



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

COM. V G BHASKARAN NAIR

Com.V G Bhaskaran Nair, All India Secretary of CITU and a member of Kerala State Committee of CPI(M) died on April 28, 1996 after prolonged illness. He was suffering from cancer and was under treatment for almost one year. He was 67.

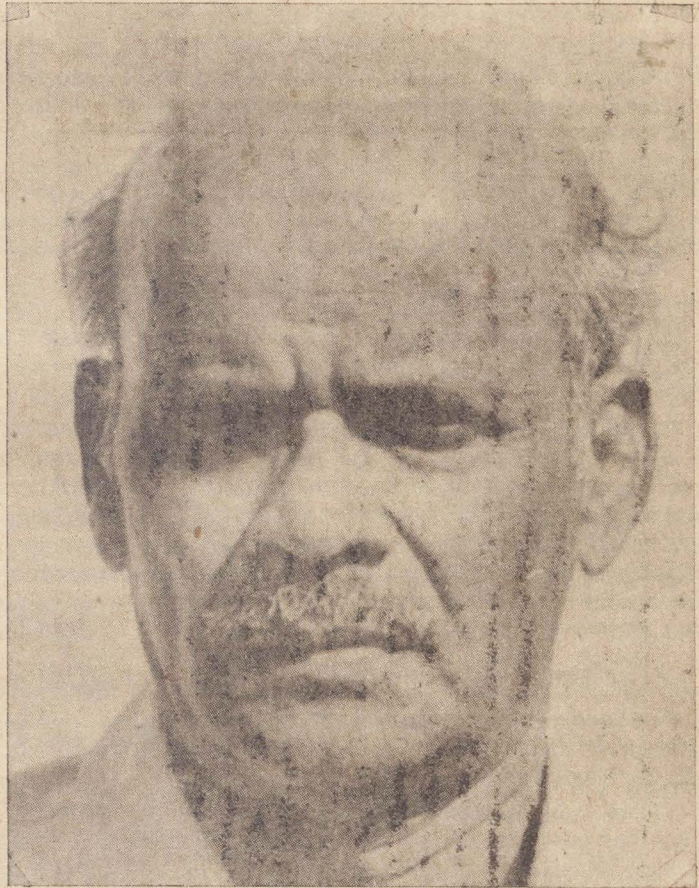
Affectionately called as VG, Com.Bhaskaran Nair started his trade union activities as a Glass factory worker in Ernakulam district in 1952. He also organised workers in the Travancore Chemicals & Metals Factory. After his retirement from the factory he worked whole time for the union.

He slowly expanded his sphere of activities to other sections of the working class. Within a short period he became the leader of textile workers. Later he was elected as State leader of the Textile workers. Apart from TU movement he actively participated in the communist movement.

Due to immense poverty VG could not continue his study and instead, was forced to take some work to support his family. Police repression against the communists was the permanent feature of those days. Anybody who found allegiance towards the communist movement was arrested and tortured mercilessly. Disregarding police repression Com.VG plunged into active politics and became an active member of the Communist Party.

The relentless fight for the upliftment of workers gave him a place in the hearts of lakhs of workers. For the last several years Com VG was looking after the State trade union centre of the CITU.

During the split in Communist Party in 1964 he



firmly stood with the CPI(M). While fighting for the working class unity Com.VG never compromised with the revisionist tendencies in the trade union movement. His contribution in placing the CITU at the forefront of the working class movement in Kerala is unerasable. The demise of Com.VG at this juncture is a great loss for the CITU. In his death the trade union movement and the CITU

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The Post Election Scenario and the Working Class

The recent Parliamentary elections have resulted in a hung Parliament with no clear cut majority for any political party. The Congress party suffered a resounding defeat and the people have given their verdict against its new economic policies and rampant corruption. Thanks to our electoral system, BJP has emerged as the largest single party but has secured support of only 22 per cent of the electorate. The Third Force comprising the LF-NF and other non-Congress non-BJP elements who have come together, mustered more support than the BJP combine, yet the President called the BJP to form the Government.

By the time this issue will be in the hands of the readers the BJP would have been defeated in Parliament, unless it succeeds in purchasing nearly 80 members of Parliament. Although, the multi-national companies and the Indian big business houses will do their best to help the BJP Government to purchase MPs who are available on sale, there is little chance of its survival, and in all likelihood the Third Force, namely, the United Front will be installed in power.

The left forces have not made advance in this election, though the Congress party has been trounced in Kerala and the LDF Government was formed there, and the Left Front in W. Bengal came to power for a record fifth time in a row, and both the Parliamentary seats were won by CPI(M) in Tripura.

It is however a matter of concern that both, the Congress and the communal forces gained sizeable support in several industrial areas. This highlights the need to pay more attention to these areas so that the workers are made to understand the dangerous implications of supporting the Congress and the BJP, and that they should swing their support to the left, democratic and secular forces in the country.

The five years of economic policies of the Narasimha Rao Government has brought the country on the verge of a debt trap and multi-national companies are now spreading their tentacles in all corners of the country to capture market for their products. The people below poverty line have increased rapidly with the spiralling prices of all commodities, while unemployment has reached menacing proportions. The industrial sickness has grown phenomenally while the exit policy is playing havoc with the livelihood of lakhs of workers. The trade union rights have been attacked and attempt to bring draconian bills in Parliament were made. In the name of giving pension scheme, provident fund benefits were sought to be reduced.

In a new situation it is the duty of the working class and the united trade union movement to get the policies reversed. This cannot be achieved without nationwide

concerted efforts. The big business houses welcomed the formation of the BJP Government at the centre, because the government announced that the reforms will be further accelerated, thereby opening the door more for the multi-national companies and honour all the commitments given by the Rao Government.

Though the working class has learnt through their experience the dangerous consequences of the so called liberalisation policies, there is need to intensify the propaganda among all sections of the workers since the election results have shown that a section of the workers has still some illusions about the structural adjustment programme.

The struggle for national self-reliance can be carried forward effectively if the working class takes a leading role in asserting its opinion about the dangerous consequences of opening of the floodgates of the economy to the multi-national companies. The other toiling sections of the society who are worst victims of these policies must be involved increasingly in the arena of struggle.

The communal danger has increased all over India due to the electoral advance of the communal forces in the country. The minority communities are feeling concerned about their future. The danger of disruption of working class unity and the secular fabric of the country being torn apart by the Sangh Parivar-Shiv Sena forces looms large. It is only the working class and the democratic movement that can safeguard the unity and integrity of the country from the semi-fascistic portends of these forces. There is urgent need to intensify propaganda among all workers to explain the harmful effects on the TU movement caused by communal forces in the country. We must keep in mind the role played by imperialist powers to spread the virus of communalism on the Indian soil.

In the highly complex situation in the era of liberalisation, the trade union movement has to decide its priorities of movements to meet the challenges of the new developing situation.

The National Platform of Mass Organisations should immediately take up these issues and chalkout a nationwide programme of united move against the reforms which have already caused deep wounds in the national economy. The CITU is confident that in the new situation the working class and the trade union movement in India will rise to the occasion and launch a vigorous campaign throughout the length and breadth of the country so that the forces advocating structural adjustment programme of the IMF and the World Bank, as well as the forces of communalism are squarely defeated in the country, which alone will save it from going towards a precipice.

21.5.96

VICTORIOUS LEADERS OF CITU IN ELECTIONS

In the Parliamentary and Assembly elections the following leaders of the CITU came out victorious from W.Bengal and Kerala:

W.Bengal

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

1. Com. Haradhan Roy - Working Committee Member, CITU.
2. " Tarit Baran Topdar - Working Committee Member, CITU.
3. " Basudev Acharya, General Council Member, CITU.
4. " Masadul Hossain - General Council Member, CITU.

WEST BENGAL STATE ASSEMBLY

1. Com. Jyoti Basu, Vice President, CITU.
2. " Md. Amin, Secretary, CITU, Vice President, W.Bengal CITU.
3. " Rajdeo Goala-W.C. Member, CITU, Vice President, W.Bengal CITU.
4. " Ranjit Kundu - Working Member, CITU
5. " Santi Ghatak - Vice President, CITU
6. " Bidyut Ganguly - Working Committee Member, W.Bengal State CITU.
7. " Lagandeo Singh - G.C. Member, CITU, W.C. Member, W.Bengal State CITU.
8. " Subhas Chakraborty - W.C. Member, CITU, Vice President, W.Bengal State CITU.
9. " Pralay Talukdar
10. " Biswanath Mitra - CITU W.Bengal State Council Member.
11. " Prakash Minz - State Council Member
12. " Chaitan Munda - Jalpaiguri Tea Union.
13. " Jagannath Oraon
14. " Lakshman Bagdi - State Council Member
15. " Mrinal Banerjee - W.C. Member, CITU; Secretary, W.B. CITU.
16. " Debabrata Banerjee - W. C. Member, W.Bengal

State CITU.

17. " Bangsagopal Chowdury
18. " Natabar Bagdi
19. " Mamata Mukherjee

Out of above, apart from Com. Jyoti Basu becoming the Chief Minister for the fifth time in a row, the following Comrades have become Ministers:

Md. Amin, Santi Ghatak, Bidyut Ganguly, Subhas Chakraborty, Mrinal Banerjee and Pralay Talukdar.

Kerala:

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

1. Com. O. Bharathan, W.C. Member, CITU, State Secretary, CITU
 2. " A. Sampath - State General Council Member.
- ### Assembly
1. Com. Susheela Gopalan, Vice President, CITU; Also State Vice President
 2. T. Sivadasa Menon, State Vice President, (Finance Minister).
 3. Anathalavattom Anandan, W.C. Member, CITU; State Secretary.
 4. Elamaram Kareem, G.C. Member, CITU; State Secretary.
 5. P. Raghavan, W.C. Member, CITU, State Committee Member.
 6. S. Sarma - State Committee Member.
 7. J. Mercykutty Amma, State Committee Member.
 8. T.K. Hamza - State General Council Member.
 9. Kadakampally Surendran - State General Council Member.
 10. M. Vijayakumar - President of State Union.
 11. M. Dasan - President of State Union.

Out of above, Com.T Sivadasa Menon has become the Finance Minister of Kerala, Com.Susheela Gopalan, the Industry Minister, Com.T K Hamza has become the Chief Whip of CPI(M) and Com.Vijay Kumar the Speaker.

CITU EXPRESSES CONCERN AT THE INSTALLATION OF COMMUNAL PARTY GOVT AT THE CENTRE

The Secretariat of the CITU has issued the following statement to the press:

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions expresses serious concern at the installation of the BJP Govt. at the centre. The country had horrifying experience of demolition of Babri Masjid under the active patronage and leadership of BJP, many of whom have been sworn in as Union Cabinet Ministers, and also the post demolition communal carnage in various places in the country engineered by this communal party.

It is unfortunate that such a party in spite of being in distinct minority position has been called to form the Govt.

CITU is also concerned over the reiteration by the

BJP leaders for pursuing the same Fund-Bank dictated Economic Policy against which the trade union movement has been carrying on grim struggle in the face of onslaught on their livelihood. This has become more evident also from the overenthusiast welcome to the BJP Govt. by business houses and their chambers and associations.

CITU urges the working class to remain vigilant and watch the development and prepare for united struggle against the pursuance and intensification of the same anti people economic policy and also the communal dangers that may be carried by the new govt at the centre.

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Manifestos of Major Political Parties on Labour

(We are publishing hereunder excerpts from the Election Manifestos of some major Political Parties on labour and issues relating to labour - Ed).

Indian National Congress(I)

The manifesto recounts the raising of eligibility limit of bonus from Rs 2500/- to Rs 3500/- per month and ceiling of calculation from Rs 1600/- to Rs 2500/- per month. It also recalls enhancement in the ceiling under the Payment of Gratuity Act to Rs 1 lakh. It talks of the implementation of recommendations of the National Commission on Rural Labour and extension of social security and insurance schemes to unorganised labour.

It promises full employment by the year 2002 by providing skill development and self-employment opportunities. It projects employment growth during 1996-97 by 150 lakh.

It promises to take all measures for substantial reduction of child labour and total abolition of child labour in hazardous industries.

The manifesto promises an old-age pension of Rs 100 per month for persons above 65 years of age, and Rs 500 for maternity assistance.

Bharatiya Janata Party

Chapter 4 of the manifesto is entitled "Our concept of employment and labour role." On employment, it promises to undertake large-scale housing activity to generate jobs as well as shelter. It promises to augment rural employment through schemes like Antyodaya, Gokul Gram, Gopal Gram, Saraswati Yojana, which are being implemented by BJP Govts. in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Promotion of vocational training is also reflected in the manifesto.

On labour policy, the manifesto promises to rationalise and simplify labour laws, introduce secret ballot as the criterion for recognition of unions, permit comprehensive collective bargaining, introduce workers' participation from shop-floor to board room in the public sector, public limited companies and foreign companies operating in India. The manifesto says that the party will not allow exit policy without fulfilling corresponding obligations towards labour. It promises to ensure better implementation of laws.

Regarding Govt employees, it promises to set up a permanent Employees Welfare Board with a view to resolving problems like time-scale promotion and revision of pay-scales, bonus, implementation of awards, housing, social welfare measures and travel concession for retired personnel.

It promises income-tax exemption for incomes upto Rs 60,000 per annum. It will realign the National Renewal Fund for greater focus on retraining and

redeployment of workers. The party proposes to confine public sector to only the sensitive areas where the nation's security is involved or where the presence of public sector is necessary for moderating the ill-effects of the unchecked private sector.

Janata Dal

The party promises to give "right to work" as a fundamental right through employment guarantee schemes. It promises to give unions the right to file prosecutions for violation of labour laws. The party will consolidate labour laws to one comprehensive industrial relations law. Management of Employees State Insurance (ESI) will be taken away from State Govts., and will be handled completely by the ESI Corporation. It promises to give increased social security rates and index them with cost of living. Workers' participation in management will be introduced at the highest levels. Amendments will be made to the Working Journalists Act to safeguard the interests of working journalists. Construction Workers Ordinance will be amended based on the recommendations of the Petitions Committee of the Lok Sabha.

All India Indira Congress (Tiwari)

The party promises to create 10 lakh additional jobs, provide for 100 per cent literacy within 10 years, launch a mass movement against rising prices, right to work as a fundamental right, a scheme for unemployment allowance and raise income-tax limit upto an annual incomes of Rs 1 lakh.

The party promises to give ownership rights to encroachers on public land and to unauthorised colonies.

Communist Party of India

The manifesto promises unemployment dole, right to work and education, employment guarantee schemes for a minimum of 200 days of employment in a year on minimum wages. It promises to link pension with the Cost of Living Index. Pension will be not less than the minimum wage in that employment. Reservation of at least 3 per cent of jobs is promised for the handicapped, disabled and the blind. The party promises setting up of a National Commission on Child-Bonded Labour. It also intends providing 1 kg of food grains for every child for every day of schooling.

Communist Party of India (Marxist)

Safeguard the country's economic sovereignty and strengthen its self-reliance; reverse the policies of unbridled liberalisation which undermine our sovereignty.

Stop privatisation of public sector; revise telecom, power policies, stop privatisation of financial sector; streamline public sector enterprises, provide them autonomy from bureaucratic controls and ensure

workers participation in management.

Reverse the present industrial policy; new policy to strengthen indigenous industry and domestic capacities; end to preferential treatment to foreign investors; entry of foreign capital to be decided on national priorities and technology needs. No amendment of the Indian Patent Act of 1970 which will erode India's sovereign right to develop domestic R&D.

Ensuring need based minimum wages for workers, protective legislation for unorganised workers; protection of labour from severe exploitation; protection of employment and emoluments and inflation linked increase in wages; Report of the fifth pay commission for government employees to be expedited and implemented.

Recognition of Trade Unions through secret ballot. Granting of pension to working people as a third benefit; one-rank-one-pension for ex-servicemen; upgrading pensions of all categories of pensioners in consonance with the cost of living; protection of the rights of handicapped employees.

Handloom weavers: Yarn to be provided at control rate for weavers and provide adequate infrastructure

for the marketing of their goods.

Guarantee right to work as a fundamental right; release accumulated food stocks to start food-for-work programmes to generate employment.

Free and compulsory education must be guaranteed by law for all children upto the age of 14 years.

Housing to be accorded the status of basic right; housing schemes for urban and rural poor to be implemented as an urgent priority.

Implementation of land reforms by plugging loopholes in the law and distribution of land; reversal of laws brought in due to the new economic policies diluting the land reform provisions; creation of authentic land reform records; security of tenure for tenants; provision of homestead land for rural poor.

Central legislation protecting the rights of agricultural workers, their wages living conditions and social benefits.

Fishermen: No licences for deep sea fishing to foreign companies and joint ventures. Protect rights of fishing people.

Increasing opportunities to women for employment and ensuring no discrimination in the pay, recruitment and promotion.

May Day Rally at Jammu

Hundreds of workers under the banner of CITU Coordination Committee assembled at Town Hall, Jammu on the May Day and held a rally.

Mohd. Maqbool convenor, CITU while addressing rally, paid homage to the martyrs and expressed solidarity with the struggling working class all over the globe against the exploiting classes for just social order. He explained the anti-people policies of the Cong(I) and communal role of the BJP which are against the interests of the working class. He appealed to the working class to vote for left, democratic and secular forces to ensure the defeat of both these forces who are bent upon to destroy the self reliant basis and secular ethos of the country.

The rally was addressed besides others by K K Bakshi (AIEU), Om Prakash (CITU), Purminder Singh, G N Malik (JKKT) Ravinder Koul (BEFI) and Surinder Singh and others. These speakers narrated the horrible experience in their respective sectors arising out of privatisation and liberalisation and pledged to fight these policies.

A cultural troop from Punjab also sang revolutionary songs and gave an impressive play.

The CITU affiliated unions also observed May Day at different centres and held rallies at Talwara, Salal Hydrel Project, Kalakot Coal Mines, Kathua and Udhampur which were addressed by Nank Chand, Ramesh Chander, Banarasi Dass, Sham Prashad

and others, respectively.

Rally at Patna

At the joint call of Central Trade Unions and Coordination Committee of Unions May Day was observed at Patna. A massive procession of employees and workers was taken out jointly from RBI premises. While the procession was passing through Exhibition Road, the District Magistrate, Patna banned the procession despite the fact that in Patna election was to take place on 7th May 1996. The procession then was converted into a rally of employees and workers there which was presided over by a presidium consisting of Radha Raman Sinha, Coordination Committee, Chakradhar P Singh, AITUC, K P Singh, AICCTU and Vijay Choudhary, AICTU. The rally protested against this stoppage of procession by the District Magistrate and decided to send a delegation to Election Commission in protest. The rally was addressed by Chandi Prasad (CITU), Ghakradhar Singh (AITUC), P Singh (AICCTU), Radha Raman Singh and Sachchida Nand Singh (Convenor). All the speakers dealt in detail the importance of May Day and called upon the employees and workers to defeat the forces of reaction and communalism as also to ensure victory of the left, democratic and secular forces in the elections.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX NUMBERS FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

(BASE 1982 = 100) Centre

	Linking factor for Old Base			Linking factor for Old Base			
	Feb.'96	Mar.96		Feb.'96	Mar.96		
All India	316	319	4.93	Solapur	345	348	5.03
Gudur	322	322	4.33	Barbil	309	311	5.00
Guntur	314	317	5.60	Rourkela	292	292	3.59
Hyderabad	296	298	5.23	Amritsar	274	281	5.19
Visakhapatnam	308	307	—	Ludhiana	282	286	—
Warrangal	311	314	—	Ajmer	315	318	5.01
Doom-Dooma Tinsukia	296	297	4.05	Jaipur	300	307	5.17
Guwahati	326	328	—	Coimbatore	310	319	5.35
Labac-Silchar	269	276	3.96	Coonoor	323	328	4.80
Mariani-Jorhat	314	313	3.95	Madras	337	337	5.05
Rangapara-Tezpur	305	304	4.29	Madurai	326	331	5.27
Jamshedpur	305	305	4.68	Salem	320	323	—
Jharia	269	272	4.63	Tiruchirapally	333	339	—
Kodarma	270	271	5.43	Agra	291	294	—
Monghyr	293	299	5.29	Ghaziabad	305	308	—
Noamundi	290	295	4.58	Kanpur	311	313	4.69
Ranchi-Hatia	302	306	—	Saharanpur	295	297	5.06
Ahmedabad	312	314	4.78	Varanasi	323	327	5.12
Baroda	311	316	—	Asansol	290	295	4.77
Bhavanagar	324	331	4.99	Calcutta	314	321	4.74
Rajkot	309	313	—	Darjeeling	279	279	4.55
Surat	339	339	—	Durgapur	325	329	—
Faridabad	307	312	—	Haldia	340	343	—
Yamunanagar	290	301	5.53	Howrah	324	328	4.12
Srinagar	308	309	5.47	Jalpaiguri	280	284	4.16
Bangalore	314	315	5.66	Raniganj	282	282	4.40
Belgaum	339	345	—	Chandigarh	299	299	—
Hubli-Dharwar	324	325	—	Delhi	327	332	4.97
Mercara	317	319	—	Pondicherry	360	360	—
Alwaye	334	335	5.19				
Mundakayam	341	341	—	<u>Additional series of Labour Bureau</u>			
Quilon	351	350	—	Kothagudem	327	326	3.25
Trivandrum	357	365	—	Himachal Pradesh	296	299	3.75
Bhalaghat	303	306	5.24	Bhilwara	316	319	3.20
Bhilai	23	290	3.49	Chindwara	327	330	2.59
Bhopa	334	336	5.46	Tripura	301	300	4.37
Indore	322	331	5.18	Goa	350	357	3.40
Jabalpur	320	321	6.41				
Bombay	349	352	5.12				
Nagpur	325	326	4.99				
Nasik	336	339	—				
Pune	348	353	—				

Note: Figures on old base can be obtained by multiplying the Index Number on New Base by the linking factor given and rounding off the result to nearest whole number. —Dash denotes new centres under 1982 series,

THE BASIC PROBLEMS OF TRADE UNIONS TODAY

□ E Balanandan

The New Age weekly, central organ of the Communist Party of India (March 31 to April 6), reported that steps are being taken for the merger of AITUC and HMS and a time schedule has already been adopted in the joint working committee of these organisations for implementation of the idea of merger. The trade unions coming together and merging to form larger unions is a measure which will be appreciated by all those who are interested in the well-being of the workers. Also the aim of one union in one industry, one federation and one central organisation for the nation are also ideal objectives one could wish for.

But, however, certain formulations and conditions made as part of it needs little more closer examination. It is said: "This can be achieved only on the principle wholly accepted by the two organisations that trade unions shall remain independent of the "employers, the government and the political parties." The unity of the organisation can be maintained and strengthened if it functions democratically and as far as possible by consensus and no effort is made to drive out minority views."

The above para carries the idea that the trade unions should be independent of political parties. The trade unions are registered organisations of workers which are formally independent and has its own separate identity. They must be independent means that it should not be adjuncts of political parties, and as is being called today as front organisations of parties. If it is so there can be no big dispute over it. On the contrary, if the idea is that the trade unions should be apolitical and should not interfere with or indulge in politics, then it becomes absurd. This was the demand made by the bourgeoisie long before, and the working class naturally had to fight against it.

The trade unions are primary organisations of workers to protect and fight for their interests against the employers; in the course of the struggle they come to understand that unless and until the bourgeois system itself is changed, the fate of the working class cannot be drastically improved. Thus they become conscious and engage themselves in the fight against the bourgeois order. The scope and sweep of this will depend on the level of consciousness and the organisational ability.

In the day to day fight of the trade unions for winning the demands of the workers—they seek the support of the political parties, willingly some of them come forward in support and others might oppose.

Thus the experience of the trade union movement shows that in their daily struggles many a time they

come in conflict with the bourgeois political parties which are heading the government. And, therefore, naturally, the trade unions are forced to fight against the policies of the government to safeguard their interests. In the course of this they even demand the change of the government itself. Therefore, debarring of trade unions from politics is an erroneous concept.

The recent experience of our trade union movement in the fight against the economic policies was a straight political fight for changing the government policies. Trade unions of all affiliations except INTUC and BMS joined in this fight. Here again we find that trade unions cannot be apolitical.

The right of the members of the trade union, to join this or that politics whichever they choose should also form part of trade union democracy. It should not allowed to be curtailed. In case of differences it should not be decided on the basis of simple majority. It can be done with the concurrence of 60 to 65% of the membership. As special cases minority may be allowed to differ. This or any other conditions can be considered instead of debarring the trade unions from joining politics.

That the trade unions should be independent of governments depends on the attitude of the governments towards the working class. The governments which uphold the cause of workers and help them to improve their lot does not deserve Trade Union support - to be precise West Bengal and Tripura?

We witness today in the developed capitalist societies an all-round crisis from which they are struggling to escape. Every step they have taken for resolving it, has put them into deeper and deeper crisis. When the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the East European countries took place, the imperialists declared that socialism is dead and the only way for human progress is capitalism and assured of building a crisis free capitalist society using the scientific and technological advance.

However, the introduction of new technologies into the process of production has drastically cut down employment opportunities by killing millions of jobs. There is no opening for the new comers, and drastic reduction of the work force in each productive activity. Consequently, the number of the unemployed is continuously on the rise. The leaders of the G-7 countries had to confer 3-4 times during the last five years to discuss the question of employment though they could not find any solution. Every developed country is simultaneously engaged in taking steps to curtail the rights and privileges of the workers which

they were enjoying. An all-round attempt is made to curtail the welfare amenities like leave, health care, insurance, education facilities, etc besides denial of wage rise. Permanancy of job is becoming more and more a casuality. Contract system, job sharing etc are being resorted to, that is, lesser hours of work with lesser wage. In the developed capitalist countries the working class is faced with uncertainty in jobs and income. They are being put under the mercy of the employers. No longer the hard earned rights are safe, they are under attack. This has its detrimental consequences in the standard of living of the workers. Not only poverty is on the increase, different kinds of cultural degradation is also taking place which I do not wish to deal here.

The claim of the capitalists that they are going to build crisis free capitalism is shattered to pieces, together with the dream of certain trade union leaders who had the notion that the working class interests can be protected within the framework of capitalism. Therefore, today the working class is face to face with a situation in which there is no alternative to a straight fight against the capitalist order itself.

In India too, under the guise of liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation gospels, the Finance Minister has gone on record that the workers "need not expect that their emoluments and employment will be protected as before.." That is the workers' wages and employment are under question mark

under the present system. Therefore, the agenda before the trade union movement today is not only to try to safeguard the immediate interest of the workers (which is difficult) but also to fight unitedly to change the capitalist order. Therefore, we have to go against the capitalists and their political parties in the big battles which are to come. We have to ally with political parties to the extent they come to oppose the capitalist policies. Therefore, the main agenda of the trade union movement is becoming more and more political.

One of the most important problems of the Indian trade union movement today is the developing caste and communal division which is fiercely being pushed through by the reactionaries of the country which eats away the very foundation of the trade union movement. It is more serious than the prevailing organisational and political differences among the trade unions. Therefore, the fight against communalism and casteism has to become the day today agenda of the trade union movement. Also the fight against capitalism as a system needs proper education of the workers for which also the trade unions should take the lead. Therefore the need of the hour is that the trade unions themselves should take up these issues to educate the workers so that their unity and fighting ability can be restored and strengthened.

State Conference of Tamilnadu Nutrition Meal Employees Association

The 5th State Conference of Tamilnadu Nutrition Meal Employees Association was held at Tanjavur on 15th and 16th March. This includes two other employees unions, that is, the ICDS and the Tamilnadu Integrated Nutritious Programme. Delegates from all the 27 districts attended the conference. Total membership of the union is 48083. Out of this total number ICDS workers are 5000.

Com.M Palaniathan, Com. Rajeshwari Murugaesham, Com. R Silveraj, Com. Raja Ram and Com.Surya Murthy were elected for the Presidium. Out of 502, 38 delegates spoke on the Secretary's report. The resolutions adopted at the conference were, Against repression on Dalits, One day strike on 12th April, Demands and On the future tasks.

The conference was greeted by different fraternal delegates, including the General Secretary of the State Govt Employees Association, Com.K R Shankaran. Comrades from AIDWA also greeted the conference. The General Secretary and the Working President of the Federation of Anganwadi Workers

and Helpers, Com.Neelima Maitra and Com.Bhabatosh Roy also were present and greeted the conference.

The following comrades were elected for the next Executive Committee: Com.Palaninathan, President; Com Rajeshwari Murugesan, Com R Silveraj, Com. Raja Ram, Com. S Murty, Com T Ramaswamy, as Vice Presidents; Com. P Ramamurty, as General Secretary; Com.S M Mohan, Com. E Mayamally, Com. M Karunanidhi, Com. A Margaret as Asst Secretaries and Com. K Subramani as Treasurer.

On 16th evening a very big rally was held. More than 30,000 people gathered there. A colourful procession was taken out along with the delegates. The Open Session was greeted among others by Com Y Gopalaswami from MDMK, Com. N Shankaraya from CPI(M), Com. K Gangadharan, Com. Tanjai Ramamurty, Com. Durai Maikam and Com. S Srinivasan.

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Child Labour - Blot on Our Society

□ Vimal Ranadive

Child labour in our country existed since many years. But last 3-4 years, this subject is being discussed from the central government to social organisations, ILO, NGOs, Trade Unions and so on. Perhaps the poor children employed in carpet industry in Bhodoi and Varanasi in UP have opened the floodgates for consideration of their cause of child labour! The child labour in carpet industry became an international issue between our govt and USA, Germany, etc who threatened to boycott the products entering in USA under the excuse of "social clause". One wonders, any way, about their feelings of 'sorrow' for our Indian Child Labour, when in garment industry in USA child labour exist! Whatever, it may be, we must own the responsibility of existence of child labour on such a big scale and try to find out the ways and means as to how rapidly we can eliminate it, from our society.

Does it strike to our conscience any time when the child of 8 years old employed in a hotel, or Dhaba brings tea to our table? Do we feel ashamed when we notice, a small child collects rags from a rotten dustbin to sell it to some contractor? Do, we feel, at least sometimes, that a small boy of 9 years is not able to go to school because of poverty and has to go to work, while my son of the same age is doing well in the school?. These are the questions, we have to ask ourselves. The answer of course will be negative.

The statistics of Child Labour speak a lot

As per the government figure, the child labour in India is 2 crores. The non-government agencies working on child labour projects however claim that it is more than 10 crores. The meeting of the advisory committee of the central government on child labour held on 27th Dec 1995 after postponement for 4 times during last 2 years, various charts were provided on child labour in various industries, and which state constitute the highest figure. As per the 1981 census the estimated figure was 13.6 million which rose to 17.02 million in 1987-88. The 1991 census data has not yet been released. Over 90% of the child labour in our country as per the govt is found in 11 states with the highest figure in Andhra i.e. 19.50 lakhs in 1981, then come Bihar, Karnataka, MP, Maharashtra and UP. As is mentioned earlier, these statistics may not cover the actual figure of child labour in our country since poverty is the root cause of this disease and unless this is removed it is difficult to eliminate the child labour totally.

Working Conditions

Our experience as social workers, or trade unionist, child labour can be found in the street, construction and beedi, carpet and hosiery, bulb making and match, fireworks and mines and so on. In powerloom industry in Komarapalayam, Tamilnadu, work force is 46,000. Out of this 10,000 are children. The boys work 12 hours a day for Rs 100/- a week. Salem powerloom factories produce superfine dhotis and lungis to be exported to Gulf, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. If one goes in the

factory to enquire about a 'boy' the management will flatly deny there was a child in his factory. He says "We do not employ "Kulandavelu" (child) As per the report, for these children day begins at 1 AM in the night shift! Here the girl children below 10 years of age are also found. A survey made by THREAD, it was found that out of 1132 children 707 were girls below 10 years while boys were 425.

In Sivakasi, Madurai dist of Tamilnadu, the match factory employ most of the children and women. It is reported the number will be about 1-5 to 2 lakhs. A petiable sight no doubt when you observe the small children working. A small boy of 9 years was asked casually, "What would you like to be when you are grown up? And apt came the answer "I want to be a doctor..." Is it ever possible for this unfortunate child who has to work for his family leaving the 'childhood' to be a doctor?

The questioner herself felt embarrassed no doubt. A small girl at a cracker factory at Sivakasi when advised to "better leave the job and go to school, education is very important..." She, instead of replying, began to cry, when she was asked why was she crying she said "I am getting some amount of Rs 200/- my family will starve..." Yes, it was a fact, that herearning was more important for her than the education due to poor conditions of the family. A girl at Erode employed in Garment unit said her parents could not afford to educate all the three children they have. So she was sent to work, so other two boys can go to school." The answer points out to those who claim that parents do not want to send their children to schools! But here, the boys have been given preference for education. In the powerloom there is piece rate and children too have to work longer hours, with 1/3 of the pay the adult worker gets.

As already mentioned earlier, in the carpet industry, there are chains of contractors and subcontractors, and with 300,000 childlabour, the industry brings Rs 1400 crores of foreign exchange which came down by about 11% last year due to 'Rug Mark' and "social clause" brought by USA in senate, which was opposed by most of the trade unions. Those who make noise more about exploitation of child labour and social clause are themselves guilty in employing child labour in USA, Germany and now in Russia too, after the overthrow of socialism.

Child labour in Hazardous Industry

As per the figures of the govt, the child labour in hazardous occupations is estimated as 20 lakhs. A very large number no doubt. The child labour in Fireworks, match, mines, beedi-cigar, etc should not be employed where they become the first victim of so many accidents in Sivakasi where hundreds of children and women burnt to death in explosion in the cracker factory. In Rohtak, Haryana, there was fire in cracker factory when once again there were hundreds of death in the factory. In fact, there is a law passed in 1986 banning child labour in hazardous industry. But as usual, there is no enforcement of the law by the department.

Policies of the Central Government

The Labour Ministry, the Prime Minister and others always give lip sympathy to the cause of the child labour and plead for abolition of the child labour, minimum in the hazardous industries. Since the carpet business is affected by the "Rugmark" the Government is shouting hoarsely about the elimination of child labour. The minimum they could have done was to remove the children from the hazardous occupations. The employers want to employ the child because of the cheap labour of children, taking advantage of the poverty of the working people. As already reported it postponed the Advisory Board meeting for four times. The money sanctioned for the projects could not be used for the projects for some reasons or other. Prime Minister continue to give lofty promises for employment, housing, jobs for women and elimination of child labour. Nothing comes out and people are suffering more and more. Holding workshop on child labour is the programme taken up in 12-13 states now. Planning Commission has earmarked of Rs 34-40 crore for 1995-1996 for this cause.

Problem of Girl Child

As it was mentioned, the percentage of girl child is on a large scale in Match, fire works, beedi, constructin , hosiery, etc. In the course of priority girls are sent to work, boys are given education if possible. The drop out of girl child is much higher than the boys in primary stage. The girl child will work in the house and also work at the factory, early morning and return in the night. There is always a danger of sexual harassment too.

Important Role of ILO

It must be admitted that the ILO has played an important role in making aware the common people, social and NGO's organisations about the child labour. It has also helped the Trade Unions, including CITU to hold the workshops in various industries in the states. The ILO has formed an 'EPEC' committee in 192-93. It is reported it devotes 83% of its budget to the programmes for elimination of child labour, numbering 134 in 12 different countries, since 1994. It has highlighted the plight of child labour in various industries and campaign by video films, exhibitions, etc

There are two ILO conventions NO.138 and NO.29 having bearing on child labour. 138 convention relates to minimum age for employment and No.29 relates to forced labour. Govt of India has not ratified 138 convention. The convention No.29 "forced labour" as per the constitution of India has been ratified but sought the opinion of ILO Committee of experts on this matter.

The question arises here, whether the parents of the poor family force the children to go to work. Are they interested to earn more by exploiting their own child? The ILO officers sometimes say "the parents should feel guilty and ashamed to send their children to work in carpet 10-12 hours but not sending him to school for education..." The parents are sending children to work, to get more moneyey are money makers" yes, it is absolutely correct when some ILO officers or other institutions say that "if these 20 crores of child labour in carpet, beedi, match etc do take education and become literate and employed, getting good salary,"

nothing more we want. "It is human wealthwe should feel guilty to send the child to carpet. "These are some of the arguments coming from ILO and others who want to ignore the real situation, the present economic conditions of the ordinary people in the society. Or should we say, that they know the economic conditions, the existing poverty, the main cause for the child labour, but do not spell out. The necessity of free primary education is very much insisted which is correct, and can be done even under the present social condition. Will this govt or the employers take this job seriously unless compelled by the mass organisations? This demand, stressed by the ILO repeatedly is quite correct and should be pursued by the trade unions, considering the drop out from the school is 40% out of 170 million children aged 6-14 in our country.

Child labour - Blot on our society

There should not be any difference of opinion whether child labour should be employed in any industry. Child should have education, proper food, culture, play and all the requirements as a child. The basic question is, will it be possible under the present bourgeois landlord society, when poverty is acute. Will it be possible for the children of the villagers to go to school? One can proudly say here that the total picture in villages in West Bengal has changed after the land distribution and Panchayat results. Children can go to school, women are coming ahead for social work. The example of Kerala is always quoted in the meetings, held by Govt and also ILO praising for their literacy work and population control. If with the conscious efforts on the part of Govt and the people, some qualitative change can come in the society.

Some Intermediate Steps for Elimination of Child Labour

Considering the acute poverty under the present bourgeois landlord government and their drive for economic reform to the extent of loosing our self-reliance, it will be better we have some intermediate programme for the child labour towards our goal to elimination of child labour. Total abolition of child labour, is not possible under the present social system however anybody desires. At present, child labour is a helping hand to the family. We feel that some steps to improve their conditions, minimum, we can do, is taking the following measures:

1. Their working hours as per the law are 6 hours. This should be implemented by the enforcement machinery of the Govt.
2. Free Primary education during these 6 hours
3. Vocational Training be given to the children
4. Free mid-day meals to be provided by the Govt
5. Agitation for land reforms by NGOs and trade unions
6. Prevent child labour from hazardous occupations as per the rule.
7. Minimum wages to be paid to the family of the child
8. Continuous campaign of awareness on the question of child labour.

Fourteenth World Congress on Occupational Safety and Health

□ M K Pandhe

The Fourteenth World Congress on Occupational Safety and Health held at Madrid (Spain) on 22-26 April 1996 highlighted the urgent need to pay serious attention to the question of occupational safety and health which is posing a serious danger to the working and living conditions of the workers all over the world. Over 2200 delegates participating from nearly 105 countries from all the continents were very much concerned at the growing threat to human life due to occupational hazards arising out of introduction of new technologies all round the world.

As Dr C Pinnagoda, Chief, occupational safety and health branch of the ILO noted in his introductory report, "Around 8000 workers die each year in European Union alone as a result of occupational accidents. Out of some 120 million workers, almost 10 million are victims of work accidents or occupational diseases." He further noted, "the proportion of occupational fatalities and diseases is much higher in countries outside the EU - some 210,000 workers die each year and another 115 million are injured or suffer from work-related diseases, mostly in the industrially developing world.

The ILO estimates that the rate of fatal accidents worldwide is approximately 6 per 100,000 workers, but warns that this relatively low number marks the extent of risk in certain occupations, such as construction work, where the rate of fatal accidents may be 10 or even 20 times higher than the average. The ILO further points out that in developing countries the workers most exposed to occupational risks are those in agricultural, primary extraction industries and heavy manufacturing. Poor equipment, heavy workloads and even poisoning due to pesticides and organic dusts all take their toll on worker health and safety. In addition, the nature of work-related hazards is changing with the introduction of new chemical substances, which pose threats not only to workers, but to entire communities. After all, about 80,000 chemicals are being used in the world in the manufacturing process, many of which are toxic and dangerous to human health.

Wilhelm Thiel while submitting the Report of the International Social Security association pointed out that every three minutes somewhere in the world, a person dies in a work accident or from an occupational disease, every second, at least four persons are injured during work, out of every hundred fatal accidents 7 are occupational accidents, 37 are traffic accidents and 56 occur outside working hours while about 4 per cent of gross social product is lost as a

result of accidents. He gave the example of a small country like Austria where the loss of production due to accident works out to be US \$ 12 billion.

I was nominated by the National Safety Council as a delegate to the Congress and had occasion to participate in several technical sessions where many studies were presented from experts in different countries.

One of the topic for debate was "Globalisation of economic relations: Implications for occupational safety and health, an international view." Most of the speakers were from the developed countries belonging to the European Union who fully advocated globalisation of economy. Yet they could not deny the fact that in the competitive environment in the market economy employers tend to ignore the health and safety of the workers. The introduction of new technology brought in several health hazards to the workers and sufficient precaution was not taken to protect the working conditions of the workers. The multinational companies are not implementing the safety standards in the third world countries which they implement in their own country. The example of Bhopal gas tragedy was cited. Some of the multinational companies do not even inform properly to the third world country the hazards involved in use of certain chemicals. Safety and health becomes casualty on the plea of cutting down cost of production.

Shifting of hazardous industries to the third world countries by the multinational corporations have become a part of globalisation since standards of safety are more rigorous in the advanced capitalist countries. When a questioner from the third world country criticised the role of multinationals and their role in the matter of health and safety a reply was given that it was not the aspect falling within the scope of the debate. The Director of the ILO also could not give a proper reply to a question relating to the failure of the ILO to develop international labour standard for the multi-national companies.

In one technical session in which I had an occasion to participate, a good research paper was submitted from Italy on "Comparative analysis of the whole-body vibration on the basis of exposure levels of city bus drivers." The study pointed out that a large number of drivers were victims of occupational hazards whose joints were severely affected and adverse affect on the spinal chord was clearly visible. Similarly, a study from Poland noted that workers working on machines which vibrate are also exposed to occupational risks which can be controlled provided

proper evaluation of risk is made and preventing steps are taken.

A study from Germany observed that workers carrying heavy loads on their backs are reporting pain which is caused due to injury in the spinal chord. The study stressed the need to avoid carrying of heavy weight by the workers manually. Though the ILO adopted a Convention that a worker should not carry more than 50 kg of weight manually, the Government of India is debating for the last 2 decades whether the convention should be ratified. At present a weight of 100 kg is carried by workers in food corporation godowns and in railways. Workers affected by occupational hazards are not given any treatment by the government since most of them are contract workers who can be thrown out of jobs if they found unfit for work.

An interesting paper was read from Spain on what is called in Europe as "sick building syndrome". The paper studied the work atmosphere in high rise buildings owned by leading banks and many other companies belonging to big business houses. The study pointed out that fresh air was not properly being circulated in these buildings and the presence of carbon-dioxide was more than the permissible limits. A large number of these buildings were found to be not properly designed for free air circulation. The smell of tobacco and alcohol in some of these buildings was also beyond permissible limits. It was found that the unhealthy environment had adverse effect on the health of employees working in these buildings.

A study from Italy on exposure to organic solvents in printing shops showed that several health hazards were encountered by the workers working in printing press. Some of the toxic chemicals resulted in several respiratory problems for the workers. The occupational hazards assume a serious shape if adequate steps are not taken in time. This was bourn

out by the study undertaken in Sweden.

The technical session of occupational hazards in construction industry raised several problems of health and safety in this industry. The new machines developed in construction have posed many hazardous conditions in addition to working underground, underwater, at excessive heights, etc. The workers have also to work under rains, hot sun which has also resulted in several occupational hazards and diseases for the construction workers. Even in advanced countries this industry is considered a 'one of the most hazardous' industry. Though some research papers were highlighting the aspects of safety in a proper perspective I found several papers which were only appreciating what their Government was doing and what was the legal steps taken to protect health and safety of workers. Some of the company executives were also endorsing the steps taken by their companies and suggesting what they were doing was sufficient to protect the health and safety of workers. The technical quality of these papers was not good and there was no self-critical approach in these papers.

Yet the Fourteenth Congress on the whole focused major health hazards faced by the workers and underlined the need to pay more attention to the task of protecting the health of workers. Cost benefit of the safe environment and working conditions was also pointed out by several speakers.

There is urgent need that in India the question of occupational health and safety should be given more importance. Merely giving lip sympathy to the subject must be discarded if the working environment has to be improved. Trade union movement should make health and safety as topics for bilateral discussion so that working environment can be improved in India in the interest of protecting the livelihood of millions of our workers. □

Com. V.G. Bhaskaran Nair

From page one)

have lost an experienced and able leader. The CITU dips its red flag in memory of Com.VG and conveys its heart-felt condolences to his bereaved family. Condolence Message from CITU Centre:

The following message of condolence was sent to the Kerala State Committee of CITU by M K Pandhe, the General Secretary of CITU:

"The Secretariat of the CITU is shocked to learn the sad news of sudden passing away of Com.VG Bhaskaran Nair, Secretary CITU and one of the outstanding leaders of the CITU in Kerala. His immense contribution in building and functioning of the

CITU State Centre in Kerala will ever be remembered.

Comrade Bhaskaran Nair, despite suffering from a deadly disease, was working with remarkable devotion for strengthening of the CITU till he breathed his last. His unassuming and simple behaviour and style of living had endeared him not only in Kerala but all over India. His unflinching loyalty to Marxism and Socialism was so great that there was nothing in his mind except the interest of the working class. In his passing away the CITU in Kerala has lost a tower of strength and the void created by this is very difficult to fill in.

The Secretariat of the CITU pays its respectful homage to the departed leader and sends its heartfelt condolences to the leaders and members of CITU in Kerala and the bereaved members of his family." □

Summary of Discussions of the Round Table Meeting of TUS at Cairo

(A write-up on the subject by M K Pandhe, General Secretary of CITU was published in the May issue of the journal. We are publishing hereunder a slightly abridged form of the Summary of Discussions—Ed).

On the 10th and 11th of April 1996, ETUF of Egypt, COSATU of South Africa, CGT of France, PIT/CNT of Uruguay, FAT of Mexico, CITU of India, CGTP of Portugal and NUMW of Namibia held a Round Table meeting in Cairo.

This meeting discussed in a multilateral framework, the challenges facing the international trade union movement.

The general feeling was that the liberal concept of globalisation is characterised by the aim of financial accumulation. Put at the service of the strategy of multinational companies, this policy leads to ruthless economic war, competition between workers and nations and devastating consequences, which threaten both developing and industrialised countries everywhere.

On the eve of the third millennium - in a labour market that is now globalised - unemployment, insecurity, exclusion, and poverty are intolerable injustices. Moreover, inequalities in development, the fracture between North and South and the increased debt all constitute additional causes for anxiety. These developments, laden with dangers and tension, are aggravated by the hazards of maintaining a costly arms race policy, including nuclear weapons, and the lack of respect for, and implementation of, international treaties. Violence, intolerance and terrorism threaten peace and the universal demand for social justice.

While full employment, co-development and democracy are found on every agenda, it is in the name of competition that the employers, the G-7, the IMF and the WTO want to reduce labour costs, destroy social protection systems, jeopardise the public sector especially by privatisation and empty collective bargaining of its very substance. For them, the very idea of social progress is an obstacle which must be overcome.

Such developments require greater cooperation, solidarity and unity among workers and thereby create historic responsibilities for the international trade union movement

To be effective, international solidarity must rely on collective, broad and united action, respecting

different approaches and without excluding anyone. This is true at the industrial level, particularly within transnational groups, at the regional level and vis-a-vis international institutions.

How can we contribute to this?

The participants in the Round table believe that struggling for new rights and freedoms for workers and trade unions are concrete objectives which can promote progress towards broad unity within the international trade union movement. This can contribute not only to more effective resistance, but would also enable alternatives to be found which promote lasting social development.

Firstly, the multinational companies, must respect fundamental rights and also trade union rights of the workers particularly as far as the social dimension of globalisation is concerned. This is equally true for the renewal and democratisation of the functioning of the ILO, by strengthening its prerogatives and resources. The international conventions and recommendations concerning the rights of women children and migrants must be respected. The rights of workers to dignity and to developing their personal projects require high levels of collective guarantees. These alone can enable them to participate in a world undergoing deep changes. This is a democratic demand.

The participants in the Cairo Round Table are ready to widen the debate and have discussions with other trade union forces whether they are affiliated internationally or not. Their aim is not to advocate the creation of new structures or to question the role of existing international trade union organisations, but, on the contrary, to expand the framework of the debate and thus contribute to the renewal of the international trade union movement.

The discussions emphasised the need to develop cooperation and solidarity in a more open, more tolerant and respectful way so as to become stronger together.

The Cairo Round Table considers - as was the case during the Trade Union Forum at the Copenhagen Social Summit - that the ILO workers' group could effectively contribute to this new state of mind through concrete initiatives. The participants wish to profit from the preparations for the ILO's coming session to have meetings with others in order to develop this need for dialogue and action on common objectives. This is possible and more than ever necessary.

ILO Press Communique

- * Teachers' Salaries, Per-Pupil Expenditure Deteriorate Under Structural Adjustment Policies!
- * Poorest Income Groups Hit Hardest by Education Spending Cuts!

The International Labour Organisation, Geneva in a press communique issued on 23rd April warned that cuts in public spending have major implications for education and teachers, particularly in the developing countries. A report prepared by the ILO, viz "Impact of Structural Adjustment on Employment and Training of Teachers," for a meeting of education experts, found a strong correlation between reductions in overall public spending—which are the results of structural adjustment policies—and reduced spending on education.

It notes that during the period 1980-90, teachers' salaries in poor countries tended to deteriorate, as did per-pupil expenditure, class size enrolment rates and the quality and quantity of teaching materials. Teachers generally suffered sharp decreases in real wages.

Where overall public spending grew in absolute terms, spending on education also grew. Teachers in those OECD countries, where spending on education increased between 1980-90, generally saw their real incomes rise.

The report further stated that although structural adjustment policies advocate shifting expenditure from higher to primary levels of education, "pressures"

to reduce overall government spending meant that educational spending was more often simply cut rather than shifted. In addition, growing poverty and income inequality had a negative effect on education, as low income groups increasingly withheld their children from school.

According to the report, in recent years following the structural adjustment policies, most of the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have had to reduce their spending per pupil at all levels of education. As the teachers' salaries shrank and resources per pupil were reduced, the class sizes increased. Enrolment rates suffered because of the financial pressure to reduce social spending, the report says. Enrolment growth of primary education in low income countries, excluding China, decreased from 5.2 per cent annually in 1976-75 to 2.7 per cent annually in 1980-85—the years that were marked by the onset of the structural adjustment policy effects.

The situation was particularly marked in Africa, where increasing poverty rates appeared to have had a significant effect on drop-out rates. "Financial constraints had a major adverse effect on the expansion of education among the young... The largest single effect was on the school enrolment rate in those African countries which experienced both negative per capita income growth rates and a constant or declining proportion of GDP in public spending," according to the report.

Bihar Anganwadi Workers Demonstrate against Privatisation

Anganwadi workers of Bihar held a big demonstration against privatisation on 12th Feb 1996 in Patna as per decision of all India Anganwadi Federation. About 5000 Anganwadi women participated in this demonstration under the leadership of Com. Sushila Devi, the state president of Anganwadi federation. This was the first time when apart from Anganwadi workers the class III and class IV govt employees also took part in this programme.

The procession started from Gandhi Maidan. It went through Frazer Road and Dak Bangla Road and reached Hartali Chowk at Baily Road. There it culminated into a big rally. Com. Sheila Sinha presided over the rally. Apart from Com. Sinha, Com. Dharmshila Devi, Kamla Sinha, Prabhavati Devi, Malti Devi and Sushila Hansda also spoke on this occasion.

While addressing the gathering the General Secretary of Bihar State Anganwadi Workers, Helpers and Employees Union, Com. Shanti Mishra strongly

criticised the anti-worker policies of state and central governments. She said that the living and working conditions of Anganwadi workers have been badly affected due to the policy of privatisation. National sovereignty was in danger. Rampant corruption also added fuel to this.

Anganwadi leaders called upon the women to launch big struggle if they really wanted to live a decent life.

International Women's Day observed: The international women's day was observed in Girls Senior Secondary School, Sikandera, District Jamui on March 8th 1996. Com. Ram Dulari Devi Viyogni presided over this function. While speaking on this occasion Com. Shanti Mishra called upon the women to unitedly fight against the exploitation. The teachers and students of the school also took part in large number. A one act play on "dowry system" was also played by the students.

17th Congress of the Central Trade Union Organisation of Cuba

Amol Samant, Assistant Secretary,
Air Corporation Employees Union, Bombay Region

The Secretariat of the CITU nominated me to be a delegate to participate in the 17th Congress of the CTC which was held on 27th-30th April, 1996 at Havana, the capital of Cuba.

The Congress opened on 26th April afternoon at Museum of Major Antonio Morio in Havana with a flag hoisting ceremony. A total of over 900 delegates from Cuba representing the working class and about 300 delegates from forty countries including many Latin American countries, China, Russia, England, France, Australia, Canada and USA, etc participated in the Congress.

The essence of the 17th Congress was to:

1. Decide how the workers and the union movement are to assume the present and future transformations and development prospects of Cuba;
2. Analyse how to preserve, under these new conditions, the unity;
- 3) Determine what to do together with the people to guarantee revolutionary power of the workers, by the workers and for the workers.

The above three thesis were intended to help the trade union movement of Cuba to find answers and to lay down the line of action for the coming years.

Fidel Castro, the President of the Cuban Republic was present and actively participated in the discussions and debates throughout the Congress. The President was well versed in almost all the details of the Cuban economy such as agriculture including production details of sugarcane to sugar, tourism, etc., and was thorough with the problems of the capitalist economy. He was throughout exchanging his experiences and knowledge during the course of the debates. He stressed the need for collection of data, analysing the data and information to bring in improvements in the systems of production so that the standard of living of the people is raised.

During the Congress the foreign delegates, one each from each country were given opportunity to speak. I was one of the speakers. My speech, prepared by the CITU Centre, was well received by all the delegates and on conclusion of the speech, there was a standing ovation in the Congress.

Whenever and wherever I expressed the solidarity on behalf of the CITU to the Cuban working class and the people in their struggle against imperialism, there was loud and clear applause inside the auditorium

where the Congress was held. I could feel the solidarity and warmth of the Cuban Trade Unions towards the working class of our country throughout my participation in the Congress.

The Background of the Congress

After the setbacks to Socialism in East European countries and collapse of Soviet Union, the Cuban economy faced severe stress and strain. The situation was further aggravated due to the economic blockade imposed by the US. The international trade of Cuba was severely affected, their exports and imports suffered. Everybody thought the days are numbered for Cuba. But the dreams of the imperialists did not come true, thanks to the able leadership provided by Fidel Castro and the revolutionary spirit shown by the Cuban people. The people of Cuba withstood and will continue to withstand the new challenges thrown by imperialism.

The agricultural production of Cuba has shown an increase of over 30% over the previous year. The Cubans call the period after the collapse of Soviet Union and setback to socialism as a "special period." During this special period, though the economy was under severe stress, the Cuban government did not curtail any of the welfare and social benefits such as free health care, education, old age pension, free food etc, inspite of the criminal blockade imposed by the US. The 17th Congress took place in this background to find ways to face the new challenges and to overcome the new situation.

The 17th Congress of the CTC and the thesis presented to it, recalled that the strategy adopted by the Revolution during this special period enabled it to broaden the possibilities for foreign investment, creation of basic co-operatives in the countryside, financial correction measures, creation of agricultural and industrial markets, decentralisation of foreign trade, employment generation, etc. The thesis noted that in other countries, economic readjustments are imposed through neo-liberal and anti-people policies that reduce public spending in health, education and social security, create mass unemployment, privatisation, destroying social and labour benefits while increasing foreign debt, diminish nation's wealth and make States more dependent.

Resolution of the Congress

The Congress elaborately discussed various aspects of Cuban economy in the various commissions. Resolutions were adopted on (1) Agriculture (2) Sugar production (3) Construction (4) Tourism (5) Mining (6) Food production and (7) Labour & Wages.

The CTC resolved to support the efforts of the Cuban Government to face the challenges.

Fidel Castro in a major speech concluding the Congress touched various subjects, both national and international. He strongly condemned the US blockade against Cuba and expressed the determination of the Cuban people to fight against the imperialist machinations. He reiterated the commitments of the Revolution and ended his speech with the slogan "Socialism or Death."

May Day Rally

On 1st May the Cuban people celebrated the May Day with great enthusiasm. There was a massive parade which lasted for three hours before the column created in memory of Jose Marti, the Revolutionary thinker. The May Day rally was an unprecedented gathering of hundreds of thousands of people. The entire route to the venue of the May Day parade was filled with people full of commitments to Socialism and faith in the leadership of the Cuban Revolution. On 1st May evening I was a special invitee to the function honouring the outstanding Cuban workers for their performance in Agriculture and Industry. About 20 workers received special awards on this historic day from the Revolutionary leader Fidel Castro.

During the entire stay at Havana, I was shown hospitality and comradely treatment was given to me. I brought back the revolutionary greetings and solidarity of the Cuban Trade Unions and the Cuban people and I share their warm and affectionate greetings to the workers of our country and the CITU.

Structural Adjustment Policy and Unemployment

(An ILO Communique dated 5th March, 1996 and received at the CITU office in May, published from the Supplement of the Bulletin of Labour Statistics, 1995-4, ILO, Geneva, the rising unemployment rates in selected countries following the structural adjustment policy.

The ILO statisticians also pointed out that the unemployment figures do not take account of "labour hoarding" and various forms of hidden unemployment, for example, unpaid and long term maternity leave, and under-employment, which in some cases pose even greater problems than unemployment.

For India, although not mentioned in the chart, the Communique said that the number of registered unemployed rose by about one and half million, that

is from 36.8 per cent in August 1994 to 37.2 per cent in August, 1995. We are publishing the data hereunder—Ed)

Unemployment Rates, 1994-1995: Selected Countries

Country	Month/94	Percentage	Month/95	percentage
Austria	December	8.5	January 1996	9.0
Belgium	December	14.1	December	14.5
Brazil	October	4.5	October	5.1
Colombia	September	7.6	September	8.7
Germany	January 1995	11.1	January 1996	12.0
Hong Kong	2nd Quarter	1.6	2nd Quarter	2.9
Japan	December	2.7	December	3.2
Luxembourg	December	3.0	December	3.2
Portugal	3rd Quarter	6.8	3rd Quarter	6.9
Sweden	December	7.4	December	7.8
United States	December	5.1	December	5.3

GFTU Greets CITU's 26th Foundation

The General Federation of Trade Unions of DPRK has sent the following greetings to the CITU on its 26th Foundation Day:

Com.M K Pandhe
General Secretary
Centre of Indian Trade Unions
May 24, 1996

Dear Comrade,

We convey warm congratulations and fraternal greetings to you and, through you, all union members on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of foundation of CITU.

Since its foundation, your organisation has developed as a powerful organisation which represent the interests of workers, waging active struggle for the improvement of socio-economic conditions of workers and to defend their rights and interests.

We are pleased with your all successes of last period as ours and particularly, highly appreciate the efforts made by your organisation for healthy development of Asian trade union movement.

We take this opportunity to express firm solidarity with your struggle opposing political and economic subordination of imperialists and for defending workers' rights and interests.

Convinced that friendly and cooperative relations between two organisation will be further enlarged and strengthened in the future in conformity with the desire of two countries' workers, we sincerely wish you successes in present activity for the election of Parliament.

Yours fraternally,
Central Committee, GFTUK

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF CONSUMER PRICE INDEX

□ L.H. BHAWNANI

(Com.L H Bhawnani is an activist of Insurance Employees' Association, Bombay, a unit of AIIEA. He has been writing on Price Index, Inflation and such other issues. Ed)

Prior to World War I, I was in such a deep slumber that I was almost non-existent, and practically unknown to the back-bone of the society i.e. Indian Working Class. However, inflation, which itself saw the light of day, during the War, not only thoughtlessly disturbed my sound sleep, but also created conditions, whereby I was forced to keep on running, as if I was scared of some danger.

As I am regarded as yard-stick to measure the inflation, the militant workers of Bombay, alarmed at my fast march, responsible for deprivation of the purchasing power of the monthly reward of their toil and moil, earned with sweat on their brow, stroved and struggled hard to secure "War Bonus", during World War I, followed by the general grant of Dearness Allowance (DA) to arrest erosion in the hard-won wages, when the World War II severely raged only to shatter the economy. As my pace constantly accelerated, the Working Class made further advances and could manage to get the right established, whereby DA a major chunk of the present days wages - count be linked with my movement.

The ground reality is that thriving on ever-green pastures of inflation, I gallop to hit the toiling multitude viciously, where it hurts most; and weaken their economic conditions to fulfil the cherished mission of my life; whereas my elder sister christened as Whole-Sale Price Index (WPI), which has been a source of inspiration, guide, philosopher and trend-setter, taken a bird's eye-view of national economy. Unlike my monthly march, her weekly movements have been so moody and erratic that it is almost impossible to predict her next step. And in sharp contrast, I have not looked back, but have steadily climbed up, adversely affecting the life and living standard of the working class. Seriously engaged in sacred nation-building activities.

However, the authorities at the helms of financial affairs, try to hoodwink the citizens. In utter disregard of my direct relation with inflation, they bank heavily on my tame and timid elder sister and dangle before public statistics of her slow weekly motion and out of 52 weeks compare her halting movement only for particular one week, convenient to them, or even her temporary retreat, with previous year's corresponding week and boast that not only they have been able to

arrest the march of inflation, but also have reversed the rising trend of price spiral. Unfortunately the bureaucratic "abracadabra" fails to serve the desired purpose; because people agree fully conscious of the starkest fact that the authorities have thrown the elementary principle of working out the "average" price rise for 12 months to the winds, but at the same time, they expect the suffering masses to believe wood for tree. And when the question of appropriate payment of DA is raised by the Salaried Class, covered by my ever-lengthening dark shadow, the same authorities develop stiff-necked attitude and religiously stick to the ethics of mathematics and take into account number of full points travelled by me from previous level during a month, or an average of a pre-determined set of full points touched by me, during a specified period, and outright reject the reasonable plea to compensate for a better part of a point or average, disregarding the "spirit" behind such rules, when I stop short of small fraction of monthly point or average of set of points. And the authorities resort to unhealthy practice, inspite of the fact that I do not reflect actual price-rise, but only indicate as to in which direction the wind is blowing, or so to say that I, in fact, point out the trend and not factual position, because actual price rise is on much larger scale than what I can record. Mind it, after all, I am made of only 260 commodities, picked up from 70 centres, spread over seven sectors of employment, which amounts to a "sample" prepared from assorted items, and nothing more.

In order to hide their embarrassment, created by my ever-accelerating pace, they are always in search of smoke-screen so that they could take shelter behind such cover. Somehow, my elder sister comes handy to them, and to play down the rate of inflation, they (mis)use her, ignoring my own DIRECT relevance to the subject, because for all practical purposes, I dominate the economic scenario. But while framing tax-laws and formulating fiscal policies, the authorities change the tracks and move in the matter on the basis of ground prepared by me alone and not by my elder sister; because they are fully aware that as she cannot gauge value of rupee, they can neither frame tax laws nor estimate cost of various projects and mop up revenue, based on my sister's pace and their position is as good as that of any ordinary consumer.

Prior to presentation of the Union Budget, the authorities, as a matter of annual rituals, create conditions, whereby my pace appears to have slowed

down, or is sought to be shown as if I have retreated for a month or two and such behaviour is dubbed as seasonal fluctuations on account of arrival of fresh crop in the grain market. Such dubious move is motivated by their genuine desire to have a cover for nervousness, they are sure to develop due to the additional fat, I will be putting on, after the fresh budgetary proposals are implemented.

The step provides them much-sought for golden opportunity to take bold postures before the representatives of the people that they have been able to contain inflation; and allay the apprehension of the public that the set of new economic policies will not add fuel to the fire nor stoke flames of inflation and push by movement up. And all this happens, even though the pace of may trend-setter does not get sluggish. However, as I am made of different mettle and it is not in my blood to remain stagnant or allow anybody to suffocate or strangulate me, I manage to slip from the tightening grip and surge forward with doubled vigour and attack any one who dares to cross my path or hinders my progress.

In order to hoodwink the public and hide my growing fat, the authorities robbed me of my gown of 1949 and dressed me with the model of 1960, in the late sixties. Thereby, they could change my form so that I could look slim to the extent of about 20 percent, but they miserably failed to tame and reduce my ferocity. Resultantly, I continued to play the role assigned to me, as before.

The Working Class has been able to secure statutory assurances in respect of (i) share in profits, by way of bonus and (ii) grant of terminal benefit in the form of gratuity. However, as my constant movements have entitled them bouts of additional DA—a partial compensation doled out prospectively against sky-rocketing prices—the same has proved to a “curse in disguise” for the employees on account of these two social security measures. Let me pause a little to narrate to you how it is.....

So far bonus is concerned, the authorities have, at times, willy nilly revised the ceilings, but on every occasion the measure has been half-hearted, because every time the so-called inflated wages have kept the overwhelming majority of labour beyond the limits revised at lower scales, thereby denying lakhs of employees what is actually due to them from the employers, who in the final analysis have last hearty laugh and the representative Trade Unions helplessly find themselves at their wits end. And all this because fatty wages surpass the depressed parameters.

The labour welfare provision of the gratuity has met the similar fate and major chunk of the Salaried Class has been deprived of the benefit for more than

two decades. Very recently, to my utter surprise, wiser counsel prevailed upon the authorities; and in order to nullify my negative impact on payment of gratuity, they lifted the age-old restriction on ceiling of qualifying seemingly high salaries and ensured gratuity to one and all, but keeping the quantum at much lower level than what should have been. Thus in respect of this benefit, they have partially clipped my wings and made me ineffective for limited purpose. Consequently DA has reversed its role and instead of denial and deprivation, has guaranteed higher amount of gratuity—thanks to grants of Additional DA, which still interfere and bars payment of bonus in case of vast multitude.

The Salaried Class has initially hailed the move as progressive, but there has been lurking suspicion in its sensitive mind that what was once considered to be a “cushion” for evening of life, may not be turned into a “bait” in the mad rush for Liberalisation and Economic Reforms to lure the gullible employees to abruptly opt for voluntary (?) retirement at middle age, when in fact they aspire to climb up a step or two of the official ladder, before they bid adieu to their long career in normal course, at the turn of superannuation age.

As old habits die hard, I continued to put on fat as in the past, during the long spell of 22 years. This extraordinary fat has been responsible to embarrass the authorities, who found it difficult to carry people with them and convince them that I am under their thumb. In order to save their face, they resorted to earlier tactics and designed a new model of 1982 and robed me with extremely tight gown in the late eighties and succeeded to hide my fat by as much as 80 percent; as a result, I look lean and thin, as if I have been starved for decades.

I find to my horror that though my breeding ground has grown greener and is poised to flourish more and more, as in the past, my pace has apparently been sluggish. If I take one step forward, irrespective of the tone and tenor of the persuasive arguments of the authorities, the Working Class, which is fully aware that my fresh movements do not reflect and reveal reality, adds four steps to find out actual position, because the fate of its DA is linked with the acceleration with which I used to surge forward since 1960, till recent past.

Let me confide that so long toiling multitude fails to assert itself, I cannot come as a saviour and offer solace and succour to the restive souls. The authorities will brand me as a “doubled edged weapon,” the sharper side of which will be used against the very labour, which looks to it for rescue and relief.

□

Who Is Responsible for Increasing Tension in Korean Peninsula?

At a time when the military situation on the Korean peninsula has entered an unpredictable phase, the south Korean authorities and some unsound elements are spreading ridiculous stories and distorting the essential aspects of the current situation. They are foolishly portraying the provocateurs as "guardians of peace" and the victims as "wreckers of peace," arguing that the DPRK's self-defence measure is a political provocation aimed at a particular purpose and a tactic of diplomatic pressure. It has been officially clarified time and again why the armed forces of the DPRK had no alternative but to take such a self-defence measure.

Since the beginning of this year, the south Korean authorities at the instigation of the bellicose circles of the United States have pushed ahead their long-prepared plan to invade the north. Unending joint US-south Korea war manoeuvres have created a war-like situation in the Korean peninsula. What is more, the south Korean authorities have converted the demilitarised zone along the military demarcation line into a battle zone. In violation of the Armistice Agreement, which provides for the preservation and operation of the DMZ, the south Korean authorities have introduced heavy weapons into the area south of the DMZ and built military installations there and have gone to the extent of constructing a forward position at a spot only 100 metres from the MDL.

In this dramatic situation, where thoroughgoing war preparations are being stepped up by one of the two hostile parties, it is entirely just for the armed forces of the DPRK to exercise the right of self-defence in order to prevent the outbreak of war.

The south Korean authorities and Rightwing conservative circles of the United States have been working hard to mislead public opinion asserting that the DPRK has violated the AA to achieve a "particular purpose" including the signing of a tentative agreement with the United States. This is nothing but a trick to conceal their true colour as provocateurs and justify their war actions.

The Government of DPRK has advanced a

reasonable proposal to convert the armistice into a durable peace on the Korean peninsula and has made patient efforts for its realisation. It has proposed to build a new peace system with a view to fill up the security vacuum. This presupposes that the existing Armistice Agreement remains valid till the appearance of a new peace mechanism that could replace the crumbling armistice system.

As part of these efforts the DPRK has put forward a proposal for replacing the fragile AA by a tentative agreement in order to prevent accidental armed clashes in the DMZ. These efforts have not been realised owing to the unjustified stand of the enemy. The responsibility for the undermining of the AA rests with the United States which has systematically violated and undermined the AA and the mechanism to supervise it.

The AA has turned out to be a useless paper not helpful to the preservation of peace on the Korean peninsula, as two thirds of the provisions of the agreement have been abrogated by the United States and the south Korean authorities over the last four decades and more.

Worse still, the United States has appointed a general of the south Korean puppet army, who has neither qualification nor competency, as senior member of the UN Forces, thus completely paralysing the function and role of the Military Armistice Commission. All this shows too clearly who is to blame for having systematically abrogated the AA and increased tension on the Korean peninsula.

It is ridiculous for the South Korean authorities to have brought the "violation" of the AA and "provocations" in the DMZ to the notice of the UN Security Council. If the United Nations wishes to do anything, it should do away with its unhappy past related to the Korean problem and take to task the US and the south Korean authorities for having systematically violated the AA.

If unsound forces, bereft of reason, dance to other's tune, they will not be able to evade the responsibility for having brought unspeakable disaster to humanity.

(Abridged version of a statement issued by the Embassy of DPRK in India).

SEMINAR OF WOOD & WOOD MATERIAL WORKERS

A seminar of wood & wood material workers union and construction workers federations of in Asia & Pasific region was held at Hanoi, the capital city of Socialist Vietnam on 27th & 28th March 1996.

T.H.K. Variar, Vice President of Construction Workers' Federation of India (CITU) and Kunnisseri Vijayan, Vice President of Confederation of

-T.H.K. VARIAR, Vice President, Construction Workers' Federation of India

Construction Workers (AITUC) participated in the seminar as representatives of India. Other delegates participated were from Pakistan, Japan, Australia and Vietnam. UITBB Secretariat members also attended the seminar.

On 27th before the session all delegates visited Com. Ho Chi Min Mausoleum and paid homage to

him. The Mausoleum is a tomb in which the body of Com. Ho Chi Min is laid in a glass box. The body is guarded by the volunteers. A museum is also situated near the tomb.

Uitbban, President of Vietnam National Union of Wood Workers presided over the seminar. He explained the role played by the working class of Vietnam in their liberation struggle against American imperialism and the role played to build a new Socialist Vietnam.

UITBB Secretary presented UITBB's report and delegates from Japan, Australia, Pakistan, Vietnam, and India presented their papers and reports in the seminar and discussions took place.

Russian Trade Unions on Struggle Path

Some 15 million Russians, or almost a third of the FITUR membership, took part in the nation-wide action of protest that reached its peak on November 30. The action was held following a joint decision by the FITUR Executive Committee and the Coordinating Committee of Trade Union Solidarity Actions.

Processions, rallies, meetings of work collectives, etc were held in all major industrial centres, while in some places warning strikes were staged.

Masses of workers took to the streets in Krasnodar, Khabarovsk, St Petersburg, Bryansk, Voronezh, Saratov, Belgorod and in many other regions. The rallies and meetings subjected the Russian government to bitter criticism for the sharp drop in the population's living standards.

Suffice it to mention that the state arrears of wages totalled last November 11.5 trillion roubles, or 2.2 billion US dollars. Thousands of enterprises have been driven to the verge of ruin, and 12 per cent of the economically active population have been rendered jobless. Participants in the action demanded that authorities guarantee prompt payment of wages, settle all pay debts and take concrete measures to curb unemployment.

Commenting on the results of the collective protest action, FITUR president Mikhail Shmakov described it as the most massive action by Russian workers in recent time, involving most of the 380 thousand primary organisations.

Bryansk: Protest Ends in Tragedy

A mass protest action by workers of an automobile plant in Bryansk driven to despair by the chronic wage delays has ended up in a tragedy. The reason behind the action was only too typical of a country ruled by good-for-nothing reformers. The enterprise employing over 9,000 workers stopped paying out wages last May, with the total wage arrears exceeding 6.5 billion roubles.

Indignant workers blocked the traffic on one of the highways in an attempt to make the authorities finally pay attention to their desperate situation. In the seething

Towards the end of the seminar the participants agreed to strengthen their co-ordination to fight against multinational companies' entry and unemployment & housing problem. The future programme of action would be discussed and decided by UITBB secretariat at an early date and a declaration in that aspect was accepted in the seminar, which concluded in the evening of 28th March.

The seminar decided unanimously to fight against the multinational entry, unemployment and the housing problem of common people by conducting agitation on regional and national level. The seminar decided for joint action in this connection.

crowd, two workers, a man and a woman, got under a passing trucks wheels, both were hospitalised. One of the victims, Vera Godun, a mother of two, died.

Despite the fact that one and a half billion roubles were in no time found to pay out the wages, the accident agitated the entire city and created an explosive situation. Some other enterprises in Bryansk also announced they were ready to strike.

Commenting on the tragic event, FITUR president Mikhail Shmakov told a press conference in Moscow that the present situation in the country could be compared with that in 1905, on the eve of the First Russian Revolution. "Once again, we find ourselves reopening the tragic pages of our history, he said. Trade unions have repeatedly warned the government about possible unpredictable consequences of the delayed payment of wages to workers. However, the authorities have turned a deaf ear to our warnings."

Primorski Territory: Women Preparing Protest Action

Women in the Primorski Territory, indignant at the Russian government's child care policy, decided to hold an unprecedented protest action, a propaganda train along the railway route Vladivostok—Moscow. Rallies will be organised at larger stations and a demonstration on the Red Square in Moscow.

The action was initiated by women working at the Zvezda (Star) defence plant, a big nuclear submarine repairing dock in the town of Bolshoy Kamen, where workers have not been paid for half a year. The government owes to the plant a total of 105 billion roubles. Olga Skripko, chairperson of the local trade union committee, said her colleagues' children had to rummage through garbage cans in search of food because their parents had already sold out, or swapped for a slice of bread, all they had.

Her comrades and herself, Olga Skripko went on to say, were going to make it a nationwide event. A special committee "Women in Defence of Their Children" has been

set up in Bolshoy Kamen. Thousands of women workers in local enterprises have already offered their support to the committee, including workers of the Far East railway, who said they would guarantee technical maintenance of the train.

FITUR Warns Against Delayed Pay

Last November the FITUR issued a statement on the aggravation of the economic and social situation in the country, which, in particular, says: "The economic and social situation in many working collectives has been heated to the utmost. The aggravation is connected with the growing wage arrears. Increasing numbers of Russians are sliding down below the poverty line. The average per capita income has been reduced by 11 per cent as against the last year's level, and the wage arrears have exceeded 10 trillion roubles (over two billion dollars).

Such an irresponsible attitude of the power structures towards the people's legitimate rights and interests causes justified indignation fraught with a social explosion. Since the beginning of 1995, 5847 strikes have been held, which exceeds the level of the previous year manifold."

The FITUR demanded a law providing that wage payments should come before all other priorities, whatever the form of enterprise ownership. The Federation believes the Russian government has in this respect actually violated the General Agreement for 1995.

Textile Workers have Extra Conference

On 23rd November 1995, the Textile and Light Industry Workers' Union convened in Moscow an all-Russia extraordinary conference to discuss the critical situation in the industry and a package of radical measures to be taken for its revival.

Leaders of the union explained that holding such a conference was caused by the threat of the industry's collapse. For the first time in the last five years the slump in the production has hit the critical mark of 70-95 per cent. unemployment has taken on a mass character. Almost 70 per cent of workers have been sent on forced leaves or are working part-time. The threat of wholesale enterprise bankruptcies has become only too obvious. The waves of social frustration have increasingly often been splashing out into spontaneous protests.

The ever-dragging negotiations of the union leaders with government representatives and members of Parliament have so far produced no positive results: the government still has no comprehensible programme of transforming the textile and light industry.

Russia: Teachers Want Their Pay

From 14-15 December 1995, Russia's education workers went on a two-day strike involving over 210 thousand people from more than four thousand work collectives.

Over a million more people have expressed their solidarity with the action by putting their signatures under an appeal to the government.

The strikers' demands were purely economic. One explanation is that in the last three months the state debts to the education sector went up to 550 billion roubles, or

120 million US dollars.

Vladimir Yakovlev, president of the Education and Scientific Workers' Union, described the federal budget for 1996 approved by the State Duma as "destructive of education," because the funds it provides for the branch can only meet less than 50 per cent of the minimum requirements of educational institutions. All this in a context where a teacher's average salary is less than the subsistence minimum.

If appropriate steps are not taken, he warned, the central union, with support from the regions will call a week-long strike in late January 1996.

Moldova's Workers Angry at Pay Delays

Last November Moldova's capital Chisinau witnessed a many thousand strong rally organised by trade unions to protest the sharp decrease of living standards. Unions' demands were of a purely socio-economic nature.

Addressing the gathering, president of the Moldova trade union centre Ion Godonoga said, among other things, that in 1990 the minimum wage amounted to 83 per cent of the subsistence minimum, whereas today it had come down to a mere five per cent. The arrears of wages have now exceeded 194 million lei and rural workers have not been paid for five to six months, which is a blatant violation of human rights and fundamental ILO Conventions.

Prior to the event, over 50,000 workers took part in protest meetings arranged in hundreds of other towns and villages all over Moldova. Their basic demands were: payment of the delayed wages, pensions and welfare benefits; indexation of the workers' bank deposits; preservation of jobs and prevention of mass unemployment; and adequate funding of health care, education and culture.

The GCTU executive issued a statement expressing fraternal solidarity with the GFTURM, its affiliates and all workers in the Republic. Messages of solidarity were also received from the ICFTU and trade union centres of 15 countries.

Ukrainian Workers Picket Government

Over 12,000 workers in the engineering and defence industries from all over Ukraine took part in a picket line outside the house of the Council of Ministers in Kiev.

The pickets demanded a stop to the destruction of Ukraine's industrial potential and a reformed labour remuneration system aimed at stimulating the production.

The machine builders and defence workers were supported by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine and by a number of other branch unions. Protest rallies, picketing administrative buildings, and meetings with local authorities were also held in regional centres and other cities of Ukraine.

Trade unions of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, as well as Belgium, Canada, Turkey, Sweden and many other countries expressed their solidarity with workers of Ukraine's engineering industry and military-industrial complex.

The action has resulted in the Council of Ministers and the Engineering Workers' Union setting up a special joint commission to consider the pickets' demands and work out urgent measures to meet them.

South African Trade Unions Fight for Social Equity and Against Market Economy.

(Three national trade union centres of South Africa consisting of COSATU, NACTU and FEDSAL have put forward their approach and proposal to the South African Government on economic policy to be adopted by the Govt with a clear re-orientation towards social equity. This proposal of the organised trade union movement of South Africa which also played the frontline and decisive role in dismantling the apartheid regime made revealing observations regarding the horrifying state of inequality nourished by the apartheid regime which is still in existence. They also challenged the theory of the so-called 'market led growth' of liberalisation and privatisation authored by the World Bank and IMF and being preached by the South African capitalist class and their pet economists, with irrefutable arguments. The excerpts from the said communique by the South African Trade Union movement is being published hereunder.- Ed).

Two years after the 1994 elections, South Africa remains a society characterised by vast inequalities, in wealth, economic power and incomes..... We now face the challenge of addressing the glaring inequities in our country. As the white population had to give up its monopoly of political power in order to usher in the new democracy, so the economic elite should now be challenged to share the wealth and resources of our country to the benefit of all.

This critical requirement for the new democracy - the active promotion of social equity - is the key objective organised labour sets for itself during 1996. We do this because too many South Africans are poor, underpaid or unemployed, homeless and with their basic needs and requirements not satisfied by the economy.

Social equity in South Africa, and particularly the reduction of the vast inequalities in the society, must entail substantial redistribution of wealth, the eradication of poverty, the promotion of worker rights, increased employment, the development of the full human potential of our people and the provision of basic infrastructure and services to all citizens. Labour puts forward this framework as a first contribution to the current debate, and in order to clarify to the society what our analysis of the current situation is, and what our vision for the future entails.

A Very Unequal Society

According to the HSRC, the poorest 40% of households in South Africa earn less than 6% of total income, while the richest 10% earn more than half the total income. While Africans make up 76% of the population, the African share of income amounts to only 29% of total income. Whites, who make up less than 13% of the population, takes away 58.5% of total income. (Source: HSRC. A Profile of Poverty, Inequality and Human Development in South Africa, 1995). The poorest 53% of the population account for less than 10% of total consumption in our country, while the richest 6% of the population account for over 40% of consumption. Of the poorest part of the population a third live in shacks or 'traditional dwellings.' Of the poorest 53% of the population, about 80% have no access to electricity, about 70% have no access to piped water to their premises, and more than 80% no access to modern sanitation.

The World Bank study in mid 1994 admits: "While only one in hundred white children dies in infancy, ten of every hundred African children do - five of them from easily preventable conditions. Of African children who reach the age of five, more than half suffer stunted growth because of inadequate nutrition. Among those who manage to enter school, only one in seven reaches standard 10.... Of adults, fewer than half work in the formal economy. For those who become parents, the maternal mortality rate is 70 times higher among Africans than among whites. Per capita, whites earn 9.5 times the income of blacks and live, on average, 11.5 years longer.

These inequalities are not accidental: they are the natural outcome of the low wage policies, followed by the private sector, and the deliberate policies of the old state to under-spend on social services for black people.....

Powerful Conglomerates

Our country has a very high concentration of ownership and control by a few large corporations. Such high levels of economic concentration, combined with a corporate culture which excludes workers from decision-making, produces a society of powerful and powerless, wealthy and poor.

The current holders of economic power have acquired their wealth over the last few hundred years

through land dispossession, the conquest of black people and the exploitation of black workers.....

In more recent times, business has engaged in speculative activities, which have served to foster unproductive economic activities, and instead of investment in plant, equipment and people, it has invested in shopping malls, and huge glass and concrete towers as monuments to the sterility of the corporate and financial sector. This must change now.

Economic Growth and Development

The debate about growth is important. The relationship between growth and equity is complex. It is certainly not true that increased growth leads automatically to increased equity. Indeed, the experience of the Reagan-Thatcher years has shown that growth in those societies came at the expense of the poor.

The US has developed into a society where greater number of people have insecure tenure of employment, working in the casual, part time and low wage sectors, and where the success of a company is now measured by the number of people it is prepared to retrench.....

There are two distinct relationships in the growth-equity nexus which is important for public policy making. First, programmes which promote social equity can lead to economic growth. Second, particular types of growth can lead to greater equity in a society.....

Social equity programmes may enhance growth in a number of ways. Investment in public infrastructure can significantly reduce production costs. The World Development Report of 1994, published by the World Bank, concedes that "many studies....have concluded that the role of infrastructure in growth is substantial, significant, and frequently greater than that of investment in other forms of capital."

Land reform policies have played a major role in stimulating economic growth in many countries. In China, land reform has allowed for new surpluses to be generated in agriculture. This has been complemented with a "minimum package" of transport, telecommunications and power at village level, which led to a massive expansion in the productivity and performance of rural enterprises.....

In our country, the Key Indicators of Poverty in South African Study draws attention to this relationship. Not only are the intense levels of poverty highly inequitable, they also constitute a brake to improving economic performance.

Recent economic growth, following the trend in certain liberalised markets elsewhere in the world, has been jobless growth. During 1995 for example, while the GDP grew by 3.5%, much of this was jobless growth. The annualised rate of employment growth, based on the first half of 1995, was only 0.3%.....

Market deregulation, or the 'rule of the free market' is often put forward as the main engine to develop the society.... In practice it is not so clear, nor so simple. Societies which have deregulated their markets have not necessarily grown fast.....

Markets have been inadequate in responding to the social needs of human beings—in setting decent wages and fair standards, in protecting the poor and the marginalised, in correcting imbalances of wealth and inequality and in addressing the problems of exploitation.

Free markets, if reduced to the freedom to exploit, have led to the development of major inequalities and poverty in societies, and defeated the purpose of economic policy. The alternative is a coherent development plan, based on market realities, and seeking to marshal resources towards the building of an efficient, dynamic economy.....

A Sterile Business Response

It is telling that the business community represented by the SA Foundation has launched a well financed and well publicised campaign to cling onto their wealth. They do so by creating a range of red-herrings, such as the alleged "inflexible" labour markets and the alleged "labour elite." In so doing, they seek to let poor people pay for growth and development, whilst keeping the wealth and power of the privileged intact.

Their policy prescriptions consist of a restatement with graphs and graphics of ideologically driven 'solutions.' Behind the gloss lies the oft-repeated programme of economic deregulation, lower tariffs, privatisation, weaker trade unions, lower corporate taxes, reduced labour standards and financial market liberalisation. This has become known as the "neo-liberal" programme. It is a programme

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which has been advanced by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and by international capital. South African business has merely repeated the stale and simplistic formulae underpinning this programme.

It is a programme to cut back the capacity of a democratic state to moderate the use of market power. It fails to acknowledge the real weaknesses in the economy, and the potential benefits in an active public sector fostering policies to promote growth. It is a programme to weaken the trade unions, one of the important institutions in society which seek to advance social justice.

It is a programme which will divide society, strengthen the wealthy and reduce the prospects of negotiated agreements on the key challenges facing society. In the process, big business seeks to repudiate key elements of agreements reached by their representatives with labour and government, on centralised bargaining (at the National Economic Forum in 1993) and on the Labour Relations Act (at Nedlac in 1995). They talk the talk of tripartism, but they walk the walk of undermining labour standards.

The Unemployed and Business

The cynical attempt by business to blame workers for high levels of unemployment, needs to be challenged.

First, it is the business community (not trade unions or workers) which retrenches thousands of workers each year. They do this simply in the chase for higher profits. Many companies continue to retrench (downsizing and rightsizing, they call it), even when making above average profits. Yet these same companies now blame workers for unemployment.

Second, the uncompetitiveness of sections of the economy is precisely due to the low levels of investment by business in education and training of the majority of workers. The partial exception to this has been the resources put into training of white artisans and professionals, by the business community, and the public sector in the past.

Successive editions of the World Competitiveness Report have placed South Africa at the bottom of the league of nations in human resource development. In the in-company training category, we are nearly at the bottom, ranked 40th in a list of 48 countries.....

Third, the cosy cartel of conglomerates which dominate the South African economy, have engaged in collusive and price-fixing practices which have blunted the ordinary competitive pressures in a market economy.....

Fourth, it is the employed workers which provide the social security net for the unemployed. The October Household Survey produced by the Central Statistical Services, reported the following breakdown of the economically active population.

Employed 8.2 million (57%), informal sector 1.5 million (10.5%), Unemployed 4.7 million (32.5%)..... Fifth, wages of many employed unionised workers are extremely low..... According to the Labour Research Service, the average wage in unionised workplaces for South African labourers was R285 per week in 1995—a wage well below what is required to maintain a reasonable standard of living.....

Contrast this with average earnings of Executive Directors of leading companies of the JSE who earn R67,000 per month (or R 15,500 per week)! In rural areas, the picture is even grimmer..... In Agriculture wages in the Western Cape (not the lowest in the country) varied from as little as R87.00 per week for males to R58.00 per week for females. These wages are even substantially below those sections of the informal sector....

Yet the ploy to blame workers for unemployment is being pursued with ruthlessness by sections of business. Every new proposal to challenge their wealth, their power or the way they conduct business is immediately said to "limit job creations" or to "scare off investors." These phrases have become the latest rationalisation for the powerful and the elite to cling onto their privileges in a society where the vast majority of people cry out for social justice. But it does not ring true, and it resolves no problems in our society. □

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