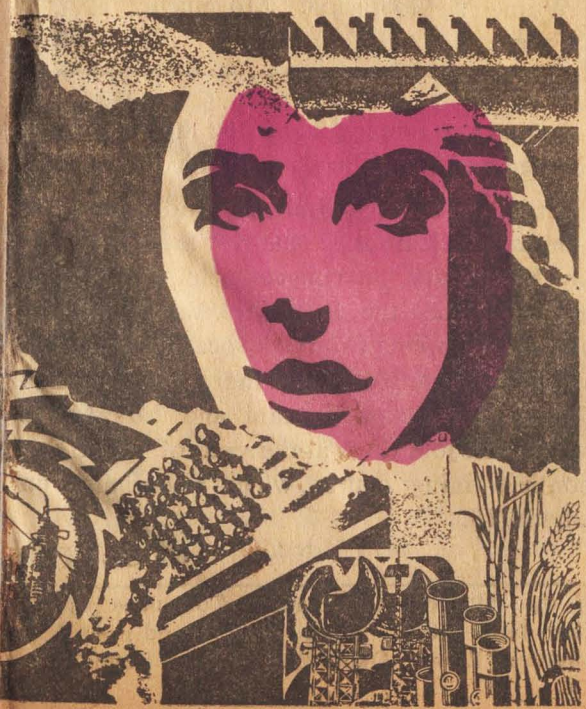
HE VOICE Vol. 2 No. 1 Jan.-Feb. 1982 50 P.

F

THE WORKING WOMAN

All-India Convention Of Working Women





IRAN : Unfulfilled Promises Of Women's Freedom

DID YOU KNOW . . .?

..... that the Minister of State for Home, Yogendra Makwana, has his own and a very peculiar notion of what constitutes crime against women. In the Lok Sabha on September 9 he announced that incidents of crime against women in the Capital have shown a decline— but murders and dowry deaths have increased !

..... that Mrs. Taradeep Nagra, lecturer in the Department of Commerce, Khalsa College, Delhi University has been forced to take extraordinary leave for three months, just because she cut her hair. The Principal, on instructions from the Chairman of the Khalsa College Governing Body, has instructed her that this period is in order to enable her to grow her hair again. The Chairman had wanted the Principal to suspend Mrs. Nagra. However, the Principal realised that University rules would not permit him to do this, and therefore he has forced her to take extraordinary leave. Extraordinary leave carries no salary.

.....that in the Bharatpur Reserve Home for Women the officiating superintendent, the man entrusted with the care of the rescued women, including teenage girls, has been suspended and arrested for repeatedly raping some of the women and beating up those who resisted his attempts. Some of the subordinate employees are also accused of being his accomplices in preying upon the helpless inmates. The sadism did not stop there, the women were locked up and denied food and water. A surprise visit by the Rajasthan Social Welfare Minister, led to prompt action.

Similary in the Kuthiravattam Mental Hospital in Calicut, Kerala, a young patient was raped. In this case the people manifested their anger in a demonstration, and as a result here, too, of prompt intervention by the then State Minister concerned, four persons including two employees of the hospital were arrested and two officials suspended.

.....that the cutting, designing and selling of diamonds, a jealously—guarded male preserve, now has women entering the field. Manju Jain, graduate, was the first: Mrs. Vijaya Mukhi, wife of a Supreme Court Advocate became the second on August 18; three more, Ms. Vandana Godra, Mrs. Seeta Virmani and Mrs. Meera Parikh will join them at the end of an eight-month training course which began also on August 18.

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INCREASED UNIONISATION OF WOMEN NEEDED

The urgent need for setting up women's committees in trade unions—particularly in those industries where there is a substantial concentration of women workers and employees—is being increasingly felt and voiced. More and more working women, under the worsening economic conditions, are coming into active struggle, as the only way of bringing some improvement in their conditions.

The reports printed below, as the reports given in earlier issues—of Central Government employees in Calcutta, Adivasi textile women workers in Orissa, dal and rice mill workers in Madhya Pradesh, engineering and electronics workers in Faridabad, contract labour workers in Kanpur, etc.—show how immediate is the response of women wherever such women's committees have been set up, and how it has widened their participation in the general union and democratic struggle.

It is also becoming clearer how deeper and more cruel are the exploitation, molestation and harassment of women where there is no union to protect them and fight for their rights. They also reflect the growing criticism and complaint that the unions are not gving the necessary support and cooperation to women workers—in their struggle as well as in training and promoting working women to the leading T.U. committees.

BOMBAY

IN Bombay, a very large number of women work in Central Government offices. In some, like Income Tax and Accountant General's office, the ratio of women to men is 60:40. For this reason and because they needed to have more and more women in active T.U. work, a year ago the Coordination Committee of the Central Government Employees Federation decided to form a women's section and invited the cooperation of the Bombay Working Women's Coordination Committee. A meeting was held on November 25, 1980, together with representatives from the various offices. At the meeting the proposal to form a Coordination Committee for Central Government Women Employees was not only enthusiastically received but immediately implemented, with Smt. Deodhar from the A.G. offices appointed as Convenor of the Committee. Representatives from Income Tax, Joint Controller Imports and Exports, Textile Commissioner, Trade Marks and others were elected as members.

The first action was to hold a series of meetings in the different offices to inform the women employees of the setting up of this Women's Committee and to urge them to participate in the Central Government Employees' agitational programme for bonus and other demands. These meetings were very well attended with the result that in the ensuing Dharna on January 20, 1981, and the procession in the evening, a far larger number of women than ever before participated.

Subsequently in February, 1981, a meeting of the Central Government women employees of the Ballard Estate area was held and a Women's Coordination Committee for that area set up.

Increased Participation

In the course of the year it was found that after the setting up of these Women's Committees, not only has the participation of the women employees in their union activities markedly increased, but equally the participation of women members in the various Union Committees has also shown a rise. For example, **Coordination Committee member, Mrs. Joshi, is now President of the**

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HYDERABAD CITY

(Excerpts from the report presented to the Working Women's Convention, Delhi November 22, 1981)

THERE are a growing number of large and small-scale industries and factories in Hyderabad City with a fairly considerable concentration of women workers. Thus in the Electronics Corporation of India (ECIL) about one-sixth of the work force, or 1000, are women, plus another 1000 in the 50-odd auxiliary small-scale workshops serving the ECIL. The second big concentration is the 800 women in the Indian Drugs and Pharmaceutical Industries (IDPL) together with a number of women employed by the small-scale producers in pharmaceuticals and the food-processing industries, such as Unisankiyo, Phonex and Sunsip.

Then comes the considerable contingent of women employees in the hospitals, teaching profession, administrative offices and banking, numbering about 50,000. Lastly, in the fast-expanding construction industry nearly fifty per cent are women. Altogether this makes about 75,000 to one lakh women in the above-mentioned categories working in Hyderabad City.

Unfortunately there is very little reflection of this in the extent of mobilisation and recruitment of women in the corresponding trade unions in the factories and services mentioned above. Small unions exist, e. g., in Unisankiyo consisting of 25 working women, or in Phonex of 30 women, and Sunsip of 100 women, under CITU leadership. But there are no special activities directed specifically at recruiting women into either the industrial trade unions or the middle-class associations. Even our CITU does not think in the direction of recruiting and promoting working women to the Executive Committees in the organisations led by them. Yet the working conditions of these women are extremely bad, and they badly need union protection. For example, in the construction and small-scale electronic and pharmaceutical companies, women draw a wage of only between Rs. 70 to Rs. 125 per month. The daily-wage of construction workers is only Rs. 3 to Rs. 6.

Three years back in our city we set up a Working Women's Committee and took up some programmes of organisation and struggle. But in the course of time, for various reasons, the committee was unable to continue functioning. At present we are participating in the agitation and strike in *Unisankiyo Ltd.* (See p. 8)

If we could provide a wholetime woman organiser for the working women, there would be immediate progress in this direction. There is wide scope for organising them on a broader scale also. We are taking a hundred copies of *The Voice of the Working Woman*, and it would help us if through the bulletin, support for the striking women of Unisankiyo was to come, as well as the exchange of experiences and suggestions so that we can improve the functioning of the Working Women's Coordination Committee in Hyderabad.

★ SUJATA

KERALA

(Excerpts from the report of the Secretary, Kerala Coordination Committee, to Working Women's Convention, Delhi, November 22, 1981).

OF the twelve districts in Kerala, we could constitute District Working Women's Committees in nine districts. Even though there was much enthusiasm on the part of women at the time of the District Conventions, five of these District Committees are now no longer functioning. The successful functioning of the Coordination Committee depends upon the cooperation from the unions. That is what we are lacking. There are many sections

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PONDICHERRY WELFARE WORKERS ENTER INTO STRUGGLE

ANGANWADIs are centres set up by the Central Government Social Welfare Board, to promote the welfare of poor children. The one in Pondicherry, set up three years ago, has in addition, to look after the welfare of all the villages under its charge. Though all the hundred women working here possess all the required qualifications, the Board has found a simple device to underpay its employees. Some of the women are termed "honorary workers" and therefore paid an "honororium" of Rs. 175 per month, others are called "Assistants", and paid a miserable Rs. 50. But the work extracted from them is a full day's work of more than one worker.

The Assistants' day begins at 8.30 a.m., when they have to report for work. After cleaning the premises, they have to cook for 100 persons; then they teach the children who visit the centre, till 12.30 p.m., then serve lunch to them and the women, after which they have to undertake teaching of the women. In addition they are expected to visit all the families individually and conduct health talks, maintain the records and registers in their centre, as well as organise meetings of the village elders once a month. Thus they function as sweepers, cooks, waiters, child educators, adult educators, clerks and registrars, health visitors and village organisers. Needless to say, the Rs. 50 they receive is not sufficient to cover even their transport charges.

Unionisation Begins

Faced with these conditions and the indifference of the administration, the women formed a union and began their struggle. The first gain was recorded—prompt and regular payment of the money for the purchase of vegetables and other provisions, earlier delayed for months. Encouraged, the union affiliated to the powerful Federation of Pondicherry Government

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MATERNITY AND CHILD CARE CENTRES—TIRUPPUR

A SIMILAR story comes from Tamil Nadu, from women assistants working in the Maternity and Child Welfare Centres in Tiruppur. Lacking a wage-board to determine the proper wages to the work done, these women have been finding their workload constantly increasing.

Here the assistant has to be at work by 7 in the morning, and is likely to be there till late at night, sometimes even having to remain till the next day. She has to take women for sterilisation operations, work as a gram sevika and health visitor, undertake the sale of commemorative stamps, and so on. Though their basic pay is Rs. 290 por month, they are treated with the usual contempt reserved for unskilled workers.

Their own children are suffering from malnutrition, heart problems, polio and a variety of the other diseases that usually affect children who cannot get nutritious food.

In order to obtain better working conditions, these women staged a fast, along with the NGO Union, but so far their efforts have not borne fruit. As one Maternity Assistant said, "We are yet to see the day break. Our sufferings persist. Will the Government condescend to pay any attention to our problems?"

THE SIVAKASI DISASTER

DIWALI in the months of October and November, is usually a time of rejoicing and happiness. To the little town of Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, one of the major centres for producing crackers, Diwali means brisk business with big profits for the proprietors, but for the workers it brings a period of highrisk and possible disaster.

September 18 this year was one such day of disaster and death for thirty-two workers of the Arun Fire Works, of whom three were women and five children.

The 'Works' are situated in a village, Annuppangulam, about five kms. from Sivakasi, and consist of thatched huts or sheds which have only one entry and exit point. With the electric connection illegally made, and so no proper security arrangements, around two in the morning, a short-circuiting set one of the thatched roofs on fire. The thirty-two victims working on the verandah were unable to escape; only a young boy sitting close to the door succeeded in running out. By the time he was able to reach the nearby village of Meenampatti, the fire had claimed the lives of the thirty-two workers trapped inside the shed.

Utter Callousness

Even when after the disaster, the police and fire-brigade arrived, they would not enter the shed, and it was the local CITU volunteers who removed the charred bodies of the victims.

Though the concerned officers tried to pin the blame on the negligence of the workers, it was of course the wholesale flouting of the safety rules and regulations by the factory owners that was responsible for this, as for so many of the other accidents which frequently take place. In the first place no cracker factory is supposed to work at night.

The utter callousness and hypocrisy of Government officials towards the common people is vividly brought out by the shameful conclusion of the officer in charge of explosives, R.P. Thapa, who was sent for an on-the-spot investigation. Since the fire took place in a shed other than the place of actual manufacture for which a licence had been sanctioned, this officer ruled that the licence need not be cancelled as the fire had taken place in another shed. That is, not only was there to be no punishment for endangering, and the actual loss of persons' lives, even illegal acts were not to be exposed, but rather shielded, if not rewarded. It should be noted that the maximum punishment ever meted out to a manufacturer has been a fine—which the manufacturers gladly pay since it is cheaper to pay fines than to incur the expenditure on safety measures.

Another regulation, always broken, limits the number of people working in a space 8' by 8' to four, whereas, as a general rule, eight to ten children sit on the floor and work in such rooms. No gloves are provided because they hamper fast movement. Food is consumed near the factory where even soap is not provided for washing hands. Consequently their food gets contaminated, resulting in digestive disorders. Recently an infant, delivered by one of the women workers, was found to be covered with aluminium dust from the crackers.

Mainly Women Workers

The work force in these factories, as we have reported earlier (*The Voice of the Working Woman*, August, 1980) consists mostly of women and children. They have no fixed hours of work and are employed mainly on a piece-rate basis. Only the workers who prepare the mixture to be used in the cracker, is paid on a daily-wage basis. The workers are expected to stay on the premises from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. They are provided with a wad of

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PONDICHERRY

From Page Five

Employees' Unions, and set about formulating its most urgent demand. These included increase in wages to subsistence level, maternity benefits, reduction in working hours, and recruitment of all Bal Sevikas from amongst the trained Anganwadi workers. Seventy out of the hundred trained workers had completed the Bal Sevika training but five months after the completion of the recruitment examination to fill the posts of Bal Sevikas, the results had still not been declared, largely because of the insistence of the women that Bal Sevikas must be recruited from the Anganwadi workers, on the basis of seniority.

First the women went on a token strike on July 14, 1981, which became prolonged to the 21st July in face of the Government's indifference. The management, backed by the Government, resorted to repressive measures to break the unity of the Anganwadi workers and Bal Sevikas. When all these methods failed to break the struggle, all the hundred workers were served with termination notices on August 1. Although this did not cow down the rest of the women, unfortunately one of them Valli, committed suicide. The situation continued to worsen, with measures like banning processions and arrests of striking workers.

Solidarity And Victory

The determined struggle of the Anganwadi workers evoked a great deal of sympathy from outside. The Government Employees' Federation staged a one-hour walk-out on August 5, in solidarity with the striking women. The NGO's also staged a token strike. In view of the determined resistance and growing support the Government finally capitulated conceding a substantial number of the demands : all the dismissed women were reinstated, the working day was reduced by a half-hour; the results of the Bal Sevika examination were declared, and election to these posts only from the trained Anganwadi women, and of only qualified women to be appointed as Assistants was agreed upon; approval for a rise in salaries will be sought by the management from the Central Government and implemented immediately on receipt of such sanction.

The struggle of the Anganwadi women workers lasted seventeen days and during this whole period the Minister for Social Welfare even though a woman herself, remained indifferent to the problems of these women, did not think to even meet them or arrange for talks with the striking women. It was from their fellow Government workers and from the Democratic Women's Association that support and sympathy came. They have emerged encouraged and with greater confidence to fight further for their demands as women and as workers.

BOMBAY WOMEN

From Page Threc

Textile Commissioner's Office Union; another member, Mrs. More has become an office-bearer of the Joint Controller of Imports and Exports Office Union, and a member of the Coordination Committee of the Central Government Employees' Federation. Mrs. Joshi and Mrs. Deodhar, who were already members of the Union Committee in the Accountant General's Office, are now its leaders, recently joined by Mrs. Maliadite. In the Income Tax Office women nominees will this year be included in the official panel for the annual union elections.

In the Accountant General's Office in the last few months, a big agitation has been going on for winning demands such as upgrading of posts, stoppage of Section closures, etc. In this women employees participated in a big way, in dharnas, walk-outs, mass casual leave, etc., and also attended gate meetings in large numbers. The Women's Committee members were very active leaders throughout the agitation.

★ **SUBHASHINI ALI**

UNISANKIYO WORKERS' STRUGGLE—HYDERABAD

UNISANKIYO Ltd., is a small-scale but highly prosperous company, producing drugs in collaboration with a Japanese firm, situated at Rajindranagar, Hyderabad. In addition to the forty workers engaged on the manufacturing side, the company employs twenty-five women to collect the urine of women in the early stages of pregnancy for use as the raw material for one of their drug preparations. While the regular workers have better working conditions and draw a wage of not less than Rs. 500 a month, the twenty-five women draw a wage of only Rs. 70 a month, and the car drivers up to Rs. 200 a month. These thirty-two workers do not get casual leave, weekly offs, or even Government-declared holidays. This has been their position for the last five months.

Recently in order to win their rights, they formed a union affiliated to the CITU. Knowing this, the management started to harass them. On November 9, 1981, the management sacked all the employees and from that time on the workers have been agitating. On a complaint from the management that the workers were threatening them, the police acted immediately and arrested all the workers including the President of the union, under Section 290 IPC, and put them in jail, where they still continue to be.

The Unisankiyo material collection workers have appealed to all democratic and progressive organisations to protest at this illegal action of the management and Government, and support their struggle for the following demands :

1. Recognition of the union and negotiations to be started immediately.
2. Regularisation of all workers as per the law.
3. Facilities for ESI, PF, Bonus and leave on par with all other employees.

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ROUND THE STATES

RAJASTHAN

CHANGING WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

The women's movement in Rajasthan is slowly emerging through the activities of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti and the Working Women's Coordination Committee. Enormous difficulties are faced because old customs, old traditions and old ideas about women's place and role still strongly grip the minds of both men and women. This is a state where the practice of 'sati' still exists in parts of it.

A number of units have started functioning in different towns : in Udaipur, where very backward and oppressive conditions exist, even for women in the Government services, a small women's group has begun meeting and a start made towards regular functioning. The Sriganganagar unit of JMS formed earlier, has been meeting regularly and contacting more and more women. But again lack of women organisers makes progress very slow. However quite a few of the women workers from Sriganganagar, attended the All-India Working Women's Convention in Delhi on November 22, and came back enthused and strengthened to start work there.

Anti-Dowry Convention

The JMS and Coordination Commitee at Jaipur have been gradually increasing their influence and gaining credibility among the working and non-working women. Their growing impact was marked by the successful Anti-Dowry Convention held four months ago, in September, with over 250 women delegates. Besides the Kachi Bastis and working class women, who were the first to get organised, there came also representatives of nurses, teachers, women from the LIC, banks, insurance, students, university intellectuals and middle class housewives. Also present were the families of two of the more recent victims of dowry deaths. The speakers at the Convention included Saroj Gupta, Head of the Sociology Department of the Rajasthan University, Mrs. F.S. Singh, President of the Trained Nurses' Association, Prabha Saxena, a prominent Hindi writer.

The delegates particulary approved of the recommendations made by the AIWWCC and the AIDWA to the Select Committee on the Dowry Bill, set up by Parliament, which Vimal Ranadive explained in her speech. The Convention also passed resolutions against dowry, price-rise and ESMA.

On the All-India Protest Day of the AIDWA, on September 29, more than 300 women from Jaipur, Udaipur, Kota and Sriganganagar, shouting slogans against ESMA and price-rise, marched to the Governor's house and presented a memorandum,

—MADHU TANDON

AHMEDABAD

For Safer Transportation

On December 13, 1981, a morcha was taken out to the office of the Assistant Manager of Transport Services to demand reservation of seats for women in buses.

Women are also being organised to hold a demonstration and rally against the goonda elements in railway stations and trains, who are constantly harassing women.

—DAMYANTI PAREKH

SECOND ALL-INDIA CONVENTION OF WORKING WOMEN

THE Second All-India Convention of Working Women was held on November 22, 1981, in Delhi, attended by nearly 300 delegates from sixteen States, though the majority came from the Hindi-speaking areas, from a number of industries as well as professions. The speeches made by the delegates reflected the collective experience of their struggles, the repression, their weaknesses, as well as the achievements they had won during the last three years. The participation of the delegates from the AIDWA in the convention showed the close link between the objectives of the struggles under the trade unions and women's organisations.

The speeches of the delegates, their personal talks, and the letters they wrote after returning to their States, confirm both the timeliness of the Convention as well as possibilities of work in the near future, and of joint actions of working women under the Central Trade Unions.

Inauguration

On behalf of the Delhi Coordination Committee, Ranjana Nirula welcomed the delegates. Susheela Gopalan, inaugurating the convention, pointed out to the delegates, "You are the leading core of the movement of the working class for women's emancipation." She reviewed the struggles, the problems of women, such as unemployment, discrimination in wages, and the weaknesses in the trade union movement. She called on women to fight within their unions for taking up demands and for promotion on to the higher committees.

Secretary's Report

While submitting her report on the activities of the AIWWCC, the Secretary, Vimal Ranadive, explained the achievements in different States with regard to the provision of creches, transportation facilities, shortening of working hours of nurses, and so on, and emphasised the need to work among the women workers under our trade unions, which has so far been neglected.

Ahilya Rangnekar emphatically stressed the need of not only taking up women's issues, but of fighting against the NSA and ESMA which ban the right to strike. She highlighted the achievements of the Left-led Governments of West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura.

Delegates' Intervention

During the ensuing three-hour discussion, more than 25 delegates spoke, making important points. Ratnamma from the Coir Industry in *Kerala* reported, "Under the Nayanar Government, creches were provided for women in Coir and Agriculture. Pension of Rs. 500 was given to workers, aid to unwed mothers." Sujata from *Andhra* requested the leadership to set up women's committees in all the States and stressed the need to change the backward attitude of family members. Nina Rao, a lecturer from *Delhi*, spoke of how the Delhi University Teachers' Association "was pressurised to take up the demand for creches for working women, for which 750 signatures were collected within two days, with the result that the University authorities had to accept our demand..." *Pondicherry* delegate Shashikalla spoke about the Anganwadi workers (report on page 5) who work from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. receiving only Rs. 50 per month. "They have to work long hours, and are not provided even sufficient food for their children." She appealed to the delegates "to unite and fight."

Prafullaben from *Gujarat* explained the conditions in the electronics industry and their low wages. Manjit and Jivan Preet Kaur from *Punjab* gave an account of the glorious struggle of the student nurses in Patiala (reported on pages 12 and 13). A school teacher from *U.P.*, Vrindavasini Dwivedi said, "Out of 80,000 teachers, 25,000 are women working at Rs. 40-50 p.m. They are graduates, transferred at any time; the unrecognised schools have acute problems." Sumitra Swami from *Rajasthan* spoke on behalf of Janwadi Mahila Samiti and Gargi Mukherjee from Philips in *West Bengal* stressed the need for taking up women's problems through their unions. She said, "the managements say that women have no training; when women demand training facilities, they say women leave the job after getting married, so it is not worth training them,..." Geeta from *Assam* told the convention that inspite of the 'bandh' slogan given by the secessionists for November 19-20, women have come to this Convention. A. Nazimunnisa from *Kerala* said, "We have formed the districtwise committees in nine out of twelve districts, representing women from Government and non-Government bodies. But cooperation from the unions is needed to function these committees. The Bulletin has made a good impact on women."

Punyavati from *Andhra* spoke of the deplorable conditions of women in the Sea Food Industries who work for eight hours standing, without any protection for their hands. "When we launch struggles labour from Kerala is brought here to divide the workers. To function the committee a whole-timer is required in our State..."

We Are Not Beggars

Jagabai from *Bhilai*, a contract worker, began to speak slowly, shyly, but when she started narrating the attacks of goondas on the workers, she overcame her shyness and standing erect challenged the management. "Our wages have risen from Rs. 1-3 to Rs. 6-9 per day after CITU was formed. I cannot express the feeling that I get when I address a gathering of this kind, but I tell you, we have told the management that we are not beggars, we are only demanding what is due to us..." Her militancy, courage and the deep feeling with which she spoke, clearly affected the delegates who went on clapping after her speech.

Savitribai from *Maharashtra* said, "We are forced to form unions to fight for our rights while the management wants to break them. Women are forced to come out for work since the wages of men are very low... married women have problems getting jobs..." Militant Laxmi from the National Seeds Corporation, *Delhi*, was confident in her fight "when our own union is formed". Bhagyam from *Tamil Nadu* raised an important question regarding the attitude of the AIADMK Government vis-a-vis our unions. "Government takes every case to the court and takes legal action" she said. Shobha emphasised the need for the organisation of women in *Haryana*, because women are coming in large numbers into struggles. A number of other women wanted

(on page sixteen)

RESOLUTION

SUPPORT TO ALL-INDIA STRIKE

This all-India Convention of Working Women held at New Delhi on November 22, 1981 fully supports the one-day strike call given by the National Campaign Committee of Trade Unions, the date of which is expected to be announced from the historic workers' March to Parliament in which working women are also participating. The strike-call has been given against the unprecedented price-rise in all essential commodities and against the anti-labour policies of the Government which include the enactment of draconian measures like NSA and ESMA, banning all strikes, thus taking away the basic rights of the working people to fight for their just demands.

This Convention calls upon all working women to come forward unitedly in the struggle and assert their fundamental rights.

Punjab

PATIALA NURSES' STRUGGLE

(A short report on the Patiala struggle appeared in our last issue. The following is taken from the report presented to the Working Women's Convention, Delhi, November 22, 1981).

THE Rajendra Hospital, Patiala, is a 2000-bed hospital with an attached Medical College admitting 150 students per year. The Nursing School, admitting 50 students per year, is a part of the Medical College. The Nurses' hostel houses about 250 students and trained nurses in 30 rooms. This hostel has been a god-forsaken place—no telephone, no canteen, no chowkidar, no guest-room, no security arrangements. The boundary wall of the hostel is broken and anyone can trespass inside. A number of gangs of goondas, mainly belonging to rich landlord, bureaucratic and politicians' families maintain their dens around the Hospital complex—including the local police post, the hospital cycle stand and some tea and fruit 'khokhas'—where all types of activities go on, drinking, gambling, selling alcohol and addictive drugs. These goondas establish contacts with a few girls residing in the hostel and through these girls, caught in the vicious trap of the goondas, use all kinds of dirty tricks to entangle the young student nurses. Ninety per cent of these girls of about 16 years of age, come from the rural areas, after passing their matriculation. They are totally innocent of city life, and nearly all are from poor families.

During the emergency the then Principal of the Nursing School, Miss Naval Kishore, was unfortunately hand-in-glove with these elements. There had been instances of her blackmailing and forcibly lifting the girls from the hostel. In one instance, together with a staff nurse she called a student nurse to her room where four men were already drinking. The student nurse was abducted to a nearby town and raped. Out of fear she kept her misery to herself. The Principal used also to collect sums of money from the nurses under the false pretext of purchasing books, uniforms, advance mess security, etc.

In addition was another harassment—the shifting of the examination centre from Patiala to other towns. While Patiala is one of the big educational centres of northern India, where examinations from first year to Ph. D. are conducted, including the PCS and IAS, student nurses are forced to go to Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Jullundur and Chandigarh, where no residential facilities exist. Inevitably nasty incidents have taken place, as the one recently in Ludhiana, where the student nurses were subjected to molestation and attack.

Organise For Self-Defence

As the burden of our miseries became heavier, we started feeling we must organise properly and defend ourselves, which we did. First we gave an organised but long and bitter fight against the Principal and succeeded, after an enquiry, in getting her transferred. This was about three years ago. But fighting alone was quite a hard job, even after this. The goondas became more revengeful, and we were hesitant to discuss our problems with outsiders for fear of bringing a bad reputation to ourselves. So we had no contact with other democratic and progressive organisations.

However, our inability to stop the goondas' misbehaviour started a hot debate amongst us

IN DEFENCE OF RIGHTS

as to whether to seek outside help. Ultimately after the midnight attack on June 30, we decided in favour of approaching the other associations of the Medical College Campus.

The Struggle Begins

In the night of June 30 five goondas broke into the Hostel at midnight, broke open the door of a room on the first floor and tried to kidnap the Association leader. Hearing her cries, the other girls came to her rescue and the goondas ran away. Clearly they were trying to terrorise all of us. Taking all risks, we succeeded in rousing the college hospital authorities and the police and by about 2 a.m. had related the whole incident. The police did not bother reaching the hostel till over two hours later and in a very small number. The College and Hospital authorities took only formal interest. So we passed that night huddled together terrified of what might happen. On the next day also, all our efforts to move the law and order machinery failed; so with a feeling of helplessness and in face of further threats from the goondas, we approached the other organisations in the Medical College Campus.

Overwhelming Support

The response was overwhelming, from the Staff Nurses' Association, the Medical Students' Union, Junior Doctors' Association, Government Doctors' Association and the Paramedical, including Class IV, Employees' Union. Together with our Student Nurses' Association, a Coordination Committee was formed, with the President of the Medical Students' Union, C. Bhatia, as the Convenor and an agitation started demanding the arrest of the culprits of the June 30 night, incident as well as proper security arrangements in the Nurses' Hostel.

Independent Action

Meeting with a formal and cold reception by all the concerned authorities, it was decided to take independent action. Night patrolling was begun and on July 2, the culprits of June 30 were traced, one of them was caught, given a severe beating, paraded in the streets after blackening his face and then handed over to the police in the presence of the DIG. The other culprits turned out to be sons of big officers. The same night, a high officer of the Central Jail, was caught by the patrolling students and police party while climbing the hostel gate. Drunk, he was brought to the Casualty Department and in the presence of the Principal, handed over to the OC of the thana. But the next day he was bailed out by a close relative of a Union Minister. One of the girls, known to invite such persons, had come forward in his defence. On our insistence the girl was expelled from the hostel, only to be reinstated on the order of higher political authorities.

Anti-Goodaism Convention

At this stage the Coordination Committee decided to hold an Anti-Goondaism Convention in which all the political parties, trade unions and other democratic and mass organisations participated, except the ruling party. The Convention condemned the authorities, including the Punjab Government, for their failure to check the goondaism in Rajendra Hospital and in the Nurses' Hostel in particular.

(on page fifteen)

WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

* M. V. SUBBAIAH

South Central Railway, Vijayawada

(While welcoming the news-item on Mazdoor Women in Railways in our last issue, the General Secretary of the South-Central Railway Employees' Union, Vijayawada, has sent the following fuller report).

THE main problem with regard to the Mazdoor Women in the Railways is the discrimination practised against them *after the enactment of the "Equal Remuneration Act"*, and also with regard to their absorption as regular employees.

In the Civil Engineering Department of the Railways, Mazdoor women were engaged as casual labourers under the Permanent Way Inspectors (PWIs), or Inspector of Works (IOWs). This procedure had been in operation for a long time. At that time there was a difference in wages of 25 paise between Mazdoor men and women. Thus if a Mazdoor man was paid Rs. 2 per day, a Mazdoor woman would be paid Rs. I. 75. This system continued till 1976, when the Equal Remuneration Act was passed, which brought the wage of Mazdoor women on par with that of Mazdoor men.

Avoid Hiring Women

However, one of the results of the passing of the Act was that in 1978 the authorities in the Railway Civil Engineering Department, decided, *as a policy measure, not* to engage Mazdoor women any longer as casual labourers on daily wages. As a result nearly 100 Mazdoor women in the Vijayawada division were rendered permanently unemployed. All these hundred women had been engaged for work in 1961 or so, and had worked at intermittent periods since then, but from 1978 onwards they were not engaged even for short periods, as casual labourers on daily wages.

The pertinent question that arises is: how were these women labourers found useful and continually re-engaged from 1961 to 1978, but suddenly found not useful after 1978 ? There can be only one answer, namely, that Mazdoor women had now to be paid equal wages with those of men. *This is how the "Equal Remuneration Act" is being implemented in the Railways.*

Another device to get rid of the women workers elsewhere in the Railways was through the device of 'screening' for absorption as regular employees.

The Vijayawada Division of Southern Railways used to employ nearly 150 Mazdoor women as casual labourers, enjoying a temporary status with all the privileges that go with this status, just like the Mazdoor men. And like the men, all these women had put in service of five to ten years in the Railways.

Orders were issued to screen the casual labourers, and all the above men and women were treated as casual labour only, for absorption as regular employees in the category of Gangmen. But the orders were made applicable only to the Mazdoor men, and in fact such screening has already taken place for the men. But not a single Mazdoor woman has been screened for absorption as a regular employee. This is discrimination against women labour of the worst and most blatant type.

Excuse of Not Enough Jobs

The argument put forward by the authorities in defence of their action is that there are no jobs to accommodate all these Mazdoor women since the Administration is committed to provide jobs to the widows of employees who die while in service. This argument is just

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PATIALA NURSES

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Agitation

Infuriated, the authorities filed court cases against the Coordination Committee and suspended the Convenor, Chandrasekhar Bhatia, on July 4. The students protested and demonstrated against this action, but on the next day Bhatia was arrested from the coffee house. The same evening the students took out a massive demonstration and gheraoed the Vice-Principal's residence. The next day, July 6, another big demonstration was held in front of the D.C's office, which was lathi-charged. Though the D. C. had agreed to call a tripartite meeting in the evening, the college authorities instead called a meeting of the College Council to take action against Bhatia. Again the students gheraoed the Principal's office, and while negotiations were going on, some senior staff members, along with plain-clothes police, forcibly entered the Principal's office, manhandled the girl students and forcibly brought out the Principal.

Vindictive Action

Subsequently the College and Nursing School were closed and all of us thrown out of the hostels, to spend the night on the road—some girls took shelter in a nearby gurdwara. Twentyone medical students and fourteen nursing students were suspended; four doctors transferred to remote places, two house-surgeons' services terminated. In the Enquiry Committee in which the senior professors were themselves the judges, jury and witnesses, Bhatia was expelled for five years, the Secretary and four other students for three years each, and twelve students for six months each. The Medical College was opened under police control after one month, and an atmosphere of terror still prevails in the College and Hostel. The Nursing School opened only after three months, but still the fate of the fourteen suspended girls is not decided. Their parents are being insulted and humiliated and the girls terrorised by all sorts of tactics—they are not allowed out of the hospital, and rebuked like animals and asked to submit written apologies on the slightest pretext. The suspended girls are not allowed in, their Secretary was arrested for talking to the student nurses, and released only later with threats.

Lessons Learned

Through our experience we have learned that the only way out of the oppression of women in our society is to fight it, and not place hopes in those in power and authority; that women in various professions must help each other and build a strong women's movement and common platform for fighting injustice; that the problems of women are deeply interlinked with the problems of the poor and downtrodden—we must understand these problems and their root causes. Wrongly, we had been hesitating to communicate our problems to other democratic and progressive organisations; we must unite with all and contribute to the development of the democratic movement, for this cannot be done in, and by one institute alone,

We appeal to all democratic organisations and to women's organisations in particular, to raise their voice against the repression being let loose in the Rajendra Hospital, Medical College, and Nursing School, to help us in getting the victimisations vacated and fighting against the terror tactics of the authorities.

★ **Jiwan Preet Kaur**

SECOND ALL INDIA CONVENTION

(from centre pages)

to speak but time did not permit it. They had to return back to their camps to prepare for the rally the next day.

Charter of Demands, Resolutions

Mythily Sivaraman from Tamil Nadu moved the charter of demands which had been referred to by various speakers. Laxmi Saigal moved the resolution supporting the one-day strike call to be given by the Central Trade Unions. A resolution condemning the reign of terror let loose by the Congress(I) in Kerala on the supporters of the LDF and for toppling the Government was passed. A document on participation of women in trade unions, already circulated, was explained by Vimal Ranadive.

To the sound of slogans and songs by the delegates, and thanks to the Janwadi Mahila Samiti and Coordination Committee, Delhi, for the strenuous efforts they made to host the meeting the convention ended. It was announced that a delegation would go to the Union Labour Ministry for submitting the charter of demands on behalf of the convention.

Accordingly Susheela Gopalan, Vimal Ranadive and Laxmi Saigal met Minister of State for Labour and handed over the memorandum on November 24, 1981.

Vimal Ranadive

WHO CAME TO THE CONVENTION

Was it not important that working women who attended the convention on the 22nd November, most of them, filled up the credential forms, which we did not expect! It gives the interesting account of women as to their class character, the position in the unions etc. Out of 300 and odd who attended, 249 filled up the forms. Out of 249, 142 delegates were below 35 years of age and 65 between 35 and 45. According to their profession, 112 women were from working class, employed in factories or the industries, 41 salaried employees, 21 teachers, 7 nurses, 4 doctors, 7 full timers. 33 housewives, members of AIDWA participated in the convention which shows the close co-operation between AIDWA and Co-ordination Committee. With regard to the question of their position in the union, the answers were very interesting. Out of 249, 29 women were office-bearers of the unions as President, General Secretary or Treasurer, 26 were Executive members and 121 were ordinary members of their unions. 131 women have participated in the mass movement and 44 have courted arrests for shorter or longer period!

South Central Railway

From Page Fourteen

a device to cover up their discrimination against these women workers. For, in the same Civil Engineering Department, one gangman is utilised to bring water and serve it to the other gangmen. Nearly two hundred gangmen are being utilised for this purpose in the Vijayawada Division alone. Thus the productive potential of these two hundred men is being wasted since they could be utilised as gangmen. As the supply of water to gangmen is essential, this work could easily be entrusted to Mazdoor women by posting one Mazdoor woman for each gang, thus creating jobs for two hundred Mazdoor women.

Thus it is clear that if the Railway Administration was not following a policy of discrimination against Mazdoor women, the authorities could easily provide jobs to two hundred Mazdoor women in the Vijayawada Division alone. In fact the entire problem of currently employed Mazdoor women (casual labourers) and retrenched Mazdoor women could be solved if this deliberate policy of discrimination were not followed.

KERALA

From Page Four

of working women who have no representation either in the State Committee or the District Committee. A good number of members are not attending Committee meetings regularly. This is mostly because of the indifference on the part of the unions. Even the CITU unions, in which there are active workers, are not taking pains to see that their representatives are attending the Committees. Women take membership in the unions or service organisations, give funds and sometimes attend some gate meetings. There ends their trade union activity. Very few participate in the struggles and strikes. Unions also do not expect much from their women members. Efforts are not forthcoming on the part of the unions to promote trade union consciousness of its women members. In spite of these drawbacks, the State Coordination Committee has tried its best to carry out satisfactorily, the programmes chalked out by the All-India Committee. These programmes have caught the attention of various sections of women workers and we were able to form Women's Committees in many sections.

We hope that the State Coordination Committee will be able to do better in promoting trade union consciousness of working women if some more help and cooperation is extended by the unions and employees' organisations. There should be some machinery set up to review the work of the Coordination Committee and to give appropriate directions to improve our work.

This All-India Convention may therefore take a decision to request State CITU Committees to help the (Working Women's) Coordination Committee, and together we should make efforts to ensure the participation of women in the higher bodies of the Union.

★ NAZEEMUNNISA

SIVAKASI DISASTER

From Page Six

cotton wool and some gauze to cover their noses. Two bananas a day are given to the workers and 100 gms. of coconut oil per week—an amount totally ineffectual and inadequate, when at the end of every day the workers' whole body is covered with aluminium dust. Facilities such as rest-rooms, toilets or creches are just fanciful ideas. The women have not yet organised themselves, so have no union to fight for them. Their employment is limited to the months between May and November and they work without off-days, since time off means no earnings.

Why Piece-Rate

The making of a cracker is not the handiwork of only one single worker, but is divided into a number of differnt jobs—the paper rings for the crackers are usually prepared by the women in their homes; and also the mud-coating and fixing of the fuse of the crackers are women's work. The mixing and pouring of the explosive into the cracker is 'men's work' ! One string usually contains 28 pieces of crackers; a small bundle of cracker, called a "tukda", contains 100 strings. The longer bundle called "solsa", contains 200 strings. The payment for the tukda is 0.70 paise, for the solsa 0.75 paise. If the women work very fast they can make seven to eight strings a day, which might enable them to earn Rs. 4.50 to Rs. 5 per day. But to earn this amount they have to work long hours without cessation.

Out of the thirty-two workers who died in Anuppangulam, twenty-five were in the age-group 15-30 years, and one a young boy of ten. The rest were in the age-group 30-45. Each family was paid Rs. 500 (!) towards funeral expenses, and Rs. 125 for the 16th day ceremony.

But the fact remains that the Sivakasi workers have absolutely no protection and are ruthlessly exploited by the employers—other-wise thirty-two workers would still be alive today.

Iran

Unfulfilled Promise Of Women's Freedom

The women of Iran had played a sgnificant role in the over-throw of the Shah Pahlavi regime two years ago through their vast participation in the popular struggle against that regime. Under the old rule women had suffered a double oppression: as workers they were subjected to the most barbarous exploitation, among the first groups to be sacked, paid less for equal work and deprived of all other facilities such as maternity benefits, creches, day-care centres, etc. Under the harshest conditions, rural women, because of their intense poverty were forced to work side by side with the men, but denied all privileges and benefits. Socially, they were relegated to the status of second class citizens, treated as a commodity without human dignity, turned into a tool for advertising goods and services—the old story of all Asian, African and Latin American women.

In the struggle against the hated Shah's regime, they had risen and fought shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk. The Shah of Iran acted as the policeman for imperialism in West Asia, to keep back the peoples not only of his own country but all other neighbouring countries. And for this he had to stamp down his people with one of the most brutal and oppressive regimes in recent times. That is why the successsful overthrow of this regime, through the heroism and sacrifice of its men, women young people and even children, was hailed throughout the world as a major success of all peoples in the struggle for freedom and democracy.

The Iranian women had fought to attain a more humane condition, to achieve an equal status, obtain equal rights. The new Islamic State had promised them a society where they might regain their human dignity, freedom and equality, and play a sensitive role in constructing an Islamic society.

But reality is proving otherwise and the new Islamic State is pushing women back to these old oppressed and suppressed State. The recently passed Bill of Retribution gives women only half the legitimate value as a man in the eyes of the law. As a witness her evidence is of a lower value: in the case of premeditated murder her testimony is comp letely invalidated. If a man murders a woman, he can be prosecuted only if the woman's relatives can pay half of what is called the man's "blood money". This is the money paid by a person convicted of a violent crime, to compensate for the losses inflicted upon the victim or his family. In this case half the blood-money is equivalent to 40 camels. If the female victim's family cannot come up with the money, the murderer needs only to pay the total bloodmoney to be set free without prosecution.

In terms of facilities for working women, not only have no new day-care centres been opened, but even the majority of those previously established by factories and offices have been closed down. No new bills have been passed to meet women's demands in relation to equal pay for equal work, rather women are facing even greater suppression and job discrimination. In fact in relation to wage levels hiring procedures, social treatment and social rights, the position of women has actually deteriorated even further from what they were in the previous regime.

Perhaps the clearest mainfestation of relegating women to their old backward position is the order for mandatory wearing of the veil, which would cause the virtual disappearance, once again, of women from the social scene, and their withdrawal into the backrooms and corners of homes. The mandatory veil, if fully implemented, would in reality practically destroy any possibility of woman's participa-

tion in jobs and social activities. Even the ability to hold a position as a judge is now restricted to men. The attack is also being directed on female office employees and other workers, either by direct dismissal or gradual filtering out of anyone who dares to be critical.

Finally the new laws on marriage and divorce, totally violate women's social rights. Today the lives of most women are in danger of disintegration under the gloomy shadow of one-sided divorce rights which completely favour men. In many cases they have been deprived of any custody rights of their children. The polygamy law has completely left the door open for the rich to abuse and disregard a woman's social position and human dignity. The Islamic law of the right of **Sigheh**, enables a man to enter into a temporary marriage in which he may enjoy all the rights of legal marriage, but terminate it whenever he desires.

Thus the institution of the Islamic society has not brought the women of Iran the liberation that they dreamed of and for which they fought by the side of men. But even in the severely difficult conditions in which the country and women find themselves today, these valiant fighters of yesterday, men and women, young and old, are fighting today to retain and further the fruits of their revolution made two years ago-equality and dignity for women, freedom, security of life and a bright and happy future for all these people.

United States

Interview With A Woman Coal Miner

Jeanne Smith a young woman works in PEABODY No. 10 Mine, at Pawnee, Illinois, U.S. We were both in the same Commission (World Congress of Women, Prague) and I had heard her speech, a frank criticism of the American Government's labour policies. I got into conversation with her, asking her about her work.

"How many workers are there in the mines Jeanne ?"

"Total workers are 950 out of which only 18 are women in the mine in which I work".

"What is your work ?"

"I load coal by machine into the wagon".

"Is it a skilled job ?"

"Yes, of course.".

"Then there is no discrimination there; men and women workers can do the wagon-loading by machine."

"No, no, none except myself, the rest are all men. I had to manoeuver for this job. I was doing unskilled work for two years, shovelling the coal into the wagon."

"Then you must have received training for machine loading ?"

"In our industry training in skilled jobs for women is impossible. You will be surprised to know that I learnt it from men when I was doing my work, without the knowledge of the management. When I had got a grip on the machine, I approached the manager, asking him to give me the job on the machine. He was flabbergasted and said, 'No, no. You are a woman, you do not know how to handle the machine'. I told him I knew, I would show him, but he would not budge. Nor would he take me to the machine."

"Then how did you manage to get it ?"

She laughed. "Our coal men helped me".

"How?" I asked, so she took out the copy of *The Voice of the working woman* which I had given to her the previous day, turned the pages and pointed to the word, "Dharna" ! The previous day she had asked me the meaning of the word. "Oh, so the men held a 'dharna' for your demand ?"

Interview.....

"Yes. They sat there and insisted that unless I were given the job they would continue to sit. The manager had to accept it then...So, you see", she said with a sweet smile, "the men helped me to get this job. They helped me by training me. No woman, otherwise, would get a skilled job like mine. They are never given any training facilities and no skilled job therefore..."

"How many hours do you work, Jeanne?"

"40 a week. It is an 8-hour day." She vehemently repeated "No woman worker will get a skilled job in the mines. They will work with shovels for years in the same position. I am an exception. The men workers helped me to get this !"

(Held in Prague during the World Congress of Women, Oct. 1981).

DID YOU KNOW.....?

From Page Two

Manju Jain and Vijaya Mukhi are the first trained women jewellers of Delhi who received their certificates of skill after successfully completing a training course at the Indian Gemmological Institute. The other three have just joined the third training course of the Institute, the first of its kind in Delhi and the third in the country, the others being one in Jaipur and one in Surat.

.....that from the Labour Ministry, for the first time two lady employees from the Reserve Bank, Madras branch, were selected to workers' education training. Expenditure for the three-months' training and tour programme will be met by the Bank.

.....that a British insurance company has evaluated housewives at £200 (approx. Rs. 3,500) a week, the amount it would cost a husband to employ a cook, waitress, dishwasher, driver, shopper, cleaner, laundress, cost clerk, childminder, nurse, gardener, window cleaner and washerwoman—if his wife died. It is offering employers a scheme to insure the wives of their workers, only a quarter of whom are insured, giving the 'cash value' of a housewife as £10,403. (Rs182,000) a year. □

Women's Liberation Movement
Letter From France

Paris, November 10, 1981.

Dear Friends,

It has been a great pleasure to receive your letter of October 27, 1981 : We have been very moved to learn that, as far away as New Delhi, women were mobilising for Ana Maria Gomez. She, herself, will be very happy to learn it.

Our appeal keeps gathering signatures and messages of solidarity from many countries of the world. Since Ana Maria's arrest in September, the mobilisation has been very large and effective. Unfortunately, we haven't got yet any news about her, but, as her comrades in El Salvador told us, the mobilisation must go on: it is an absolute necessity, faced with such a regime.

The Women's Liberation Movement in France has been existing since 1968. It is a large political, social and cultural movement, which keeps growing and developing its productions: political activities, bookshops, a pulishing house "Des femmes", a weekly magazine "Des femmes en mouvements hebdo". We are sending you a few issues of it, so that you get an idea of what it is like. We insist also very much on international solidarity with women struggling all over the world, and that is the reason why we would be very interested in knowing more about your movement. At a time when Indira Gandhi is visiting France and presents hereself as the only representative of the people of India, we would very much like to know what working women think and do.

We hope you will send us more information and we send you all our solidarity in your struggle for the liberation of women.

With warm greetings,

pour le Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes:

Francoise Verges

Latest information says that Ana Maria Gomez, was tortured and murdered and her body was found on the roadside.