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THE WORKING CLASS

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WORLD SOCIAL FORUM IN PORTO ALEGRE

The World Social Forum 2005, was organised in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where it originated in 2001. With surging crowds—over 100,000 in number, the cacophony of myriad voices, drum beats and the determination on their faces people came there to celebrate their protest and resistance. They debated in over 2000 events, spread over four days. WSF 2004 was held in Mumbai with the same enthusiasm and fervour. Next it will be held in South Africa in 2007.

PORTO ALEGRE: WORLD SOCIAL FORUM, 2005

The World Social Forum, which had sailed to Mumbai in 2004 returned to Porto Alegre (Brazil) for its fifth edition, held from the 26th to 31st January 2005. The organizers have claimed 'more than 200,000 people took part in the Forum opening march in Porto Alegre. In total, there have been 155,000 participants, of whom 35,000 stayed in the Youth Camp and 6,880 were lecturers. People from 135 countries have been involved in 2,500 activities and 2,800 volunteers helped in the event'. The 5th International Youth Encampment was a part of the WSF 2005,

The WSF 2005 witnessed an indelible imprint of Mumbai, as a more participative and dynamic forum. He entire activities of the WSF were organised in tents, of varying sizes, erected on the riverbank of the Rio Guaiba, which became the territory of the WSF. Besides this geographical change, from what was during 2003, the entire activities during the Forum were self-organised, except for the opening and closing plenary on 26th and 31st January respectively. Besides this, the WSF 2004 in Mumbai had also found an echo in the way cultural activities formed part of the WSF 2005.

Reminiscing the WSF 2004, an 'India House' was in display at the centre of the WSF 2005 territory, where a photographic exhibition was organised by the WSF India.

The participating social movements, mass organisations and activists had also adopted a declaration (which is published separately as the 'call of the social movements').

WSF 2005 was again reverberating with determined voices against war and anti-imperialist slogans. There were several activities organised by the movements of different countries independently and collectively, for example by Korea, Vietnam, Japan, India etc. The Anti-War Assembly renewed the call for Global Day of Action on the 19th & 20th March 2005. Posters carrying "Bush as the Number 1 terrorist" were in display everywhere.

Labour in WSF (India), comprising several Central Trade Union Organisations of India, organised a few seminars including the one on "Threats to Peace, Democracy and Peoples Unity; Impact on Labour and Responses by Trade Union Movement." These seminars were co-ordinated by CEC, a Delhi based labour support organisation.

Several Marxist and socialist research centres of the world have jointly organised an International Seminar on 'the actual challenges in the struggle for socialism', which was addressed by speakers (representing the communist parties) from 24 countries. (W.R. Varada Rajan was the speaker from India).

President Luis Inancio lula da Silva of Brazil and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, addressed large gatherings at the Gigantinho Stadium.

The International Council, meeting on the eve of WSF 2005, had taken the decision to have decentralised (continent-wise) forums during 2006 followed by the sixth edition of the WSF to be held in 2007 in Africa, the venue of it to be decided by the African Social Forum.

ON OTHER PAGES

1.	Coal Miners Struggle - M K Pandhe	P - 172
2.	Another World is Possible	P - 175
3.	Social Ownership of Means of Production - Chittabrata Majumdar	P - 178
4.	Patent Ordinance	P - 180
5.	Economy: Reality Checks	P - 182
6.	Patent Act: Third Amendment - Shyamal Chakraborty	P - 184
7.	Reports & Events	From P - 186
8.	Price Index	P - 194
9.	Tsunami: CITU Initiative	P - 195
10.	A Case of How not to Honour a Commitment	Back Page

THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

MARCH 2005

YOU SAID IT by Laxman



Everybody's assets are in crores; cricket players, movie stars, politicians, excise officials... still why do people think we are a poor nation?

Courtesy: The Times of India

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EDITORIAL

UPA REGIME RENEGING ON COMMITMENTS

The UPA government, which assumed office after the general elections last year, had adopted a National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP). It was expected of the Manmohan Singh government to honestly embark on a path of implementing whatever pro-people commitments it had made in the NCMP. But, as the government heads towards presenting its second budget - which must be out when this issue is in the hands of our readers - it is becoming increasingly clear that the commitments in the NCMP are only meant to be on paper. Rather, the UPA regime is steadfastly adhering to the mandate of the World Bank, IMF and the WTO and persists with the disastrous liberalisation policies. The promulgation of two ordinances soon after the winter session of the parliament adjourned bears eloquent testimony to this.

Employment Guarantee Bill is a pale shadow of the promise contained in the NCMP. The legislations on Agricultural and Unorganised sector workers have not even been sincerely taken up for processing. 'Creeping' Privatisation through backdoor - in the deceptive plea of 'social sector spending' - is being pushed through relentlessly. Doors are wide opened for the foreign finance capital even in the strategic sectors. On WTO issues, the third amendment to Patents Act proffers more than what is stated to be 'sticking to the deadline of honouring past commitment'. A sham announcement is made on EPF interest rate and there is nothing in evidence that it will materialise into a reality. Moves are in place to throw the hard earned social security moneys of workers to the wolves in the speculative financial markets. The Finance Ministry is reportedly keen on implementing the infamous Kelkar prescriptions on tax reforms - read favouring the rich and burdening the poor - and cutting down 'subsidies'. There is no action in evidence to meet any of the demands of the trade union movement, handed in to the Prime Minister onwards.

We can go on listing such disappointing record of the UPA government in the last ten months.

Suffice to record here that the workers and toiling masses of the country cannot but come to the inescapable conclusion that this government is guilty of reneging on its commitments. And they cannot show any more indulgence! As the other governments in the past, this regime also will not yield to reasoning; it will only relent if the masses move into action in pursuit of their genuine demands. The central trade unions have already initiated steps for a sustained programme of struggles. If the budget 2005 confirms the worst fears of the people, it will trigger off militant protests by the trade unions and other mass organisations. We call upon the workers irrespective of affiliations to respond appropriately by entering the arena of sustained struggles!

COAL MINERS PREPARE FOR STRUGGLE

M K Pandhe

Nearly six lakh coal workers all over India have been expressing their resentment over the non-settlement of their long overdue wage-revision and the attempts of the Government to outsource and privatise the coal mines.

The National Coal Wage Agreement VII commenced from 1st July 2001 but it has yet to see the light of the day. The Government of India delayed for two and a half years the constitution of the Joint Bipartite Committee for coal industry consequent to the recommendation of Rakesh Mohan Committee not to have JBCCI itself. The motive was to keep the BCCL and ECL, which were referred to BIFR out of the wage negotiation. It was only after a six days' strike threat that the Govt. of India constituted the JBCCI.

Out of the five years wage settlement only 22 months have remained for its completion. It should be noted here that in all the public sector undertaking the Joint Bipartite Committees are formed by trade unions and the management while the Government does not come in the picture. It is only in coal industry that every round of wage negotiations can commence only after the Government constitutes such a committee. The last wage settlement was signed only 6 months before the conclusion of the five year term of the agreement.

SHORT COMINGS

National Coal Wage Agreement-VI has several shortcomings and CITU expressed its reservation over the same. The rate of increment, wages and allowances were far below the level compared to other PSUs. While the officers were getting full neutralisation in DA, workers drawing salary above Rs.6500 were getting only 75 per cent neutralisation. The CITU pressed for overcoming the weakness in the agreement while arriving at settlement of NCWA-VII.

After bitter negotiations and strike threat the management had to agree Rs.5550 as the as minimum basic wage in comparison with earlier Rs.3300. The rate of annual increment was agreed from 2.5 to 3 per cent of basic pay which works out to be a rise from earlier Rs.28 to Rs.139. The underground allowance was raised from earlier Rs.300 to Rs.555. However on other issues higher benefits could not be achieved. At a minimum level the guaranteed benefit worked out to Rs.1185 but a higher level the workers were not getting adequate benefit. The CITU's proposal to give Rs.250-300 extra for higher levels of workers could not be accepted since some trade unions pressed for uniform benefits. But whatever have been agreed at bipartite level could not be finalised owing to impractical conditionalities posed by the management.

CONDITIONALITIES

The managements however tried to put following humiliating conditions while accepting the above concessions.

1. The agreement will be made applicable to BCCL and ECL workers only after the approval of the Govt. of India.
2. The full neutralisation will be paid to the coal workers only after the approval of the Department of Public Enterprises.
3. Productivity will be increased by 20 per cent and attendance as per norms will be ensured.
4. The quarterly bonus of 10% of basic wages will be paid subject to minimum attendance of 54 days in underground and 66 days on surface in a quarter.
5. Compassionate employment will be restricted to fatal mine accidents only.
6. Seven days working with staggered rest day at normal wages will be introduced.
7. The above will have to comply with the guidelines received from the DPE vide their letter dated 11 February 2004.

All the trade unions rejected the above proposals of the managements and asked the management to withdraw them. The management has, however, not agreed to withdraw their pre-conditions, which resulted in a stalemate in wage negotiations. The Government of India is

resorting to dilatory tactics in giving clearance to the question of payment of full neutralisation and making NCWA-VII applicable to BCCL and ECL. After the announcement of elections in Haryana, Jharkhand and Bihar the matter was further delayed on the plea of code of conduct after the announcement of electoral process.

The Cabinet announced a committee of group of Ministers under Chairmanship of Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of Defence Govt. of India. The Committee did not have meeting as yet.

BMS GIMMICK

The BMS tried to make political capital out of the situation by unilaterally giving a call for 3-day strike one day prior to the Joint Committee called by the management to discuss the wage agreement.

The CITU wrote to BMS that all Federation should meet and decide a common date of strike, which can bring sufficient pressure on the CIL management and the Govt. of India. Other Federations took the similar stand and BMS was isolated. However it decided to go ahead with the call of 3-day strike from 29th November 2004 when the meeting was called by the management on 30th November 2004.

Seeing the political game of BMS the coal workers did not respond to the strike call. Only 1.5 per cent of the workers participated in the strike call on the first day. On the second and the third day there was no response from the workers.

The CITU has appealed to all the Federations in coal industry to be prepared for the countrywide action after the election in 3 states are over. It has demanded from the JBCCI convenor to call a meeting of the JBCCI to consider the early settlement of all outstanding issues of the wage agreement. If the talks fail to settle the issues, the Federations should come out with the programme of action. The meeting of the office bearers of the All India Coal Workers federation held on 11th January 2005 took a decision to prepare for a countrywide strike if the coal management continues with the dilatory tactics.

The Tata management has decided to withdraw from the JBCCI and have its own wage structure. The IISCO management under SAIL has also followed suit and is not participating in the meeting of the JBCCI on the plea that IISCO has been referred to BIFR, though IISCO collieries are not running in loss.

Similarly the private sector coal companies who have got permission to produce coal on the plea of having captive mines of power or cement plant like Jindal, Bengal Amta and Daga etc. are producing coal and illegally selling in the market. These companies do not pay coal wages and exploiting workers by paying them extremely low rate of wages. This puts Coal India in competitive disadvantage. Hence all the federations working in coal industry have demanded that coal wages as decided by JBCCI should be made applicable to all the coal mines in India, private or public. The Govt. of India, however, has not taken any firm step in the matter. Though the notification of constitution of JBCCI included representatives of all these private sector coal producers, these companies are not complying with Govt. order and the Govt. of India is behaving like a silent spectator, which only encourages their defiance.

LOOMING NEW ATTACKS

The Government of India is still determined to withdraw the Coal Nationalisation Bill with a view to give green signal to privatisation of coal mines. The Government has not been able to pursue the Bill in Parliament due to stout opposition expressed by all the Five Federations in coal industry.

To pursue the game of privatisation the Ministry of Coal has appointed a committee under chairmanship of T.L. Shankar, a retired IAS officer to suggest the measures to improve the functioning of coal industry and meet the demand for coal in the country.

The trade unions in coal industry have separately advocated that Coal India has capacity to meet the national demand for coal consumers provided the Government constitute a single coal company by merging all the subsidiaries. The Government of India is ignoring the proposals of the trade unions with its ulterior motive of handing over the coal industry to mafias who are out to make money by exploiting the workers.

Shankar Committee does not include any representative of the trade unions and mainly

bureaucrats are dominating the committee. The trade unions came to know about it only through press advertisement. The CITU has written a protest letter to the Prime Minister criticising the manner in which such a committee is constituted by the Govt. of India.

The Government of India, instead of taking action against illegal sale of coal by private sector "captive" coal mines, is resorting to legalise it by purchasing coal from these companies through Coal India for marketing purposes. It is only strengthening back door privatisation of coal industry.

In the name of outsourcing, the coal companies are recklessly handing over operation of the mines to mafias who pay paltry wages to coal workers and minting money. Coal management and local administration are receiving heavy kickbacks from the mafia to facilitate violation all the labour laws. More and more operations of permanent nature are being handed over to contractors though the Ministry of Labour prohibits many of them, through notifications. In Mahanandi Coalfields global tender has been issued for removal or overburden though it is a job of a permanent nature. CITU also protested against the Coal India's move to hand over the auditing jobs to foreign companies.

The Govt. has drastically reduced custom duty on coal to facilitate import of coal. Last year 23 million tonnes of coal was imported by India when our mines are getting closed on the plea that they are non-viable and uneconomic. This has increased the unemployment in coal mines and peasants whose land has been taken over do not get proper job opportunity in coal mines. They have been agitating in most of the coal mines for getting a source of livelihood.

PREPARE FOR STRUGGLE

With the corruption and theft of coal growing to menacing proportion, the coal industry has become a hunting ground for mafias and unscrupulous contractors, and despite repeated warnings by trade unions, these malpractices continue unabated while legitimate demands of coal miners are being neglected purposefully.

There is no wonder that safety is the casualty in the coal industry wherein safety norms are blatantly being violated, occupational diseases are threatening the lives of coal miners while medical facilities are getting deteriorated. The quality of life of coal miners is getting adversely affected due to all these resulting in accumulated discontent among the coal miners all over the country.

Under these circumstances the situation will not improve unless united struggle is built up all over the country. The involvement of some coal mine leaders in benami contract in the industry is resulting in creating serious obstacle in united movement of the workers.

The All India Coal Workers Federation is therefore intensifying its campaign all over the country despite the vindictive attitude taken by the mine managements in several places. The magnificent response given by the coal miners in all the coal companies is indicative of a big nationwide struggle that is likely to emerge in the forthcoming period to address the problems of coal industry and its workers.

COMRADE S SUDEVAN

Com S Sudevan, Genereal Council member of the CITU for several years passed away on 7th January 2005 at Thiruvananthapuram. As a worker from Bisrampur Colliery in Sarguja district Com.Sudevan was among the earliest activists of CITU in former Madhya Pradesh was rose to the position of President of the State Committee of the CITU. He had to face gangster attack by the hirelings of the managements and was hospitalized for several days. After formation of Jharkhand he became president of that state committee. Sudevan was president of MP Koyla Shramik Sangh for several years and was also vice president of All India Coal Workers Federation. He worked as member of the joint committee in SECL . Sudevan was a member of the secretariat of CPI(M), Chhattisgarh State Committee. The sudden passing away of Sudevan is a big loss to the coal workers movement in the country. The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay homage to the memory of Com. Sudevan.

CALL FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FOR MOBILISATIONS AGAINST THE WAR, NEOLIBERALISM, EXPLOITATION AND EXCLUSION

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE!

On the sidelines of the World Social Forum, 2005 held in PORTO ALEGRE the assembly of social movements adopted this declaration on January 31, 2005:

We are social movements gathered in the 5th World Social Forum. The great success of the plural and massive participation in the Forum gives us the possibility and the responsibility to organize more and better our campaigns and mobilizations, to expand and strengthen our struggles. Four years ago the collective and global call for ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE broke the lie that neoliberal domination is unavoidable as well as the acceptance of the 'normality' of war, of social inequalities, racism, casts, patriarchy, imperialism and the destruction of the environment. As people take this truth as their own their strength becomes unstoppable and it starts materialising in concrete actions of resistance, for demands and proposals.

Therefore what is new about our proposal is the outbreak and the scale of the social movements in all continents and their ability to build within diversity new convergences and common actions at global level. Summits like the G8 and the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank, where few intend to decide for everybody, were questioned and de-legitimized by the action of social movements. Popular struggles in defence of nature, the rights of people and the common good, against their privatization, such as in Bolivia, Uruguay and other peoples, demonstrated the possibility of creating a crisis for neoliberal domination.

Neoliberalism is incapable of offering a dignified and democratic future to humanity. Nevertheless, nowadays it again takes the initiative responding to its crisis of legitimacy with force, militarisation, repression, criminalisation of social struggles, political authoritarianism and ideological reaction. Millions of men and women suffer every day. We want here to remember the war in Congo that has already caused four million victims.

Conscious that we still have a long way ahead of us, we call all movements of the world to fight for peace, human, social and democratic rights, for the right of people to decide their destiny and for the immediate cancellation of foreign debt from the countries of the South, from the AGENDA that we share in the 5th World Social Forum:

AGENDA OF STRUGGLES

" We call all organisations and social movements which have participated in the World Social Forum and those who could not be in Porto Alegre, to work together in the campaign for the IMMEDIATE and UNCONDITIONAL CANCELLATION OF THE FOREIGN and illegitimate DEBT of the countries of the South, beginning with the countries victims of tsunami and other that have undergone terrible disasters and crisis in the recent months.

" We support Social Movements from the South that declare themselves CREDITORS of historical, social and ecological debts. We demand the end of the implementation of projects and 'integration agreements', which facilitate the looting of natural resources, form the countries of the South. We support demands from peasant and fisher folk Social Movements in areas affected by the Tsunami, in order to have the resources for emergency aid and reconstruction managed directly by local communities in order to avoid new debts, colonisation and militarisation.

" After two years of the Iraq invasion, global opposition to the war is constantly increasing. It is time for the anti-warm movement to increase actions and do not retreat. We demand the end of the Iraq occupation. We demand the US to stop threatening Iran, Venezuela and other countries. We commit to establish more contacts with the occupation forces in Iraq and the Middle East. We will strengthen our campaigns against transnationals committed with the invasion, we support soldiers who oppose to participate in the war and we defend activists that have been persecuted for being against the war. We call all movements to organize on March 19th a global day of actions to demand the retreat of US troops

from Iraq. No more war!

" We support all campaigns for disarmament and demilitarization, including the campaign against US military bases in the world, the campaigns for nuclear disarmament, for the control of arms trade and the cut on military spending. Under the pretext of 'Free Trade' neoliberal capitalism advances under the weakness of the US, in the de-regulation of economies and the 'legalisation' of privileges for transnational corporations through free trade Agreements (FTAs). After the failure of FTAA due to popular pressure, now Central America and other countries have been obliged to subscribe to Bilateral Free Trade Agreements that we the people reject. In Europe the European Union Bolkenstein directive wants to impose the complete privatization of public services. We call everyone to mobilize during the Global Action Rally, from April 10th to 17th, in the Summit of the People of the Americas, in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in November 2005; and during the 6th WTO meeting in Hong Kong, in December 2005.

" We support the Women's World March, which is organising a campaign of global feminist actions throughout the world starting from São Paulo on March 8th and ending on October 17th in Burkina Faso, to restate their commitment with in the struggle against neoliberalism, patriarchy, exclusion and domination. We call all movements to organize feminist actions during this period against free trade, sex trade, militarisation and food sovereignty.

" We support the efforts of social movements and organizations that promote the struggle for dignity, justice, equality and human rights specially the dalit movement; afro-descendents, indigenous people, romas, burakumins and the most oppressed and repressed sectors of society.

" We call for mass mobilisation against the G8 meeting in Scotland on July 2nd to 8th. We will take to the streets and will participate in the counter-meeting in Edinburgh and Gleneagles. We demand: poverty to go to history, to stop the war, to cancel debt and impose a global tax on financial transactions to finance development.

" We protest against neoliberal policies and the EU military support in Latin America. We call for a solidarity mobilization among the peoples during the Meeting from Latin American and European Union Presidents in May 2006, in Vienna, Austria.

" We struggle for the universal right to healthy and sufficient food. We struggle for the right of the peoples, nations and peasants to produce their own food. We manifest against subsidies to exports, which destroy the economies of rural communities. Let's avoid food dumping. We reject GMO foods because besides threatening our health and the environment, they are an instrument for five transnationals to have control of all markets. We reject patents on any form of life and in special on seeds, since the intention is the appropriation of our resources and the knowledge associated to them. We demand the Agrarian Reform as a strategy to allow the access of peasants to land, and healthy and sufficient food, and not to be concentrated in the hands of transnationals and latifundiários. We demand for actions against peasants around the world to be called off, for the immediate liberation of peasants and political prisoners in the world, and the end of militarization of rural areas. We support sustainable production based in the preservation of natural resources: soil, water, forest, air, biodiversity, water resources etc. We support the development of organic and agro-ecological production. We call for mobilizations during the national peasant day on April 17th; and on the anniversary of the death of Mr. Lee on September 10th against the WTO.

" We support campaigns and struggles in defence of water as a common good, against its privatisation and for the recognition of the right to access to water as a human right, such as the campaign 'No to Suez in Latin America'. We invite all to participate in International Forum from March 18th to 20th in Geneva. We share the demands to build an alliance between social movements and networks for a 'World contract on climate: a solar world is possible'.

" Energy is the right to life and it is a common good. The struggle against poverty and climate change demands sustainable energy to be among the priorities of initiatives and campaigns from social movements. We support the international march on climate in November. The 'Social Responsibility of Transnationals' did not manage to eliminate abuses and crimes committed by transnationals. It must be seriously challenged.

Movements will work together to take power away from transnationals and stop their abuses and crimes. Communities must have the freedom to protect themselves, their environment and society against the power of transnationals. We support campaigns against transnationals that violate human, social and trade union's rights, such as those against Nestlé and Coca-Cola in Colombia; and Pepsi and Coca-Cola in India.

" We support the struggle of the Palestinian people for their fundamental and national rights, including the right to return, based on the international law and in the UN resolutions. We ask the international community and governments to impose political and economic sanctions to Israel, including an embargo on Arms. We call social movements to also mobilise for de-investments and boycotts. These efforts aim at pressuring Israel to implement international resolutions and to respect the decision of the International Court of Justice for the immediate stop and destruction of the illegal apartheid wall and the end of occupation. We support Israeli activists for peace and the refusnik for their struggle against the occupation.

" We condemn the unfair embargo of Cuba and demand a fair trial to the five Cubans who have been arrested in the US. We also demand the withdrawal of military foreign troops in Haiti.

" We recognise diversity in sexual orientation as an expression of an alternative world and we condemn mercantilisation. Movements commit to participate in the struggle against exclusion based on identity, gender and homophobia. We will unite our voices against all forms of mercantilisation of the body of women and GLBT.

" We support the process of building a global network of social movements committed to defend migrants, refugees and displaced peoples. Neoliberalism and the policies of 'the war against terror' have increased the criminalisation of migrants, the militarisation of borders, clandestine operations and the access to cheap labour. We support the campaign to ratify the United Nations Convention for the rights of migrants, which no government from the North wants to accept. We support the campaign to establish an independent organism to sanction governments that do not respect the Geneva Convention for refugees and the rights of migrants.

" We support campaigns and struggles for children's rights, against labour and sexual exploitation, against the trade of children and sexual tourism. We support the call of the excluded, of those with no voice, to develop an active solidarity campaign to propel a world march in which the oppressed and excluded of the planet will raise their voice to conquer the right to a dignified life.

" From September 14th to 16th, in the general Assembly of the UN, government heads of the whole world will make decisions about the agrarian reform in the United Nations and will revise their commitments to eradicate poverty. They are mainly responsible for the critical situation of humanity now. We support the call for international networks which invite to mobilize globally on September 10th for a new world democratic order and against poverty and the war.

" We support the call for a mobilisation on November 17th, international student day, in defence of public education, against privatisation and the trans-nationalization of education. In solidarity with Venezuela, the youth of the world is calling to participate in the 16th World Youth Festival and of the Students from Venezuela between August 7th and 15th.

" Communication is a fundamental human right. We support the call for mobilizations during the World Conference of the Communication Society, in Tunis from November 16th to 18th. We support the call for a strong international convention about Cultural Diversity and we oppose the mercantilisation of information and communication from the WTO.

" We support social economy as a concrete expression of an alternative for a fair, mutual, democratic and equitable development. In defence of public health and against its privatisation, we call all peoples of the world for a permanent struggle. We call for mobilisations during the General Assembly in Defence of the Health of the People, in Cuenca, Peru, in 2005 and in the World Health Forum during the World Social Forum in Africa in 2007.

This is a small demonstration of the struggle of social movements

GLOBALISE STRUGGLE, GLOBALISE HOPE!

Social Ownership of Means of Production: Pre-condition for Even Accessibility to Science & Technology

Chittabrata Majumdar

Modernity can best be looked into the phenomenal advancement of science and wondrous development of technology. None can contest the fact that the civilisation at its present state has been the result of astonishing scientific invention and technological development. And, by all means, we are earnestly looking forward to see this on-march of science and technology, wherever and whatever for the well being of the human society.

The accelerated pace of technological advancement, needless to say, have a significant impact on the production process through out the world. The productivity has been improved through modernisation, incessant qualitative improvement has been ensured with the emerging technology and the new generation of industries has been figuring keeping the parity with the pace of the advancement of science and technology and thus being welcomed as such by anybody and everybody.

While we are overwhelmed to welcome all sorts of technological advancement that aid the human civilisation to move forward, we can no way void the other basic issue of the impact of such technological improvement on the working class and the people within the capitalist form of economy.

At any time, within capitalist system, the capital enjoys the full dominance over the means of production, where the labour is hired to create the surplus to be appropriated by the former. During its relative progressive phase, till the time production started lagging behind the demand, improvement in productivity, development of new product with the innovated technology has contributed in employment generation. But even during such time, though it is an undeniable fact that the working class could also test some benefits, of course not in a significant extent, since the capital being the master of the means of production have appropriated almost the whole. And thus, the real income of the working class in the capitalist order irrespective of location fell far short of the required level taking its toll by increasing the immense distress of toiling mass. Thus the said progressive phase of the capitalism has been turned to be short-lived one. The world capitalism has re-entered in the phase of its innate crises, which has been fast deepened, showing hardly any manifestation of its cessation or turnaround. The demand-supply situation has been continued to be worsen for the demand sluggishness caused by continued fall in purchasing and consumption capacity because of squeeze in real earning of the working class across the globe. Thus despite of phenomenal advancement of technology that has contributed in the profuse productive capacity, the capitalism has been forced to test the sever crises, which is in fact an unprecedented one.

However, the progression of technological advancement has been uninterrupted, independent of the crises that have rocked the world capitalism. And the capitalism as a system and being the master of the means of production has been in its term using the emerging technologies mindlessly causing unimaginable distress of the toiling mass to get rid of its persisting crises. As the recession has been continuing, modernisation as a tool to increase the productivity has been proved to be the means of retrenchment of the workforce all over. The capitalism with its ongoing stagnation, which created a huge contingent of unemployed workforce across this globe, with the aid of technological development has taken the working class for a ride further. Improved productivity using emerging technology has been used as a tool to deprive the working class denying the increase in the real wages. Casualisation of workforce for further exploitation, denying the legitimate wage and disintegration of the production process aiming to curb the growing bargaining power of the workers are some of the collateral benefits the capital has been successfully targeting at

through full utilisation of technology emerging everyday.

The empirical data of the industries give sufficient insight to establish the reality in this respect. For instance, Hindustan Lever Limited at Garden Reach Factory of Kolkata have reduced the present employees strength to nearly 780 from 2600 since 1985, offering successive voluntary retirement schemes during the said period. The sales value of production of the said factory was 198.52crore in 1985. The plant had at that time the installed capacity of producing 400mt detergent per week offering alone employment opportunity of 286 besides of the other products. At present the company has stopped producing the detergent at Garden Reach factory. Instead, it has set up a factory at Haldia in West Bengal for production of detergent having an installed capacity of 1000mt per week with the manpower of just 105. Thus, while the productive capacity, utilising the modern technology has been enhanced substantially; the manpower deployment has been drastically slashed. And the enhanced production utilising lesser manpower has logically contributed to significant addition to the profit. Capitalism having the monopoly over capital and technology, using the technological advancement and scientific development, in the narrated manner, has been aggressively replacing human beings by machines, causing a phenomenon of "jobless growth".

Again, it is pertinent to take a careful note of the fact that the developed capitalist countries, better known as the first world, with their brute superiority in monitory and military terms, have traditionally cornered the benefits of the technological advancement and scientific invention. As a result the developing and underdeveloped third world even following the capitalist path has been facing the stiff resistance from the said first world to get the access to new technologies and scientific inventions for the indigenous development of the countries. The ongoing process of imposition of restrictions in the form of trade related intellectual properties right in WTO regime is the glaring feature that speaks itself, how the class divided human society has been denying the weaker of the access to the right to research and development. The ever widening of the gap between the first world and the countries of the third world as well as the fast increasing disparity between the handful rich and the rest forming the vast majority within the countries glaringly identify the real beneficiaries of the such wondering technological advancement and scientific inventions.

Thus it is empathetically evident that the capitalist has been historically appropriating the benefits of astonishing achievements in the arena of science and technology in class divided society. The capitalist so far has appropriated all the benefits of scientific and technological researches and development in a totally selfish manner. Rather those have been utilised in a manner detrimental to the interest of the working class, as described. However, this no way undermine the tremendous potential of the science and technology that could be the real driving force to eradicate the sufferings of the entire humanity, had the same would have been employed in a proper and equitable manner. But, since we are living in a class divided society, who else other than working class, who have to fight tooth and nail to liberate the mass from the yoke of the centuries long exploitation, better realise that such thinking is an utopia. Only a classless society where the working class have the decisive ownership over the means of production, can guarantee the universal access to the benefits of the invention and development of science and technology, which are derived from the knowledge and by no logic be captured by the wealth and muscle since it is as free as the nature of this world is.

BANK MERGERS.... WHAT IS HAPPENING ELSEWHERE?

"Two Japanese banking giants said on Friday their 3.99 trillion yen ($38 billion) merger, which will create the World's largest bank, which will involve 6000 job cuts and target a profit of 1.1 trillion in fiscal 2008...Mitsubishi Tokyo and UFJ said that they plan to cut 6000 jobs-or about 8% of their current global workforce-in three years following the merger. By the fiscal year ending 2009, the combined entity will close 170 retail outlets from the more than 900 they have now."

What will happen if the banks merger in India materialises can well be guessed!

PATENTS ORDINANCE ... WHITHER OBLIGATORY?

The Government of India promulgated the Third Amendment Ordinance of Indian Patents Act just after the close of the winter session of Parliament. The Ordinance legalised the commencement of products patent regime in the country with accompanying monopoly rights to the patent-holder on production and marketing of the concerned patented product.

The Government of India seeks to justify its haste in resorting to the Ordinance route, in initiating an altogether changed patents-regime, by saying that it was obligatory for the Government to shift over to the new patents regime by the deadline of 1-1-2005. This, we are told, had been set by the stipulations in the WTO agreement and particularly those pertaining to the Trade Related Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Rights. How far this pleading is correct and honest?

The plea of the deadline theory (of 1-1-2005) is not an honest one. Had there been enough political will, the Government of India could have deferred the change-over of the Patents regime on valid irrefutable grounds. The WTO can not circumscribe the sovereign right of our supreme legislative authority to deliberate and decide upon such an important piece of legislation. The dissolution of the earlier Lok Sabha, the general elections that followed and the short time at the disposal of the present Lok Sabha since the inception of the UPA government are but normal features of the functioning of our democratic polity. These could more than justify the requirement of more time in processing this most important piece of legislation. Moreover, it is always open to introduce legal provisions to give retrospective effect to certain amendments, where necessary. Indeed, in the case of the provisions relating to the introduction of the exclusive marketing rights in our Patents Act, such a course of action was followed in the recent past. In the instant case, the option of prescribing 1.1.2005 as the "priority date" for the product patents can also be used in order to ensure compatibility with the TRIPS obligation.

The other arguments are: the quota regime restraining our textiles and garments exports will be coming to an end on 31.12.2004 under another Agreement of WTO viz. Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) and there is linkage between TRIPS and ATC agreements; in other words, if we do not implement the requirement under TRIPs, the developed countries (USA and EU, in particular) would go back on their commitment to end quotas on textiles and garments exports. This is nothing but wild stretch of imagination to justify by any means the foul intention behind hasty promulgation of the Patents Ordinance. It may be noted that the developed countries have recently tried their best to seek extension of the quota regime of ATC beyond 31.12.2004 through some proxy moves but have failed and the meeting of the WTO Council on Trade in Goods (CTG) held in October 2004 has categorically rejected any reopening of the question. The plea that some developed countries will try to reopen the issue and defer ending of the quota regime on textiles, as a retaliatory measure for India's deferring the legislative change in patents on valid and irrefutable ground linked with its sovereign democratic process of governance, is totally baseless and untenable, which the Government itself is quite aware of.

The similar haste is also reflected in drafting the amendment Ordinance, which deliberately overlooked many provisions of relief and flexibility in the TRIPS agreement and the subsequent Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health. These could have made the patents regime more congenial and less atrocious to domestic industries, agriculture and people at large.

There have been number of flexibilities available in TRIPS. Article 7 (objectives) of the TRIPS agreement stipulates that 'the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights should contribute to the

promotion of technological innovation and to the transfer and dissemination of technology, to the mutual advantage of producers and users of technological knowledge and in a manner conducive to social and economic welfare, and to a balance of rights and obligations.' Article 8 (principles) stipulates that "in formulating or amending national patent laws and regulations, members may adopt measures necessary to protect public health and nutrition and to promote public interest in sectors of vital importance to their socio economic and technological development." There are also avenues of flexibility provided in TRIPS under Articles 27.3-b (mandated review), 31-b (on compulsory licenses for commercial activities) and 70.3 (products in public domain). The Doha Declaration recognized the member-country's right to protect public health and it has also been clarified that the members have the right to grant compulsory licenses to domestic industries and freedom to determine the ground therefor. Had all these avenues of flexibilities been appropriately availed of while processing the legislative change in the Patents-regime, the interests of the people and the domestic economy could have been protected to considerable extent from the aggressive exercise of the monopoly powers assumed by the giant MNCs under the product-patent system. But most of these flexibilities have been ignored while promulgating the Ordinance by the Government in a hurry, not in public interests but to satisfy the interests of their masters in World Bank and IMF, in their anxiety to prove their reformist-credential before the authors of the designs of reform. And while doing so, the Government of India yielded much more to the MNCs than required under TRIPS. William Haddad, Chairman and CEO of Biogenerics Inc and the United States Research & Development Corporation, who is also popularly known as father of the US generics industry, during his recent visit to India commented on the Patents Ordinance that "Further under TRIPS, most of the sections of the Ordinance are not required by the WTO. The multinational pharmaceutical corporations are convincing the countries around world, including India, that this TRIPS plus regulation is required." *(Business Line, 6-02-2005)*

The hasty action of those in governance of the country as reflected in the promulgation of the Patents Ordinance reveals that they are already convinced by the MNCs to act in their interests in the Patents matter to let the interests of the people go to hell.

Oh FDI: The tale of two companies....

Hindustan Times a leading national daily owned by the Birlas entered into a collaboration with a foreign-owned media company by forming a joint venture company and transferred its printing press division to new FDI driven joint venture. In that process 364 employees of HT who served the company for decades were thrown out of employment. And the Patrons of FDI in governance declined to even touch the issue despite such unlawful arrogance of one of the biggest monopoly house in the country, lest FDI gets angry !

In contrast, another national daily, "The Hindu" also has undertaken modernization of its establishment. Nobody was retrenched. The union was taken into confidence. Workers were retrained and redeployed. 62 casual workers were regularized. They did not suffer any pay-cut, rather there has been improvement in the pay-packet, bonus and other fringe benefits. The retired employees were also major beneficiaries of the new deal.

However, there has been no FDI involved in "The Hindu" operation as in the case of Hindustan Times.

(Source: All India Newspaper Employees Federation, New Delhi)

ECONOMY: REALITY CHECKS

ON UNEMPLOYMENT: PLAIN SPEAKING

There is little doubt that the President, A P J Abdul Kalam, spoke from considerable personal knowledge when he said that brows of the country's youth are increasingly lined with worry as the spectre of unemployment stares them in their face...It is easy to see that the situation has assumed crisis proportions from the welter of empirical evidence that is available to anyone who cares to look for it. The sluggish off-take of food grains from public distribution system, the poor demand for essential fast-moving consumer goods items and scientific surveys by the National Sample Survey Organisation of household consumption data, all afford ample evidence of financial distress stemming from a lack of income-generating opportunities for vast sections.

Official data, which put the number of unemployed at 36 million, is a gross understatement as it ignores those engaged in activity that offer wages below the subsistence level. A peanut vendor on the beachfront or someone selling lottery tickets on the streets may be officially described as 'gainfully engaged' and thus outside the pale of unemployment statistics. But it would be a folly to regard it as providing them and their dependents a subsistence level of income. In the event, the President has done well to top up the official statistics with another 40 million, which perhaps as a concession to official sensibility, he has described as the number needing 'value-added employment'.

(Editorial, Business Line, 27-01-2005)

DISQUIETING!

An RBI study on State Govt finances in 2004-05 reveals —that the expected improvement in the states' fiscal position during 2004-05 would also be contingent upon the acceleration in their share in central tax revenue and the revenue mobilization efforts of the State Governments. As the central tax revenue is set to be running a sizable shortfall this fiscal, to this extent the likely improvement in States' fiscal position would suffer.... It is also disquieting to note that social sector spending of the States is estimated to decline to 5.4 per cent of GDP this fiscal from 5.9 per cent last year and within this, provisions for education and health are estimated to decline from 2.52% and 0.72% in 2003-04 to 2.37% and 0.67% respectively in 2004-05.

(Business Line, 27-01-2005.)

LEARN TO GROW!

....Till only recently, manufacturing was dismissed as laggard, while services were extolled as our bacon of hope. Whatever the leapfrog theorists might say, India needs agriculture, manufacturing and services to flourish in equal measure. We are too complex a society to be able to ride on the strength of services alone.

....The common minimum programme and the first budget of the UPA Govt focus on micro irrigation projects and improving public irrigation in agriculture, now stagnant at just over Rs 4000 crore per annum. The forthcoming budget should remain faithful to the CMP thrust in this regard. The proposed employment guarantee programme will reate not just rural infrastructure, but also generate income. The decline in off-farm rural employment is a major feature of post-reforms years, perhaps as a result of which India could not sustain its growth momentum after the mid-90s. A successful employment scheme should not be seen as a social sector allocation, or a perceived concession to the Left, but rather an investment in generating a stream of returns for industry. ....

(Editorial, Times of India, 09-02-2005)

ECONOMY: REALITY CHECKS

UNEMPLOYMENT : REALITY CHECK

....No doubt, the growth of IT sector has brightened the prospects of employment for engineering graduates churned out by country's higher education system.....But given the pronounced export focus, the scope for significant forward and backward linkages to other sector must of necessity be limited. Thus any perception that in the IT sector lies the salvation to the country's unemployment problem would seem shortsighted. The scale of unemployment problem makes this so. The one million additional jobs that may be created in this sector over the next three-four years has to be seen in the context of current official statistics on unemployment, which is estimated at approximately 30 million. If we take into account the vast numbers engaged in gainful economic activity that offers only an income below the subsistence level, the magnitude of the problem can easily be imagined.

Unfortunately, principal sectors of unemployment suffer from certain fundamental structural deficiencies. The agricultural sector has been struggling to retain the existing workforce leave alone absorbing the additional numbers cropping up in the hinterland. The organized manufacturing sector too has been shedding jobs....To compound matters, there is no relief in sight from demographics, which has seen the population in the age group 18-60 recording one of the highest rate of growth. The euphoria over the success of the IT sector, however well merited, should not obscure us to the larger reality of a problem that has defied solution over the years.

(Editorial, Business Line, 11-02-2005)

PATENT ORDINANCE TO SATISFY TRIPS PLUS REQUIREMENT OF MNCs

"PATIENTS comes first, patents next" said William F Haddad, Chairman and CEO of Biogenerics Inc and the United States Research and Development Corporation, who was here recently. Championing the cause of drug affordability, Mr Haddad, popularly known as the father of the US generics industry-said that on January 1, when the products patents regime came into effect, "a perfect storm of political intrigue, corporate greed and a lack of political will congealed into a reality that will systematically deny not only India but two-thirds of the world's population access to life saving essential medicines." ...He further squashed the claims made by the Govt of India and other organisations around the world that over 90 per cent of the medicines on the WHO list are off-patent.

"Further under TRIPS, most of the sections of the Ordinance are not required by the WTO. The multinational pharmaceutical corporations are convincing the countries around the world, including India, that this TRIPS plus regulation is required," Mr Haddad said.

(Business Line, 06-02-2005)

Comrade C Babu

Comrade C Babu, General Secretary of North Andaman PWD Workers Union breathed his last on 9th February 2005. He was suffering from cancer and has been in the hospital for last few months. He was only 55.

Com Babu was frontline leader of CITU in the island and played important role in building the movement there. CITU, A & N Committee expressed heartfelt grief at his untimely demise. The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay homage to Com Babu and convey condolences to the comrades of the island and the bereaved family members.

PATENT ACT:

THIRD AMENDMENT DISASTROUS FOR THE PEOPLE

SHYAMAL CHAKRABORTY

The Patents Act has been revised for the third time and an ordinance issued to that effect.

In 1994, the then defence minister Pranab Mukherjee signed the agreement on multilateral trade negotiations. The Trade Related Intellectual property Rights (TRIPS) was put in place. It was decided at the WTO that no nation could have patents rights of its own except those fashioned after the TRIPS model.

The Patents Act formulated by India in 1970 served as a model for the third world. To make it compatible with TRIPS, three amendments were found to be necessary. Of these, two amendments were effected earlier in 1999 and 2002. The third amendment was put in motion on and from January 1, 2005. The applications for patents, indigenous and foreign, were being received from 1999. The 'mail box' will now be opened.

In 1995 the BJP organised protest when the patent bill was placed in Rajya Sabha. On coming to office, however, the BJP rushed through two of the amendments and tried to enact the third one back in 2003. At that time, 44 intellectuals had vehemently protested against these steps being taken about the patent act. On coming to office in 2004, the Congress-led UPA government has no qualms about stepping into the BJP's shoes and is keen to have the bill passed.

Both the NDA and the Congress consistently ignored the suggestions and advice of the mass organisations, trade unions, various science organisations, expert groups and even the Law Commission.

RELIEFS NOT UTILISED

Quoting the former director of the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (ICAR), K L Mehra writes that the non-formal producers of economic assets organised free exchange of knowledge across groups and along the lines to advance and develop agriculture and to improve the standard of living, but without documentation since that was improbable during those earlier times.

Botanists gathered knowledge from peasants and traditional herbal doctors for free, and that knowledge acquired by generations could not have any property rights attached. Making patents out of these knowledge bases is some kind of a theft. Mehra cites neem and says patents have been taken out for neem products of various kinds. They include pesticides, bactericides and sweeteners. Indians have been using neem products for centuries. But a recent survey reveals that such herbal products as have been patented represent a value of 48 billion US dollars. Why should not the 250-odd concerns that have organised these patents for themselves provide royalties to the people who own the true intellectual property rights to these products?

Article 27 of the TRIPS agreement clearly states speaks of some amount of relief for the member countries, but the union government has not taken advantage of the provisions.

The Law Commission has stated that patents should not be instituted in (1) symptomatic, investigative, and surgical treatment of humans and animals, and (2) in products and plants directly related to the overall development of a country, its standard of living, conservation, public health, and environment.

The products to be exempted from patents are: (1) the products included in the system of medicine incorporated in the Indian Medicine Central Council Act, which are used by the Indian people, and (2) the products and systems of treatment used for generations by local anthropological groups.

The second amendment to the patent act incorporates in full article 5 of the TRIPS. The exceptions in this regard, i.e., chemicals, medicines, food articles, and agricultural chemicals, have been duly incorporated in the third amendment as the 'deadline' had been set for January 1, 2005.

ANTI-NATIONAL!

There were two aspects of the 2003 amendments. The first was a concern to implement the TRIPS conditionality. Secondly, they were based on certain acts that are anti-national. The promise

and political assurance of social security, that was given in the second amendment, has been given a go-by in the third amendment.

Earlier there was a system where the process could be patented. Now a product itself is to be given a patent. Even similar products produced through alternative processes must have to give a royalty to the patent holders of the original product. As a result, the prices of patented seeds, fertilisers and medicines are bound to go sky-high.

Earlier, a patent could be opposed and appealed against within four months of its grant on grounds of 'common knowledge', 'wrong citation of geographical facts and material resources', 'traditional systems' etc.

But the third amendment stipulates that, other than a representation, no opposition to the patent could be lodged before the patent is implemented. This is clearly a sop because, once its marketing starts, there would be no point in opposing a patent. The representation part does not say anything about the length of the hearing on the protest and the ultimate result. Argentina and Thailand have protested against this procedure, but not India.

POSSIBLE STEPS

By signing the TRIPS agreement, India has become enmeshed in the vortices of the world trade agreement. Until such time when the third world countries unitedly oppose the agreement, some steps could conceivably be taken:

1. Following the example set by China, it could be decided that if the price of a patented product is not fixed even after the passage of a stipulated time, another producer might be compulsorily given a license.
2. The example of some other countries may be emulated and royalty to be given may be limited to four per cent.
3. Medicines patented for internal consumption may be exported to such third world countries as do not produce them.
4. The applications for patents in the 'mail box' must be considered and rampant grant of patents checked.

Disputes are still going on the issue of patenting. Discussions are going on, for example, on micro-organisms. The union government has to desist from haste in implementing the patent act. Compulsory licensing exists in scores of developed countries and these countries have never employed any such indiscretion in the implementation of patenting, as does India. As India is in a position to export medicines, at a cheap rate, to other countries needing these products, multinational corporations (MNCs) would close down the import and export of generic medicines to such countries if India desists from such exports.

The Doha declaration on TRIPS agreement and public health clearly states that all agreements on patenting must have people's interests in mind, and that medicines must not be excluded from the process in this regard.

POSSIBLE IMPACT

The possible impact of patenting will be made clear if one cites certain examples. For one, the cost of a medicine will jump tenfold or more. In case of anti-retroviral drugs used for AIDS cases, the cost would increase from Rs 7,000 per year to Rs two lakh per year. As it is, only 10 per cent of AIDS patients receive treatment of any kind. The cost of Glivek, an anti-cancer drug, will stand at Rs 22,000 per ampoule — 20 times the present Rs 1,100. No less than 39 life saving medicines will be withdrawn from the Indian market. The country will be at the mercy of the MNCs. In the circumstances, why is the union government bowing down and needlessly capitulating before the WTO? Cannot it realise that its job is to safeguard the interests of more than 100 crore people?

The struggle to pressurise the union government into not putting in place the third amendment to the patent act, indeed to preserve the patent act 1970 itself, must be based on a wide footing, involving every section of the people. The task brooks no delay.

National Convention

on
Right To Work

Salt Lake Stadium, Kolkata
12 - 13 March 2005

MOVE TO SELL BHEL SHARES OPPOSED

Despite clear stipulation of not to privatize the profit making PSUs in the National Common Minimum Programme(NCMP) of the UPA Govt at the center, the so called reform savvy UPA ministers have chosen to inch towards privatization of the Nava Ratna PSUs in a phased manner through disinvestments of govt equity in tranches. The Govt's deceptive move to off-load 5% share has been made public by the media in recent times. On 25th January it was learnt that the Govt is going to decide to disinvest 10 per cent share of BHEL. It is noteworthy that around 33% shares of BHEL are already in private hands and further sale of 10% shares will reduce the Govt equity holding to around 57% and another round of offloading will lead to privatization of BHEL. The trade Union movement opposed and condemned such move vehemently. While denouncing such move of sale of shares just to fill the Govt coffers and terming it as a "surreptitious ploy of creeping privatization of the profit-making PSUs in gross violation of NCMP", CITU called upon the workers to denounce such retrograde design of the Govt through massive demonstration at all the workplace in preparation to a bigger struggle in the days to come.

BHEL workers all over the country responded to the call magnificently. On 24th January 2005, when Shri Santosh Mohan Dev, Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises visited the Hardwar plant of BHEL, spontaneous demonstration by several hundreds of workers took place at the initiative of BHEL Kamgar Union and CFFP Shramik Union, both affiliated to CITU. From the demonstration a delegation of leadership met the Minister and handed over the memorandum to him demanding immediate stoppage of disinvestments in BHEL. On 27th January 2005 again almost all the BHEL plants and establishments at Hardwar, Bhopal, Jhansi, Jagadishpur, Tiruchirapally, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ranipet etc witnessed spontaneous demonstrations by the workers and from all the places telegram/Fax have been sent to Prime Minister and the Minister of Heavy Industries opposing and denouncing the retrograde move to sell 10% shares of BHEL by the Govt of India. On 27th afternoon the Union Cabinet which was supposed to meet and formally decide on sale of BHEL shares have reportedly deferred the decision till the next meeting, it is learnt.

CITU cautioned the BHEL workers not to be complacent and prepare for grimmer struggle to defend the public sector entity of BHEL and stop further dilution of Govt equity.

Against FDI-CAP hike

TELECOM WORKERS' PROTEST COUNTRYWIDE

Despite opposition by all having least concern on country's interest, the UPA Govt has announced its decision to hike the FDI cap in telecom to 74%. This retrograde decision has drawn protest by the telecom employees enmasse all over the country. All the establishments/units/exchanges of BSNL and MTNL including those in the remotest corner of the country witnessed massive demonstrations by employees including the officers belonging to all the unions against the decision of the Govt on 8th February 2005. In New Delhi, thousands of employees of BSNL and MTNL marched in a huge procession from the BSNL-Hq at Statesman House MTNL-Hq at Eastern

Court and staged demonstration demanding reversal of the Govt decision. The rally was addressed by V A N Namboodiri (BSNLEU), O P Gupta (NFTE), G L Jogi (SNEA), S Basu (AIBSNLEA), Tomar (MEA), Suresh Kumar(BMS) and other leaders. The speakers announced that the telecom employees will go for united countrywide action if the Govt continues with the wrong policy of appeasing MNCs against the interests of the country.

Uttar Pradesh

FEB 15: STATEWIDE STRIKE BY UNORGANISED WORKERS

Ten lakhs workers of unorganized sector industries and thirty thousand medical representatives in the state of Uttar Pradesh have gone on strike on 15th February 2005 demanding implementation of the recommendation of the State Advisory Committee on Minimum Wage. The Committee recommended Rs 3500 as minimum wage which is not being notified by the State Govt under pressure of the capitalist lobby.

The Joint Struggle Committee on Minimum Wages in Uttar Pradesh comprising CITU, AITUC, HMS, BMS, INTUC, HMKP and AICCTU have congratulated the working class of UP for their magnificent response to the call of statewide strike action.

As per report received from all over UP, two lakh glass-bangle workers at Ferozabad, fifty thousand leather workers at Kanpur and Unnao, besodes two lakh workers in engineering, steel, carpet, rubber, biscuit, plastic, chemicals and other sectors have joined the strike in a big way braving atrocities and hell-bent bid of the State administration.

Orissa

BEEDI WORKERS' DEMONSTRATION

Thousands of Beedi workers held militant demonstration before the office of the Cess Commissioner at Bhubaneswaron 27th January 2005. Most of the demonstrators were women workers. All Orissa Beedi Workers' Union, Beedi workers' unions at Sambalpur, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Regional Beedi Shramik Sangh, Beedi Karigar Industrial Cooperative Society Ltd etc joined the demonstration in á big way at the leadership of All Orissa Beedi Workers' Federation under CITU.

The demonstration highlighted the 10 point Charter of Demands formulated by the Joint Action Committee of Beedi Workers and demanded upon the Govt and the employers to respond to the just demands immediately.

Demonstration also denounced the discriminatory attitude of the State administration by not giving representation to CITU unions in the district level and regional coordination committee and also in the state level coordination committee and urged upon the administration to to include the nominee of CITU in those committee at the earliest. From the demonstration a delegation consisting of Lambodar Nayak, President, Orissa State CITU, Sivaji Patnaik, Vice President, along with Sunita Samal, Sk Abdulla, Kishore Jena, Satyananda Behara, Subhash Singh etc met the Cess Commissioner and the Labour Commissioner to submit the memorandum.

MASS CONVENTION BY SAVE IISCO COMMITTEE

A mass convention was held on 30th January 2005 at Bharati Bhawan, Burnpur to press for the long standing issue of merger of IISCO with SAIL and demanding expeditious action for modernization of IISCO.

Chandrasekhar Mukherjee, Chairman, SAVE IISCO COMMITTEE, presided over the convention. The leadership and activists of the unions functioning in IISCO affiliated to AITUC, INTUC, CITU, HMS and BMS, the members of IISCO Officers' Association attended the convention. More than 1000 workers were present in the convention. M K Pandhe, President CITU was the main speaker in the convention. In his address, while criticizing the delay in merger of IISCO with SAIL despite clear assurance of the Steel Minister, Pandhe stressed upon the need for united movement of the IISCO workers to sustain pressure on the Govt to expedite the process of merger and modernization of IISCO. Brahmananda Mishra, President, SEFI, B P Mukherjee, Dy President, ABK Metal and Engg Workers' Union (CITU) and other central leaders of AITUC, HMS and BMS also addressed the convention.

Himachal Pradesh

HYDEL PROJECT WORKERS' STRUGGLE

NTPC started a 800 megawatt power project on the river Satluj at Himachal Pradesh. The construction work has been awarded to two major construction companies under which around 1500 contract workers are working. After commencement of the construction work, the workers themselves took initiative to contact CITU and form union there. On 15-12-2004 the union submitted their charter of demands to management, which includes implementation of all basic labour laws pertaining to minimum wages, safety, medical care, social security etc. The management did not respond to the request of the union for commencement of negotiation.

On 3-02-2005 the union decided to hold gate meeting to announce the next course of action programme. The company tried its best not to allow the workers to assemble for the meeting but miserably failed. The gate meeting took place with the participation of all the project workers. After the meeting the NTPC management refused to take the workers to work unless the CITU state committee leaders and whole timers are sent out of the project area. The workers refused enmasse to oblige the management and held a big mass rally in protest of the NTPC management's arrogant behaviour. The NTPC management tried to stop the mass rally and brought the CIRF to break the rally on the plea that the project area is the prohibited zone. The workers enamsse again ignored all such threats and meeting took place as usual and leaders of the CITU State Committee addressed the rally. After the meeting the CIRF force physically obstructed the workers assembled there to go back to work and unleashed lathi charge on the workers and opened firing in the air in order to terrorise them. But under the leadership of CITU workers confronted bravely and declared that if the company takes any punitive steps like pay-cut etc, there will be total strike in the plant. Under the pressure of total unity of the project workers bravely confronting all onslaughts, the NTPC management had to come to sense and sit in negotiation with the union. There has been no pay cut and all the workers including the leadership have to be taken back in duty and assured on negotiated settlement on charter of demands.

West Bengal

JOINT CONVENTION ON PATENTS ORDINANCE

Kolkata, 1st February 2005, the joint trade union convention held in Netaji Subhash Institute Hall denounced the third Patents Amendment Ordinance and called upon the workers and employees to unitedly fight against the design of total surrender of the Govt of India to the pressure of the imperialist forces and multinational companies.

Chunilal Dasgupta, Joint Convenor, 12th July Committee presided over the Convention. Shyamal Chakraborty, President WB State CITU, placed the main Resolution of the Convention. While explaining the pernicious import of the product-patent regime on Indian economy and the people initiated by this Patents Ordinance, Chakraborty stressed upon the urgency of intensive mass awareness campaign on the issue for unleashing countrywide united struggle against the nefarious design of the imperialist forces and the multinational companies to establish their complete dominance on the industry, agriculture, services etc of the developing countries including India through this product-patent regime.

The convention was also addressed by Paltu Dasgupta (AITUC), Mihir Chanda (UTUC), Dipankar Bhattacharya (AICCTU), Sankar Saha (UTUC-LS), Sudhangshu Ghosh (TUCC), Shibshankar Roy (12th July Committee) and K D Ghosh (Mercantile Federation).

Assam

CONVENTION AGAINST PATENTS ORDINANCE

A mass convention of trade unions and other mass organisations was held on 20th January 2005 at Lakhiram Baruah Sadan at Guwahati to plan actions against the retrograde Patents amendment Ordinance. Several hundreds representing the leadership and activists of Central Trade Unions and independent federations of banks, insurance, medical representatives etc joined the convention.

Deben Bhattacharya, General Secretary of Assam State CITU presided over the convention. The main resolution passed by the convention mentioned the Patents Ordinance as an instrument to serve the interests of the multinational companies and strengthen their grip on the Indian economy and market and ruin the Indian industry, agriculture and health care. The resolution called for united countrywide struggle by the toiling people to force the Govt to scrap the Ordinance and formulate appropriate patent-regime in the interests of country's people and curbing the monopoly control of the MNCs on the patented products. The Convention was addressed by Amitava Guha, Secretary, FMRAI whi explained in details the dangerous import of the Patent Ordinance which will lead to exclusive domination of foreign MNCs in the sphere of drugs, agriculture, chemical products and loss of whatever self-reliance achieved in these areas.

Satanjib Das, General Secretary, Guwahati Division Insurance Employes Association presented the resolution calling for observance of a 'mass awareness week' on the issue through intensive grassroot level campaign and mass demonstration and rallies to press for scrapping of the Ordinance by the Govt.

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PUNJAB

DEMONSTRATION DENOUNCING PATENT ORDINANCE

More than 5000 workers and employees held a militant demonstration at Matka Chawk, Chandigarh, on 1st February 2005, denouncing the Third Patent Amendment Ordinance and anti-people policies of the Central and the State Govt. The coordinating committee of the Chandigarh Committee of CITU and the union of the employees of Union Territory at Chandigarh organized the demonstration.

The huge rally of the UT employees and industrial workers was addressed by Basudev Acharia, MP, the leader of the CPI(M) group in Parliament. Acharia asserted before the rally that promulgation of the retrograde Ordinance amending the Patents Act to the detriment of the interests of the Indian people and the economy is part of the same anti-people policy of neoliberal globalisation being pursued by the UPA Govt. He further told that the Patent Ordinance will severely damage the industry and agriculture of the country and strengthen the grip of multinational companies. The prices of essential medicines will increase manifold beyond the affordability of common people to fatten the profit of foreign companies. On the other hand other aspects of the economic policies like disinvestments, non-implementation of labour laws, cut in subsidies on public utilities and attack on the rights of the employees and workers are also aimed at looting people at the behest of the rich corporates and landlords. The working class movement must resolutely fight against these anti-people designs, Acharia stated.

The rally was also addressed by Balwant Singh, Bijoy Mishra, Raghunath Singh, the President, Working President and General Secretary of Punjab State CITU, Rakesh Kumar, Amrick Singh, Darshan Singh etc from the UT Employees Union and Ram Singh of Palledar Workers' Union. Raghunath Singh while addressing the rally announced that around 3000 workers from Punjab will take part in the demonstration before Parliament to protest against the Patent Ordinance.

On 6th February, a mass convention against the Patents Ordianance was held at Chandigarh at the initiative of CITU and other mass organisations. Dipankar Mukherjee, MP and Secretary CITU addressed the Convention. The Convention also decided to send 3000 workers to join the demonstration before Parliament on 26th February.

DELHI

CONVENTION AGAINST PATENT ORDINANCE

The Joint Convention against the third Patents Amendment Ordinance held at Speaker's hall, New Delhi on February 11, called for a massive demonstration before Parliament on 26th February 2005, the second day of the budget session to press for scraping the Ordinance and formulating an appropriate Patent regime in the interests of the country's people and not the multinational companies.

More than 300 delegates from the central trade unions viz. CITU, AICCTU, UTUC, TUCC and the federations in banks, insurance, central government employees and medical representatives, besides the mass organisations of peasants, agricultural workers, students, youth, women and science forum, attended the convention. A presidium, comprising Sudhir Kumar (CITU), N M Thomas (AICCTU), M L Pandey (TUCC), T A K Sinha (NZIEA) and M. L.

Malkotia (BEFI), conducted the proceedings..

Those who addressed the convention were: M K Pandhe, President CITU, Santosh Roy (AICCTU), P N Dwibedi (TUCC), S R Pillai, President, All India Kisan Sabha, M Malkotia (BEFI), A K Bhatnagar (NZIEA), T K Mitra (FMRAI), Sunit Chopra (AIAWU), Chandran Pillai (Central Govt Employees), Pramila Pandhe (AIDWA), Uma Gupta (AIPWA), Ragesh (SFI), Sreekant (AISA), Aritra Chatterjee (AISB) B Keyala (National Working Group on Patents), S P Shukla, former member, Planning Commission and Amit Sengupta (Delhi Science Forum).

The speakers dealt on the disastrous consequences the retrograde Ordinance will bring about on the industry, agriculture and health care and stressed upon the urgent need for united struggle to pressurize the Govt to scrap the Ordinance and formulate appropriate patent regime in the interests of the people.

The Declaration unanimously adopted by the Convention called upon the toiling and patriotic people of the country to ensure massive mobilization in the demonstration before Parliament on February 26.

Himachal Pradesh

MASS CONVENTION ON PATENTS ORDINANCE

A Peoples' Platform was formed at the initiative of CITU in Himachal Pradesh to fight against the anti-national Patents Ordinance. Besides the CITU unions, the employees federations in banks, insurance, medical and sales representatives, central govt and state govt employees, SFI, DYFI, Kisan Sabha, JMS etc joined the platform. A mass convention was held at Simla on 5-2-2005 in which hundreds of delegates from all the sponsoring organisations joined.

The Declaration adopted by the Convention denounced the Patents Ordinance and resolved to build up mass struggles to pressurize the Govt of India to scrap the Ordinance and formulate appropriate patents-regime in the interests of the country and the people. The Convention was addressed by Dr Kashmir Singh Thakur, General Secretary, HP State CITU, Rakesh Singha, Secretary, HP State CPI(M), Devinder (DYFI), Niraj (SFI), Amar Singh Raghava (Kisan Sabha), Roshan Lal Dogra, Secretary, HP State AITUC, Santosh Kumari (JMS) etc. Dr Amit Sengupta of Delhi Science Forum and RP Singh, Secretary FMRAI also addressed the Convention and explained in details the real damaging import of the Patents Ordinance and stressed upon the need for a countrywide united struggle.

The Convention decided to hold massive demonstration before all the district headquarters in the state on 26th February 2005 when the Delhi based workers will be demonstrating before Parliament on the same issue.

Chhattisgarh

JOINT SEMINAR AGAINST PATENT ORDINANCE PLANNED

The joint meeting of trade unions and mass organisations held on 14th February 2005 at Raipur discussed the damaging import of the third Amendment Ordinance of the Patents Act and decided to unleash intensive statewide campaign against the anti-national move of the UPA Govt. It was decided that on 27th February a state-level seminar will be held on the Patents Ordinance with the participation of leadership of the unions and mass organization and intellectuals to

decide on next course of action. The Joint meeting was attended by M K Nandy, General Secretary, Chhattisgarh State CITU along with Dushyanta Tewari, S K Shukla (RDIEU), Sanjay Parate (Kisan Sabha), Navin Gupta (MPMSRU), S C Bhattacharya (BSNLEU), V Saiprakash (Water Board Employees), G G Barawa (Accounts Office Employees).

BANK EMPLOYEES ON STRUGGLE PATH

The financial sector of the country has been the target of the neoliberal policy regime being pursued by the Govt of the day. Despite opposition by the entire trade union movement, the Govt is moving ahead to raise the FDI cap in private banks to 74 per cent. The public sector banks also are not being spared. The Govt has been making hectic exercise to merge the public sector banks, while simultaneously taking steps to disinvest the Govt equity in those banks to bring them down to 51% for the time being. All these are being planned to create ground for final privatization at the opportune moment.

The bank employees movement have firmly resolved to oppose these disastrous moves. The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) comprising all the employees and officers' associations in the banking sector met on 17th January 2005 to decide the course of united countrywide action.

The bank employees all over the country already staged massive demonstration in all the banks in the country on 18th January 2005. The employees of Dena Bank had gone on complete strike throughout the country on 24th January 2005 in protest of disinvestments of shares.

The UFBU has also given call for centralized rallies, dharnas and demonstrations followed by countrywide strike action in all the banks sometimes in the middle of March during the budget session of Parliament.

EPFO: CITU RESENTS APPOINTMENT OF INVESTMENT CONSULTANT

The Central Board of Trustees of the Employees Provident Fund met on February 21, 2005, chaired by the Labour Minister, K. Chandra Shekar Rao. This meeting, in an yet another deviation from the practice of arriving decisions through a process of consensus, decided by majority to appoint M/s. Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Mumbai to conduct a study 'for identifying new avenues for investment of social security funds and to establish a road map for investment after studying national/international best practices'. This was opposed by the representatives of the CITU, AITUC, HMS, UTUC-LS and the BMS, with the INTUC being the lone supporter of the move from the workers' side. Such a study will only be an exercise in futility as the EPFO is bound by the guidelines issued by the Government of India (read Ministry of Finance) in all matters of investment. Moreover, the terms of reference to the consultants, inter-alia, include 'examining the legal issues involved in investment of PF funds in the modern investment instruments' and 'to design and develop an institutional and legal framework to facilitate investment of social security funds like P.F. etc. in Multilaterally guaranteed international investment instruments'. These are directed only towards diverting social security funds to the speculative share a market and place them at the disposal of international financial agencies. The EPFO will end up spending a fat sum of over Rs. 33 lakh on this score, without any ostensible benefit to the workers of the EPF Organisation itself.

Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, in a statement, disapproved the manner in which the consensual mode of decision-making process in the CBT has been breached for the second time under UPA governance. He has urged the Minister of Labour to uphold the time honoured tradition of arriving at decisions only through consensus.

MAKING BLACK MONEY WHITE

No marks for black money amnesty...

Reports that the Union Finance Minister is taking a "close look" at yet another proposal for amnesty to tax evaders who disclose undeclared income fills us with a sense of déjà vu. When Mr Chidambaram introduced a Voluntary Disclosure of Income Scheme (VDIS) during his earlier tenure in 1997, it was accompanied by assurances that usually accompanied such ideas : of how it would be the ultimate chance for evaders to square their accounts with the law, and how the future evaders would be squarely tackled....with the predictable, "the idea is not to reward tax evaders, but to channel black money into the mainstream."

That was said on the previous occasion and for that matter, on every occasion-six in recent times-when there was a VDIS announcement. Government is about pragmatism and this newspaper has been a strong advocate for it in economic policy. Yet this point deserves to be made at the outset: periodic black money amnesty schemes are a betrayal of the honest tax-payer. Once in a long while, it is permissible. You repeat it at your peril, even where governments are held at higher standards than here....

(Editorial, The Financial Express, 14-02-2005)

India's black economy

Budget 2005-06 could contain steps to tackle the huge black economy in India, reliably estimated to be 40% of the country's gross domestic produce (GDP). The budget loses roughly Rs 4 lakh crore of taxes on this count - taxes that could turn the fiscal deficit into a surplus and provide adequate resources for social and physical infrastructure, the two major pitfalls in achieving an 8% or higher growth rate.

Unfortunately, earlier attempts like the voluntary disclosure schemes have not only been insufficient due to inadequate political will, they have actually encouraged generation of black money. Reduction in tax rates, etc recommended by various committees that have studied the problems in the last 50 yearshave not helped. The highest tax rates has come down from 97.5% in 1971 to the current level of 33%. However, the black economy has grown from 7% to 40% of GDP. Most analysts confuse the sources with the cause and mistakenly suggest the elimination of regulations and controls. Since 1991, many controls have been eliminated, but scams have increased exponentially and so has the black economy. Rather than genuine reform to tackle the black economy, the businessmen are being favoured. The government's approach shows lack of analytical clarity. Black income generation thrives on the triad of corrupt businessmen, politicians and executive. No simple-minded technical suggestion can demolish this nexus. This triad rules and does not want to hurt its own interest. Rather, it would like to keep up the pretence of being active.

(Off the cuff: Arun Kumar, The Financial Express, 14-02-2005)

PANDHE FELICITATED BY SOLAPUR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

The Solapur Municipal Corporation felicitated M K Pandhe, President, CITU, on January 6, 2005 in Hutatma Memorial Hall. Nalini Chandele, Mayor of Solapur, characterised Pandhe as a proud son of the city of Solapur who rose to the position of President of CITU. She also noted his contribution in the political field, which led to his becoming a member of the Polit Bureau of CPI(M). Chandele expressed pride that Pandhe got doctorate in economics on the trade union movement in Solapur under the guidance of Prof D R Gadgil, a prominent Indian economist. He also got fellowship to study the people's upsurge in Solapur in 1930, which led to the declaration of Martial Law by the British Government. The citation also appreciated Pandhe's contribution in development of ties of friendship between Solapur, the city of Dr Kotnis who led his life in China during anti Japanese struggle in 1943 and Shichyachnang in China where memorial of Dr Kotnis has been built. Leaders of all political parties in the Solapur Municipal Corporation spoke on the occasion and expressed their agreement with the citation presented by the Mayor.

M K Pandhe, while speaking on the occasion, thanked the Solapur Municipal Corporation for expressing kind words about him.

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

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Nov.' 04	Dec.' 04	State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Nov.' 04	Dec.' 04
Andhra	1	Gudur	501	500	Maharastra	38	Mumbai	613	612
Pradesh	2	Guntur	513	513		39	Nagpur	537	535
	3	Hyderabad	517	517		40	Nasik	569	571
	4	Visakhapatnam	509	509		41	Pune	582	577
	5	Warangal	536	538		42	Solapur	534	534
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	442	437	Orissa	43	Barbil	463	459
	7	Guwahati	525	516		44	Rourkela	465	457
	8	Labac-Silchar	419	412	Punjab	45	Amritsar	462	461
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	453	448		46	Ludhiana	487	480
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	442	434	Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	527	516
Bihar	11	Monghyr	488	482		48	Jaipur	476	475
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	470	464	Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	563	559
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	514	511		50	Coimbatore	511	505
	14	Bhavnagar	532	526		51	Coonoor	512	507
	15	Rajkot	474	472		52	Madurai	511	508
	16	Surat	498	491		53	Salem	484	486
	17	Vadodra	490	486		54	Tiruchirapally	562	555
Haryana	18	Faridabad	541	535	Uttar	55	Agra	491	482
	19	Yamunanagar	505	494	Pradesh	56	Ghaziabad	536	529
J & K	20	Srinagar	607	613		57	Kanpur	503	490
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	488	482		58	Saharanpur	487	474
	22	Jharia	425	425		59	Varanasi	542	535
	23	Kodarma	452	448	West	60	Asansol	496	493
	24	Noamundi	474	474	Bengal	61	Darjeeling	443	437
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	490	479		62	Durgapur	590	581
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	516	515		63	Haldia	619	603
	27	Belgaum	569	571		64	Howrah	610	592
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	532	528		65	Jalpaiguri	448	439
	29	Mercara	498	499		66	Kolkata	578	562
Kerala	30	Alwaye	524	527		67	Raniganj	462	455
	31	Mundakayam	511	510	Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	575	572
	32	Quilon	539	550	Delhi	69	Delhi	613	605
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	583	595	Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	587	591
Madhya	34	Balaghat	466	460					
Pradesh	35	Bhopal	542	537					
	36	Indore	526	519					
	37	Jabalpur	522	512			ALL-INDIA	525	521

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State		Centre	November 2004	December 2004
Andhra Pradesh	1	Kethgudem	523	524
Himachal Pradesh	2	Himachal Pradesh	498	491
Rajasthan	3	Bhilwara	516	513
Madhya Pradesh	4	Chhindwara	468	462
Tripura	5	Tripura	483	467
Goa	6	Goa	618	620

TSUNAMI AND AFTER-THE TRADE UNION INITIATIVE

After the Tsunami disaster struck the coastal regions of Andaman, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala on 26TH December taking a heavy toll on lakhs of human lives, washing away the residences making several million homeless, CITU called upon its affiliated units to jump into the relief and rescue operations of the people in the affected areas. CITU also gave a call for collecting relief funds for relief and rehabilitation of the affected people and opened a separate bank account titled "CITU TSUNAMI VICTIMS' RELIEF FUND" for that purpose. As an immediate measure, CITU sent Rs 1,00,000 and Rs 50,000 to its State Committees at Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh respectively and made provisions for Rs 1,00,000 for immediate relief work at Andaman.

At the initiative of the CITU State Committees at Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Andaman, the trade union activists took active part in the relief operations immediately after the tsunami strikes in association with other mass organisations. The TU activists in Kerala besides taking part in relief work in the affected areas of Kerala also volunteered and contributed for relief work in the Kanyakumari region of Tamilnadu, it being the border of Kerala. West Bengal State CITU as an immediate measure rushed relief materials worth Rs 2,00,000 to Andaman. The workers in all the four affected states also contributed generously to the relief-fund drive taken by the CITU State Committees in those four states.

Throughout the country, the working people responded magnificently to the call for relief funds. The workers and employees in public sector units both under the central and state Governments and also workers of many major private sector companies donated one-day's wage to the relief funds. Side by side, fund collection drives are being carried on by the unions all over the country. After the Tsunami strikes, the stage of clearing the corpses, immediate relief and rescue etc is almost over. Lakhs of people have become homeless, several lakhs have lost their livelihoods and lakhs of children have turned orphan. The fishermen's community who suffered most with their boats and implements being washed away. The rehabilitation of those people, providing home to the homeless, jobs to jobless and shelter and security to the orphans etc are the stupendous tasks before which cannot be effectively taken care of without the active assistance of the working people of the country. The working people and their unions thus have taken up the challenge and are collective funds for relief and rehabilitation of the Tsunami affecteds in full vigour.

The list of contributors to CITU Tsunami Relief Fund is given hereunder. Other State Committees are requested to send urgently their contributions.

1 Bharat Electronics Employees Union, Ghaziabad	5,000.00
2 CITU, Orissa State Committee	31,500.00
3 Collection from CITU Centre Comrades	5,380.00
4 CITU, Chhatishgarh State Committee	5,000.00
5 BHEL Kamgar Union, Hardwar, Uttaranchal	6,000.00
6 Ms. Meenakshi Marwah, New Delhi	2,500.00
7 Com. B.D.Prasad, Bokaro Steel Union, Jharkhand	3,500.00
8 All India Road Transport Federation, Thiruvananthapuram	10,000.00
9 Mr. Rana Siddiqui	6,000.00
10 J.K.Tyre Karmachari Ekta Union (CITU), Rajasthan	187,190.00
11 Phal Sabji Vikreta Vyapar Sangh, Rajasthan	5,000.00
12 Bharat Earth Movers Limited, Karnataka	5,000.00
13 Construction Workers Federation of India, Kolkata	5,000.00
14 Com.B.T.Virendra Kumar, Karnataka	1,872.00
15CITU, Assam State Committee	20,000.00
16 B.H.E. Kamgar Trade Union,Bhopal, M.P.	2,000.00
17 Com. S.K.Dhar	100.00
18 All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers	30,850.00
19 National Coal Organisation (G.O.I.) Employees Association, Ranchi	7,000.00
20 C.F.J.V. Workers Ekta Union, H.P.	29,000.00
21 Larjee Project Movers Union, H.P.	72,450.00
22 Steel Workers Federation of India, W.B.	10,000.00
23 Karnataka Workers Union	56,632.00
24 All - China Federation of Trade Unions	1,090,000.00
25 Keonjhar Industrial Workers Union, Orissa	5,000.00
26 Suman Dandass	500.00
27 Lal Jhanda Hero Cycle Majdoor Union, Punjab	40,000.00
28 Lal Jhanda Rockman Cycle mazdoor Union, Punjab	19,000.00
29 Lal Jhanda Highway Workers Union, Punjab	4,500.00
30 Lal Jhanda Avon Bycycle Component Union, Punjab	4,000.00
31 Lal Jhanda Avon Cycle Mazdoor Union, Punjab	12,000.00
32 Lal Jhanda Vyas Eng. Majdoor Union, Punjab	9,000.00
33 Lal Jhanda K.W. Majdoor Union, Punjab	8,500.00
34 Lal Jhanda K.W. Rim Majdoor Union, Punjab	2,500.00
35 Amritsar CITU, Punjab	10,500.00
36 Lal Jhanda (Mangli Div.) Hero Cycle Workers Union, Punjab	13,000.00
37 Aska Co-Operative Sugar Industry Sramik Sangh, Orissa	2165.00
38 CITU, Sirmour District Committee, H.P.	11,800.00
39 Himachal Hotel Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union, H.P.	6,000.00
Total as on 22-2-2005	1745439.00

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A CASE OF HOW NOT TO HONOUR A COMMITMENT!

The UPA government had committed in their NCMP: "Interest rates will provide incentive both to investors and savers, particularly pensioners and senior citizens. The UPA government will never take decisions on the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) without consultations and approval of the EPF board".

The meeting of the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) held during June -August 2004, in four sittings, had made an unprecedented move by taking a majority decision of recommending an interim rate of interest at 8.5 per cent payable to the subscribers of EPF for the year 2004-05. The meeting also sought Finance Ministry's clearance for the notifications of the interest rate (at 9.5 per cent) for the years 2002-03 and 2003-04. The CBT had also recommended enhancement of the rate of interest on Special Deposit Scheme (SDS) as well as to allow reinvestment of interest on SDS in SDS itself.

The matter had been kept lingering by the government till an announcement was made by the Finance Minister, after a meeting with the Prime Minister on February 2, 2005. The media had reported (on Feb. 3): "The Government tonight decided to hike the interest rate on Employees Provident Fund to 9.5 per cent from the current 8.5 per cent with effect from 2002-03" The next day the media carried an official statement that 'a notification on the Centre's decision to give 9.5 per cent interest on the deposits of the EPF subscribers will be issued by the Labour Ministry today (Feb.3)'. The Ministry of Labour had come out with a lengthy press release, again stating, "The notification to this effect will be issued by the Labour Ministry"! The release also stated "The increase in the rate of interest for the current financial year would be brought up before the Central Board of Trustees, EPFO". The Labour Ministry proceeded to narrate the history of interest rate for these three years, specifically indicating that at 9.5 % rate of interest would raise the deficit to Rs. 927.15 crores!

A spokesperson of the Ministry of Finance (Department of Expenditure) subsequently clarified that there was no question of the government extending any subsidy to sustain the 9.5 % interest-rate and the interest rate on SDS would not be enhanced (from the present 8 per cent). This in effect meant that the EPFO would have to fend for itself to find ways to cover the deficit of Rs. 927.15 crores for the current year. It may be recalled that the finance ministry placed its view in writing before the CBT at its earlier meetings that 'the current interest rate (9.5 per cent) is clearly unsustainable'.

Now, the question that begs answer from the Finance Ministry is 'how it has come to conclude that this 9.5 per cent interest rate could be sustained by the EPFO?' And if the Government decision as announced by the Finance Minister is to give effect to the 9.5 per cent interest rate from 2002-03, why is it that the Finance Ministry has not cleared the notifications in respect of the past two years? As the employers of the exempted establishments are required to match the interest rate declared by the EPFO, irrespective of whether the yield on the corpus is adequate or not, why that concept should not be applicable to the Government of India, as an employer, to pay the same rate of interest (9.5 per cent) on the GPF balances of the government employees. If the 9.5 per cent rate is considered as appropriate return for the EPF subscribers, those subscribing to GPF, PPF and small savings instruments also deserve to be paid interest at the same interest. This leads to the inevitable course that the government should revise upwards the administered rate of interest from the present 8.5 per cent.

Even though the CBT, EPF met on 21st February, 2005, the interest rate issue was not on its agenda! It will meet again on 20 March, 2005. In fine, the EPF interest rate issue is a clear demonstration, by the UPA governance, of how not to honour a commitment.

The CITU has urged the Prime Minister to spell out clearly how and when the Government proposes to give effect to its present decision. The CITU holds that the present trend of an all round increase in the borrowing and lending rates in the banking system very well justifies the trade union demand for restoration of the erstwhile 12 per cent rate of interest itself.

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Editor: M K Pandhe