

THE VOICE

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Re 1

People shall Govern — Not Botha !



Greetings to Soviet Women on 7th November

INDIAN Working Women send their warm greetings to the Soviet Women on the occasion of the Great October Revolution Day. The great contribution made by women in Russian Revolution in 1917 and in the Patriotic war, is acknowledged by all. Without such active participation of the Soviet women neither the socialist state could have survived, nor the half of the world would have come under Socialist system. Men and women defended their country, sacrificed everything to defend the Socialist system. The women in Soviet Union and in other Socialist countries, after the revolution have surpassed others in every sphere—economy, education, health, science etc, in sharp contrast to women in the capitalist countries, where women's unemployment is on the increase, unequal status still continues.

November 7th is observed today in the midst of threats of nuclear and space war by the American imperialism whose ultimate aim is to dominate the whole world and to destroy the Socialist system. At the same time the peace movement in all corners of the world including USA is gathering momentum. A significant role is again played by women everywhere, including Soviet Union.

A sustained movement for peace aided by genuine peace proposals by Com. Gorbachyov, General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party has made a breach in the capitalist world. France and EEC countries have virtually compelled Reagan to have a summit meeting in November in Geneva with Soviet leaders.

The World Conference of women at Nairobi held in July 1985 have demonstrated their explicit support for peace without which no development of women was possible in any field. The "Peace Tent" there became a symbol of expression of solidarity with peace loving women in Vietnam, Soviet Union, Latin America, South Africa, Asia and so on, and resentment against the American war policies. While greeting the valiant women in Soviet Union on this Day, we assure our full support

In This Issue		Pages
Greetings to Soviet Women		2
Nurses give call for Security Year		3
Take over the Tobacco Industry in Andhra Pradesh		4
Conference of Women Workers in Tamilnadu		5-6
Thousands of Women Demonstrate in Patna-Bihar — Act on Child Labour soon-Shri T. Anjaiah		7-8
Struggle to Get Justice Will Continue, Death of a Nurse		
AICCW Statement		9
AIDWA Meets—J.M.S. Formed in Bhopal		10-11
In Memory of Ashok Lata Jain		12
Ist Conference of JMS Rajasthan		13
They Shall Not Pass — LA Pasionaria		
Women in Action — USA		14-15
Muslim Women and Russian Revolution		16-17
Iranian Women Tortured under Fundamentalist Regime		
Bangladesh Nurses win their Demands		18-19
South African Govt Condemned for Murder of Benjamin		
Dr. Wendy Ostracised		20
The Czechoslovak Women and the Women's Decade		21
Union Carbide's Parting Gift — A Study		22
The Veiled Struggle — Pakistan		23
Advertisement		24

for the peace proposals made by Soviet Union, and resolve to fight against the war conspiracies of USA.

Nurses give Call for "Security Year"

Dr. Sujata Dhawale, Maharashtra

"WE give service to the sick give us security and respect as working women." This was the slogan which rent the air at the 5th biannual Maharashtra State Conference of the Ten Thousand Strong Maharashtra Nurses Federation. Besides being the special call given at the conference, this is also the heart rending cry for help, as the organisation has decided to finally focus attention on the serious problem by observing this year as "Special Security year".

On 17th August, 1985 at the J.J. Hospital around 800 Nurses delegates pondered over the solution to this and many other problems which the Nurses of Maharashtra are facing. Having over 10,000 task force spread over the distant corners of Maharashtra and working on various posts and positions, ranging from sister, Tutors anaxillary nurses, midwives, and dais, their plight can be described as pathetic.

The President of the Maharashtra Govt. Nurses Federation, Smt. Anuradha Athavale placed the plight of these unfortunate women before the Conference. Among those present were Shri Bhai Savant, Health Minister of Maharashtra who inaugurated the Conference, Smt. Rajani Satao, Minister of State for Health, the Nursing Director, and Deputy Director, themselves women from the same profession, Director of the ESIS, Maharashtra and Dean of the J.J. Group of Hospitals. Shri R. G. Karnik of the Maharashtra State Employees Confederation, and Fraternal delegates from the Doctor's organisations of Maharashtra were also among those who listened to the horror stories, which have already been brought to the notice of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi a month earlier on 17th July, 1985, when a 10 member delegation was sent as S.D.S. emissaries to stern this mounting daily danger on this section of the Government Health Staff.

Number of incidents were quoted with names of victims, culprits, dates and place assuring full authenticity of which all can certainly not be quoted here. The last one which has raised a hue and cry in the State is the

case of MS. Bongaonkar of Buldanha District. The bereaved father urged that other young girls taking to this "noble profession of Florence Nightingale" should not suffer such fate as his daughter who had been the victim of a cold blooded murder. Launch an organisation that will force the Government and society to provide security was his appeal and he handed over a cheque of Rs. 500/- for the purpose. The President of the NOMOA & HMOA Doctors organisation of Maharashtra also immediately announced Rs. 500/- for the same cause, a spirit of Doctors, Nurses unity in the state. "Girls taking to this profession are invariably from the lowest economic section of society claimed Ms. Annuradha Athavale as she narrated this case and numerous others of rape, attacks from unscrupulous elements in the villages and urged that the Govt. provide quarters to the nursing staff, or alternative security force to the woman living far away before and after night duties odd hours! Heavy duty hours, and dark hours, holding camps in keeping with the National Health calls given by Govt. such as National Family Planning Camps, National eye camps took their toll and the life of Ms. Bongaonkar the newly married nurse.

After a heavy day's work at one such camp the 6 months married nurse worked upto 3.00 a.m. only to be admitted to hospital at 5.00 AM in an emergency case of 90 per cent burns. She eventually succumbed to the burns, and the whole matter was hushed up. The other demand which was highlighted was a very important basic demand of a right to organise without facing repression from the Government machinery in the form of transfers and terminations. The president herself had fought for 3 years against the unjust transfer, till she was reinstated at the original posting. Such victimisation had been faught in the past and would be combatted in the future too, she said.

Ms. Kamal Vyakole—the General Secretary of the federation placed the report and the 56 points detailed charter. Demanding a patient
(Continued on page 8)

Take Over the Tobacco Industry in Andhra Pradesh

THE following Memorandum was submitted by the Workers' Federation to the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, on 14.8.1985.

"The Management of ITC-ILTD Dvn. has taken up unscrupulous line of closure, thus jeopardizing the security of workers in the industry. In the beginning of February 1983, when the management issued closure notice to Chirala Factory and Parcehur Depot, we the representatives of the unions met you at your chamber. You have taken much interest to persuade the management to stay its proposal. The management did not listen and closures were taken place resulting in unemployment of 6000 workers among which 5,000 were women.

Earlier the representatives of the Union met Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, and Central Ministers were urged, to cancel the licences of this multinational company. Unfortunately licences were given to four more companies. The IJCS machine, at Anapathi is the biggest-job killer.

In 1984, when the issue of Chirala closure was raised by the members in the Assembly, you answered that the Management was installing another factory at Chirala, to provide jobs to 2,000 workers. The management did not do it, instead it installed another Green Threshing Machine (GGST) brought from Bangalore and 200 male workers were employed on it, with the result 4,000 women continued to be unemployed. The Management is not only using job killing devices, but began to operate there through benami, contract Companies and drastically reduced working days in 1984 season from 100 days to 50 days. The Management issued closure notices to four more depots, Guntur, Childeleupeta, Ongole and Tagatur. When the union represented the case to the Labour Department which banned the closures it further referred the issue to the Industrial Tribunal, Guntur.

The workers welcomed the move of the government, but the management did not show

any work in these depots. Thus 4500 workmen among whom 3000 were women were thrown out of employment.

This Management has taken very drastic step of closing down the remaining leaf operations at Rajmundry, the biggest depot in North and Anapathi Factory where 5000 workmen of whom 3500 is the female force.

Thus this company is proposing to keep two GLT plants, one at Anarpathi with 350 Males and another at Chirala with 200 male workers. With this, the Green leaf Threshing Machine disbanded about 20,000 workers, out of which 16,000 would be the women workers. The Government of India proclaims as "mechanisation without tears", but situation is adverse and its action shows from 1960 to 1985, all the 30,000 workers were thrown out of employment.

This Company earned huge profits and their anti-labour attitudes resulted in the present serious situation, affecting the rural economy in Andhra Pradesh seriously. It was surprising that neither the Govt. of India nor the State Government could avert the crises in Tobacco Industry.

Therefore we urge upon the state government (1) to prohibit proposed closures of leaf operations of Rajmundry and Anapathi, (2) and take over closed depots. The Tobacco Board should operate the Industry rehabilitating the displaced workmen."

The Voice of the Working Woman

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1st Conference of Unorganised Women Under CITU

Mythily Sivaraman

IT was strange sight indeed! Little girls in half skirts some seemed barely 10, girls in early teens, mothers and withered old grannies, all flags in hand, shouting slogans and marching together. But perhaps not so strange to those who know that in the industrial town of Tiruppur (Coimbatore district), TN the young and the old alike are not spared brutal exploitation by the hosiery and ginning factories and rice mills that abound there. Slogans asserting the women's rights to form unions, demanding legal benefits and criticising the Government's apathy to their plight, rent the air. The message was clear — the tolerant and timid woman worker belonged to the past; the daring and defiant woman was emerging.

Tamil Nadu State a rally and
The CITU-organised rally and Conference of women in the unorganised sector on October 29 was an impressive one that none could ignore. The women had turned up in hundreds despite the many mean tricks resorted to by the managements to foil the rally.

The procession which culminated in the conference began with flag hoisting by Lakshmi, a long-time mill worker. Iswari, a young worker from a local knitwear factory and a member of the All India Working Women's Co-ordination Committee, presided. Iswari explained that the conference was being held in accordance with a decision taken by the Tamil Nadu WWCC and later endorsed by CITU.

The President and General Secretary of CITU, Tamilnadu, K. Ramani, M.L.A., and R. Umanath addressed the Conference. Com. Umanath said, "The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, claiming to be the champion of motherhood stood exposed when he did nothing to punish the son of a factory owner in Manmadurai who had raped and killed two young workers of the factory. "It is only a strong

and united trade union movement that can defend your interests".

The delegates session held in the afternoon was attended by 166 delegates 27 of whom came from 8 other districts. The session began with a report on industries in the unorganised sector where a predominant majority of the 56 lakh working women of Tamil Nadu were employed. The report submitted by Mythily Sivaraman, Convener of WWCC, TN, summed up the nature of women's work in these industries and the problems faced by them. Certain characteristics seemed common to all such industries: long hours of work, no paid holidays, piece-rated and unequal wages, no job security, non-implementation of statutory provisions such as ESI, PF, Maternity Benefits, Child-care and lack of elementary facilities like drinking water and toilet at work places.

A spirited and informative discussion followed in which 29 delegates took part. Some of the facts highlighted in the report and mentioned in the discussion: *dis missed*

(a) In the hosiery industry in Tiruppur more than 5000 women — predominantly teenagers and children were employed. ESI benefits were unknown even to those with 8 years of service. Very few names were entered in the muster roll, fewer still got PF. Small children worked till 9 p.m. and work till mid night was common during peak season. *this* Factory Inspectors did visit the units but never came around to see the workers! Job security was unheard of and even a whisper about forming a union could cost a job.

(b) In the ginning factories a large number of older women were employed whose daily wages varied from Rs. 5 to 9. During peak season, women, especially those who were the sole bread *earners* of the family, worked continuously for 4 shifts, *was* about 36 hours! The work was monotonous and back-breaking.

(c) About 70 per cent of match industry workers, mainly in Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli were women and children. A large number of unregistered units carried out production illegally flouting all safety regulations and accidents involving women and children were common. Young women were sexually exploited by contractors and refusal to yield meant loss of job.

(d) About 3 lakh women and children were engaged in the handloom industry. They were crowded in dingy little rooms with hardly any space to lay their babies next to them. Sometimes women with week-old babies came back to work, for maternity leave benefits were unknown. A law enacted in 1981 for the benefit of handloom workers is yet to be implemented.

(e) Out of about 15 lakh beedi workers in TN, nearly 75 per cent were women. They rarely got the statutory wage of Rs. 10/20 per 1000 beedies ~~due to the widely prevalent problem of under weighment and~~ sometimes the wage worked out to Rs. 6 only. Beedi factories had almost disappeared making it a totally home-based work.

(f) In the export garment industry in Madras employing about 32,000 workers (of whom only 8000 were in the registered units) the Government had ordered minimum wages in 1981 consequent to CITU — led year long struggle in Balu Garments. The managements promptly got the order stayed, and the Government had shown little interest in getting it vacated. ~~The writ filed by CITU has been admitted.~~

(g) In plantations where women formed half the labour force, the Grievance Committee in many areas had no woman representative on it. In the Government run Chincona estate, the 800 odd women had no protection against wild animals and the meal centres for children had no roof.

(h) In tanneries concentrated in North Arcot district, a large number of Muslim and Harijan women were employed on contract basis on grading jobs. Muslim women were transported to the factories and back, by the managements which ensured that the women

were totally inaccessible to outsiders and to union contacts.

(A) Construction road and quarry workers who live like nomads going wherever the job take them were virtually bonded labour. Often women quarry workers got no separate wage as it was fixed on a load basis and the work was done by the family as a whole.

One thing emerged clearly from what one delegate after another said wherever some legal benefit was wrested from the management it was because of the union support and the women had begun to understand that there were no alternatives to forming unions and fighting for their due.

The conference adopted resolutions on
The following resolutions were adopted by the Conference:

as demanding implementation of all legal provisions abolition of contract system, job security, etc.
(1) All legal provisions must be duly implemented. (2) Children must be provided lunch at work places. (3) Abolition of piece rate and fixation of minimum monthly wages. (4) Implementation of all legal provisions such as maternity benefit and paid leave, abolition of contract system and provision of job security.

The Conference also called upon the delegates to oppose the Government's policy of relying mainly upon cottage and home based industries to generate employment instead of increasing employment opportunities in the modern industrial sector.

Comrade Vimal Ranadive, Secretary of AIWWCC addressed both sessions of the Conference and gave an overall view of the Government's economic policies, its perception of working women's problems and the struggles that were going on in various parts of the country. She explained how the policy of the present Government at the Centre was bound to displace more workers, especially women, in the name of mechanisation. She expressed the hope that they would march ahead victorious under the banner of CITU.

The Thiruppur Convention had demonstrated that the women workers at the lowest rungs were determined to change their 'fate' by united and organised class action.

Thousands of Women Demonstrate in Patna—Bihar

ON September 16, the Bihar State hospital and public health employees and village level midwives staged a demonstration in front of the Government Secretariat at Patna as part of their programme of action to obtain redressal of their grievances. It was a massive demonstration of 10,000 strong. Thousands of women workers, who deal with child-birth in rural Bihar, travelled hundreds of kilometres with infants in their arms and children walking by their side, to participate in this demonstration.

Before the rally, a procession paraded through the streets of Patna and reached the Secretariat where they were cordoned off by armed police. The procession culminated into a huge rally.

Vimal Ranadive, Secretary of the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) addressed the rally as the main speaker. She commented that it was the biggest ever demonstration of working women anywhere outside West Bengal and Kerala, and noted the tremendous upsurge amongst this section of working women in the State.

Neglected by the State Government so far, now because of their struggle and massive demonstration, the Bihar Government had invited their leaders for discussion. This was their first victory. She further narrated the experiences of struggle of the working women of Haryana and Tamilnadu, and called upon the working women to carry on their struggle and assured them of the active support of the Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU).

In Bihar there are about 70,000 Prasava Sevikas called 'as 'Dai'. They are working in the rural areas with worse working conditions. As in the other parts of the country, here also these Sevikas are helping the delivery of babies since many years for which they used to get one or two only from the parents of the newly born babies.

Under the Planning Programme of trained Prasava Sevikas the Govt. of India tried to give

minimum training to these sevikas for last six years. The State Govt. of Bihar also has given training to them for one month with Rs. 300/- as stipend. After completing their training they were given a sort of kitbag along with the minimum useful medicines. In the beginning of this programme of Central Govt., the two districts of Bihar i.e., Patna and Muzaffarpur, they were being paid Rs. 50 per month as honorarium. But after a few months, this regular honorarium was discontinued and they were being paid Rs. 3 only per delivery.

But, practically these trained Prasava Sevikas were given neither the Kitbag along with the minimum useful medicines, nor the amount of Rs. three per delivery. These thousands of women from the scheduled caste, a chamar Community, were many a times given insulting treatment from the villagers and they are being exploited also by the different Classes of the people in our society. Now, these, Prasava Sevikas have been organised under the Bihar Medical and Public health Employees Association.

Amongst others who addressed the rally, were Yogeshwar Gope, President of the State CITU and President of the State Non-Gazetted Employee's Federation; Radha Raman Sinha, General Secretary of the Bihar Hospital and Public Health Employees' Association, Shantidevi, Secretary of the Action Committee of the Bihar Village-level-trained Midwives, Sudhabindu Mitra of the All India Democratic Women's Association. Ramasray Sharma, President of the Association presided.

A deputation, led by Yogeswar Gope, consisting of Radha Raman Sinha, Shantidevi and others met the Health Commissioner at the Government's invitation and discussed the demands of the workers.

Hospital and Public Health employees are exposed to dangerous diseases and drugs. The hazards of the profession were noted by the Fourth Pay Revision Committee but it failed to give any weightage to these hazards. Further, active trade union functionaries are being indiscriminately transferred, and the

Government has created anomalies in upgrading the employees on the basis of the last settlement.

For the trained midwives in the villages, the Association demanded that they be considered as Government employees. Till that time, each of them must be paid a monthly honorarium of Rs. 100, given clean garments and other equipment for hygienic delivery measures as well as regular payments.

For more than one and a half years the Association had been making several representations to the Government without any result compelling the workers to resort to agitation. A demonstration was staged at Patna on February 20 this year, then on August 20 block-level demonstrations were held; on August 22 deputations met the Civil Surgeons in district headquarters and finally a relay dharna was staged in front of the Secretariat from September 16 to 21.

The AICCWW demanded immediate action on the demands made by the Prasavsevikas, in a note submitted to the Health Ministry a few days back.

Act on Child Labour soon !

The Union Minister of State for Labour Shri T. Anjaiah while addressing newsmen at Srinagar on the 25th May, 1985 said that his ministry was planning to bring out a comprehensive Act on Child Labour aimed at practically resolving various problems confronting them. The project report in this regard, which would deal with the problems of child labour was under preparation. In a reply to a question, Shri Anjaiah said that there was a 1.5 crore child labour force in the country, most of them working under inhuman conditions. He also emphasised that the working hours of children engaged in labour, needed to be reduced. They needed to be provided education oriented work. Shri Anjaiah further added that provision would also be made for free medical aid to children.

How long our children should wait for the Act ?

(from page 3)

nurse ratio of 3:1 which has been accepted by the Nursing Council of India—as against the present State of affairs where almost all hospitals are seriously understaffed causing serious inconvenience to not only the nursing staff but also the patients who eventually suffer from lack of attention and naturally blame the over worked nurses.

Promotional facilities should be introduced and regular channels of promotion and relative increments be provided in an otherwise stagnant service conditions. Night duties should be organised to facilitate one day night for each staff giving some relief to the staff, and break duties should be replaced with continuous service hours.

In short the implementation of the “Wanmala Mohite Commission” was imminent and long overdue. The report was submitted on 25th November, 1976.

Greetings to the conference were extended by the Maharashtra Government Employees Confederation, Maharashtra Gazetted Medical Officers' Association, Maharashtra Medical Officers' Association, Confederation of Doctors Association, organisations of other Health Staff of Maharashtra etc.

(from page 23)

nance that is awaiting presidential assent. It provides that a woman's or even ten women's evidence cannot be sufficient in cases involving grave physical injury or wilful murder, where the maximum punishment could be given. It also calls for mechanical compensation—if a finger is lost, a tenth of the value of a hand will be given as compensation—making a total reversal of the basic principle that crime is against the state and not the individual.

The above article is produced from 'The Week' October—November '85 written by Rita Manchanda.

Khilanand-Minauti Struggle for Justice

CONGRESS Governments claim that they work for the cause for scheduled caste. But, their deeds are just the opposite harming the cause for which they vouch! For instance take the cause of Khilanand Jha from Bihar. He, a Brahmin married a harijan girl, in 1979, was to receive Rs. 5000 as incentive from the Government and a peon job, in the Govt. service. Khilanand least expected that he would face harassment and threat of murder in his office for marrying of harijan girl. He was compelled to resign. In fact the progressive people would welcome and congratulate the couple for this courageous step. But no, the whole family with three children had to sit on fast to death at Boat Club from 30th September 1985, demanding protection from the high caste Hindus at his office, pay the amount of Rs. 5000 promised as incentive and back to job with proper security. It was surprising to know, those very people who offered an incentive for marrying a Harijan girl, asked for proof whether his wife was really a Harijan by birth, then he was asked to establish that "she was really herself and not an impersonator out to avail of certain incentives". This is an insult to injury who braved all the harassment for marrying the Harijan girl. Minauti Jha, the young wife, with 3 children continued the fast and refused to listen to the advice by people to give up the fast in the interest of small children. The Chief Minister of Bihar promised that he would fulfil his promise to that Khilanand replied "no promises would do, you must act" when the agreement was drawn out, the clause regarding the payment of Rs. 5000 was not clear. Therefore in spite of the repeated request from the Secretaries of the Govt. Khilanand would not agree to give up the fast.

On 8th of October the fast was given up in the evening after every term of settlement was signed on paper.

The question here arises, whether such incentive schemes will change the position of scheduled caste in the society though they may serve temporarily the cause. Khilanand Jha, his wife and children had shown unprecedented

courage, fasting for 7 days. The small children with the mother also were determined to support the cause for which they stood.

Bihar is one of the states ruled by the Congress where atrocities on Harijans are the highest. The caste system has deep roots among the people. The feudal and obscurantist ideas prevail on a large scale. And Congress itself is riddled with all these casteism. The common movement of the democratic people only will help to eradicate the caste disease in our society. Conscious efforts by the progressive minded people are to be made. It may take time no doubt. The Jha couple and the children are to be congratulated for their courage and determination to get justice. The fast and the press publicity for this have brought out the urgency to get rid of the caste system. It is not only a question whether any person from any community can marry a girl or boy without any threats from the upper castes, but a question from Khilanand family raised is how long would the society allow them to suffer for no fault of theirs!

AICCWW Demands Enquiry

The case of disappearance and death of Threslama Joseph, a Kerala nurse at Jhajjar village in Haryana concerned all working women. Miss Joseph was admitted to Sucheta Kirpalani Hospital with Malaria. From there she disappeared on 20th October. There were some more deaths also of the nurses in this hospital according to the reports from the nurses. If the nurses who look after the patients become ill and are not looked after properly by the hospital staff, no words are enough to condemn such incidents. The nurses are over burdened with work, the ratio of patients with beds is something not yet been worked out. Over and above this the nurses are not looked after well, they can be kidnapped and found dead in far off places. The AICCWW demands full enquiry into the incident and the culprits to be brought to book.

AIDWA Meets

THE meeting of AIDWA was held on 5-6 Oct. 1985 in New Delhi, presided over by Vimal Ranadive, Vice President, with the following members present:—

Sushila Gopalan, Rajinder Kaur, Sumitra Swamy, Sudha Bindu Mitra, Niruben Patel, Shyamali Gupta, Sukamati Debarma, Ila Bhattacharya, M. Udayam, Madhuri Das Gupta, Banani Biswas, Brinda Karat, Indu Agnihotri, V.K. Anandam, Papa Umanath, Mythily Shivaraman, Mallu Swarajyam, Lakshmi Sahgal and Subhashini Ali.

The meeting started with a condolence resolution paying homage to Com. P. Sundarayya, the great revolutionary leader and member of the Central Committee of the CPI(M) and the secretary of the Andhra Pradesh unit of the party.

The General Secretary, Com. Sushila Gopalan placed the report and laid stress on the threefold tasks of waging struggles against the economic policies of the Government, against fundamentalists and divisive forces who are disrupting the unity of the people and of fighting for peace against the threat of nuclear war by the US imperialists.

The AIDWA conducted its own review of the women's decade. Though the Government agencies organised a series of meetings to put forward the official perspective ours was the only organisation which could go into the masses for propagating the true problems facing women. She condemned the religious fundamentalists who with the aid of imperialism are spreading obscurantist ideas in the country. The Muslim fundamentalists have come out strongly against the Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Banu case which upheld the right to maintenance for a divorced Muslim woman.

Sushila Gopalan sharply criticised the present economic policy of the Government which promoted the multinational corporations and big business houses. The policy will only help to stimulate the growth of unemploy-

ment and price rise. In the 7th Five Year Plan the Government has not allocated any money for the promotion of women's employment. Self employment and home based employment will take place in women's specific industries and traditional industries like coir, tobacco, cashew, fishing etc. The rise in prices is a direct effect of the Government's policy of handing over the economy to the private sector. The prices of essential commodities are increasing sharply which will cause suffering to the common people.

At the International level the imperialism is feverishly trying to unleash starwars especially against the socialist countries, on the other hand the CPSU General Secretary Gorbachev has called for peace and has offered a 50 per cent reduction of the USSR long range missiles.

After Com. Sushila presented the report, a discussion took place in which Pappa Umanath, Mythily Shivaraman, Shyamali Gupta, Banani Biswas, Sukhomati Debarma, Niruben Patel, Mallu Swarajyam, M. Udayam, Rajinder Kaur Chokaha, Sumitra Swami, Anandam, Vrunda Karat, Indu Agnihotri and Vimal Ranadive participated.

In the course of discussion certain suggestions came up for inclusion in the report. On the international level, issues like Gorbachev's proposal for peace, the apartheid continuing in South Africa, the Israeli attack on Tunisia, the continuing massacre of Tamils in Srilanka and about International Peace Year were raised.

On the national level, questions of citizenship and right to franchise in Assam, the issues in Punjab the problems of daily wage labourers in Gujarat who were adversely affected by the anti-reservation struggles and about the Section 311 (2) (b) (c) of the Constitution also came up. The report was passed, with the amendments. Lakshmi Sahgal presented a report on the Nairobi conference.

Resolutions on Israeli attack on Tunisia, on the Supreme Court judgement on the Section 311 (2) (b) (c), on struggles against

growing religious fundamentalists and on women's employment were adopted.

The meeting took the following action programmes: *decisions and action programmes*

(1) All India Conference to be held in April 1986 in Kerala.

(2) Observance of the last week of January as employment week.

(3) Campaigns for the rights of minority women.

(4) Campaigns against price rise

(5) Peace campaign on the proposals made by Gorbachev.

The following Statement was issued after the CEC meeting held in Delhi on 5 6th October, 1985, by the General Secretary Susheela Gopalan.

The Central Executive Committee of the All India Democratic Women's Association met and discussed major issues facing women today.

The CEC noted that the AIDWA units in West Bengal, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Delhi have been in the forefront of the struggle for the rights of women belonging to the minority communities in the wake of the Supreme Court Judgement in the Shah Banu case. Many instances were reported where fundamentalists in the name of protection of Shariat were trying to disrupt our meetings. The AIDWA called on its units to intensify its campaigns among minorities including women of the Christian community. The CEC also sharply demarcated itself from the Hindi communalists who were trying to divert the problem into communal lines. It congratulated the thousands of Muslim women who have courageously come out in support of the judgement.

The CEC sharply criticised the economic policies of the Government which have resulted in unprecedented price rise. The meeting demanded halt in indiscriminate mechanisation in female specific industries and demanded that the Government should not give any licences to the multinationals and big business houses to bring in machines which will displace women

in traditional industries like tobacco, coir, cashew, matches etc. who have already been displaced by machines and no alternate employment has been offered to them. The CEC also pinpointed and condemned the official advocacy of the home based production or self-employment through co-operatives as a panacea for the evil of women's unemployment. This trend will only perpetuate the prevailing tendency to keep women in low paid, low skilled work, isolated from social contact. The AIDWA called upon its units to observe 'Women's employment week throughout the country.

AIDWA also called upon its units to maintain vigilance against divisive and secessionist forces. The meeting noted with great concern the serious situation in Tripura where TNV extremists were intensifying their attacks. Their depredation have reached the extent where tribal women who wear sarees are physically assaulted for wearing 'non-tribal dresses'. The meeting strongly condemned the Congress(I) for its support to the TUIJS and the extremists for narrow political interests.

The meeting called upon its units to strengthen their campaigns against war and for peace and extended full support to the recent proposals made by the Soviet Union.

J M S Formed in Bhopal

In a meeting attended by about 400 women, the unit of J.M.S. was formed on 29.9.85 in the hall near BHEL. Vimal Ranadive, the Vice-President of AIDWA addressed the gathering explaining the purpose of forming the women's organisation. She explained the difference in the outlook and ideology between AIDWA and others. Already 400 members were enrolled. Anagha Shinde who was elected as Vice-President conducted the meeting. N.K. Kamalam who was elected as the General Secretary also addressed the gathering. A Committee of 17 was formed with Smt. Sita Jagtap as President and Smt. Shanta as a Treasurer.

In Memory of Ashok Lata Jain

THE Ashoklata Jain Memorial declamation contest was held on 3rd. October at the Constitution Club, Delhi on the occasion of the second death anniversary of Com. Ashoklata, the first President of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, Delhi. The subject for this years' contest was an issue which is of crucial concern to the women's movement in India today-i.e. "The role of women's organisations in the struggle against communal and divisive forces". Besides the AIDWA General Secretary, Susheela Gopalan and Vice-President, Kanak Mukherjee, the others present included the Secretary of the CPI (M) Delhi State Committee, and representatives of CITU, SFI & Democratic Teachers Front.

For the 250 women, many from the resettlement colonies, it was a memorable day. For some it was a day which brought back memories of their associations with Ashoka — Association in struggles in the student movement, in the general democratic movement and in the women's movement. Many recalled that they had come into the JMS through struggles led by Ashoka. For those who had come into the JMS in recent years, it was a day to get to know the traditions left behind by Ashoka. This was movingly told by Kanak Mukherjee and Susheela Gopalan who outlined the challenges facing the women's movement today, and how Ashoka's presence would have provided added strength. The meeting observed two minutes silence in Ashoka's memory. A condolence resolution was passed for Phulwati, the President of the Nandnagari unit of the JMS who died suddenly. The Ashoklata Jain Memorial Scholarship was awarded to two girls from Class XI, Prakash Kumari from Jehangirpuri and Sujeet Kaur from Bagichi. This scholarship is given every year to two girls from economically deprived families.

The judges for the declamation contest were Indu Agnihotri, President of the JMS (Delhi), Dr. Utsa Patnaik, a professor from Jawaharlal Nehru University and Mrs. Hashmi, a school principal. The contest was marked by great enthusiasm, by the teams and individual. The teams were from Mongolpuri, Dakshinpuri, Bhoor Colony (Faridabad),

Azadpur, Shakurpur, Old Faridabad, Manakpura and from the Central unit. The speakers were mainly from the resettlement colonies and included a large number of young girls. The contest indicated that the women were becoming aware of the tasks before the women's movement. In their speeches they stressed on the threats facing the general democratic movement and united women's movement. These threats came from reactionary forces who used religion, caste, region to divide the people. These forces were aided by imperialist agencies. Be it the riots in Bhiwandi, the anti-Sikhs riots in Delhi, the common people, particularly women and children suffered the most. A few speakers criticised the feminist perspective which considered men to be the main enemy of the women's movement.

Another point brought out by many speakers was about the prevailing feudal attitudes and practices regarding women in our country and that women themselves had internalised backward ideas. The hold of religion on women was very strong and therefore the religious fundamentalist attack on women's rights was one of the foremost challenges facing the women's movement. A third point mentioned by a few speakers was the situation of women in socialist countries where women were equal participants in economic activity and where poverty and injustice did not exist. The team prizes for the contest were given to the following:-

1st prize — Bhoor Colony (Faridabad)

2nd prize — Azad pur

3rd prize — Central team

The first, second and third prizes were awarded to Anita (Shakurpur), Bachhi Devi (Bhoor Colony) and Renu (Centre). Special mention was made of Nirmal Rana (Shakurpur), Vandana and Upasana (Centre), Rajendri (Mongolpuri), Nemvati (Dakshinpuri).

First State Conference of Janwadi Mahila Samiti-Rajasthan

FIRST state conference held on 13th October in Jaipur was a remarkable event in the development of women's movement in Rajasthan, though J.M.S. is still a very small organisation in the state. Its membership is still less than two thousand and it functions in only four districts, and has nominal existence in two more districts out of the total twenty seven districts in the state. Yet, the fact that it has been able to bring within its fold the most backward women in the country and organise the most oppressed and down-trodden women of the state to be able to hold a conference made this conference a landmark in the history of women's movement in Rajasthan.

The conference was organised by the ad-hoc committee of J.M.S. in Rajasthan, with Sumitra Swami as its convener. One hundred and sixty three delegates from six districts viz. Jaipur, Sri Ganganagar, Udaipur, Kota, Ajmer and Sikar attended the conference. The women from different districts reached Jaipur on their own, unescorted by any men, which in itself was an achievement for them.

The conference elected a four member presidium and the AIDWA flag was hoisted by Narmada, one of the founder members of J.M.S. in Jaipur. The martyrs column was made of a woman with a flag in her hand portrayed with red roses against a black background. A noted vocal artist from Jaipur, Ruby Chatterjee and a member of AIDWA accompanied by Meeta Joshi, Suvidya and Neerja Pathak rendered songs on Peace and National integration at the beginning.

Chairman of the Reception Committee Dr. Mohini Sharma, Assistant Professor in Hindi Deptt. University of Rajasthan, welcoming the delegates emphasized the need for a militant women's organisation in the state and greeted J.M.S. for the role which it has played in this respect in Jaipur and other places.

Vimal Ranadive, Vice President of AIDWA

gave the inaugural speech. Addressing the open session she warned against the threat to peace and national integration and the on coming onslaught on women's employment in the garb of computerisation and mechanisation. She also outlined the present social and economic position of women, the significant victories registered by women through their struggles and the negative role being played by the government particularly on the demand of non-interference in the Muslim Personal law, raised by the fundamentalists.

The report of J.M.S. was placed by Sumitra. Twenty women participated in the discussion on the report. The women mostly expressed their own feelings and experiences of women's movement in their area.

Several resolutions were also passed. The main resolutions were, against war, on national integration, against price rise, against atrocities on women, Fight against decadent culture, Education and Employment for women and against religious obscurantist beliefs and social evils etc.

Twenty one member executive committee was elected. The executive elected following office bearers — Madhu Sethia, President, Durga Swami and Sita Devi — Vice Presidents, Sumitra Swami as General Secretary, Manju Singhvi and B.P. Chandra — Joint Secretaries and Sharda Sharma as Treasurer.

The newly elected executive committee held a meeting soon after the conference and took a decision to increase membership and to observe the AIDWA call for protest week against unemployment in January '86.

They shall not Pass—La Pasionaria

DOLARES Ibarruri, known as "Pasionaria" a great leader, a revolutionary fighter will be 90 years old on 9th of December 1985. On this occasion, the Communist Party of Spain, of which Dolares is the President will organise a series of activities to pay homage to the most important figure of the anti-fascist struggle, workers movement and Communist International. On this occasion, the Party will bring out her biographical sketch during the International celebration to be held in Madrid on 8th December.

Dolares Ibarruri was born on 9th Dec., 1875, in a mine Town of Gallarta in a miners family. Her father Antonio, was called 'artilleryman', because he mastered the art of handling a dynamite. The mother Juliana Goinez was a Spanish housewife looking after the children and home. Dolares was their 8th child. Her brothers and grandfather and uncles worked as miners.

Dolares managed to go to school upto the age of 15 years. She was compelled then to work as a servant. She married Julian Reiz, a revolutionary miner at the age of 20. Dolares used to participate in all the solidarity actions of the Trade unions. In a strike during August 1917 she actively intervened in the resistance against the repression let loose on the workers.

She was overjoyed to hear the news in the month of November that the working class in Czarist Russia won the power. Her articles started appearing in the local papers under the name of Pasionaria. The articles "The class struggle" and "The Vizeayan Miners" appeared in the local papers for the first time. The name "pasionaria" became thus a symbol of strength and a legend throughout Spain and all over the world.

In 1920, Pasionaria with her socialist group decided to integrate themselves in forming the Communist Party of Spain and she was elected as a member of the Provincial Committee of the CPS in Vizcaya. The dictator of Spain, Priona de Rivera launched attacks on the workers and on the members of the Spanish CP. Those were difficult years for Pasionaria

and her comrades. Two of her triplets died at home with starvation. Out of six children only Ameya and Ruben survived the difficult situation and diseases. Ruben fell a victim to Hitlerian aggression defending stalingrad in 1942.

In 1930 Dolares was elected to the CC of the CPS. It was a year when the dictatorship came to an end, and the proclamation of Republic was declared. Dolares in her various articles showed the different trends in the Party and corrected them. The publication of "Marub Oburero" put her in the detention camp for the first time. The election of the leader Josi Diaz as Secretary General of CPS marked a new stage, mass movements took place in which Dolares played an important role. She emerged in the national political life as an undefatigable and rallying force in the struggle against repression unleashed by General Franco from 1934 onwards who suppressed the Fascist revolt in Austrias Ansta Pasionaria who was again imprisoned became a symbol of revolutionary struggle. In 1935 she had to cross the border for France on foot with Jose Diaz to attend the VII congress of communist International where the tactics of United Front to defeat Fascism were to be adopted. She wrote hundreds of articles, spoke in meetings, giving repeated warnings about the dangers facing the Spanish Democracy.

As soon as the elections in February 1936 gave victory to the popular Front, and 16 communist deputies from Asturia got elected in Parliament, she along with others rushed to the prison of Oviedo to open the gates for the antifascist prisoners. The constant warnings in the Assembly and outside about the fascist uprising were given by Pasionaria and Josi Diaz, on July 18, Franco revolted against the legitimate Government of the Republic. Pasionaria raised her voice on Radio "against those heartless people who wanted to drown Spain in the hell of war and death". She said "They shall never succeed." In 1936 Dolares led the people in Paris to the winter velodrome with the historic words "It is better to die standing than to live on one's Knees..." During the three years of Civil war Dolares became the

soul of the resistance of Spanish people and also of the International struggle against Fascism. She had an honour of delivering the historic speech before the International Brigades.

Dolares Ibarruri led the anti-fascist women's movement in Spain. She is one of the founders of the world International Democratic Federation of women. The final defeat of the Spanish Republic in March 1939, compelled Dolares to leave Spain. Thus she had to be in exile for 40 years. She described this period as "Unending" which took her to many countries through various difficulties while travelling. These dangers, threats and difficulties she faced were narrated by her in *Memoirs of Pasionaria 1939-1977*.

She was elected as Secretary General of CPS in 1954 after the death of Josi Diaz. In 1960 she was elected as President of the CPS.

On 13th May 1977, after the death of the dictator, Pasionaria returned to Madrid from Moscow where she spent the major part of her 'unending' exile. She won as deputy member in Parliament and got elected by the Austrian Workers.

She wrote an open letter addressed to all party members to the XI Congress, where she said "Today we find ourselves plunged in a difficult debate. But I am sure that we shall find the way to unity based on a correct policy. Life has not stopped. Everything is moving and everything is changing. To know how to adopt our theory, our policy and our struggle to the concrete conditions in which we are living as shown by Lenin, and advance towards the future ... towards the goal that we have chosen ... Socialism and Peace is our way and only way of human emancipation."

Women in Action

U.S.A.

Several events in various parts of the USA were organized by women's and other public organisations to mark the 40th anniversary of the first atomic bombings and to call for an end to all nuclear explosions.

On August 4th in Washington D.C. women, men and children from across the country came together on the initiative of several women's organizations to encircle the Pentagon with a peace ribbon over 15 miles long. The panels of the ribbon had been collected from 50 US states, and included messages from over 20 other countries.

The demonstrators demanded disarmament, no Star Wars and a constructive response from the US government to the unilateral moratorium of the Soviet Union on nuclear explosions that came into force on 6 August to demonstrate goodwill for the Geneva negotiations to take place in the fall.

Great Britain

The National Assembly of Women held a vigil on August 8th at St. James Church of Piccadilly, London to remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to say never again. Links were established with the people of the St James Church and members of other peace groups who joined the vigil, and agreements were reached to work together on the issue of peace in the future also.

"The signing of the Helsinki Final Act by 33 European states, Canada and the USA on August 1, 1975 gave hope to the world and offered encouraging prospects of solving even the gravest regional and international problems," says the letter of the National Assembly of Women to the British Prime Minister on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the signing of that document. In it NAW asked the government to welcome the new Soviet unilateral decision to cease all nuclear tests and to press the USA to respond positively in the same manner and to implement the Final Act in its entirety.

The Muslim Women and the Russian Revolution

THE fundamentalists from all communities in our country try to exploit women, making use of various laws with regard to divorce, inheritance, marriage etc. The principal aim of all fundamentalists is to keep women's position unequal in the society. In the recent period, the Muslim fundamentalists have risen against the famous Supreme Court judgement on maintenance to Muslim women divorcees. The progressive sections of all communities including women have come forward in support of the cause of Muslim women.

The following article based on the Soviet literature will be interesting for our readers to understand as to how the women in the East part of Russia, most backward, had to pass through the worst situation, when the fundamentalists even murdered women to keep them away from the path of emancipation and what steps the Socialist Govt. took for their liberation. — Editor.

FOR the women of the Soviet East the steps taken to improve their new life after the revolution were difficult to implement. Patriarchal and Feudal practices and old customs persisted in this area for a long time. The Shariat and the Adat, legalised polygamy, the purchase and sale of brides, the marriage of juveniles and other slavish practices were humiliating to women from Uzbek, Tajik and Azerbaijan which were completely cut off from the main part of Russia. The unwritten laws of mountains, like Adat and Shariat were guarded by the Khans, beks, mullahs and Kulaks supported by the Tsarist regime. The women never ate or drank water in the presence of their husbands, never exchanged a word with their father-in-laws. This was the custom laid down by Adat. The 'Adat' demanded that the widow become the wife of the brother or cousin of the deceased. These customs and laws could not be changed in a single day. The struggle against them required utmost caution and flexibility for the leaders and the Soviet state.

How have they started work among these backward sections of women? Women's units were set up first in Baku and Tashkent in 1920

and in Tbilis in February 1921. The work began with talking with individual women in their homes and at public baths. The question of language difficulty also was there. The preparation for the All-Russia Congress was going on a large scale. Numerous meetings, conferences were held and delegates were elected. The very fact that women going to a Congress or a conference created tremendous enthusiasm as well as fear among women in the Central Asia, the thing never happened in their life. Many delegates had to travel for days, on horse, camel and mule or walking, to board the train with so much apprehension! Many came with their husbands and babies too. Men sat at the back while women in front!

In September, 1920, a Congress of the people of East was held in Baku. It was the first time that Muslim women attended a Congress together with men. Women also came from Turkey, Persia, Egypt, India, Afganistan, China, Japan Korea and other countries. There were only 55 women who attended this Congress and three of them were elected to the presidium. But on this question there was discussion whether electing women on the presidium would have negative effect in the East and affect the prestige of the Soviet Communist Party! After three days only the decision was taken and when they came on the stage a great ovation was given by the delegates. Enthused by the discussion, one invite Azerbaijan woman sprang to her feet and said "Victory or death" and tore off her Yashmak — Burqua. (a burqua with horsehair) The Uzbek women came wearing their "horsehair yashmak" which completely covered their faces and part of their body. However the picture changed towards the close of the congress. All the women discarded these veils though some of the men protested they were given a rebuff! The women had courage to say that they were also delegates like men and had no right to order women as they did.

To work among Muslim women in the East, clubs were opened in Azerbaijan, to educate them. The club organised theatre groups where women listened with rapt atten-

tion about the new changes coming in the East after the Russian Revolution. The famous play "Sevil" dedicated to emancipation of women, where the heroine discarded the "Yashmak" once for all was enacted. The impact of the drama was such that many women in the audience followed the example of the heroine!

A news paper "women of the East" began to be published in 1923. The co-operatives of women to give training in sewing, embroidery, book binding, weaving, were organised by the clubs. Later the classes also were opened for telephone operators, stenographers, Typists. membership of the co-operatives began to increase rapidly, in other districts also, such as in eastern Republics in Tashkent. During early years, if the lecturer was a man, women set in 'Yashmaks'. So club organisers enlisted services of women. The clubs taught women to read and write. They were provided medical help, taught to use soap, bathe their children and so on. The organisers spoke about the new laws passed by the Soviet Government concerning women's equality. Clubs were organised in Turkmenia. Thus women's clubs, have become one of the principal vehicles of the emancipation of women. There were peoples courts to solve the legal problems cropped up every now and then. Soviet Govt. was always of the opinion that the participation of women in social production was one of the vital conditions of their emancipation. The women's organisations were trying to draw women into socially useful work. In the old days women in Turkestan used to make beautiful carpets. But it was the property of the husbands, the money used to go to them. Now contracts were signed with women and money was paid to them. This changed the position of women in the family making her more independent and awakening in her a sense of her own dignity.

It must be noted that there was fierce resistance to the emancipation moves from the old world such as Kulaks, 'bays', and the Mullahs. They provoked people, threatened the women organisers, killed many of the women leaders who went for propaganda. For instance, Annajimal a woman leader in Turkmenia was brutally stabbed to death in the village of Geok — Tepe in April 1925. Suleimanova was hacked to death in February 1925. They

were the leaders of these clubs. The women organisers did not always have sympathy of the men because the men were still having the old feudal outlook towards women. Therefore, it was very necessary to combat the survivals of the past in the minds of men. In 1921 the Turkman Soviet passed a decree of abolishing "Kalym" and raising the marriage age of girls from 16 to 18. The Shariat allowed the girls to be married from the age of 9 and boys from the age of 11. The land belonged to men only before the revolution. The 1925-27 decree gave the land to the landless including women. The equal right for men and a women was given for land and water. A big offensive was launched by women's organisation against the use of 'Yshmak's and to bring them into the productive work. It was to be noted that the wives of the leaders, deputies etc. had taken the lead in discarding this horse hair yashmak. Most of the women working in Urtak Tobacco Mill in Tashkant stopped wearing the Yashmak by March, 1927. A demonstration held on 4th March attended by 10,000 in Tashkent, women took pledge to refuse to wear yashmak any longer! The so-called "travelling prison" was put to an end once for all! In the meeting a women with a yashmak climbed to the rostrum, bared her face open said a few words of gratitude and energetically tore off the Yashmak at the foot of the rostrum: Then thousands of women made piles of their Yashmaks and set them to fire! This happened at many places in the East.

They rose against polygamy too. During this period a total of 226 cases of kidnapping and murder of women took place in Uzbekistan, most of them were fanatics who opposed these progressive measures. Against all these, Soviet Govt. women's organisation had to fight to root out these feudal ideas from the common people. An education drive had to be taken up by them to reform them. Since then many changes have taken place among men and women.

The position of women in the East is quite different today. They are equal to other women in the rest of Russia in every sphere. They occupy a worthy place in the economy, culture and science. Against the background of the past, the present changes that have taken place in the status of women in the East are indeed noteworthy.

Iranian Women Tortured under Fundamentalist Regime

OPEN letter issued by the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women.

Seven years after the anti-dictatorial and popular revolution of February 1979 which succeeded to overthrow the Shah's regime — in which the Iranian women and men participated with unprecedented self-sacrifice — dictatorship and repression still rule over Iran. By establishing an autocratic rule and the outdated laws and regulations of 1400 yrs ago under the banner of "Islamic Rule", the Islamic Republican regime is brutally violating the human rights charter and answers on the slightest opposition with detention, imprisonment, torture and execution.

The Islamic regime's notorious prisons are filled by more than one hundred thousand political prisoners — among them thousands of women. Among women political prisoners young girls of 12-13 years of age and old women can be sighted. To break the women's spirit of resistance and defiance and to extract information, the regime's torturers resort to barbaric means. Prolonged interrogations accompanied by beatings and insults, blind folding for months, solitary confinement, lashing and flogging with leather and metal cables to the point of unconsciousness, burning of the body by cigarette, insertion of hot needle into the women's breast, electric shock, hanging by hair, knocking out teeth and pulling out nails, raping women in the presence of their husbands and relatives and use of narcotics and other psychiatric drugs are amongst the tortures used against women in the Islamic Republican prisons.

A number of women have given birth in the prisons. The unhealthy and depressing prison environment, lack of space, insufficient and unhygienic diet has caused various physical and mental illnesses amongst children who at the same time witness the torture of their mothers. There are no doctors, medicine or health care available in prisons for women. Women suffer from various skin diseases, nervous and digestive disorders. The cells are

overcrowded to the extent that prisoners have to take turn to lie down to sleep. Women are deprived of exercise time, visits by their relatives, and are denied access to books and papers. Correspondence with outside is rare, any such correspondence are only allowed on special forms, under the direct supervision of the prison guard. To inflict psychological pressure on women prisoners, their relatives are subjected to harassment. In the event of regime's inability to arrest political activists, their families are held hostage.

The trials take place behind closed doors in the absence of a jury. Prisoners are denied the right to have a defence lawyer. Women's defence of their political and human rights is interpreted as "arrogance and insulance" by the religious judges and meets with their savage reaction. To date, hundreds of women have been executed. Amongst them young girls and pregnant women can be found. Young girls are systematically raped by the guards before execution as according to the Islamic laws, the execution of virgin girls is not permissible. On many occasions, the executioners of the Islamic Republic refuse to return the bodies of the victims to their relatives. The sentences passed by the regime's courts are particularly harsh against women. To date many cadres and members of the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women have been sentenced to 15 to 20 years of imprisonment. Their crime is nothing but to have fought to restore the violated rights of the Iranian women.

To date, the Islamic Republican regime has persistently opposed the logical demand to allow a team of independent medical and legal experts to enter Iran and inspect the prisons.

On behalf of the oppressed and militant women of Iran, we appeal for help and solidarity. The freedom of political prisoners in Iran requires joint action on the part of progressive and democratic organisations and individuals the world over. We rely on the awakened conscience of all freedom and peace loving people and call on them to come to the

aid of the women political prisoners in Iran including imprisoned members of the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women.

Women's Ordeal in the Lahijan Prison

A letter by a Tudeh prisoner from the women's prison in Lahijan paints a vivid picture of the prisoners' ordeal there: "I came round after being unconscious for 12 hours. There were 43 young girls and women between the ages of 14 and 25 being kept in the dark and damp prison cells. Most of them suffered from psychological stress; goitre; convulsion, kidney, stomach and digestion disorders. We had all been flogged; and this effected the whole of our nervous system. Nearly everyone suffered from bleeding in the ovaries, in the ears and nose, or behind the cornea of the eyes which in turn led to gradual loss of sight. We had no right to outdoor exercises. Spending months on end sitting down, without much opportunity to walk resulted in severe pain in the spine, especially in the lower back. Besides these, skin diseases were rife. Lice crawled all over us".

"One 23 year old woman was sentenced to life imprisonment. Her brother and husband had been executed in front of her eyes. She had been pregnant at the time of her arrest in 1981. As a result of flogging and torture, she gave pre-mature birth in the dirty prison environment, without any medical care. The prison keepers took away her body. It died a few days later.

A 14 year old girl had been arrested along with 2 other friends at her school for arguing over the question of wearing a veil, with a female member of the Islamic Society. They had been flogged all over their bodies (virgins are flogged in this way, whereas married women are flogged only on the soles of their feet). One night a guard had come and taken her to solitary prison. In the middle of the night others were woken up with her screams when she was brutally raped. They were transferred to this prison the next day. She now suffered from convulsions and hallucinations.

"The prisoners are subjected to tortures and ordeals far worse than the ones I have mentioned. Even remembering them tortures me".

Tudeh—10th July, 1985.

Nurses in Bangladesh Win Demands

6,000 striking nurses throughout Bangladesh resumed their duties today after the government agreed to meet some of their demands.

The Nurses, at various Government Hospitals and Health Centres, went on strike on September 18 demanding a Seven-point programme including higher salaries and better service conditions.

The Nine-day strike was called off after Health Minister Shamsul Huq and womens affairs minister Rabeya Bhuiyan agreed during talks with the nurses to meet demands for better payment and to discuss other grievances.

Meanwhile the government also released the nurses' leader Jahanara Begum President of the Bangladesh Diploma Nurses Association, who was arrested by Police yesterday when she began a hunger strike.

Execution of Moloise Condemned

The following statement was issued by Susheela Gopalan, the General Secretary AIDWA.

The All India Democratic Women's Association vehemently condemns the execution of the poet Benjamin Moloise in Pretoria by the racist South African regime. This blatant act of brutality has come even as the conference of the Commonwealth Heads of States is discussing the sanctions against the South African Government and also ignored the world wide appeals for Clemency. We the women of India strongly protests against this execution and demand that the British and US imperialists withdraw their overt and covert collaboration with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Condemn South African Govt for the Murder of Benjamin Moloise

THE World famous black poet, Benjamin Moloise was hanged in the Pretoria prison at 7 A.M. on 18th Oct. 1985, by Botha Govt. in spite of world wide demand from most of the countries to open the case again and for clemency. The appeal for last minute stay of execution was rejected by the Apartheid Govt. Benjamin was only 28. He never denied his firm support for the cause of the black. He was a professed sympathiser of the outlawed African National Congress. Winni Mandela, wife of Nelson Mandela, went to the prison to mourn his death, when the guards ordered her out. The courageous mother of Benjamin told the people that her family was harassed, abused by the African police during the night vigil for her son in Sowet. The police threw teargas shells at her house. The cruelty of the Botha Govt. could be imagined, when she was not even allowed to bid a traditional farewell to her son. They arrived at the prison gets one hour before the hanging and she was told to go away! She could see him before the

execution just a few minutes along with her lawyer.

There were riots and shooting between the police and armed protesters. Already people in South Africa have decided to take up arms for their freedom. The Imperialist countries, Britain and USA are not bringing sufficient pressure on Botha in spite of Commonwealth countries, including India insisting on economic sanctions, the minimum and urgent need to stop the gamble of Apartheid Govt.

The African National Congress said in Lusaka "the murder of Benjamin Moloise must become the signal of even greater blows against the enemy in every corner of our land". The blows will be given and are being given to the enemy no doubt, till the Apartheid Govt. is no more! To fulfil the wishes of her son Benjamin, the mother and a small group of blacks sang the black liberation song, when the riot police were watching! We salute you, Benjamin Moloise! while assuring all our support to the cause for which you died!

Dr. Wendy 'Ostracised' for Exposure of crime of Botha Police

DR. Wendy Orr, 25, a South African woman doctor who was treating political prisoners as patients in the port Elizabeth now herself have become the prisoner, in her department and "Ostracised", for exposing the torture on prisoners to the Supreme Court. Dr. Orr, along with other 44 sought a ban from the Supreme Court on the African police from assaulting the detainees held at Albana and North End prisons under the two months old state of emergency regulations. As soon as the news spread in the office and elsewhere, she was 'Ostracised', and was not allowed even to speak on the phone, on the "order from Pretoria Govt."

What type of tortures the prisoners had to go through, for the exposure which Dr. Orr was punished?

"The daily appearance of the warder was an event everyone feared and lived in dread of." Reverend Hamilton Dandola, a former de-

tainee said, "when a name was called there was usually a murmur of sympathy and apprehensive — those taken for interrogation usually returned shocked & in pain". "Another detainee, Mr. Jhon Reusburg, said he returned after one interrogation with a "Smashed nose, split lip, battered face and restricted neck movement." He was forced to clean up his own blood in the torture chamber! The detainees were forced to eat their own hair, to drink petrol, and brutally and systematically tortured. Many prisoners wrote these in their affidavits.

One such horrible torture was named as "Helicopter". A prisoner was asked to sit in a crouching position with a stick behind his knees. Then he was suspended upside down and kicked into a Spin!

Dr. Wendy, the courageous doctor may be suspended or dismissed for exposing these barbarous acts of position on the detainees by the notorious Botha Govt. But she served the cause of humanity and for justice.

Czechoslovak Women and the Women's Decade

EQUALITY, development, peace are the three words that became the theme of the Decade for Women, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1975.

Czechoslovak women, too, contributed tangibly to the promotion of the Decade's goals — above all, acting through their organisation, the Czechoslovak Women's Union which cooperate with 134 women's organisation in 120 countries.

The passionate commitment of Czechoslovak women to peace and their efforts to uphold basic human rights, especially the right to life, stem from the historical experience of Czechoslovakia's people who went through the tragic experience of this century's both world wars. Czech and Slovak women are aware of these wars' consequences and also of their causes. As citizens of a Socialist country, they speak not only of the responsibility of women as mothers who give birth to new life but also of the common responsibility for the world's progress without violence or injustice. They are convinced that war can be banished forever. They are active in the drive to defend peace, and they held to safeguard it by their work and social involvement. Czechoslovak women have demonstrated their complete dedication to the struggle for peace in different forms — through demonstrations, rallies, seminars, action groups, peace marches and the like. Their open dialogue with representatives of women's anti-war movements in capitalist and developing countries has emerged as a major manifestation of this commitment. The dialogue has been conducted at numerous international forums, during peace marches, at international workshops and in peace camps. On the initiative of the Czechoslovak Women's Union, the organisers of the first peace march in 1981, were invited to the World Congress of Women held in Prague. Contacts were established with women in the peace camps at Greenham Common and Comiso and with women active in the anti-war movement in the Netherlands, the FRG, Belgium, the Nordic countries, Japan and Australia. One of the positive results of these contacts was the broad participation of women representing these movements and organisa-

tions in the World Assembly for Peace and Life, Against Nuclear War held in Prague in 1983.

In Czechoslovakia proper, initiatives coordinated by the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Women's Union spread throughout the country and generated nationwide response. One example is the 1982 campaign to sign antiwar postcards published by the Union; 4,200,000 signatures were sent to the White House. Or take the more than 110 tons of goods raised in major drives to collect material assistance to the women and children of nationals suffering from imperialist forces, aggressions and foreign occupation. People also responded broadly to the appeal of the Women's International Democratic Federation which urged a worldwide campaign for peace and disarmament, as well as to the 1985 drive to sign the document "For the Right of Nations to Peace".

The Czechoslovak Women's Union has cooperated with several other domestic civic organisations on a number of peace initiatives. For example, the 1982 Peace March across Czechoslovakia and a children's art contest were received with enthusiasm.

To the efforts to ensure broad antiwar and anti-imperialist solidarity of progressive women all over the world, Czechoslovak women have added the weight of their moral, political and material support for and solidarity with the women of countries suffering from the consequences of imperialist policies, wars, aggression and fighting for their national independence and freedom. Over the past five years alone, the solidarity fund of the Czechoslovak Women's Union has made it possible to send material assistance to more than 30 women's organisations in developing countries, in some cases several times. They have also extended medical assistance to those women from developing countries whose health has been affected by war or harsh living conditions. Czechoslovak women draw on the solidarity fund to support the Mother and Child care centre in Hanoi the construction of which they helped to finance. In 1985 women activists are organising an all-Czechoslovak fund-raising drive to help women and children in Angola, Ethiopia, Kampuchea and Mozambique, as well as women from Namibia and Palestine.

Union Carbide's Parting Gift — A Study

OFFICIAL surveys have confirmed that the lethal MIC gas of the Bhopal Union Carbide plant had its most treacherous impact on pregnant mothers and their unborn children. Figures released by the Madhya Pradesh Government from a close study of one lakh segment of the affected population, particularly of 2,245 women who were within three months of their pregnancies on the night of the gas disaster show:

- 361 women had abortions;
- 22 babies were born dead;
- 84 were premature births, and most tragically,
- 17 of the babies born alive had congenital defects.

Doctors who are conducting the ongoing survey are keeping under observation 495 pregnant women who are expected to deliver in the next few weeks. A subject of particular study is congenital defects which could have been caused either by oxygen deficiency in the foetus because of the mother's impaired lung capacity after becoming a victim of the gas, and any possible genetic aberrations.

Dr. Ishwar Das, the commissioner for relief operations in the Bhopal gas tragedy, said the surviving children born to the 2,900 pregnant women of December 1984 will be kept under scientific observation for at least five years to evaluate long-term effects of the gas.

The high level commission appointed by the Central Government to study long term biological effects of the MIC on humans, animals and vegetation life systems is yet to start work. Dr. C.R. Krishnamurti, the eminent toxicologist, who heads the five member commission has returned to India and the commission is expected to formulate its plan of action shortly.

Dr. Das admitted that perhaps as many as 25 per cent of the seriously affected persons have suffered permanent lung damage, which incapacitates them from work, involving hard physical labour. Citing incidents from the 1.75 lakh persons who were treated in hospitals after the gas leakage, and particularly the 15,000 who were hospitalised for various durations, the relief commissioner said there had been a recurrence of hacking cough, breathlessness and eye irritation in many people. Treatment in some cases, he said, would have to continue for up to 10 years. It is found that

there is large incidence of mental illness among people affected by the gas, and about one in 10 persons affected by the gas shows symptoms of mental illness. These take the form of anxiety neurosis, acute depression and other ailments.

A Committee was formed of various trade unions, All India Federations, Delhi Science Forum, CSIR, Scientific Workers' Association, Madhya Pradesh Vigyan Sabha, Banks, FMRAI etc. in a meeting convened by CITU to implement the tasks which were enumerated in the resolution adopted at the Seminar held on May 24, 1985 at Delhi. After discussing the programme, it was decided to launch campaign in pursuance of the same and make preparations for successful observance of Dec. 3 as Bhopal Day. The discussion was on the question of Industrial Safety, relief and rehabilitation measures, compensation to the victims by the Union Carbide, MIC Gas effect on pregnant women, absorption of the workers affected by the closure of the plant and the role of the Multinational Companies etc.

The Committee will visit Bhopal on 14-15th of November to make in depth study and meet the Chief Minister to submit a charter of Demands.

According to a report to be submitted to forthcoming session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva. June 7-27), in this final year of the United Nations Decade for women, equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women in employment remains far from being realised. In many countries, the evolution of social equality has not kept pace with the progress registered in the legislative domain, and the training often leads to occupational segregation which, in turn tends to perpetuate the wide gap between the sexes. The international Labour Office referring to the basic normative changes, points out that collective action is the most potent weapon at the disposal of women workers for achieving respect for their rights, the main channels for such action being trade unions, cooperatives and women organisations. Over the past 10 years the number of women workers in the world has gone up by over 100 million. According to ILO estimates, women still represent a little over one-third of the world labour force.

The Veiled Struggle

THE controversy over the Supreme Court judgement in the Shahbano case has evoked great interest in Pakistan, a theocratic state where the Shariat is the law of the land. According to Asma Jahangir, one of the two women lawyers of Lahore and founder-member of Women's Action Forum (WAF), Lahore it is absurd to give an Islamic interpretation to the question of maintenance to divorced women in a secular country like India.

But the situation is worse in Pakistan, she admitted. Women's rights have been further curtailed because of President Zia's zeal for Islamisation of the country. Official licence has been given to the maulvis to formulate laws which seek to drag women back to the *burqa char devari* (four walls). Educated Pakistani women have challenged this obscurantist interpretation of Islam and Asma, 32, has been in the struggle against laws which "foster an inherent contempt for the status of women and have given rise to an alarming increase in suicides by women and sexual crimes against them".

The malaise, she said, was rooted in the macho psyche of a culture that looks down upon women. "Despite the fact that the punishment for rape is very severe (25 years' imprisonment and 100 lashes), sexual crimes against women have in the last four years shown a sharp rise," she said.

Jehan Mina, 13, was not that fortunate. An orphan, she was raped by her uncle and his son and became pregnant. The accused were acquitted for want of circumstantial evidence but Jehan was punished for zina. She was sent to jail but the sentence of whipping was suspended till she gave birth to her child.

Even 12-year old minors who are victims of rape are not spared under zina. This is against the principle that consent is immaterial with minors. The bias in the application of the law against women is evident.

A few months ago the Pakistan press and public were engrossed in a debate on the merits of public flogging of a woman who was accused of zina although she was married to

the man. Shagufta Masih, 20, had run away with Asif Masih and her father registered a case of kidnapping. On their arrest, Asif claimed that Shagufta had willingly come away with him and that they had got married. But they could not convincingly prove that and they were sentenced under the zina ordinance of public flogging. The fact that they were Christians made the case all the more controversial. The whipping, however, was suspended especially as Shagufta was pregnant and also because of pressure from the press and women's rights activists.

There is also the case of a married woman convicted of zina, although the complaint had been made in the form of an anonymous letter to a policeman. The letter alleged that the accused had been pregnant before her marriage. The trial court did not take into account even the husband's testimony in favour of the wife.

There are four women's jails in Pakistan and the prisoners are kept in subhuman conditions, according to Asma. A few months ago Bashiran, accused in a kidnapping case, was beaten mercilessly by the jail authorities and put in the condemned prisoners' cell. For 16 days she lay chained to an iron grill and was tortured. In Multan jail, a prisoner called Safia Begum committed suicide because of constant maltreatment in the jail. There are also cases of rape by jail officials.

Organisations like the WAF and the lawyers association have been challenging the anti-women policies of the government, Asma said. She accepted the criticism that these were essentially elite movements. "But the important thing is that they exist and have been able to do something", she said. It was through their efforts that the discriminatory law of evidence was blocked. It would have in effect made the evidence of one man equal to that of two women. Now its application is limited to business matters.

Yet for every such discriminatory law that is successfully opposed, there are scores more. Asma referred to the recent Qisas Diyat ordi-

(Contd. on page 8)

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