

Released in the Press Conference addressed
by Sri Jyoti Basu, Vice-President of C.I.T.U.

The irresponsibility and bankruptcy of the present Congress Government of West Bengal has reached its peak through the measure taken by it in introducing power rationing. When there is no guarantee of minimum supply of power to introduce rationing worth its name, the power rationing introduced since 12th August, 1974 has further accentuated the crisis increasing the suffering of the workers, consumers and the common people. The minimum requirement of power in Calcutta industrial area serviced by the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation is 545 MW in the morning and 595 MW in the evening. The Government of West Bengal announced that with a supply of 430 MW in the morning and 490 MW in the evening they can introduce power rationing. But in the way existing power generating units in West Bengal have been worn out and over worked besides original defects from which they suffer, there is no guarantee of supply of that much of power. Sri Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the Chief Minister of West Bengal told the press on 3rd July, 1974 that "he had not received any assurance regarding the minimum supply of power which could be the basis for power rationing. "So, it is not known how suddenly he could find a basis to introduce power rationing from 12th August, 1974 when the shortage of power was to the extent of 234 MW on the very day of introduction of rationing.

The power crisis became most acute in West Bengal in June, 1972. But the West Bengal Government deliberately wasted last two years and gave one false promise after another to the people for solving power crisis while taking no action to improve power supply which was and is feasible by taking short term and long term measures suggested by CITU West Bengal Committee and other central T.U.s in the meeting of State Labour Advisory Board held on 31st July, 1972.

Firm steps to supply good quality coal with low ash content (available from Raniganj coal field) to Thermal Power Stations, proper functioning of Coal pulverising plants feeding coal in big boilers, supply of good quality Furnace Oil and light Diesel Oil and inadequate quantities to power generating units, proper maintenance of machineries and plants, replacements of defective and worn out parts and elimination of administrative inefficiency and corruption a little more seriousness on the part of the Ministry and establishing good relations with the workers and engineers can help to immediately increase power generation. These points were repeatedly mentioned by CITU and other Central Trade Unions in the meetings of State Labour Advisory Board held on 8th, 14th and 21st May, 1974. But West Bengal Government deliberately ignored these constructive suggestions. Uptil now there is no explanation from the Government as to why CMA cannot supply good quality coal and I.O.C. good quality oil.

The reluctance of the Central Government to provide foreign exchange allocation to import vital spare parts for power generating units is also accentuating power crisis in West Bengal.

The original defects of generators and defective planning of the power generating units have now fully confirmed the risk run by the national economy in depending on the assistance of imperialist countries.

The solution of power crisis lies in increasing generation and supply of power. But both the State Government and the Central

Government are purposefully neglecting it. The Santaldih Thermal Power Project originally provided for inclusion in the third five year plan with instalation of four generators of 120 MW each was scuttled and only one generator of 120 MW has so far been installed which is already crippled due to defect in the generator manufactured by BHEL and the boiler facricated by ACC-Vickers-Babcock. This generator commissioned with great fanfare by the Prime Minister is actually generating 15 to 20 MW and on 10th August, 1974 generated only 7 MW. Uptill now there is no explanation from the Government as to why these defective generators and boilers were installed. Moreover there is no guarantee that infure such defects will be rectified. The corruption and negligence of the Government has turned the entire Santaldih Thermal Power Project into a big bluff and does not meet our requirements at all.

The Planning Commission, as reported, originally approved instalation of sixth unit for DPL to generate 200 MW, subsequently revised to 110 MW and Rs. 29 crores was allocated for it. The order for boiler and generators have already been placed with BHEL and AVB= But now it is reported that planning Commission has declined to allocate the approved fund for tis unit.

The proposals of Steel Authority of India Limited to install one captive plant for Durgapur Steel Plant to generate 90 MW and the other at Raniganj to generate 100 MW are being opposed by Central Power & Irrigation Ministry and future of this proposal is most uncertain.

If the Central Government has an uota of interest to solve the power crisis in West Bengal, it is not understood as to why these projects are not approved for immediate execution.

The Central Government has shown similar negligence in the matter of installing fifth unit of Bandel Thermal Power Station for 200 MW and a new Thermal Power Plant at Kolagat with two generators of 200 MW each. Had these projects been taken up in 1971-72, as announced, then during the last three years these could be completed and there would have been no pewwer crisis in West Bengal.

From all indication it also appears that the proposal to install an Atomic Power Station in West Bengal will be scuttled by the Centrl Government.

For a solution of Power Crisis these long terms projects should be immediately taken up for completion as speedily as possible and the short term measures suggested by CITU and other Central Trade Unions for improving power generation from the existing units should be immediately taken up. Otherwise, the entire economy of West Bengal will be crippled and production will come to a stand still. Power rationing will not bring about the solution.

It is also not understood that when such an acute power crisis is going on, e the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation is allowed to exist. A foreign company like CESC should not be allowed in a vital sector like power generation. This company should be immediately nationalised and steps should be taken to replace its old and wornout boilers and generators and integrated planning be made for over all improvement of power generation.

The entire brunt of the power crisis is faced by the workers domestic consumers and the common people. 10 to 12 hours load shedding in all the areas has almost become a permanent feature and

daily life of the common people is completely disrupted. Even after introduction of rationing accentuation of the crisis is not arrested. The power crisis resulted in lay-off of 310736 workers, in 1972 553799 workers in 1973 and 270000 workers in the first five months of 1974. The loss of wage for the workers is enormous event even to the extent of 50% per month. The Central Commerce Minister said in Calcutta on 10th August, 1974 that "during the last one year the State had suffered a loss of Rs. 500 crores because of power shortage". The jute workers are most drastically affected due to power crisis. In 42 Cotton Textile Mills of West Bengal "on an average the mills suffer a monthly power cut ranging from 200 to 250 hours" and cotton yarn is being sold at 40 to 100% higher price compared to last year. The request made by the Government of West Bengal to employers to pay 50% lay-off compensation to the workers for the shortfall of weekly working hours following introduction of 5 day week in place of prevalent 6 day week and 6 week in place of prevalent 7 day week, pursuant to power rationing will not compensate the loss of earnings of the workers. The workers must be guaranteed their normal weekly earnings. The workers will resolutely fight for realisation of this demand. The workers must not be made to suffer for the power crisis created by the Government.

The irresponsibility of the Government is all the more evidenced from the restrictions imposed on shopping hours. On the eve of Puja and in spite of low purchasing power of the people, the shop owners expect some return and restriction on shopping hours will further dwindle their earnings. During load shedding the shop owners used to carry on sale by lighting candles and lanterns to restrict their hazards and their freedom to continue this practice. The restriction on shopping hours should be immediately lifted.

Before the rigged election of 1972 in West Bengal, the Prime Minister said in an election campaign that the Congress Government in Centre and State will ensure progress and development of West Bengal. The attitude of the Central Government towards the power crisis in West Bengal has revealed once again how the people of West Bengal were being deliberately misled during the election.

The Congress Government which talk so much of increasing production as the solution of all evils created by it, is accentuating power crisis by its gross inaction. The power crisis is an all India phenomenon and in West Bengal it is most acute. Hardly 45% of the productive capacity of the industries of West Bengal is being utilised. The situation has already taken a grim turn. It has created a crisis engulfing the entire economy of West Bengal. But the Government is still not telling the truth in apprising the people about the actual position. I hold the Congress Government in the State and at the Centre entirely responsible for the power crisis. The failure of the Congress Government to take short term and long term measures for solution of power crisis, giving priority on new power generating projects, will compel the workers domestic consumers and the common people to launch a state-wide united and powerful movement.

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