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THE WORKING CLASS

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Working People Assert Right to Strike



Defeat the BJP & its Allies, Save India !

WHY NOT FIVE Vs. FIVE MR PRIME MINISTER?

Dipankar Mukherjee

Prime Minister Vajpayee, while dedicating three power projects to the nation which was commissioned six months back, last week reportedly lamented that the achievement of his NDA Government in power sector could not be highlighted because of the dismal performance of power sector during the last 50 years. This was incidentally an official function and not an election meeting. But that did not deter him from putting forth his party's electoral slogan of so-called "five vs. fifty years rule." One need not be an admirer of fifty years rule but the performance of NDA Government in power sector during 1998-2003 vs. the earlier years speaks for itself.

During VII plan (1985-90) the country added 21000 mw. In the VIII Plan (1992-97) it was 16000 mw. In the IX plan the capacity addition was 19000 mw against the target of 40000 mw. In the current X plan, against the target of 41000 mw, the projects under execution likely to be completed by 2005-06, are reportedly 19139 mw. The achievement therefore lies more with fixing high target for public consumption without any improvement in implementation.

In 1997-98 before NDA came to power the energy shortage was 8.1% and peak shortage

was 11.3%. In 2002-03, the same has increased to 9.1% and 12.2% respectively.

Interestingly the generation showed a growth of 40% (from 301 billion units to 422 BU) during five years preceding the NDA rule. During the period from 1998-2003, it has gone up by 30% (422 BU to 550 BU) only.

Average tariff rate for both domestic and agricultural sector has increased by 2-3 folds during the NDA regime.

The shining glory of NDA Govt, which has pleased the corporate lobby, is of course the legislation of Electricity Bill, 2003 which would privatise the power sector and remove the cross-subsidies so that access to electricity is further denied to rural and urban poor including farmers.

NDA Government can also take pride in the 3 billion dollar power plant which is lying idle for the past 32 months without generating a single unit of electricity. Enron's 2184 mw Dabhol Power Company which was financed by domestic lenders like IDBI to a large extent is a sordid saga of political somersault of BJP and its ally in Maharashtra. After vowing that the Enron project would be thrown in to Arabian sea, if they came to power, Vajpayee gov't's only contribution in power sector during its 13-day rule in 1996 was to extend counter guarantee to the same project. Subsequently, the BJP-Sena Government permitted Enron to erect this plant with an enhanced capacity.

Power sector is not the only area of this bogus campaign of five vs fifty, propagated by the BJP campaign managers. In every sector, the dismal performance of the present government is being covered up with such half truths or untruths. Even the Prime Minister's chair on an official occasion with the emblem of Satya Meva Jayate in the background is also being utilised for this purpose. Mungeri Lal made people to dream. Natwarlal robbed people with sweet talks. There is a combination of both in the campaign of "Shining Wallah" pracharaks. Why go back to fifty years, "five vs. five" is enough to reveal the truth.

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THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

MARCH 2004

YOU SAID IT by Laxman



These indicate nothing in particular. These are just to promote and generate feel-good factor!

Courtesy: The Times of India

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EDITORIAL

DEFEAT THE DAMNED LIARS!

As this issue reaches the hands of our readers, the country would have witnessed yet another glorious strike action by the working people of the country asserting their inalienable right to strike and once again manifesting their resolve to resist the disastrous economic policies.

Plunging the country into election mode, much ahead of its due schedule, the ruling combine is resorting to patent lies and falsehood. The Prime Minister and his associates have no time to listen to the genuine grievances of the masses, not to speak of responding to the unanimous demand of all sections of workers to nullify the pernicious impact of the Supreme Court judgement against the right to strike.

The working class has to decisively act with ample vigilance and fore sight in meeting the political challenge confronting democratic India in the ensuing elections.

It is not the slogans of 'development' 'unprecedented GDP growth rate' 'India shining' 'feel good' 'feel great' etc that the rabid communal right wing party, that the BJP is, will frontload as the issues in this election. All these are just to cloak the real communal agenda of the 'sangh parivar' dividing the Indian society on religious lines and forcing the minority into submission, as attempted in Gujarat through state sponsored incendiary violence.

It is worth recalling what Swami Agnivesh had cautioned the people recently. He said: "People should not fall prey to the 'India Shining' campaign of the BJP-led Central Government. The Ram Temple issue is on and off the election agenda of the BJP according to its necessities. Wearing the 'mask of Ram Bhakti' vested interests are misusing and exploiting Hindu religious sentiments." He added: "If this trend was allowed to continue, it is doubtful if, a few years from now, Hinduism will be recognisable from other violent and vicious ideologies." Needless to remind, this 'violent and vicious ideology' of the BJP, the political outfit of the RSS, is much the same as the fascism of the Nazi variety.

The working class can never afford to forget the vengeance with which the BJP led government had been pursuing the 'liberalisation' policies of the World bank IMF prescriptions during the last six years of the Vajpayee regime. It is increasingly becoming evident that the globalisation driven development model has less and less space for democratic rights, particularly expressions of dissent and protest. The recent attack of the Supreme Court on the right to strike and the BJP regime's acquiescence therewith has ominous portents for the future of trade union movement.

It is, therefore, incumbent for the workers of the country to be in the forefront of the struggle to inflict a crushing defeat to the combine of damned liars headed by the BJP and save the country.

WHILE REAL INDIA BLEEDS, ONLY 'REEL' INDIA SHINES

Addressing a press conference at B. T. Ranadive Bhawan in New Delhi on 12th Feb. 2004, M K Pandhe and Chittabrata Majumdar, President and General Secretary, CITU announced: "all is set for a massive countrywide strike, to affirm the right to strike, to say no to the disastrous economic policies of the government, which are leading to galloping unemployment, grinding poverty and reckless privatization - all to the drum beats of the IMF, World Bank and WTO."

Indications were available that the banks were set to be heading for a total closure. Defence establishments, too, through the All India Defence Employees Federation, would be witnessing the strike besides the central and state government federations, insurance, ports and docks, steel and mines and the coal sectors. Support from the peasantry in variety of forms and from others through rasta roko and solidarity rallies would naturally be there. Students and youth would be joining in solidarity all over the country.

A statement released by the CITU said that the right to strike was won after long struggles and it can't be taken away and charged the prime minister with reneging on his promise to hold negotiations with the trade unions to undo the situation created by the Supreme Court

judgement. Following is the full text of the statement:

"The working class is going ahead with its preparations for the countrywide general strike on February 24, 2004, called by the major central trade unions along with all India federations of employees of state and central governments, banks, insurance, defence and other service sectors. The strike is to defend workers' right to strike in the face of prohibitive judgement by the Supreme Court and also against the anti-people economic policies of the NDA government resulting in growing poverty, increasing unemployment, reckless privatisation and closures and onslaught on labour rights.

"Joint trade union conventions have already been held in all the states in the months of December 03 - January 04, which have drawn wide participation by workers and unions of almost all affiliations. Reports have been received of strike notices served by the unions from all industrial centres of the country through joint demonstrations by February 9, 2004. Despite confusion being sought to be created by the government and the employers in various places regarding the efficacy of the strike action, the working class is going ahead with the preparation for the strike with firm resolve.

"The NDA government is seeking to create confusion by its multi-crore ad-campaign on so called 'feel good situation' in the economy and on pre-election sops, which are mostly fraudulent, so far as the common people and workers are concerned. The so-called social security scheme for unorganised sector workers declared by the government without any structural, administrative and budgetary back-up is one example of such fraudulent tactics of the NDA government. The decision of merger of 50 per cent DA with basic pay for the central government employees was nothing but implementation of the 5th pay commission recommendation, which had been accepted during the United Front regime. The NDA government can only claim of dubious credit for choosing the time for declaring the same keeping the elections in mind. But they are yet to issue the notification on the same. The government employees' organisations, both in the states and the centre, have reiterated their resolve for the general strike on February 24. The prime minister committed before the 39th Indian Labour Conference held on October, 2003 to have discussion with the trade unions on their grievances in the matter of Supreme Court judgment on right to strike and vindictive actions on the

Tamilnadu government against its employees. The prime minister has reneged on his promise.

"Moreover, in the month of December itself, in a communication to ILO in response to the complaint lodged by CITU and Public Service International on the Tamilnadu situation, the government of India fully endorsed all the repressive actions taken by the Tamilnadu government against its employees. It is only in the background of countrywide preparatory actions for the general strike on February 24, the Jayalalitha government had to decide on taking back the 999 dismissed employees and reduce the punitive actions on the striking employees. Yet, the grievous wounds, inflicted by the state terrorism unleashed by the Jayalalitha regime during and after the strike, remain an inerasable scar among the state employees and their families.

"The major issues on which the strike had been called are yet to be addressed. The judicial ban on right to strike for the government employees in particular and others in general is not acceptable to the working class. The

campaign on the so called feel-good-factor indulged in by the NDA government is draining out huge public money at a time when the country and the majority of the people are actually witnessing deepening poverty, growing unemployment and job-losses, aggravating industrial sickness and closures. The working class of the country is going to assert their forceful condemnation against all these happenings, while upholding their resolve to defend their "Right to Strike".

"The February 24 strike will assert that the working India is only feeling hurt and deceived by the NDA regime and the real India of the masses bleeding, while the 'reel' India of the MNCs, corporate and

speculative lobbies alone is 'shining' with the patronage and favours showered on them by the 'reforms' savvy NDA regime." The CITU also denounced the nasty comments made by the US consul-general at Kolkata challenging the trade union movement in the country, which tantamount to interference on the internal affairs of a sovereign country. At Kolkata, the working people conveyed their condemnation to such interference through massive demonstration before the USIS. The CITU called upon the working class to further intensify the preparations and make the February 24 General Strike (*ninth such massive action against the disastrous economic policies in the country*) a massive success.

IT'S SUPREME COURT AGAIN!

A Supreme Court Bench has again come out with a very strange ruling distinguishing between legal and illegal strike and justifying punishment of the workers for a so-called 'illegal strike'. The ruling came on February 18, 2004 in connection with a petition filed by UP State Bridge Corporation Ltd. against the workers' strike and Allahabad High Court's judgement in favour of the workers. Unfortunately, whenever a strike arises, management always hastens to declare it illegal. Anti-worker rulings are coming out from the apex court one after another without any word on the Govt's or Management's arbitrary decisions of retrenching the workers, downsizing, closure and privatisation of the Govt. Depts., Boards, semi-Govt. institutions and public sector units.

This is yet another instance how the country's judiciary is constantly taking position against the working class who are being endlessly harassed by the offensive of IMF-World Bank dictated globalisation. The entire working class will stand united against all offensives of the Govt., management and its endorsement by the judiciary. Such repeated pronouncements will only strengthen the resolve of the working class of the country to give a befitting rebuff to these relentless offensives, by making the nationwide strike on 24 February 2004 to re-assert Right to Strike a challenging success.

(Com. P. Ramamurti, the founder General Secretary of the CITU, wrote a critique of the two bills introduced by the Government of India during 1982 to amend the Industrial Disputes Act and the Trade Union Act, aimed at curtailing the right to strike. We publish some excerpts from that write up, which has relevance in the present context as well. - Editor)

DEFEND RIGHT TO STRIKE

They (the bills) throw Indian Working Class to the period three centuries back when the 'combination law' was enacted in Great Britain. At the time, when the workers started organising themselves in Trade Unions, the Law was passed by the British Parliament making such organisations illegal and any attempt to organise a trade union a criminal offence punishable with drastic sentences including death sentence. The workers had to fight the battle for decades in which many were sent to the gallows to win the right to organise the trade unions.

BACKGROUND OF TU ACT

In many industrialist countries like Great Britain, France, United States of America, etc, there is no trade unions act, no registration of trade unions. They are just voluntary organisations with whose internal affairs, the government does not interfere in any way.

In India, the need for a Trade Unions Act arose because of the notorious judgement of the High Court of Madras in 1921 in a suit filed by the management of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. At the end of First World War, a heroic strike struggle was waged by the workers of the mill. The Madras Labour Union had earlier been formed by people

interested in the working class namely, B Shiva Rao, B P Wadia, V Chakkrai Chettiar and V Kalyansundara Mudaliar. The strike was organised by this union and these leaders led the strike. It was a prolonged strike but was ultimately suppressed by brutal repression including repeated firing on the workers by the then British Government. The management of the mill filed a suit for damage against these leaders in the Madras High Court on the ground that they were responsible for the strike and if the strike had not taken place, they would have made profits. Because of the strike, they had lost the profits. The High Court accepted this plea and decreed lakhs of Rupees to be paid by the leaders to the management.

Thus, the position arose when no strike could be organised in this country. It was after that judgement, a big agitation took place and due to the efforts in the then Central Legislature, by the late Com. N M Joshi, the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926 was enacted. This Act nullified the judgement of the Madras High Court and gave the right to organise and strike to the working class.

ATTEMPTS TO IMPOSE RESTRICTIONS

The first restriction on the right

to strike was put by an amendment to the Payment of Wages Act by the late Sir H P Modi a representative of the Bombay Mill owners' constituency in the Central Assembly. In 1934, he moved an amendment to the Payment of Wages Act stipulating that if any group of workers acting in concert abstained from attending the factory for any cause not connected with their terms of service in the factory they would be liable to lose their wages up to seven days' wages. The Amending Bill was promptly accepted by the British Government and moved as an official bill. But still it has come to be known as the Mody's Amendment.

That amendment was aimed at deterring the working class from going on sympathetic strikes with their fellow workers, and at the possibilities of political strikes in the wake of the rising tide of the anti-imperialist movement and freedom struggle. It is significant that the Congress Party in the central legislature supported this legislation even during the British regime. After independence the Congress Govt. began putting further restrictions.

The first of these restrictions was the enactment of the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 which was

the first 'gift' of the Congress Govt. to the Indian working class after India became independent. Prior to the enactment of this Act, the workers could go on strike at any time. This Act empowered the government to declare any industry or service to be an "essential service", and once the Govt. declared so, the workers in that industry had to give fourteen days' notice to the employer and the govt, and could not go on strike either during the notice period or after six weeks of the notice. Any such strike would be illegal.

RESULT OF CAPITALIST PATH

The question naturally arises as to why the Govt. of India, seeks to take away all the right that the workers had wrested from a foreign Govt and to push them back to the situation that existed two centuries back, at the dawn of the industrial revolution in Great Britain.

The fact is that the Govt. of India, with spurious slogans, with 'cooperative commonwealth', 'socialist pattern of society' and finally, 'socialism; had embarked from the very beginning upon developing capitalism, without shattering but by compromising with the feudal landlordism, and in collaboration with imperialist foreign capital and multinationals. Capitalism and imperialism has entered the phase of decay and the imperialists seized the opportunity to utilise India's dire needs of capital, machinery, and technology. More and more India is forced to depend upon massive loans from imperialist governments and the international financial institutions

dominated by the USA like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, etc.

DICTATES OF IMF-WORLD BANK

Passing through an intense economic crisis, reminiscent of the 1930s the imperialism and their agencies to which the govt. of India goes begging, resort to arm twisting and put conditions to open their purse strings. They want slave labour to extract maximum profits, to tide over to some extent the crisis. The Govt. of India is unable to resist these pressures and obliges them. These anti-working class measures are the direct result of these dictates of the IMF, the World Bank and the multinationals.

NOOSE OF NEO-COLONIALISM

What is at stake, therefore, is not only the right to strike and the Right to collective bargaining, but the very right to organise without interference of the Government. And more than these, freedom and independence won after bitter struggles and sacrifices is at stake. The noose of neo-colonialism is drawing nearer. The class that can lead the struggle against this danger and smash it is sought to be strangled.

FIGHT BACK UNITEDLY

It is against these diabolical attacks that the Indian working class should unite and fight. It is the task of all those interested in democracy and freedom of the country to unite and fight these sinister designs.

If they approach every worker, irrespective of the union in which

he may be at present, all of them, including those who are in the INTUC unions, can be mobilised for this battle for democracy. For the attack on democracy, on the people, every where begins with the attack on the working class.

It must also be realised that these measures are dictated by the multinationals, big monopoly houses, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Continuation of these policies of dependence would lead to our country becoming a neo-colonial country.

The battle, therefore, is not only a battle for the rights of the working class and democracy for our people, but also for our freedom and independence. Mobilisation of the entire working class has, therefore, become urgent. A united working class can successfully inspire the entire people, and not only halt, but also turn this process.

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TROUNCE THE BJP COMBINE, SAVE INDIA!

M. K. PANDHE

During the run up to the elections to the recently dissolved 13th Lok Sabha, the battle cry of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee was 'fixed 5 year tenure for Lok Sabha'. The NDA government had embarked on a Constitution Review exercise after the last elections. Throwing all that talk to the winds, the self same PM has advised the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha prematurely to enable the BJP to seek a fresh mandate from the people. This is nothing but the buoyant mood under which the BJP top brass is feeling exhilarated after its victory in the Assembly elections in three states, riding the anti-incumbency sentiments there. They have a fond hope that it can help them win the parliamentary elections as well.

SOPS GALORE

Even before Parliament being convened, the Finance Minister announced concessions to the tune of Rs. 12,000 crore for the rich with cut in excise duty on aviation fuel and, in air travel tax, customs duty on cell-phones laptop computers, on coal and other products. For common people also many promises were announced, mostly not meant for actual implementation.

Govt. has now announced their decision to merge DA with basic pay for the central govt employees in line with the recommendation of fifth Pay Commission—a demand.

Special funds for Rs 50,000 crore each for rural development and small scale sector were announced, with no indication as to where the funds will come from. Similarly, The Railway Minister announced 18 new trains of long distance without creating necessary infrastructure for these trains. As if not to lag behind, Mamata Banerjee Minister for Coal announced a scheme of Rs 10,000 crores for revival and expansion of BCCL and ECL without bothering for the financial provisions. Nor the budget indicated any allocation for that purpose.

WHITHER FEEL GOOD FACTOR?

A massive self-congratulatory advertisement blitz was plan-fully launched by the BJP with life-size

portrayal of Prime Minister and others with a view to creating pro-NDA psychosis. Thousands of crores from the national exchequer and also from PSU-funds was spent on them. The so called opinion polls were also organised to build-up the popularity of BJP. This is still going on despite disapproval of the Election Commission.

The so-called feel good factor and India shining campaign are also twin election gimmicks invented by the BJP for brightening its electoral prospects. In reality, the BJP rule has hit hard the living standards of the people. The public distribution system has been drastically marginalised by the NDA Government by raising prices and slowing down procurement.

During BJP's rule the oil prices increased more than 30% pushing up the bus fare and transport cost for the people. As a result of reduction of rate of interest on PF, the workers have been defrauded Rs 3600 crores per year. Despite rise in prices, upward revision of pensionary benefits was not done. The retrograde judgement of the Supreme Court upholding the Employees Pension Scheme, 1995 has made matters worse. The Central Government also made retrograde changes in the pension scheme for the central Govt employees making it contributory for the new entrants.

The unemployment under BJP rule has increased phenomenally. The downsizing of manpower in public sector due to voluntary retirement scheme has crossed 4.5 lakhs in last five years. NDA's decision for 2 per cent reduction of manpower per annum in central government services has already resulted in sizable reduction of employment in Govt services while post-retirement vacancies are not being filled up. Lakhs of state government employees have also lost their jobs in the same period.

The common people of India do not see any feel good factor or India shining.. After all during the last two years India's ranking among the 175 countries regarding Human Development Index has gone down from 123 to 127! Is it a sign of

shining ?

PRIVATISATION SCAM

The reckless drive towards privatisation of profit making public sector undertakings at throw away prices has made the BJP-led NDA the front-runner in Scam-scandal front involving thousands of crores of rupees of public funds. Recent observation of CAG report on Centaur Hotel sale at Mumbai has highlighted how government made a free-gift of the public property on prime location to a RSS man. The pro-RSS man who got the Hotel made a clean profit in a period of 3 months of Rs 32 crore without investing a single pie. To favour the private buyer, the Govt drastically reduced the turnover-levy by 67% and also the lease rent leading to a an additional hidden sops to the private buyer of RSS camp amounting Rs 145 crore while receiving a sale proceeds of only Rs 83 crore. Virtually, each and every case of sale of public sector units under BJP's stewardship has ultimately become a free-gift of national asset to chosen private hands and such scams resulted in huge gains to those handling such sale in governance and huge loss to public exchequer.

"INDIA SHINING" FOR WHOM?

Then who are the claimants of the feel good factor? L K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharati, in spite of being chargesheeted in a criminal case are still enjoying fruits of power in India and hence feeling good no doubt. George Fernandes who still enjoys the chair of Minister of Defence despite being exposed by the Tehelka exposure in bribe scandal will also be enjoying the 'feel good' to his heart's content. Telgi scam-tainted police officers and MLAs who enjoyed fruits of Rs 60,000 crore swindle are also feeling really good. The private sector tycoons being gifted with valuable PSUs on a platter would no doubt join the feel-good partying. The PMO beneficiaries of UTI scandal and also the five Cabinet Ministers against whom CVC gave a report to the Prime Minister have also reasons to believe in feel good factor. The Corporate-accumulators of NPA of public sector banks to the tune of Rs 1,20,000 crores and the corporate evaders of tax obligations of Rs 1.50 lakh crores have never felt so good as of now. The CII, FICCI and the employers lobby also are definitely feeling good circle the workers rights are being taken

away both by labour-law changes and also well-planned administrative ferocity on the trade union movement and Tamilnadu stands before us as the burning example.

The working class of the country is going to record their strong disapproval of such atrocities and unveil the lie campaign through countrywide general strike on 24th February 2004.

THE COMMUNAL AGENDA

Along with the Govt funded lie campaign, the communal agenda of BJP is also being raised simultaneously once again and communal frenzy is being built up by the RSS outfits to win Hindu votes during the elections. Anti-Muslim, anti-Christian propaganda is viciously being carried out to threaten minorities and browbeat them. The threat to construct Ram temple are given daily and national unity and integrity is being thrown overboard by the Sangh Parivar. The arrogance of this "Hindutva brigade" is being demonstrated by physical attacks on the institutions of history research, cultural exhibitions bearing fascistic portents. That is the real face of BJP which nobody should forget.

IN DEFENCE OF SECULARISM

To save secularism and democratic traditions of India the BJP and its allies must be squarely defeated by the toiling masses of India. People must be educated about the disastrous propaganda carried by BJP in the Gobelsian style through every media.

We appeal to all secular and democratic forces to launch a powerful campaign in the forthcoming period so that no stone is unturned to explain to the people the dangerous role played by the BJP and its allies in damaging the peoples interest.

- People of India must defeat BJP in electoral battle which alone will save India's secularism and its valuable democratic traditions.
- People of India must vote left, democratic and secular forces so that secular vote is not allowed to be divided.
- BJP's attempt to hoodwink the people through deceptive and fundamentalist slogan must be nipped in the bud so that it is not allowed to handover India to foreign MNCs and imperialism.
- Self-reliant economy of India will shine only if BJP and its allies are given a resounding rebuff in the forthcoming electoral battle.

FORGET NOT THESE ONSLAUGHTS BY NDA REGIME

■ An agreement was signed on 11.9.97 between the then U.F. Govt. at centre and Central Government staff, wherein it was categorically stated that Govt. of India would not accept the retrograde recommendations of 5th Pay Commission regarding downsizing through abolition of post, stoppage of recruitment, compulsory retirement etc. as well as privatisation. Negating the above agreement, NDA Govt. constituted Expenditure Reform Commission (ERC) on 28.2.2000 to prepare a road map to downsize Central Govt. establishments.

■ In the budget speech of 2001, Finance Minister announced a host of measures against Central Govt. employees including i) reduction of number of employees to the extent of 10% in next 5 years ii) introduction of VRS iii) abolition of number of posts in various depts. iv) reduction in rate of interest on P.F. and small savings.

■ ERC submitted its final report in September 2001 endorsing the above decisions. Large scale of closure of offices, withdrawal of services, privatisation, corporatisation and computerisation were proposed to dismantle the Govt. Deptts. Govt. accepted these recommendations and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in a strong DO letter dt. 23.11.2001 asked all Ministers to faithfully implement ERC's recommendations, reiterating Govt.'s decision to reduce number of Govt. staff by 10% in 5 years..

■ Implementation is on

■ Dept. of Telecom (DOT) has been corporatised into BSNL and its privatisation is being planned. VSNL has already been sold. Postal bill 2002 is pending before Parliament, allowing private agencies to undertake postal services, corporatisation of speed post, business post etc., outsourcing of traditional postal services etc. Last year in 2003, 10,000 posts were abolished and Govt. of the day intends to reduce number of ED employees to 1lakh from over 3 lakhs at present.

■ In Railways there were 1.57 lakh vacancies as on 30.11.2003, in Group 'C' and Group 'D' category, which are not being filled up

to facilitate outsourcing and future Corporatisation/Privatisation.

■ Income tax department is going for large scale outsourcing, rendering about 30,000 out of 55,000 employees redundant.

■ Geological Survey's main functions like Coal and offshore exploration are being curbed, making 4500 employees redundant.

■ Govt. of India's Mints, Security presses, are planned to be corporatised/and or privatised. National Savings Organisation has been dismantled throwing out 1100 employees. Govt. of India Form Store, Office of Development Commissioner for iron and steel, Asst. Director (outside printing) Dept. of supply located in Kolkata have been ordered outright closure. Govt. of India Stationary Office, employing about 800 employees is going to be closed by Sept. 2004.

■ Serious attack has come on Pension in the form of new pension scheme, for which employees have to shell out their 'contributions'. 80 lakh Central and State employees could soon be pushed over to the new scheme to become pawns in the hands share marketeers, speculators and Corporates.

■ Interest on GPF has been brought down to 8% from 12% during NDA. Pensioners, retired employees, senior citizens, who are dependent on small saving schemes, are getting now only 8% interest instead of 13%, because of the present Govt. which intends it to further bring it down to 6% and below, just to make Corporate Heads and industrialists shine further.

■ INDUSTRIAL SICKNESS

Industrial sickness, attributable mostly to govt policies in both public and private sector, are reflected in a number of such companies registered in BIFR.

Till Dec 1997, 2084 companies were registered in BIFR, involving 13 lakh employees. In Dec 2003, the same is now 4748 companies involving 24 lakh employees, most of them on the verge of losing jobs (source BIFR). If this is the case of large and medium scale industries, plight of small scale industries is still worse. As per the estimate of

Small Scale Industries Federation, about 5 lakh small scale industries employing 5 million workers, have been shut down.

■ PERNICIOUS ROLE

The govt as the biggest employer is leading the onslaught. There had been job loss of 8 lakhs in CPSUs and banking sector alone during last five years. As for the sick CPSUs, statutory dues like PF, gratuity, VRS and wages, have gone up to about Rs 2000 cr as against Rs 645 cr dues before the present govt came in power.

In Railways as on 30.11.2003 there are 1,18,500 vacancies in Group 'C' and 39,758 vacancies in Group 'D'. For 20,000 Group 'D' jobs there were 75 lakh applicants.

During NDA rule the number of job seekers (as on August 2002) in employment exchanges reached 4.16 crores against 3.91 in 1997. The placement during Jan-Aug 2002 was a meager 99,000, which must have come down further. The number of unregistered employees are more than three times the same, including engineers and other highly qualified persons. This is how India is shinning with its Jobless Army.

■ EMPLOYERS' MILITANCY

In 2001 18 million man days were lost because of lockouts against 6 million man days lost on account of strike. In 1997 man days lost because of lock out was 10 million. Clearly employers' militancy is increasing by leaps and bounds, backed by the NDA govt. Till Sept 2003, 90% of the man days lost in the year were due to lock outs.

■ FIXED TERM EMPLOYMENT

Govt has through backdoor initiated the process of "hire & fire", as demanded by the employers through a notification dt 10.12.2003. As per the notification, along with temporary and badli workers, a new category of "Fixed term employment workmen" would be added who will work like a permanent workman but on "Contract basis" and their services can be terminated without any notice on non-renewal of contract. With this notification, employers would not need a permanent workman in future and all jobs can be now on "Contract basis" only to smoothen the process of "hire and fire."

■ IT SECTOR

The mouch touted claim of creating employment in IT sector is unfounded. The entire IT sector employed only 0.7 million persons in 2002. According to Mr Kiran Karnik, Preisdent of the National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom), even by 2008 the IT sector will generate only 2.1 million jobs (1.1 mn in IT services and 1.0 mn in BPO). This is only a small consolation for a country that adds around 8 million to its labour force each year.

Select Employment figures (*in millions*)

	1991	2002
Organized sector	26.74	27.96
IT	Negligible	0.70

(Source: Tata Economic Services)

VERIFICATION OF MEMBERSHIP OF CENTRAL TUs

You are aware that the exercise on verification of membership of Central TUs has already been initiated by Govt. of India in November 2003. All the Central TUs participating in the verification have already submitted their claims and interchanged amongst themselves.

According to the list submitted by different Central TUs the membership claimed is as follows:

BMS - 83,18,348	AITUC - 44,12,455	INTUC - 78,68,192	CITU - 34,31,518
HMS - 53,50,441	UTUC (LS) - 16,03,287	AICCTU - 6,73,078	UTUC - 7,81,176

Now within the next 2 months each Central TU will scrutinise the claims of the others and record its objection, if any, over the claims. Thereafter, the physical verification of records of unions will be initiated by the Govt. 3 notices within a stipulated period of time will be sent to the unions to present their records before the verifying officer.

Our unions must be ready with the the records and respond to the call of the verifying authorities. Last time we lost 25% of our claims for not responding to the call. Please be ready with the relevant records and documents viz. Registration Certificate, Affiliation Certificate, Membership Register, Membership Receipt Counterfoils, Copy of the Annual Returns etc. Seeing the claims made by other trade unions, we must ensure that whatever claims have been made by CITU is not reduced for not presenting the records.

A CRUEL FRAUD ON UNORGANISED WORKERS

W. R. VARADA RAJAN

With the general elections round the corner, the Vajpayee regime targets nothing but the votes of the unsuspecting, gullible masses of the country, indulging in everything - sops, doles, lavish ads, false promises, unabashed lies, frauds and what not. The most cruel part of this package of fraudulent exercises of the BJP government is the one resorted to by the Ministry of Labour, headed by Sahib Singh Verma. With much fanfare, he has launched the new Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security Scheme on 28th January, 2004.

Earlier, announcing the decision of the Union Cabinet to launch such a scheme, Sushma Swaraj, Minister for Parliamentary affairs, on 7th January, 2004, gave a descriptive outline of the salient features thereof to the media.

Neither the central trade unions nor even the Central Board of Trustees of the Employees Provident Fund, which is supposed to 'professionally manage the scheme' have been taken into confidence on the details of the new scheme. The website of the Ministry of Labour has put out two items related to this. One is the draft of the scheme; another is its salient features.

Tall claims are being made about what the new scheme would fetch the 37 crore

population of unorganised workers in the country. They are being told that they would get:

- ◆ Minimum pension of Rs. 500 per month, at the age of 60 years

- ◆ Personal accident insurance for Rs. One lakh 25 thousand

- ◆ Health insurance scheme for expenses up to Rs. 30000

- ◆ In the event of hospitalisation compensation of Rs. 50 per day up to 15 days

- ◆ A unique social security card to claim the above benefits

The Cabinet decision outlined by Sushma Swaraj clearly spelt out that the new scheme proposed "to cover the entire working population in the informal economy and the uncovered workers in the formal economy due to their being ineligible under the provisions of the Employees Provident Fund (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1952".

If the unorganised workers are ineligible for coverage under the EPF Act, how the new scheme can be 'professionally managed' - note the usage of the word, it is not 'administered' - by the EPF organisation? As a late thought, it is reported that the meeting of the CBT of the EPFO had been convened on 23rd February, where the proposed scheme may be placed.

Far back in September, 2003, it was reported that "the

Government plans to offer the unorganised sector of about 370 million workers a scheme which would give them old age pension as well as life insurance and medical cover." "A Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, met today (26 Sep. 2003) and cleared the scheme."

... "The seven-member GoM decided to provide three basic necessities to the workers in the unorganised sector. A draft Bill has been prepared - the Unorganised Sector Workers' Bill - under which each worker and five members of his family will get medical cover up to Rs. 30,000 a year through a Universal Health Insurance Scheme. It will also give him a life insurance cover for Rs. one lakh and an old age pension of Rs. 500 per month on attaining the age of 60 years". "The Union Labour Minister, Sahib Singh Verma, said that the Centre intended to levy an additional surcharge of 10 paise per litre on petrol and diesel to partially generate resources for this voluntary scheme that will cost the Government Rs. 1,000 crores for covering 5 million workers in the next 10 years." (The Hindu, Sep 27, 2003)

Sahib Singh Verma, even as late as 16th January, 2004, was boastfully declaring that the Bill would be introduced in and enacted by Parliament. The Bill never saw the light of the day

and 'generating resources' for the new scheme did not figure among the many sops announced by the Finance Minister in his mini-budget, prior to dissolution of the 13th Lok Sabha.

Nobody in the government or the EPF Organisation seems to be clear how the new scheme can become operational without an enabling legislation. Yet, the Vajpayee regime is beating the drums loudly that 'This scheme will dispel the fears from the eyes of our poor for all time to come' and **blatantly lie that all the 37 crore workers are covered by this!**

The 'salient features' published on the Ministry website claims the new scheme to be 'fully funded'. But, it is not a regular or a permanent scheme. "The scheme will only be implemented for 25 lakh workers in 50 districts for two years on a pilot basis, to be jointly reviewed by the Ministries of Finance and Labour"

If the assessment in Sep. 2003 was that to cover 50 lakh workers the government was to bear a cost burden of Rs. 1000 crore, one can logically expect that even for a 'pilot scheme' to cover 25 lakh workers an outlay of Rs. 500 crore ought to have been provided. Where is the provision? Will the PM and other Ministers busying themselves in 'launching' the new scheme at different cities in the country bother to answer?

When it is claimed to be a 'fully funded scheme', the government makes no mistakes; it clearly stipulates that it would be funded by contributions of

the workers and the employers (where identifiable) and a 1.16 per cent contribution by the government calculated on the national floor level wage which is presently Rs. 1800 per month. (The scheme is supposed to cover workers drawing income not more than Rs. 6500 per month; but the government contribution will be limited on Rs. 1800 only!)

Where it is specifically stated that this 'pilot' scheme will run for two years only, the draft of the scheme stipulates that 'workers in the age group of 36 - 50 will be eligible to become members only for a period of five years from the notification of the scheme' and thereafter doors will be shut for them. When will the scheme be notified? It is a mysteriously guarded secret. The draft has only this: "This Scheme will come into force from" (Date left delightfully blank!)

And what burden the hapless poor with fear in their eyes will have to shoulder? Workers below the age of 36 years Rs. 50 per month; those in the age group of 36 - 50 years Rs. 100 per month; those above 50 years of age Rs. 200 per month. And workers with no identifiable employers will have to shell out an additional Rs. 50 or Rs. 100 or Rs. 200 per month, as the case may be. Even the government estimate is that only in 30 per cent of the cases the employer could be identifiable! And this contribution has to be paid month on month till attainment of 60 years of age!

The government itself has only

prescribed a national floor level minimum wage of Rs. 1800 per month. This is on the assumption that the workers in the informal sector get gainful employment of 25 days in a month. But, it is an admitted fact that even the statutory minimum wage fixed for various scheduled employments is far below the 'national floor wage' and nowhere they are enforced. An overwhelming proportion of the unorganised workers do not come under such 'scheduled employments' and the wages they get are only a 'bottomless pit'. In several industries falling under the unorganised sector and more particularly in the rural sector, workers do not get employed even for 8 to 10 days a month. Under such distressing situation, how do one expect these workers to pay for buying their 'social security'?

The catch is that the pension of Rs. 500 per month will be available to only those who contribute **fully and regularly** for 30 years and will be proportionately reduced in other cases!

As for the health, accident and hospitalisation benefits that have been tom-tomed, the less said the better. The workers will be left to fend for themselves to obtain their claims under the 'insurance' cover.

This is just not a gimmick - it is a case unalloyed fraud played against the poor and destitute sections of the working population in the country. This fraud must be fully exposed and perpetrators of this fraud meted out the punishment they deserve - a crushing defeat in the forthcoming polls!

ECONOMY DERAILED ...

FARMERS FACE CREDIT DROUGHT

According to data available over the past few years, outstanding priority sector advances to agriculture have practically stagnated as percentage of net bank credit (NBC). Rather, it marked a continuous decline from 11.7% in 1998-

99 to 10.5% in 2002-03.....The small scale industries, the other priority sector has seen a fall in outstanding advances from 16.1% in 1998-99 to 11.1% in 2003-03.....

(Economic Times, 06-02-2004)

INDIA'S ECONOMY SURGES AHEAD?

It is now official. The Central Statistical Organisation's advance estimates of a GDP growth rate of 8.1 per cent in 2003-04 end months of speculation on what the real pace of expansion will be...

Here, it is necessary to reiterate a couple of caveats on the rebound. First, the acceleration of 2003-04 is very much a recovery from the low of last year; it is being driven by the good monsoon of 2003...The double-digit expansion of 1988-89, which came after the 1987 drought, was one such event...

The economy is doing well more because it is experiencing a greater utilisation of unused capacity than because there has been a major increase in investment in agriculture, industry and services. The CSO's statistics have placed the gross domestic capital formation in 2002-03 at 23.3 per cent of GDP at current market prices, only a marginal increase from the 2001-02 level of 23.1 per cent. This is still well below the investment rates of 26 to 27 per cent during 1995-97.....

(Editorial, The Hindu, Thursday, Feb 12, 2004)

QUALITY OF STATISTICS!

At a time when official statistics are frequently cited to argue that the Indian economy is booming, it is worth reflecting on the quality of the economic data generated by the state agencies. Frequent and large revisions of the gross domestic product estimates complicate the task of forming a realistic assessment of the state of the economy at any point of time. A good example of these revisions is the latest estimate by the Central Statistical Organisation of GDP in 2002-03. The CSO now says, nearly a year later, that in 2002-03 the economy grew by only 4 per cent and not 4.4 per cent..... And this is not the final picture. One

should not be surprised by further revisions when the provisional and then the final estimates of GDP in 2002-03 are prepared over the course of the next year...

The immediate impact of the CSO's downward revision of the GDP in 2002-03 is that growth in the current fiscal year, according to the advance estimates, will turn out to be higher than expected.... This is worth keeping in mind before coming to any conclusions about India registering a scorching pace of growth when the CSO releases next week its advance estimates of 2003-04 GDP.

(Editorial, The Hindu, Feb 07, 2004)

GDP GROWTH FAILS TO CHECK PLUNGE IN JOBS

There has been a sharp fall in employment generation since 1993-94, despite the sustained

and accelerated growth in the Indian economy. "The employment growth fell to 1.07 per cent per

DOWN THE DISASTER LANE !

annum between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 from 2.7 per cent per annum between 1982-83 and 1993-94, in spite of acceleration in GDP growth," according to the Institute of Small Enterprise and Development. The institute said that there is a big challenge before the nation, the policy makers, entrepreneurs and people, asking for a remedial action.

The institute was quoting from the report of the Special Group on Targeting Ten Million Employment Opportunities per year, under the Chairmanship of Dr S.P. Gupta, Member Planning Commission. The Vision 2020 Document of the Planning Commission has also underscored the findings of the Gupta Special Group report.

(Business Line, December 30, 2003)

SHINIGWALLAHS OR 420WALLAHS?

"When the rulers start to believe their own lies, it may be the beginning of the end for their rule."... Jayati Ghosh

With elections catching up, the NDA bandwagon has jumped on an aggressive lie-campaign in the media, both print and electronic, spending several hundreds of crore from national exchequer. Some of those lies are analysed hereunder.

Much euphoria is created over attainment of 8% growth rate in 2003-04, which is nothing but jugglery with statistics.

The reality check of state of the economy under NDA rule may be made in a better way by looking into the annual average growth over last five years. The figures published in Economic Surveys and RBI publications depict that:

1. The annual economic growth(GDP) during all the three years in the new millennium till 2003 fell well below the average growth rate of 1990s, meaning thereby that the first decade of liberalized policy regime set the economy in the track of terminal decline.

2. As compared with the average growth rates of the pre-NDA regime (1992-97- 6.7%), the NDA regime (1998-2003) witnessed a lower growth rate of below 5%.

The Prime Minister earlier announced a commitment for generating one crore additional jobs every year. And as the election is approaching nearby, the Prime Minister, posing himself to be more credible, has claimed that 84 lakh jobs (close to one crore!) have been created last year. Again an unalloyed falsehood.

The organised sector employment has been declining consistently over last five years. As admitted by none less than the Union Labour Minister in Parliament, the year ending March 31, 2002 recorded a further drop of 4.2 lakh, making it the fifth consecutive year of decline. In all, in the five years between 1996-97 and 2001-02, there has been a destruction of about 8.8 lakh organised sector jobs.

Quasi government (central) registered a highest negative growth of employment (3.59 per cent) followed by state government, quasi government (state) and central government, which recorded a negative growth of 0.47 per cent, 0.41 per cent and 0.38 per cent, respectively. (Source: Directorate of Employment, Labour Ministry). The Govt sector as well, in tune with the decision of the central govt. to downsize the total manpower by 10% in next five years, i.e., at the rate of 66000 every year, the employment growth has already turned negative.

These are some of the issues of the lie campaign. Much more lies will pour in from NDA quarters to cheat and mislead the people as the election nears by. Though Cr Pc 420 may not be invoked in the official courts, but the liars' bandwagon of NDA must be exposed thoroughly so that peoples' court takes due care of them.

Call of Social Movements and Mass Organisations

Mumbai, January 2004

The following is the declaration of social movements and mass organisations which had assembled in Mumbai in January 2004 for the fourth World Social Forum:

We the social movements united in assembly in the city of Mumbai, India, share the struggles of the people of India and all Asians. We reiterate our opposition to the neoliberal system which generates economic, social and environmental crises and produces war. Our mobilisation against war and deep social and economic injustices has served to reveal the true face of neoliberalism.

We are united here to organise the resistance against capitalism and to find alternatives. Our resistance began in Chiapas, Seattle and Genoa, and led to a massive worldwide mobilisation against the war in Iraq on February 15, 2003 which condemned the strategy of global, ongoing war implemented by the United States Government and its allies. It is this resistance that led to the victory over the WTO in Cancun.

The occupation of Iraq showed the whole world the existing links between militarism and the economic domination of the multinational corporations. Moreover, it also justified the reasons for our mobilisation. As social movements and mass organisations, we reaffirm our commitment to fight neoliberal globalisation, imperialism, war, racism, the caste system, cultural imperialism, poverty, patriarchy, and all forms of discrimination-economic social, political, ethnic, gender, sexual-including that of sexual orientation and gender identity. We are also against all kinds of discrimination to persons with different capacities and fatal illnesses such as AIDS.

We struggle for social justice, access to natural resources-land, water and seeds-human and citizens' rights, participative democracy, the rights of workers of both genders as guaranteed in inter-national treaties, womens' rights, and also the people's right to self-determination. We are partisans of peace, international cooperation and we promote sustainable societies that are able to guarantee access to public services and basic goods. At the same time, we reject social and patriarchal violence against women.

We call for a mass mobilisation on March 8, the International Women's Day.

We fight all forms of terrorism, including state terrorism. At the same time we are opposed to the use of terrorism which criminalises popular movements and restricts civil activists. The so-called law against terrorism restricts civil rights and democratic freedom all over the world.

We vindicate the struggle of peasants, workers, popular urban movements and all people under threat of losing their homes, jobs, land or their rights. We also vindicate the struggle to reverse privatisation in order to protect common, public goods, as is happening with pensions and social security in Europe. The victory of the massive mobilisation of the Bolivian people in defense of their natural resources, democracy and sovereignty testifies to the strength and potential of our movements. Simultaneously, peasants across the globe are struggling against multinationals and neoliberal corporate agricultural policies, demanding sovereignty over food and democratic land reform.

We call for unity with all peasants on April 17, the International Day of Peasants Struggles.

We identify with the struggle of the mass movements and popular organisations in India, and together with them, we condemn the political and ideological forces which promote violence, sectarianism, exclusion and nationalism based on religion and ethnicity. We condemn the threats, arrests, torture and assassinations of social activists who organised communities in order to struggle for global justice. We also denounce discrimination based on caste, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity. We condemn the perpetuation of violence and oppression against women through

cultural, religious and traditional discriminatory practices.

We support the efforts of mass movements and popular organisations in India and Asia which promote the struggle for justice, equality and human rights, especially that of the Dalits, Adivasis, and the most oppressed and repressed sectors of society. The neoliberal policy of the Indian Government aggravated the marginalisation and social oppression which the Dalits have suffered historically.

For all these reasons we support the struggle of all the marginalised throughout the world, and urge everyone worldwide to join the call of the Dalits for a day of mobilisation for social inclusion.

As an escape from its crisis of legitimacy, global capitalism is using force and war in order to maintain an anti-popular order. We demand that the governments put a stop to militarism, war, and military spending, and demand the closure of US military bases because they are a risk and threat to humanity and life on earth. We have to follow the example of the people of Puerto Rico who forced the US to close its base in Vieques. The opposition to global warfare remains our main object of mobilisation around the world.

We call on all citizens of the world to mobilise simultaneously on March 20 in an International Day of Protest against War and the Occupation of Iraq imposed by the United States, Great Britain and the Allied Forces.

In each country, the anti-war movements are developing their own consensus and tactics in order to guarantee as wide a participation and mobilisation as possible. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all occupying troops and support the right of the Iraqis to self-determination and sovereignty, as well as their right to reparation for all the damages caused by the embargo and war.

The struggle against terrorism not only acts as a pretext for continuing the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but it is also being used to threaten and attack the global community. At the same time, the US is maintaining a criminal embargo against Cuba, and destabilising Venezuela.

We call upon all people to give maximum support this year to the mobilisation for the Palestinian people, especially on March 30, the Palestinian Land Day, against the building of the wall of apartheid.

We denounce imperialist forces that are generating religious, ethnic, racial and tribal conflicts in order to further their own interests, increasing the suffering of the people and multiplying the hate and violence between them. More than 80 per cent of the ongoing conflicts in the world are internal and especially affect African and Asian communities.

We denounce the unsustainable situation of debt in poor countries of the world, and the coercive use by governments, multinational corporations and international financial institutions. We strongly demand the total and unconditional cancellation and rejection of the illegitimate debts of the Third World. As a preliminary condition for the satisfaction of the fundamental economic, social, cultural and political rights, we also demand the restitution of the longstanding plunder of the Third World. We especially support the struggle of the African peoples and their social movements.

Once again we raise our voices against the G-8 Summit and the meetings of the IMF and World Bank, who bear the greatest responsibility for the plunder of entire communities.

We reject the imposition of regional and bilateral free-trade agreements such as FTAA, NAFTA, CAFTA, AGOA, NEPAD, Euro-Med, AFTA and ASEAN.

We are millions of persons united in the struggle against our common enemy: the WTO. The indigenous people are struggling against patents on all kinds of life-forms and the theft of biodiversity, water, land. We are united in fighting the privatisation of public services and common goods.

We call upon everybody to mobilise for the right to water as a source of life that cannot be privatised. We are endeavouring to recover control over public, common goods and natural resources, previously privatised and given to transnational enterprises and the private sector.

In the victory at Cancun, the death of Lee symbolised the suffering of millions of peasants and poor people all over the world that are excluded by the "free market". His immolation is a symbol for our struggle against the WTO. This proves our determination to oppose any attempt to revive the WTO. WTO out of agriculture, food, health, water, education, natural resources and common goods!

With this determination in mind, we call upon all the social movements and mass organisations of the world to join the mobilisation in Hong Kong or in any other place where the WTO Ministerial will be held. Let us join our efforts to struggle against privatisation, in defence of common goods, environment, agriculture, water, health, public services and education.

In order to achieve our objectives, we reiterate our strong desire to reinforce the network of social movements and our capacity for struggle.

GLOBALISE THE STRUGGLE! GLOBALISE THE HOPE!

WSF TO RETURN TO PORTO ALEGRE IN 2005

The WSF 5th edition has defined its venue. In 2005, the WSF will take place in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil). There is no decision yet on dates, which will in due course be finalised by the International Council and the Brazilian Organising Committee of the WSF.

WSF 2004 STATISTICS

Around 80 thousand people represented by 2.660 organizations from 132 countries have participated in the World Social Forum's fourth edition, which has taken place in Mumbai, India, between January 16 and 21, 2004.

VOLUNTEERS and INTERPRETERS

Over 800 volunteers from 20 countries have taken part in the WSF 2004. There were 180 interpreters and translators altogether, from Argentina, Brazil, India, USA, France, Spain, United Kingdom, Belgian, Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and Palestine. Babels, an international network, provided interpretation and translation for free during the Forum. Four or five translators were professional ones while the rest were students.

There were 13 official languages at the WSF - Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Malayalam, Spanish, English, French, Korean, Bahasa Indonesia, Thai and Japanese.

PRESS

About 3.200 journalists from 644 press organs, from 45 countries, covered the WSF. The International Media Centre had 100 workstations with Linux Operational System (free software).

PROGRAMME

The activities programme under India Organiser Committee accountability presented 13 events in different formats: panels, round tables, conferences and public meetings. A new WSF process methodology was included in the programme: large self-organised activities by registered organisations from WSF, such as panels, conferences and round tables. In the sum total 35 events were organised with this size. Smaller self-organised activities such as seminars, workshops, meetings etc, had a noteworthy presence in WSF: more than 1.200 events.

CULTURAL EVENTS

During the six days of WSF, more than 1.500 artists, poets, playwrights, writers and film directors took an active part with their cultural works. There were 150 street theatre plays and also a film festival with more than 85 titles about the mainly WSF themes.

WORKING PEOPLE ASSERT RIGHT TO STRIKE

Tapan Sen

On 24th February 2004, the country will witness the 9th all India general strike since the onset of the disastrous liberalised economic policy regime. The date of the general strike was finalised in the joint meeting of all the major central trade unions in the country held at the INTUC headquarters at New Delhi on 5th January.

This general strike is not to press any economic demands of the workers. The strike is essentially for defending the right to strike, in the face of prohibitive order of the Supreme Court in that regard. The strike is also directed against the disastrous economic policy regime of the NDA Govt resulting in deepening poverty, growing unemployment, reckless privatisation and closures - all bringing about a severe distortion in the national economy as a whole, much to the detriment of the national interest.

OFFENSIVES GALORE!

Both the issues before the forthcoming general strike are closely interrelated. The ongoing attacks on labour rights are the reflections in continuity of the Fund-Bank dictated policies of liberalisation being vigorously pursued by the NDA regime. The working class movement has been consistently working for building countrywide resistance against such policies from the day one

of the onset of the liberalised policy regime, which has now started drawing support from the mass of the populace beyond the boundaries of the trade union movement. And hence the so called labour market reform has now become the main agenda of second generation reforms which aims at imposing the conditions of slavery on the working people and strip them off all their rights to collectively express and protest. Thus, the bills to amend the Industrial Disputes Act and the Contract Labour (Regulations and Abolition) Act have already been finalized and cleared by the NDA Cabinet. They are designed to vest unfettered power with the employers to hire and fire at will and deploy workers on contract on every occupation on the one hand and to impose insurmountable embargo before the unions to organise, collectively represent and strike on the other. Those bills could not be brought before the 13th Lok Sabha by the NDA government, may be because of its immediate political constraints, in view of advancing of the general election.

But along with the legislative initiative to enslave and casualise the entire working class, administrative exercise by the State machinery to totally clip the rights of organised working class movement has come out with all its fangs and

claws with a vengeance. Even the judicial wing has come forward to supplement as well as legitimise the proactive and mostly unlawful actions by the State administration to curb the trade union activities in active collusion with the employers. This is not without reason that the entire post liberalisation period has witnessed consistent rise in the employers' militancy in their randomly resorting to lockout and closures in the face of a decline in incidence of strikes. In fact during 1991-2000, lock-outs accounted for 60 percent of the total man days lost compared to strikes. In 1999 alone, man days lost owing to lock-outs were eight times more than that due to strikes. In 2001 and 2002 lock-outs led to three times and four times more man days lost respectively as compared to strikes. If man days lost due to closures and undeclared shut-downs are added to lock-outs, more than 90 per cent man days lost during the entire post liberalization period can be attributed to the employers' class alone. Yet the apex court judgment dated 6th August 2003 did not hesitate to describe 'strike' as a weapon 'mostly abused by the workers'.

Besides lock-outs and closures, flagrant violations of labour laws particularly pertaining to statutory minimum wages and others are so common that the

workers got tired of even raising complaints regarding the same since the enforcement machinery has been made totally ineffective by the Govt.s in the name of so called investment friendliness. As for example, of the total complaints lodged regarding violation of Minimum Wages Act during 2002-03, hardly one third have been attended to and disposed of according to the latest Annual Report of the Union Labour Ministry (2002-03). In reality, violation of existing labour laws on workers' rights-related matters is being indulged and promoted by the Govt machinery as a part of their policy of so called 'investment-friendliness'.

EMPLOYERS' MILITANCY!

In fact, the toiling people in the country, are losing jobs in several thousands owing to closures, lock-outs and much more due to unlawful shutdowns but remain deprived of even the minimum statutory compensations in most of the cases. Any form of organised protest against unlawful shutdowns and lock-outs has been tackled with brutality by the local police and administration that are always ready at the beck and call of the employers. Such is the experience in almost every case of lock-outs and closures in the industrial centres of Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, UP and many other states of the country. The happenings with the striking employees of Tamil Nadu betrayed perverse vindictiveness on the part of the State administration, unheard of in the entire history of labour movement. Such perversion has

become the order under the new policy regime. The perverse bias of the entire state machinery against the working class thus stands thoroughly exposed.

In this background, the working people throughout the country are going in for countrywide general strike on 24th February 2004 to assert their right to strike and reiterate their firm resolve to fight back the anti-people and anti-national policies. The attack on the labour rights is a prelude to the attacks on the entire democratic set up and institutions as the imperialist globalisation cannot remain comfortable with the democratic and collective assertions of the people.

STRIKE PREPARATIONS

The strike preparations started countrywide immediately after the announcement of the date of general strike on 5th January. Unfortunately, in the aftermath, the national leadership of INTUC went back on its commitment in favour of the strike decision, but that made little difference in the situation. The joint state level conventions, already held in most of the states in the country in support of the call for general strike, have witnessed in many places the participation of the INTUC and also some BMS affiliated unions. In Andamans, the INTUC state leadership joined other trade union centers is issuing a joint statement supporting the strike action. In Banking sector the United Forum of Bank Unions consisting of all the unions of employees and officers of all shades in that sector have decided to join the

general strike and it is going to be a total strike in the banking sector involving all sections. Same will be the situation in other part of financial sector, i.e., insurance sector.

In Bharat Electronics Ltd, Ghaziabad, all the unions affiliated to INTUC, AITUC, CITU and HMS have served the strike notice. In the public sector units all over the country, various independent unions have also come forward to join the strike. In Maharashtra, the Kamgarh Aghadi of Dada Samant has also joined the strike campaign. Even in the state of Gujarat, where the trade union movement is weak otherwise, massive response to the strike preparation has been witnessed, in which almost all the major trade unions of the govt. employees, transport sector, and other industries. Unions of various affiliations, including those not covered by the trade union centers that first sponsored the strike action, also joined in a big way and massive mobilisations are being organised in all major centers of the state. The All India Defence Employees Federation representing overwhelming majority of the employees engaged in defence production and ordnance depots spread all over the country have also decided to join the General Strike. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK led Labour Progressive Federation has come forward to join the general strike in the state, which will add a bigger sweep to the strike action. At the present stage, district level joint conventions are being

organised throughout the country as a part of strike preparation. Reports of district level conventions have already started pouring in from Andhra Pradesh, Assam and few other states. Reports are being received of enthusiastic response from many centers. Massive response is reported in the preparatory rallies held in the collieries throughout the country and also from the non-coal mining belts of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar and Jharkhand. Total strike will be witnessed in all the hydel projects under construction in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Uttaranchal. Good response is also reported of the unorganised sector workers in loading-unloading, brick-kilns, construction, beedi and other occupations taking active initiative in the strike campaign at various places of the country. Anganwadi workers throughout the country are also joining the strike action in a big way.

The govt. employees all over the country are most directly affected by the Supreme Court judgment and this time the govt. employees in all the states and at the centre are determined to give a fitting reply to the onslaught on their basic rights. The federations of the govt. employees, in fact, took the pioneering initiative along with others, which ultimately materialised in the programme of countrywide general strike on 24th February involving most of the central trade union organisations. The activities of the All India State Govt

Employees Federation and the Confederation of Central Govt Employees and Workers preparatory to the strike are receiving massive response throughout the country. It is not without reason that the Jayalalitha govt. had to finally take back all the dismissed employees in service, albeit with cumulative cuts in increments. The intense campaign for the strike and the forthcoming elections have created a compulsion for the Jayalalitha regime to retrace its earlier actions, at least partially. This has created a further impetus for the strike on 24th February.

'NO CONFUSION'

Confusion is sought to be created by the govt. and the anti-strike lobby about the justification of the strike, in a situation where there is only a caretaker govt. in office and the country is heading for general election. The matter is crystal clear. The major issue before the strike is the issue of basic democratic rights of the workers to strike and organise, which is sought to be curbed by the Supreme Court. The general Strike of 24th February will voice the condemnation and exposure of the anti-worker NDA rule. At the same time, it would send a message also to those others vying for power in the coming general election as to what would be position of the working class on the issue of economic policies and democratic rights of the people. In fact, the forthcoming general election has made the general strike much more relevant for the working class and democratic

people to voice their clear-cut opposition to anti-people neo-liberal globalisation and the nasty move to curb the rights of the toiling people. The strike will be the working people's befitting reply to the multi-million crore lie campaign by the NDA bandwagon on so called "feel good situation" with a view to cheating the people.

Active participation by the unorganised sector workers in the 24th February strike will explode the utter falsehood being propagated in the electronic media with the larger than life size portrayal of Vajpayee on the so called "social safety net" for "37 crore workers of the unorganised sector". The said scheme is just an unalloyed falsehood being campaigned as an election gimmick that too with public money. Even the last interim budget did not sanction even a pie for the said scheme nor the scheme, if at all takes off, will cover even a fraction of one per cent of the magic figure of 37 crore in next five years period. This is what is actually written in the scheme paper supplied by Labour Minister's office itself on its launching day. The 24th February strike will lay bare the naked lies of the opportunist bandwagon named NDA, while the working class will be asserting their inalienable right to strike. The country is going to witness bandh like situation in at least in six, seven states including West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. The rural workers and the peasantry along with other sections of people will stage militant demonstrations throughout the country.

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POST PRIVATISATION DELHI VIDYUT BOARD

EMPLOYEES BEING DENIED THEIR RETIREMENT DUES

Hardly seventeen months have passed since the Delhi Vidyut Board was trifurcated and the major parts were privatised in several pieces. The privatisation followed competition between the newly privatised companies to offer VRS to the employees and more than 6000 employees have already taken VRS.

But this is just the beginning of the story. 6000 employees, who had taken VRS, have got practically nothing. All the privatised offsprings of erstwhile Delhi Vidyut Board have acted with utter promptness in granting VRS to all the applicant employees and take away their identity cards. Very little of the committed amount under the VRS schemes floated by the concerned companies have actually reached those 'voluntarily retired' employees. In the North Delhi Power Ltd (NDPL) 1857 employees have taken VRS. In another privatised segment, under BSES, 4200 employees were shown the door under VRS. As per some estimates, VRS to these 6000 plus employees would have

cost Rs 410 crore only on account of VRS benefits, besides their usual dues of PF, gratuity and pension. But in reality most of those voluntarily retired employees are still knocking the doors of the companies to get their promised VRS dues even after the lapse of more than two months since their VRS was granted.

But that is not all. Leave aside the promised VRS benefits, what about the usual dues on account of provident fund, gratuity and pension which those employees would have been entitled to even if normally retired. Nobody knows. A game of shifting responsibility on each other is going on between the management of privatised segment and the Delhi Government. The VRS-employees, after burning their fingers are now being shuttlecocked between the two entities while none is ready to recognize them. The tripartite agreement on privatisation of Delhi Vidyut Board envisaged continuity of all social security benefits for the employees post privatisation. But after

privatisation, the employees are witnessing a volte-face. The private managements are showing the pension-trust and the Delhi Govt for the PF and pension dues of the VRS-employees. The Pension Trust, of which the Power Secretary of Govt of Delhi is the chairman, stated that the trust is supposed to take care of the normally retired employees and cannot take the responsibility of meeting the PF/pension dues of 'voluntarily retired employees' unless funds are realised from the privatised companies who are responsible for this sudden influx of 6000 claimants of PF/pension etc owing to VRS. It is interesting to note that even 356 voluntarily retired employees of GENCO (which is still under Delhi Govt) who had taken VRS much earlier than those in NDPL and BSES have not yet received any of their dues.

Post privatisation, the story is the same almost everywhere; the employees are the victims.

(Source: Rastriya Sahara, 26.01. 2004)

ANDAMAN

JOINT TU INITIATIVE FOR GENERAL STRIKE

On 9th February 2004, the State leadership of INTUC, CITU and AICCTU had joint meeting to

discuss about the observance of the General Strike on 24th February 2004 called by major

central trade unions in the country to protest against the Supreme Court Judgment banning the right

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to strike and also against the anti-people economic policies of the Govt.

The Joint meeting decided to hold a joint convention on 13th February 2004 at Hotel ACC Auditorium,

Mohanpura to along with other sister unions and association to discuss about joint preparation to make the General Strike a success throughout the Islands.

In a Press Release jointly signed

by the general Secretaries of the State units of INTUC, CITU and AICCTU called for widest participation of the working people in the General Strike of 24th February 2004.

GUJARAT

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES FOR GENERAL STRIKE

The State of Gujarat, otherwise considered weak in trade union movement, is now witnessing increasing response to the preparatory initiatives for 24th February General Strike. The major sections of the Govt employees organizations who could not participate in the last 21st May general strike, this time came forward and declared their resolve to join the countrywide strike action on 24th February.

On 1st February 2004, the joint meeting of the employees of the Govt sector in the state, participated by 174 leading figures from the unions of the Secretariat employees, other Govt employees,

the unions of the Panchayat employees state transport employees held in presence of Sukomal Sen, General Secretary of All India State Govt Employees Federation decided to observe complete strike on 24th.

On the same day the meeting of National Platform of Mass Organisations was held in the afternoon which was participated by leadership of CITU, AITUC, AIBEA, AIIEA, state Bank of India Employees Union, North Gujarat Chemical Union, Gujarat Mazdoor Panchayat, Gujarat Federation of Trade Unions besides the leadership of the mass organizations of peasants,

agricultural workers, women, students and youth. The meeting decided to carry on statewide campaign to make the general Strike a complete success throughout the state. It was also decided to organise massive demonstrations in all the district headquarters. A programme of joint rallies in Baroda, Surat, Rajkot, Bhavanagar and other centers in support of the General Strike was also adopted.

Meantime, Gujarat Kisan Sabha has decided to organise "Rail-Roko" on the day of General Strike at Sabar Kantha, Rajkot, Surat, Dahod and Bhavanagar districts.

PUNJAB

STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN FOR GENERAL STRIKE

At the initiative of the Central Trade Unions, the state level convention of National Platform of Mass Organisation was held on 17th January at Jalandhar which was participated by around 1000

representatives from the trade unions and other mass organizations of peasants, agricultural workers, students, youth, women etc. District level conventions also are being held at

Amritsar on 20th January, Hoshierpur on 25th January, Patiala on 1st February, BHATINDA ON 6TH February, Ludhiana on 8th February, Patankot on 8th February, and

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Chandigarh on 3rd February. Conventions are also being organized in Sangrur, Nawan Shehar, Muktasar and Ropar.

Representative of various mass organizations and trade unions attended the convention and decided to make the General Strike of 24th February a massive success in the state. Notable is the

mobilization in the convention held at Ludhiana which was held in a big stadium drawing participation of around 6000 people.

Various organizations of the state govt employees federations held massive rally at Chandigarh in preparation of the general strike. The State level unions in Transport sector, Anganwadi, brick-kiln

workers, Ntc mills are also carrying on strike-preparation through rallies, meetings etc statewide. Good response have also been received from the mass of the workers including the followers of INTUC and other unions in the industrial centers of Asron, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Lidhiana, Rajpura, Sangrur, Malout, Dera Bassi etc.

ASSAM

STATEWIDE PREPARATIONS FOR 24TH STRIKE

Joint activities in preparation of the forthcoming general strike on 24th February is gaining momentum. Joint trade union conventions held in Guwahati, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Nagaon, Tezpur, New Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Goalpara, Silchar and Barpeta have drawn enthusiastic participation of hundreds of workers from different unions and occupations. The convention adopted various joint campaign programmes like street corner meetings, processions, gate-meetings etc which are being carried on at different centers of

the state. On 21st February, massive demonstrations were held in all district headquarters and memorandums addressed to President of India were submitted by those demonstrations through the Deputy Commissioners of the concerned districts. All the trade unions jointly addressed a well attended press conference at Guwahati on 19th February calling upon the working class and democratic people to make the general strike a total success.

The trade unions In Insurance sector are also carrying on statewide campaign in support of

the strike action. The Joint Council of Trade Unions, Assam has organized a sit-in dharna on 18th February in support of the general strike in Guwahati which has drawn good participation. The private transport workers unions including All India Motor Transport Federation, Assam Unit have decided to join the strike action and have given a call for "Chakka Bandh" on 24th February throughout the state.

The Coordination Committee of Teachers in Assam has also lent support to the call of general strike.

Against Privatisation move of Eastern Railway Press

RAILWAY WORKERS DEMONSTRATES IN THOUSANDS

Kolkata, 18th February 2004, The workers of Eastern Railway establishments at Kolkata

held massive demonstration in front of the Eastern Railway Headquarters at Fairlie Place.

The Railway Ministry has already taken a move to hive-off the Railway Printing Press at Kolkata

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involving around 900 workers. The Eastern Railwaymen's Union has given the call for demonstration.

The meeting was addressed by Nilmani Das, Sujit Roy, General Secretary and President of ERMU

respectively besides Santosh Brahma, D D Chatterjee and others.

STEEL WORKERS MEETING AT KOLKATA

On 18th February 2004, the workers of the Kolkata based units of Steel Workers Federation of India held joint meeting at IISCO canteen hall in preparation of 24th February Strike. The Unions of Central Marketing Organisation of SAIL, Raw Material Division, MSTC, JPC and

IISCO offices jointly organized the meeting which has drawn participation of hundreds of workers.

While addressing the meeting, Md Amin, Secretary, CITU and Labour Minister, Govt of West Bengal called upon the workers to carry the message of strike to

mass of the employees and also to expose the anti-people anti-worker policies of the NDA govt through in the process of strike campaign. The meeting was also addressed by P K Das, General Secretary, SWFI and Promit Sarkar, General Secretary, Association of SAIL employees.

TAMIL NADU: WORKING WOMEN PLAN ACTIONS

The Tamil Nadu State Coordination Committee of Working Women met on 1st February 2004 at the CITU State Committee office in Chennai. The joint convenor of the CCWW, P. Indira, presided over the meeting. Convenors of 15 District Coordination Committees, and members representing the Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees, CITU affiliated unions in Construction, Handloom, besides members in insurance - both LIC and GIC, participated in the meeting. A Soundara Rajan and A K Padmanabhan, General Secretary and Secretary respectively of the CITU State Committee also participated in the meeting. The meeting condoled the death of

Tulasi, an anganwadi worker and convenor of the Vellore district coordination committee of working women.

The State CCWW decided to increase the membership of women in different districts of the State and quotas were given to the members accordingly. Construction, handloom, power loom, beedi, tailoring, papad making, fisheries, flower garland making, gem cutting, leather works, match and fire works, home based work were some of the areas identified for concentrating and increasing women's membership in the CITU. It was also decided to pay more attention to the work among working women in electricity, corporation workers, garment workers etc.

The State Coordination Committee of Working Women decided to campaign for the 24th February strike on 'Right to Strike'.

With the experience gained in running the Non Formal Education Centres as part of the recently concluded CITU - ILO Child Labour Project, there were proposals to start some such centres in Tuticorin, North Chennai, South Chennai, Dindigul, Thiruvallur, and Kanya Kumari districts.

Rallies and Dharnas were planned to be organised on the International Women's Day on March 8, highlighting the demands of job security and the right to strike.

(Report from Malathi Chittibabu)

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

State	Sr. Centre No.		Month		State	Sr. Centre No.		Month		
			Nov.' 03	Dec.' 03				Nov.' 03	Dec.'03	
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	476	475	Maharastra	38	Mumbai	587	589	
	2	Guntur	504	502		39	Nagpur	508	506	
	3	Hyderabad	503	497		40	Nasik	534	545	
	4	Visakhapatnam	488	488		41	Pune	564	566	
	5	Warangal	521	511		42	Solapur	515	517	
Assam	6	D.D. Tinsukia	434	426	Orissa	43	Barbil	443	440	
	7	Guwahati	511	505		44	Rourkela	446	443	
	8	Labac-Silchar	397	398		Punjab	45	Amritsar	439	436
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	446	439			46	Ludhiana	449	447
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	451	442			Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	492
Bihar	11	Monghyr	484	485	48	Jaipur		457	457	
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	452	447	Tamil Nadu	49		Chennai	534	535
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	484	491		50	Coimbatore	500	501	
	14	Bhavnagar	505	504		51	Coonoor	495	497	
	15	Rajkot	448	451		52	Madurai	492	492	
	16	Surat	483	477		53	Salem	489	486	
	17	Vadodra	467	467	54	Tiruchirapally	583	576		
Haryana	18	Faridabad	508	504	Uttar Pradesh	55	Agra	468	464	
	19	Yamunanagar	476	466		56	Ghaziabad	495	494	
J & K	20	Srinagar	587	589		57	Kanpur	485	476	
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	468	466		58	Saharanpur	461	459	
	22	Jharia	410	404		59	Varanasi	517	513	
	23	Kodarma	416	409	West Bengal	60	Asansol	490	484	
	24	Noamundi	442	442		61	Darjeeling	436	430	
	Karnataka	25	Ranchi-Hatia	451	456		62	Durgapur	576	571
26		Bangalore	486	485		63	Haldia	612	595	
27		Belgaum	544	544		64	Howrah	575	565	
28		Hubli-Dharwar	498	503		65	Jalpaiguri	433	429	
29		Mercara	481	486		66	Kolkata	561	547	
Kerala	30	Alwaye	500	499		67	Raniganj	447	443	
	31	Mundakayam	492	494	Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	538	538	
	32	Quilon	539	530	Delhi	69	Delhi	574	576	
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	566	572	Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	555	549	
Madhya Pradesh	34	Balaghat	455	452						
	35	Bhopal	534	531						
	36	Indore	516	513						
	37	Jabalpur	506	498						
						ALL-INDIA	504	502		

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State	Centre	November 2003	December 2003
Andhra Pradesh	1 Kethgudem	498	
Himachal Pradesh	2 Himachal Pradesh	476	
Rajasthan	3 Bhilwara	491	
Madhya Pradesh	4 Chhindwara	458	
Tripura	5 Tripura	456	
Goa	6 Goa	596	

MARCH 8: INTERNATIONAL WORKING WOMEN'S DAY

K. Hemalata

International Working Women's Day is observed on March 8 world wide to commemorate the heroic struggle, nearly a century ago, of the women needle workers of New York against exploitation and for the right to vote and other benefits. It is an occasion to pledge support to the continuing struggles of women to achieve their rightful place in the society, to rededicate to the cause of women's true emancipation from all kinds of social and economic exploitation.

It is true that because of the prolonged struggles, gender equality and gender related issues have come into focus in the society. Women's role and their contribution to the development of society have come to be recognised though even today women's contribution is under valued and their abilities are under estimated.

Historically, with the development of private property and inheritance, women lost their pre-eminent position in the society. Engels described the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal family and the overthrow of mother right as the world historical defeat of the female sex. True emancipation of women is not possible in a class divided society. Writing on the occasion of 'International Working Women's Day' in 1920, Lenin pointed out 'Capitalism combines formal equality with economic and consequently social inequality...But even in the matter of formal equality (equality before the law, the 'equality' of the well fed and the hungry man, of the man of property and the property less), capitalism cannot be consistent. And one of the most glaring manifestations of this inconsistency is the inequality of women and men'.

Whatever advances women have made in our country in the fields of education, wage employment, health status etc have suffered a set back with the advent of the policies of neo liberal reforms in our country. Withdrawal of the State from the responsibility of providing the basic necessities to the poor, shrinking job opportunities, the 'hire and fire' policies, increasing contractorisation and home based work without any job security or social welfare benefits, down

sizing by the Government departments, VRS, dismantling of the Public Distribution System etc have adverse impacted the life and living conditions of women. During the last more than a decade, successive Governments at the Centre, whether led by the Congress or the BJP, have followed the same policies, which only benefit the top 10% of the population and increase the inequalities. The present NDA Government led by the BJP has been pursuing the policies with vengeance.

The struggle for women's equality and emancipation has become more difficult in our country with the BJP in power guided as it is by the fascist RSS. The RSS vision of 'Hindu Rashtra' is based on the 'Manusmriti', which legitimises caste and gender oppression and denies the Dalits and women basic democratic rights. Women's place according to them is in the home and her job is mainly to bear sons and look after the family; women's inequality is backed in the name of culture and tradition. The RSS has opposed giving rights in parental property to daughters. The BJP leaders including the Rajmata Vijay Raje Scindia endorsed the practice of sati. The present BJP led Government of her daughter Vasundhara Raje is yet to appeal against the district court's ruling acquitting the accused in the Deorala sati case. The BJP led Government at the Centre failed to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed, in spite of its clear majority and support of the Congress and the Left Parties. The law that this Government brought against domestic violence in effect legitimises violence against women as domestic violence becomes punishable only if it is habitual. And even then, it is not an offence if it is said to be committed in self defence or in defence of property.

As Lenin said, it is not possible to attain women's emancipation until and unless this capitalist society is replaced by an exploitation free socialist society. It is a prerequisite to first remove the BJP led NDA Government from office.

On this Day, let us take a pledge to thrust a decisive and resounding defeat on this anti women BJP led Government in the ensuing elections.

B T R CENTENARY

B.T. RANADIVE ON WORKING WOMEN

Neglect of Working Women, and their problems, failure to fight discriminatory practices against them and defend their interest, indifference towards recruiting them as members of Trade Unions and virtual resistance to promote them to responsible positions in the organization - these indicate the feudal male outlook prevalent inside the Indian trade union movement and especially inside the established leadership of the trade unions. This is nothing but a projection of the neglect of woman and her inferior status in Indian society.

The development of modern industry since independence, the spread of capitalist relations, the constitutional guarantee of equality irrespective of sex and religion and the increased strength of the trade union movement - all these have not proved powerful enough to affect the old outlook regarding women.

In passing, it may be noted that the disease of neglecting the women workers is an old disease of the trade union movement against which the revolutionary trade unions have waged an irreconcilable struggle. Marx criticized the narrow mindedness of the British and French leaders in this connection and praised the American labour movement for taking the question of working women. Writing to Kugelman in December 1868 Marx wrote: "Joking aside, great progress was evident in the last Congress of the working women with complete equality. While in this respect the English and still more the gallant French are burdened with spirit of narrow mindedness." It cannot be said that all trade unions in Western countries have even now given up this narrowness.

In the last decade the working women in India have been under constant attack. Every kind of discrimination is practiced against them.

The trade unions and their leaders have been silent spectators of this discrimination against working women. It seems their vociferous cry "workers of world unite" does not include women workers. In this respect all are guilty-the leaders of the unions of industrial workers as well as the leaders of the middle class employees, highly educated and some times highly remunerated. Ancient 'culture' is ancient 'culture', notwithstanding modern education.

All this shows that the attitude towards the working women requires a drastic change. Nonetheless the one day discussion, the informations and points raised in the special report and the speeches of women comrades all should activate our trade unions to move in the proper direction. The fact that a large number of working women have been elected to the General Council, the Working Committee should offer further assurance that the problems of working women will get proper attention from the CITU unions.

Lastly, all should note that the problem of working women is a part of the struggle of the working class against capitalist society and not just a question which concern women alone. The lack of active interest shown by men workers towards this question and the outlook it represents was once sharply criticized by Lenin when he found the same attitude among members of the Communist Party. "Agitations and propaganda work among women, their awakening and revolutionisation are regarded as an incidental matter, as an affair, which only concerns women communists. They alone are reproached because the work in the districts does not proceed more quickly and more vigorously. That is wrong, quite wrong, real, separatism and as the French say Feminism Ala Rebour, -feminism upside down. What is the basis of this incorrect attitude of our national sections? In the final analysis it is nothing but underestimation of woman and her work. Yes, indeed. Unfortunately it is all true to say of many of our comrades, "scratch a communist and find a Philistine. Of course you must scratch on the sensitive spot of their mentality as regards women."

(Address to the Delegates of the 6th Conference of CITU in Bombay, 1987)