaj said: "Seven of our workers signed the option form that confirmed their willingness to abide by the Supreme Court order and go along with the relocated industries. But we found no work in progress and when the workers desired to register their attendance, they were not allowed to do so."

He said that a majority of the industries had no intention of relocating and the court order had facilitated the retrenchment process. A report by the Janwadi Adhikar Manch said that the decision to relocate the Birla Textile Mills unit in Baddi was made soon after the Court amended its order to December 4, 1996 directing that workers be paid six years' wages in the event of closure and non-relocation.

The CITU team's findings at Baddi confirmed the workers' worst apprehensions about the intention of the industry barons. For many workers, who had completed 20 years of service in the same place, relocation was an unthinkable proposition as their children were enrolled in local educational institutions.

A resolution passed at the "Save Delhi" convention stated that the real agenda of the Delhi Government was to "cleanse" Delhi of its poor and convert it into the exclusive domain of the rich and the powerful. The poor were seen as creating "ugly slums" that disturbed the "aesthetics" of the city. The convention demanded that the Central Government promul-

gate an ordinance to scrap the court order relating to the closure or relocation of industries; the workers of the units that had closed down be paid six years' wages as compensation; industrial units relocating outside the National Capital Region be treated as closed and the workers be paid six years' wages as compensation; units relocating within the National Capital Region pay full wages to their workers until such time as these units became fully functional at the new sites; and industry owners who cheated the workers of compensation be prosecuted.

The resolution said that relocation should be undertaken only in unavoidable cases. It suggested that anti-pollution measures be made mandatory for all industrial units instead of just asking polluting units to relocate; pollution control be enforced strictly with respect to all vehicles; all waste water that flows into the Yamuna be treated and a proper garbage disposal system be introduced.

"Things Fall Apart - Voices of women affected by the closure of 168 industrial units," a report by the Janwadi Adhikar Manch, sketches the pathetic conditions in which the workers and their families live. A survey of seven large industrial units was undertaken and 53 families were interviewed. The team found that only 16 families had a regular source of income after the closures. In all cases, there had been a steep drop in family incomes. While members of 20 families were employed as casual labourers, members of five families had taken to piece rate work.

In the latter case, mostly women and children did such work.

Ras Behari Prasad, who had been an employee of Birla Textile Mills for 19 years, said that he had a monthly salary of Rs 2,100 earlier. After the closure, he worked as a watchman in a residential colony for Rs 800 a month.

Many workers, who had earned upto Rs 2,500 a month, plied cycle-rickshaws after the closure of their factories. Their daily wage now ranged between Rs 20 and Rs 50. Some others are employed as *beldars* (the lowest paid work in construction). Women and children contribute to family incomes through *bindi*-making, making flower garlands, wrapping sweets, and so on.

One woman said, "*Aadmi paise nahin laa paata, kisi na kisi ko to kaam karna padega*: (My husband cannot earn any money. Someone has to work in the family). She took to making *bindis* after working as a domestic help.

All the respondents were in varying degrees of debt. They had all cut down on food. They could not afford to buy milk for the children; they bought just enough milk to make tea. Provisions were bought in smaller quantities. *Chapatris* were eaten with salt or chutney as vegetables had disappeared from their diets. Social life was under strain and family tensions were on the increase. Many older children discontinued school or did various kinds of work after school.

"How can I buy school uniforms for my children when we can afford only salt and chillies to eat with our *rotis*," says Mathuri, a former employee of Birla Textile

Mills. "If at all workers had to be removed, the Supreme Court should have at least ensured that they were relocated nearby," said Bharadwaj of the CITU. Workers were reluctant to move out of Delhi as they were uncertain of the facilities that would be available in the new locations. Hardwar Dubey of the All India Federation of Trade Unions told *Frontline* that the Shivaji Marg unit of Shri Ram Food and Fertilisers had relocated in Rajpura in Punjaba where there were no basic facili-

ties. The factory would be operational only after one year.

While the owners of the 168 industries can make good some losses by selling their land and premises, the workers feel cheated and let down by all, including the judiciary.

On May Day last year, Sarveh Chand, a frustrated employee of Swatantra Bharat Mills, immolated himself in front of Parliament House. On May Day this year, trade unions and working class representatives raised several vital issues concerning the

rights of workers. They include the threatened mass displacement of workers in the context of the impending closure of another 52,000 industrial units; the demolition of workers' colonies to cleanse Delhi; the non-implementation of minimum wages and the freeze on dearness allowance in industrial units by the Delhi government; and the rights of workers to education, health, housing and civic amenities.

(Courtesy: *Frontline*, Story by T K Rajalakshmi in May 22, 1998, issue)

CITU HIGHLIGHTS PRESSING ISSUES OF LABOUR

MK. Pandhe has addressed a letter to Dr. Satyanarayan Jatia, the new Minister for Labour, Government of India, highlighting the pressing issues faced by the workers in the country. Here is the text of the letter.

"On behalf of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, we extend our greetings to you, on assuming office as the Union Minister for Labour.

2. We wish to place before you some of the urgent issues of concern to the vast millions of the workers in our country and urge you to initiate prompt and speedy measures to resolve them.

3. We note that the National Agenda for Governance which forms the programme of the present Government had assured as follows:

Quote: "Labour: We will make labour, both organised and unorganised, an equal and proud partner in the production of the na-

tion's wealth and in its progress. Laws relating to equal pay for equal work for men and women shall be strictly implemented." Unquote.

4. We emphasise here that labour as one of the key players in the economic sphere shall be involved in the process of taking policy decisions on all important matters concerning the economy. We urge that an appropriate mechanism be evolved for ensuring periodical and prior consultations with the central trade union organisations. Steps to pass the Workers' Participation in Management Bill pending in Parliament for almost a decade now will be an appropriate measure to make labour a partner.

5. The last verification of membership of the various trade unions based on the annual returns submitted for the year 1989 is under challenge before the court. The Central Trade Unions in the coun-

try have been pressing for enactment of a legislation to introduce secret ballot for ascertaining the membership of trade unions for purposes of verification and recognition. Enactment of such a legislation without any further prevarication is the need of the hour.

6. The National Agenda for Governance also mentions "speedy redressal of industrial sickness." The number of sick industrial units is alarmingly on the increase. Concrete measures to identify the causes of sickness and to revive the sick units are urgently needed.

7. The Sick Industrial Companies (Amendment) Bill pending in the Parliament is designed to facilitate a fast-track liquidation of the sick industrial companies and not the revival. The Central Trade Unions are unanimously of the view that the Bill in its present form should totally be scrapped and a fresh amending legislation be brought, in due consultation

Dr Satyanarayan Jatiya, Union Labour Minister of the new Government at the centre called a meeting on 13th April, 1998 of the representatives of Central Trade Union Organisations and Employers organisations. M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary, represented the CITU at the meeting. The points made by him at the meeting, as per the record note or discussions circulated by the Labour Ministry, are reproduced below:

Shri M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) :

“Regretting the decline in the spirit of tripartism, he observed that the meetings of special tripartite committee on sick industrial undertakings have not been held almost for a period of two years and even in regard to the meeting which was held in August, 1996, the decisions have not yet been fully implemented. He was of the view that all tripartite committee set up in the Ministry of Labour should meet at close and regular intervals and their decisions should be faithfully implemented. He also felt that Government should immediately adopt secret ballot as a tool for verification of membership. Regretting the phenomenon that contractualisation and casualisation of labour was on the increase in the wake of globalisation and privatisation, he felt that the decision of the Supreme Court in Airport Corporation of India Vs. United Labour Union should be implemented in letter and in spirit. He regretted the decline in the status of Ministry of Labour and felt that the Ministry of Labour should not be bypassed in the decision-making process of Government which affected both industry and labour. He deplored that sickness of the industry was a motivated phenomenon and the causes and factors contributing to sickness should be critically analysed. He regretfully observed that even though Central legislation on agricultural labour was in the agenda of the Ministry of Labour for more than 20 years the legislation could not see the light of the day as yet. Referring to the scope, content, quality and impact of Social Security laws, schemes and programmes, he observed that not only the coverage of EPF and ESI should be enlarged by extending them to the unorganised sector, there was urgent and imperative need to bring about a qualitative change and improvement in the functioning of these schemes as well as in the functioning of the two organisations. Supporting the stand of the Government on the issue of Social Clause, he felt that some of the Core Conventions should be ratified by the Government of India without further delay. There was also need for better implementation of the ratified Conventions. In regard to the visit of Indian tripartite the delegation to Geneva to attend the International Labour Organization meeting, Dr, Pandhe observed that they all should stay at one hotel which would facilitate better communication and sharing of information. He also suggested that the Indian delegation should have a woman representative.”

with the unions. We request you to initiate appropriate action in this regard urgently.

8. The entire trade union movement in the country has been demanding removal of the obsolete ceilings in the Payment of Bonus Act, which have pushed out a large sections of organised workers from the purview of the bonus payment. Income parameters presently in force in many of the industrial legislations also need to be removed in the context of present inflation and wage-level. We request you to take immediate steps meeting the genuine de-

mands of the trade unions in this regard.

9. The last changes in the Employees State Insurance Act, had a twin impact of raising the coverage limit in terms of salaries and increasing the rate of contribution. The working of the ESI Corporation leaves much to be desired. We request you to please review the Act and its working with Central Trade Unions and move to introduce appropriate changes.

10. The Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 was introduced by the Government of India with vast sections of workers dissenting.

The last two years of the working of the scheme has only exposed the shortcomings and inadequacies inherent in the scheme. The issue needs to be evaluated with an open mind and a beneficial scheme without encroaching the provident fund contributions has to be evolved. Pending this, the existing scheme may be made optional. We urge you to initiate appropriate action with the end in view.

11. The spectre of disinvestment is haunting the employees of the Central Public Sector Units which account for a large chunk of em-

CITU FLAYS FUND-BANK DICTATED ECONOMIC POLICIES

The customary pre-budget consultation between the Finance Minister and the Trade Unions was held on 24th April 1998. The CITU was represented by S. Dev Roye, Secretary. Attacking the recently announced Exim Policy, whereby 340 items have been put under OGL and the declaration of the Finance Minister made during his recent visit to USA that the Government is "committed to broadening, deepening and accelerating the reforms", the CITU representative indignantly pointed out as to how the BJP-led coalition government is implementing the Fund-Bank dictated economic policies.

The CITU strongly opposed privatisation of public sector including opening up of Financial Sector even to indigenous private capital. Rejecting the recommendations of the Disinvestment Commission, CITU demanded that the Commission should be scrapped let alone giving it a statutory status.

While demanding revival of the sick unit in public sector, the CITU suggested that the Finance Minister should convene a meeting with the trade unions ensuring the participation of the concerned Administrative Ministers for finalising the broad strategies for revival of sick units. The Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Amendment Bill pending in Parliament must be scrapped and a fresh bill to be prepared taking into confidence the views of the trade unions.

CITU demanded regular payment of salaries and immediate steps to revise the wages and release of revised D.A. pending since 1992 to the workers of sick PSUs. At the same time it also asked for immediate commencement of long due wage negotiations effectively for the PSUs and pending that Interim Relief should be cleared.

Other major demands made by CITU to the Finance Minister were enactment of Agricultural Labour Bill, steps to ensure democratisation of public sector management, removal of ceilings on Payment of Bonus Act, raising the maximum ceiling of Gratuity to Rs.3.5 lakh, raising the limit of exemption from Income Tax to Rs.1 lakh, release of certain applicable benefits to other employees as granted to central govt. employees under the Fifth Central Pay commission.

employment in the organised sector. The Disinvestment Commission has come out with seven volumes of reports, which are all aimed at privatisation of the majority of the PSUs referred to it. All the Central Trade Unions have unanimously expressed their opposition to the Disinvestment Commission and its recommendations.

We request you to initiate a meaningful dialogue with the Central Trade Unions and the Committee of Public Sector Unions(CPSTU), to make the CPSUs strong, efficient and healthy, instead of aimlessly pursuing the recommendations on disinvestment. Also, wage revision for the employees of CPSUs is overdue since 1st January, 1997 and this needs to be expedited. 12. The proportion of

unorganised sector workers in the total population of working people is on the increase. The 34th Session of the Indian Labour Conference held during December, 1997 could not, in the then political atmosphere, draw up any concrete action plan. The consensus there, however, pointed to urgent need to take steps to ensure a decent minimum wage and extension of industrial legislation benefits and social security measures to the vast unorganised sector workers, who are worst hit by the economic liberalisation. Improvements in and proper implementation of Minimum Wages Act and other labour and social security legislations covering the entire unorganised sector is an urgent need. A comprehensive new leg-

islation to cover the unorganised sector workers may also be brought up at the earliest.

13. The Government of India have recently gone in for conducting family budget surveys for introduction of a new series of price index with 1996 as the base year. This has been resorted to without any consultation, whatsoever, with the Central Trade Unions. We request you to convene a meeting of the Central Trade Unions to discuss and evolve a transparent and trustworthy mechanism for price index compilation.

14. Enactment of a comprehensive legislation on agricultural workers has been a long pending demand of the trade union movement. Some of the changes incor

(cont. on page 23)

TOWARDS A TWO DAYS NATION WIDE STRIKE

Public Sector Workers plan campaign & agitations

The extended meeting of the CPSTU held at New Delhi on 12-13 May '98 was attended by about 130 leading trade union representatives who came from all over the country representing all the major Public Sector industries. The meeting was presided over by a presidium consisting of S. Dev Roye (CITU), H. Mahadevan (AITUC), V. Tiagi (HMS), Michael B. Fernandes (JAF, Bangalore) and G. Narasingha Rao (PSU Coordination Committee, Hyderabad).

On the basis of the deliberations and suggestions of the representatives, the CPSTU, while reiterating its commitment for continuously improving performance in Public Sector, has adopted the following programmes of propaganda, agitation and action to defeat the anti-Public Sector Policies of the Government of India and realising the long pending urgent issues of the Public Sector workers noted hereunder:

1. Expeditious revival of all sick PSU Govt must act as promoter and give necessary financial assistance.
2. Scrap of SICA Amendment Bill introduced in the Parliament.
3. Embargo on wage revision of the PSUs referred to BIFR and also on payment of slab system VDA should be withdrawn immediately. The 67 PSUs under Central Govt. DA should also be granted wage revision.
4. Already delayed wage negotiations in all CPSUs (where the ten

ure of previous agreement has expired) must be started forthwith in right earnest without attaching any conditions.

5. No privatisation of Public Sector units.
6. Stop disinvestment of PSU shares and scrap the Disinvestment Commission.
7. No deployment of contract workers in permanent and perennial nature of jobs; regularisation of existing contract workers.
8. Removal of all ceilings in the Payment of Bonus Act by bringing suitable legislation; upward revision of exemption limit of Income Tax.
9. Enhancement of ceiling on payment of Gratuity to Rs.3.5 lakhs with effect from 1.4.1995 in line with the Central Government employees.
10. PSUs should be allowed to devise separate Pension Scheme without diverting compulsorily any fund from contributory PF scheme. PSUs - who have applied for exemption should be granted immediately.

CAMPAIGN, ACTION PROGRAMMES

Two Days nation-wide strike by all the central public sector workers during the next winter session of Parliament

For preparation of the strike, the following propaganda and agitational programmes are to be implemented besides any further additional programme according to local situation.

1. Gate meeting to explain the

decisions of the CPSTU meeting to be organised by 1st week of JUNE '98.

2. Joint Convention to be followed by massive demonstration at each unit level to be completed by 20TH JUNE '98.

3. State/Regional level joint conventions during the months of July and August 1998 in all the State capitals and major PSU centres.

Some such centres are:-

- (a) Bangalore (b) Hyderabad (c) Chennai (d) Kochi (e) Vizag (f) Dhanbad (g) Durgapur (h) Calcutta (i) Lucknow (j) Bhopal (k) Delhi (l) Chandigarh (m) Mumbai (n) Guwahati (o) Bhilai (p) Ranchi (q) Nagpur (r) Rourkela (s) Patna (t) Vadodara (u) Korba (v) Singrauli and others.

5. DEFEND PUBLIC SECTOR DAY all over the country by wearing Badges, countrywide canteen boycott by PSU workers and DAY LONG DHARNA before the respective Raj Bhawan in the States and submission of Memorandum to the Governor on 4TH AUGUST '98.

On the same day, Dharna and canteen boycott to be organised at all the Public Sector Industrial Centres away from the State Capitals.

6. NATIONAL CONVENTION ensuring massive participation by central public sector workers at New Delhi, in AUGUST, 1998, followed by demonstration before the residence of Prime Minister. The dates of the strike is to be declared from this convention.

7. Organising human chains in

TAKE LEAD, FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION CITU CALL

In a circular issued on 19-5-1998 the CITU Secretariat has endorsed the CPSTU call and drawn attention of all state committees and trade unions in PSUs to the undernoted points:

From the steps already taken by the BJP-led coalition government at the centre and statements made by the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, it is certain that attack on public sector and grip of foreign multinational companies on our economy are going to be further intensified putting economic sovereignty of the country at stake.

That under this government public sector shall be the worst victim is further evident from the fact that in the name of countering 'economic sanction', the private sector including the foreign multinational companies are allowed unrestricted entry into the core sector of our industry with untenable haste. The government is rather utilizing the sanction to impose their hidden economic agenda on the nation.

The movemental programmes of CPSTU must be perceived from the above considerations. It is imperative on the part of our state committees to take leading initiative for activating our public sector trade unions for successful implementation of the programmes along with the other constituents of the CPSTU as well as other trade unions irrespective of affiliations.

It is also very important to involve the mass of the people in the current phase of the movement of CPSTU. It is essential to ensure that fight to defend public sector attains the character of popular mass movement so as to pave the way for wider national movement against the World Bank-IMF dictated economic policies pursued by the successive central governments ever since the country has been pushed to the disastrous path of structural adjustment programme.

The state committees and the public sector trade unions are requested to contact the CITU centre for fixing the date for joint state/regional level convention. It is obvious that the fight to save public sector shall have to be taken to much greater dimension and that is dependent on the success of the current phase of movement. It is requested to send regular report on the programmes and the preparation. Further if any state committee and/or public sector trade unions needs any help and assistance from the centre, they may write accordingly.

M K PANDHE
GENERAL SECRETARY

defence of public sector. Date to be announced later.

CPSTU urges all the Public Sector Unions to make maximum efforts to involve common people from other sections of the society in the above programmes in defence of the public sector.

CPSTU appeals to all Public Sector workers irrespective of affiliations to join these programmes enmasse and make them a total success.

CPSTU also unanimously adopted a resolution extending support and solidarity to the ongoing strike of the Nurses of Govt. Hospital at

Delhi and condemning the repressive measures including invoking of ESMA and dismissal by the Govt. on the striking Nurses.

CPSTU extended support to the strike of the Public Sector Officers to be observed on 21st May 1998 and also to the struggle of the IDPL workers.

The joint declaration has been signed by M.K. Pandhe (CITU), H. Mahadevan (AITUC), A.D. Nagpal (HMS), Michael Fernandes (JAF, Bangalore), and G. Narasingha Rao (PSU CC, Hyderabad)

EDITORIAL BOARD
M K Pandhe (Chairman)
W R Varada Rajan
(Working Editor)
Vimal Ranadive,
PK Ganguly
Jibon Roy,
Tapan Sen,
S Dev Roye

WHAT AILS EMPLOYEES' STATE INSURANCE SCHEME? HOW TO REMEDY?

Kali Ghosh

The Employees State Insurance Scheme is a multi-dimensional three-in-one Social Security Scheme.

The benefits that are provided under the Scheme are:

1. Comprehensive medical benefit.
2. Sickness benefit i.e. Cash benefit for the period of sickness.
3. Maternity benefit.
4. Employment Injury Benefit.

(a) Temporary Disablement benefit.

(b) Permanent Disablement benefit.

(c) Dependents Benefit.

In addition, the Scheme also provides some other benefits i.e.

- (1) Funeral Expenses
- (2) Rehabilitation Allowance
- (3) Vocational Rehabilitation
- (4) Old age medical care for the retired person.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHEME

A Statutory body called the "Employees State Insurance Corporation" setup under the Employees State Insurance Act administers the Scheme. The Corporation comprises of representatives from Employers, Employees, Central and State Government, medical profession and the Members of Parliament nominated by Govt. of India. The day to day administration is carried out by the Headquarter. The Corporation has its Regional offices in different

regions.

The medical care in States is administered by the State Governments.

The cash benefits for sickness and employment injury benefits are administered by the Regional offices.

FINANCE

The Scheme is funded by the contributions from employers and employees. The rates of contribution payable are as under:

Employers' contribution - 4.75% of wages

Employees' contribution - 1.75% of wages

The State Govt. contribute 12.5% of expenditure on medical care, subject to a maximum Ceiling imposed by the ESI Corporation from time to time.

The Corporation is supposed to be an autonomous body, but all matters pertaining to recruitment of Staff and principal officers, fixation of their pay scale, service conditions, promotional avenues etc. require prior approval of the Govt. of India.

Till 1984 the Corporation was enjoying the powers to make regulations on all procedural matters pertaining to registration of Factories/Establishments and of insured persons, collection of contributions, medical certification, disbursement of benefits, constitution of medical boards and medical appeal tribunals, prescrib-

ing return, registers of record to be maintained by employers etc. as specified in Sec.97 of the Act. In 1984, by an amendment of the Act, the absolute power of the Corporation to make these regulations has been withdrawn and subjected to prior approval of the Govt. of India. From the position of decision-making body, the ESI Corporation has been relegated to the position of mere recommendatory body. While the Govt. of India is exercising its over-all control in all matters, and utilising its reserve fund to meet their budget deficits, they are not contributing a single paisa for the operation of the Scheme.

It may be mentioned in this connection that, at the initiative of the CITU nominee in the corporation a unanimous resolution was adopted requesting the Govt. of India to contribute for the scheme at par with the State Govts, or at least to bear the administrative expenses, but the proposal was straight away turned down by the Govt. of India.

Again, in 1993, on the basis of the report of the Cash benefit Sub-Committee, the Corporation recommended enhancement of various Cash benefits, but till now most of the recommendations except a few have not received the approval of the Central Govt. Further, the Corporation at the instance of Govt. of India depos-

ited about Rs.2500 crores with the Reserve bank of India in the Special Deposit Account. Of late, Central Govt. have issued a directive that the Corporation will not be allowed to withdraw any amount from the said Special Deposit Account, they will only be allowed to withdraw the annual interest.

Thus, the Govt. of India is not only exercising their arbitrary power in the day to day administration of the Corporation, they are also standing in the way of extending benefits to the insured persons..

MEDICAL BENEFIT

Within the parameters prescribed by the Corporation, the administration of the medical benefit is the responsibility of the State Govt.'s. But in most States the picture is very dismal.

The wage ceiling for coverage has now been raised to Rs.6500/- from Rs.3000/- per month. All concerned were very much reluctant to widen the coverage of the scheme, one of the main reasons being that the medical care provided under the scheme is very unsatisfactory. Its standard has been deteriorating day by day. The main complaints are as follows:-

- (1) Drugs and medicines are not available
- (2) Medical and para-medical staff are very inadequate
- (3) The maintenance of the dispensaries and hospitals is very poor
- (4) The facilities provided in the hospitals are much below the required norms
- (5) In many dispensaries and hos-

pitals even the minimum equipment required are not provided or remain out of order

(6) Diagnostic and Specialist centers are either non-functioning or not functioning properly

(7) In many hospitals superintendents and doctors do not stay in the hospitals, even though provided with staff quarters

The out-door treatment is provided through panel system and also through service dispensaries. It was decided that Service System will gradually replace the panel system. Not that the Service system is functioning very efficiently, but atleast there is scope for better supervision and control. Panel doctors are not amenable to discipline and a large number of them look at the scheme as a minimum source of income. The doctors at all level, whether directly in the service or doctors at the panel systems, are the lever in which the whole edifice of the scheme stands. It is not the question of dedication, it is the professional integrity, their duty towards the patient that is being questioned.

THE WOES OF WORKERS

By exercising various administrative and regulatory control, the Govt. of India and ESI Corporation are restricting and restraining various benefits to the workers. The workers are unnecessarily harassed. They are forced to move from pillar to post to avail of the medical as well as cash benefits.

To be entitled to sickness benefit and disablement benefit due to employment injury, a worker is to wait for two days. The inherent

idea being that absence of such provision will enfore absenteeism on false pretext. It is to be noted that a day's loss of earnings is much higher than the sickness benefit.

A condition has been imposed on the State Governments that, if the average number of sickness exceeds 5 days (earlier it was all India average of the current year and in a year then excess payment made by the Corporation will be adjusted from the States' share. This is a panel clause, purported to pressurise the State Govt. so that the doctors restrict their medical leave certificates.

The ESI Scheme is a contributory scheme. Non-payment or delayed payment of contributions disentitles an insured person from Medical benefit, Sickness benefit and Maternity benefit (no contributory condition is applicable for entitlement to the disablement benefit for employment injury).

Quite a sizeable section of the workers suffer for no fault of their own, because some errant employers wilfully disregard their responsibility to deposit the contributions collected from the wages/salaries of the workers along with employers contribution due to ESIC. The Act provides for penal as well as dues recovery action from the defaulting employers. Callous and inept handling of the matter has completely failed to give a check, rather it is on the increase. Many employers are also taking shelter behind Section 22 (1) of the Sick Industrial Companies Act. Not to speak of payment of arrears dues, they are not even paying the current dues. The ESIC is supposed

to realise the defaulted amount and in many cases they do get it by certificate cases, though belated. However, it is not understandable why a worker and his family members should suffer for non-payment of contributions by their employers and when the said dues are realisable by the ESIC?

Workers and members of their families are supposed to get full medical care free of cost including free supply of drugs and dressing, pathological examination, specialised investigations like CAT scan, MRI, Ultrasonography etc., including super speciality treatment like Heart Surgery, Neuro Surgery, kidney transplantation. If the scheme fails to provide such facilities and treatment for any reason, the cost of such treatment or diagnostic facilities or purchase of medicines are reimbursed. But due to control by the State Finance Deptt. and timely non-availability of the fund, workers are unnecessarily harassed and they are to wait for long even for a petty payment.

CORRUPTION RIDDEN

The administrative sector is inert, undisciplined, inefficient, self-gratifying and corrupt at important places of their activities. All conveniently forget that they earn their bread and butter from the contributions the workers and their employers make towards the scheme. The way the scheme is functioning, the workers have become very apathetic and the scheme has become very unpopular.

Despite all its deficiencies and administrative lapses, the Corporation has grown and the growth is

colossal. Appropriate measures should be taken to decentralise its operation. But taking advantage of the mal-functioning of the scheme by the State Governments, there was an effort to take over the administration of the medical scheme from the State Governments. However due to opposition from various quarters this attempt could be stalled.

Recently, an idea of State level Subsidiary Corporation has been mooted. We should give serious thought to this proposal. Appropriate measures should be taken to decentralise the operation of the scheme. To avoid bureaucratisation of the administration some kind of popular control with the involvement of workers has to be thought of.

The Scheme is for the workers, funded by the workers. Crores of Rupees are being spent but the benefits of the scheme do not properly reach the beneficiaries.

The trade unions can not absolve themselves of their responsibilities and it is to be admitted that we have failed in discharging our responsibilities in this regard.

In fine, unless the scheme is reviewed thoroughly and improvement in the working of the scheme is made substantially and a new approach is thought of, the scheme will not become popular and cannot succeed.

REMEDY THE SITUATION

To remedy the situation, there is urgent need to build up a countrywide struggle for improvement and expansion of the ESI benefits its efficient administration of the scheme and effective control of the workers representa-

tives on the functioning of ESI Corporation has been emphasised. The demands to be highlighted by the united movement of the workers all over the country, *inter alia* are as under:

The ESI Corporations becomes autonomous in its real sense with power to add/amend and/or alter existing schemes introduced new schemes and benefits without interference from the Government of India.

The corporation should have full control over its own fund.

The ESI Corporation should be reconstituted so that workers representatives on the corporation have effective control over the functioning of the corporation.

The Administration of the scheme should be decentralised State level subsidiary corporation be formed with decision making powers.

The Government of India should contribute for the operation of the scheme and the entire cost of administrative expenses be borne by them.

Contribution from workers side be gradually abolished pending that:

1. Non-Contributory limit be raised to Rs 50/- per day
2. Workers contribution be reduced 1.5% of the Basic Pay and DA only.

A worker covered under the scheme shall continue to be covered irrespective of wage limit.

Standard benefit rate be raised to 0.75% of the pay with consequent increase in other benefits.

No worker and his family be debarred from any benefit of the scheme including cash benefits due to failure of the employer to

deposit contributions to the ESI authority, i.e. a coverable worker shall get and continue to get all benefits irrespective of contribution condition.

Condition of '2 days waiting' period be waived for entitlement cash benefits both for sickness and disablement.

The penal clause of stoppage of benefits for joining the strike be withdrawn.

Both indoor and outdoor medical services including super speciality treatment be improved.

Rules and regulations to avail of the medical and cash benefits be simplified.

The arrangements of medical services i.e. services by the IMF's service dispensaries and RBO's be

so made that it is available in all the days.

If for any reason the scheme fails to provide or the IP fails to avail of due to unforeseen circumstances medical treatment and other diagnostic facilities rules be formed so that and advance can be made to IP or members of his family subject to adjustment. This is necessary for costly treatment and diagnosis.

Rules of reimbursement be simplified and small payments can be made from the local offices.

No employer be allowed to escape taking shelter under Sec 22 of SICA Act.

Prompt and stringent actions be taken against the defaulting employers.

Initially the medical benefits under the scheme be extended for workers and members of their family of the unorganised sector with provision for nominal contribution.

Expenditure on this scheme be equally shared by both central and state governments.

Unimplemented recommendations of cash benefit committee be implemented forthwith.

Cashew workers scheme be re-introduced.

These and other demands to tackle the area specific problem should be the basis for launch of the struggle of the working class to expand this important social security measures to further height.

WFTU MEMORANDUM TO WTO

The Second Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) began in Geneva on 18 May, 1998.

The World Federation of Trade Unions in a memorandum sent to the meeting drew attention to several matters of vital concern to the working people and trade unions the world over.

We reproduce excerpts from the WFTU memorandum:

"Abundant jobs were promised by the promoters of the multilateral trade agreements, which led to the establishment of the World Trade Organisation. But as the years have gone by, these promises have remained unfulfilled. On the other hand, more countries are losing jobs or are faced with massive job losses because of the policy of

trade liberalisation without sufficient safeguards as well as because of the unfair competition and the rampant trade manipulation by monopolies and cartels.

The outflow of resources from the developing countries as well as the weaker economies has now become accelerated, as a consequence of the unequal trade and declining terms of trade for the developing countries where the bulk of the world's poor live. Regional integration without adequate safeguards has also shown similar negative trends. A recent assessment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) concludes that the "flood of imports from the USA has destroyed millions of jobs in traditional industry and agriculture in Mexico."

The human dimensions of the recent economic crisis and financial turmoil in South East Asia are equally colossal. Millions of jobs are being lost as whole sectors of industry become bankrupt and national currencies are under siege by the global financial speculators. The IMF and the international bankers impose more austerity and belt-tightening which means more job losses and much more poverty.

The multinational trade agreements which are supposed to create a level playing field for all trading partners have apparently failed to instil a sense of equity and fairness in the global market which is dominated by the transnational cartels.

On the other side, the world so-

cial situation is becoming worse. Solemn commitments of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) remain on paper. The growing hunger, poverty and unemployment are now recognised as the most serious violation of basic human rights, for the widespread and scandalous resort to child labour and the non-existence of trade union rights for the victims of backwardness and exploitation within all societies, the developing countries, in particular.

On 1st May 1974 - twenty-four years ago - the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action for the establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). That declaration was adopted to fulfil the spirit of the UN Charter to "*promote the economic advancement and social progress of all peoples*" by establishing a new international economic order "*based on equity, sovereignty, equality, interdependence, common interest and co-operation between states* —

which shall correct inequalities and redress existing injustices (and) make it possible to eliminate the widening gap between the developed and developing countries." The widening gap so sharply underlined a quarter century ago continues to widen.

Upholding the full permanent sovereignty of states over their natural resources and economic activities, the NIEO set itself the goal of establishing a "just and equitable" relationship between the prices of products, raw materials and primary commodities exported by developing countries, and the prices of capital and manufactured goods and equipment imported by them with the aim of bringing about improvement in their "unsatisfactory terms of trade".

As against these aims and objectives of the NIEO, those who are pushing the corporate agenda of the transnational corporations now seek, in the name of liberalisation and globalisation, to further entrench the absolute control and domination of the TNCs over all

natural resources and all economic and financial sectors. These proposals have raised a storm of protest from the trade unions, NGOs, political parties and several governments.

The recent financial turmoil has forced the world to think in terms of strict surveillance and regulation over capital movements and currency exchanges. While capital transfers for productive purposes and as trade finance should be encouraged, strict measures should be taken against the tycoons of speculative finance."

The WFTU memorandum emphasised the need to take measures to ensure that international trading systems are based on principles of equality, sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. It also called for the lifting of all trade sanctions against countries such as Cuba, Libya, Iraq and Iran which deprive working people of access to food, medicines and other essential commodities as well as deny job creating economic growth.

(cont. from page 9)

tional level it will not be possible to lay the basis of powerful struggles.

The CITU unions will have to organise independent actions on pressing issues which would create favourable atmosphere for others to join the movement. We have seen in the past some of the organisations which support the nationwide calls in the central level meetings, do not make any attempt to implement the calls. Here, the initiative by our unions and independent actions by us will create a favourable atmosphere for others to join in the common struggle. The vacillators also have to show their readiness to join the struggles when they see their ranks also press for united struggle on these issues.

(From the report to CITU, General Council)

(cont. from page 16)

porated by the earlier Government in the proposed Bill at the instance of the vested interests should not be included in the final Bill. We request you to take speedy steps for enacting such a legislation in consultation with the trade union.

15. During the past several rehabilitation/revival packages were evolved which however could not culminate in implementation for the sick industrial units in public sector. We urge effective steps for securing clearance and implementation of these packages.

We trust you will ensure periodical consultation with the Central Trade Unions on all matters concerning various sections of labour.

We look forward to your positive response."

HISTORIC STRUGGLE OF DELHI NURSES

A R Sindhu

The twelve days long strike of the nurses of the Govt. Hospitals of Delhi, successfully culminated with an agreement on 7.5.1998.

The Delhi Nurses Union, which spearheaded the strike had been taking up issues regarding disparities in their pay scales, right from the IVth Pay Commission time. They were assured that the disparities would be set right by the Vth Pay Commission. But even the 5th Pay Commission recommendations, instead of removing the disparities, gave rise to further anomalies. Repeated representations and pleas fell on deaf ears. In September 1997, after a 5 days strike by the Delhi Nurses Union, the Union Health Ministry reached an understanding assuring redressal of their long pending grievances over anomalies in pay scales, promotion, filling up of vacancies, setting up a Directorate of Nursing etc. A deadline of 6 weeks was agreed to for getting the Finance Ministry approval.

But even after 8 months, the Finance Ministry refused to grant the approval. Driven to frustration, the nurses gave an ultimatum to the Ministry and after 10 days relay hunger strike and 5 days to 2 hours strike, the nurses embarked on an indefinite strike from 5.5.1998.

The Sahib Singh Government of Delhi took to repressive measures. But the strike was total, bringing all the 28 Govt Hospitals in the capital to a standstill.



The effigy of the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Madan Lal Khurana, getting rough treatment at the hands of striking nurses. -The Statesman

Almost 12,000 nurses joined the strike. Nirman Bhawan, the headquarters of Union Health Ministry, witnessed massive demonstrations and a daily dharna, relay hunger strike, etc. The Delhi Govt. issued termination orders, invoked ESMA and started eviction of nurses from the hostel. But all these could not suppress the strike. More and more nurses from different hospitals joined the strike and support was pouring in from all States.

The CITU extended full support to the strike and condemned the move to invoke ESMA. The All India Coordination Committee of Working Women also supported the strike.

The Union Health Minister issued a statement that only after withdrawal of strike talks can be held. But at the intervention of the CITU leadership, he agreed to hold talks without preconditions with the nurses and the process of negotiations started.

While discussions with the Union Health Minister was going on positively, the ruling BJP tried to derive political mileage. The PM instructed Madan Lal Khurana to mediate. He held separate discussions with the nurses but later backtracked on the package offered by himself on 11.5.98. The enraged nurses burnt the effigy of Khurana the next day.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Govt. was going ahead with termination of nurses, eviction from hostel etc. One widow was thrown out from the hostel of RBTB hospital at midnight with her seven year old girl child who was seriously ill.

The Delhi state CITU organised a demonstration condemning the repressive measures, where Vimal Ranadive, Tapan Sen and S B Bhardwaj, Secretaries, addressed pledging support.

The Janwadi Mahila Samiti (AIDWA) extended support and staged solidarity actions.

The nurses of the AIIMS also

joined the strike from the 15th May, 1998.

In between an over enthusiastic Delhi Magistrate took *suo motto* cognisance of the strike and passed orders for arrest of the leaders of the strike. This highly objectionable intervention was subsequently stayed by the Delhi High Court.

The Delhi Health Minister Harsh Vardhan was itching to let loose severe oppression to break the

strike.

But at last the Health Ministry came with a package and on 16.5.98 the strike came to an end with an agreement. The agreement included (i) a cadre review immediately benefiting 1200 nurses of the Central Govt. hospitals, (ii) increase in nursing allowance from Rs.300, to Rs 1600 per month; (ii) formation of standing committee with nurses' repre-

sentatives to review status of pending matters; (iv) a standing committee to monitor filling up of posts; (v) establishment of nursing directorate by Sept. 1998; (vi) anomalies referred to the anomalies committee on pay revision; and (vii) no victimisation of the nurses.

The CITU congratulates the nurses for the victory accomplished with their unity.

VAJPAYEE GOVT. ON CONTRACT AWARDING SPREE ; CITU EXPRESSES SERIOUS CONCERN

It appears that the imposition of economic sanction on the country has become a boon for the private sector including the foreign multinational companies and handy for the Vajpayee government to ride on contract awarding spree.

As reported, the Government has "rushed through a decision and signed production sharing contracts for 18 (crude oil) exploration blocks, 11 of which are with US petroleum companies." Further, 34 proposals (14 Australian, 13 UK and 1 US and 6 Indian private companies) for contracting out the prospecting and exploration in the 49,000 square km mining areas in the states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat have been approved by the government. According to news paper report, the PMO has issued directive to the nodal ministries to expedite clearance of contracts in core sector to foreign multinational companies. As per available indications, within a matter

of days many more contracts are going to be awarded to the MNCs like Unocal, Enron, Occidental, Rexwood, Arco etc.

Sacrificing the economic interest and self-reliant industrial development of the country, the dangerous speed and dimension with which the private sector including foreign multinational companies are given entry into the core sectors like oil, mining etc. is definitely a matter of serious concern for the economic sovereignty of the country.

It is evident that the Government is utilizing the economic sanction as 'license' for destroying the public sector net work, allowing unrestricted entry of private sector including the foreign ones in the core sector of our industry.

The CITU warns the Government that they have no right to barter the economic sovereignty of the country and take undue advantage out of the sentiment of the people in the name turning the nation into a N-power. The economic sanc-

tion must not be mis-utilized for implementing the anti-people economic policies of the ruling parties.

The CITU further appeals to the working class and the democratic people to raise their powerful voice against the pro-capital and anti-people economic policies of the BJP-led coalition government, and exercise extreme vigilance on the steps being taken by the government in the name of facing the economic sanction.

ANGANWADI CONFERENCE

The 3rd All India Conference of the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers will be held from the 6th to 8th June 1998, at Bhopal, with the mass rally on 6th.

The working committee of the Federation which met at New Delhi on 27.3.1998 deliberated on the agenda before the conference and finalised the arrangements etc. The venue of the conference is Modh Samaj ki Bagiya, half - a kilometer away from Bhopal railway station.

ZENROREN'S MAY DAY MESSAGE TO CITU

On the occasion of May Day 1998, National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren) extends its cordial congratulations and warm solidarity to your union and all its members, and to all working people in your country.

On the threshold to the 21st century, workers of the world in almost all countries are suffering from employment destruction, i.e., massive unemployment and unprecedented wave of casualisation and marginalisation, cuts in social security, wage destruction and all-out deterioration of their working conditions.

It is characteristic, however, that the world has witnessed mounting workers' struggles including strike actions in resistance to these

attacks by governments and monopoly capital and for their pressing demands.

The Zenroren is waging struggles demanding for big wage increase and shorter working hours, stop of the labour laws revision, in particular, which undermines an eight hour day gained by workers of the world with the May Day as its origin, reduction of the consumption tax rate, against the successive revision of health insurance system, for the reduction of military budget, withdrawal of the US military bases. On May Day 1998, the day of workers' unity and international solidarity, the Zenroren wishes to express its determination to strive further for the interest of working people hand in hand with workers throughout the

world, succeeding to the militant history and tradition for over a century of May Day.

Let us make the May Day 1998 a good opportunity for further strengthening dialogue, cooperation and solidarity among broader workers and working people in respective countries and beyond their national frontiers in order to materialise the demands of all working people!

April 1998

National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren)

(The CITU has responded by sending a message greeting ZENORREN and the working class and people of Japan on the occasion of May Day, 1998- Editor)

3DAYS-STRIKE BY FMRAI

Over 40,000 Medical and Sales Representatives all over the country under the banner of the Federation of Medical and Sales Representatives' Associations of India (FMRAI), observed an unprecedented three days strike from 2nd to 4th March 1998. The strike was a total success all over the country completely paralysing fieldwork in the Pharmaceutical industry.

The three days strike was preceded by a "strike ballot" when 96% supported the strike.

In the ongoing process of product transfer, purchase, acquisition of shares merger of companies etc., in the Drug & Pharmaceutical Industry direct employment under

Principal employer has become a casualty. Large scale resort to contract, casual and trainee employment in lieu of permanent recruitment has reduced the job potential in the industry. Marketing executives and managers are deployed in replacement of sales employees. Service conditions of the medical and sales employees are adversely affected and their collective bargaining rights infringed. All legislations including the Sales Promotion Employees (Conditions of Service) Act are grossly violated.

The Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) the Indian Drugs Manufacturers Association (IDMA) and the indi-

vidual employers have not responded to repeated pleas of the Federation of Medical and Sales Representatives' Association of India (FMRAI) for industrywise negotiations and settlement of demands. This led to the strike.

The CITU while extending full support to the strike, urged the Government of India to immediately intervene and initiate the process of industry level discussions between the employers and the FMRAI to bring about a settlement of the issues.

In Delhi, strike-rally was greeted by P.K. Ganguly, Secretary, CITU, Sachdev, Secretary, AITUC, Vijayaraghavan, M.P. and others. (Report by Sudhir Kumar)

MAJOR WIN FOR MARITIME UNION OF AUSTRALIA

1400 Australian dock workers were sacked on 7th April 1998. They were employed by Patrick Stevedores, a private stevedoring company. In the language of economic reforms by the Government of Australia, this was part of a *waterfront reform* process.

Patrick Stevedores played a trick. The parent company did not engage the services of these dockers directly. It created four subsidiary companies. These subsidiaries were labour-supply contractors to the parent company.

The subsidiary companies were rendered bankrupt and the same day the 1400 dock workers were thrown out.

But, after a legal fight, the High Court at Canberra, upheld a lower court order, and ordered the reinstatement of the dismissed dockers under the Workplace Relations Act of Australia. This was within four weeks of their *enmasse removal!*.



Photo Courtesy: 'Frontline'

A Workers' march in Sydney on April 28, Hundreds of members from a range of unions rallied in support of the Maritime Union of Australia's struggle to have 1,400 of their members reinstated by Patric Stevedores.



CITU GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING

Chennai, April 1998