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THE WORKING CLASS

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RAJASTHAN:

HEROIC VICTORY FOR PEASANTS' STRUGGLE

The heroic and determined struggle of the peasants in Rajasthan under the leadership of the All India Kisan Sabha has ultimately forced the BJP led state government to concede their demands. The agitation initially started in Sriganga Nagar and nearby districts in the First Phase area of the Indira Gandhi Canal Project, on the issue of water for irrigation. Thousands of peasants participated in the agitation and six peasants lost their lives in the police firing. The Vasundhara Raje government had to come down and give some assurances. But the government went back on its assurances, it also raised the power tariff. Adding insult to injury, the state government exempted the big industrial houses from the tariff hike.

The AIKS took up these burning issues of the peasants and organised a two month statewide movement. 50 mass meetings, in which thousands of farmers participated, were organised throughout the state. Dharnas and demonstrations were held in the *tehsil* headquarters. The offices of the district collectors in Sikar and Nagore were gheraoed. This gave a momentum to the entire movement and thousands of peasants declared that they would not pay the hiked tariff. The movement spread to several districts like Jaipur, Jhunjhunu, Churu etc and even from districts where the AIKS had no units, peasants invited Kisan Sabha leaders and participated in the movement. The state government tried to suppress the agitation by resorting to arrests, solitary confinement of the leaders like Hetram Beniwal, and others, filing of illegal cases etc.

As a culmination of this campaign, the Kisan Sabha gave a call for *'Mahapadav'* (grand camping programme) in Jaipur from 1st September 2005. Around one lakh peasants from 15 districts converged in Jaipur in their camel carts and tractors and other vehicles bringing their own food, cooking utensils etc and camped in the state capital. They organised rallies and marches in the capital. While the peasants camped in the capital, the workers mobilised by the CITU organised conventions and solidarity actions throughout the state. Students, youth and women all over the state supported their struggle.

A remarkable feature of the struggle was the unity of the peasants. In Rajasthan, dominated by feudal traditions, the peasants rose above the caste and religious affiliations. Women participated in thousands in the *rasta roko*. The struggle for water and power took the form of a mass movement all over the state.

The unity and discipline of the peasants under the leadership of the AIKS impressed the urban people. The anti hike struggle became a common cause of the urban and rural masses. The rally of the peasants was aptly named 'Unity Rally' of the peasants and urban masses. While the Left Parties supported the struggle from the beginning, around 10 Congress MLAs were also compelled to support the struggle though after some hesitation. The struggle also brought forth the differences within the BJP. While the RSS was advising sterner measures against the peacefully agitating peasants, the BJP government had to undertake some restraint. Ultimately the state government held talks with the leaders of AIKS and agreed to put in abeyance the increase in the tariff hike. It has also agreed supply full voltage power for 8 hours in a day during the rabi season. The leaders of the struggle were released.

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THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

OCTOBER 2005

Last Bite

Shekhar Gurera



... Try to understand, we'll cover-up in petrol prices!

Courtesy: The Pioneer

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EDITORIAL

MESSAGE OF SEPTEMBER 29

By the time this issue of 'The Working Class' would be in the hands of our readers, the nation would have witnessed the countrywide strike of September 29 called by the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions. This strike was against the persistence of the UPA government with the anti-people, anti-labour economic policies, which have played havoc with the livelihood of the people. It is significant to note that the 16-point demands, in pursuit of which the strike took place, had reflected the pressing demands of the entire masses of the country. Besides the strike by workers and employees, kisans, agricultural workers, youth, students and women had also planned to stage several militant action programmes including *'road roko', 'rasta roko'*, etc.

Intriguing is the utter insensitivity that has marked the response of the Government of India, *rather the lack of any response*.

Meanwhile, fresh burdens have been imposed by the fifth hike affected by the UPA regime on the prices of petrol and diesel. Meaningful and practical proposals mooted by the Left Parties to avoid this huge burden on the people had been ignored, with the government having nothing to justify its stance.

The Union Cabinet has moved for corporatisation of Security Press and government mints, with eventual privatisation in mind. The process to privatise the Delhi and Mumbai airports, in the name of modernisation through the private-public-partnership is vigourously being taken forward. The chorus for labour law changes had been revived, reportedly at the instance of the Prime Minister himself. Attempts are on to release a new series of Consumer Price Index with 2001 as the base year, while the unanimous concerns voiced by the Central Trade Unions Organisations remain to be addressed. Scores of draft Bills on the unorganised sector workers, fail to incorporate suggestions mooted by the trade unions.

The Human Development Report – 2005, released by the UNDP is a revealing telltale of the utter failure of the economic reforms process, in all respect. Yet, the rich and affluent gloat on the fanciful climb of the SENSEX figures and the government swears 'no scope of scam' in this Bull Run.

It is worth recalling the question that was up in everyone's lips during the run up to the general elections last year, when the NDA bigwigs trumpeted the 'India Shining' slogan: **"For Whom India is Shining?"** Now, we turn to the UPA regime and query them whether they will take any lesson from the angry verdict of the masses that routed the NDA dispensation? It seems they are reluctant to learn. Sustained struggle in resistance to the disastrous policies of economic liberalisation will force them to learn the much-needed lesson. That is the message of Septemebr 29, 2005!

CHANGE IN LABOUR LAWS:

RESIST THESE SURREPTITIOUS MOVES!

Tapan Sen

A surreptitious move is afoot to overhaul the labour laws in favour of the employers. The target is to completely enslave the working class by introducing "hire & fire" regime in the workplaces and casualising the entire workforce.

The Government at the centre does not have the mandate for the same. Not only that, the National Common Minimum Programme adopted by the UPA combine stipulated that "No automatic hire and fire; dialogue to be pursued with industry and trade unions regarding changes in labour laws while fully protecting the interests of workers." It also envisaged that the 'Industrial Disputes Act' would not be tinkered upon.

But still the move is on in various forms. In the joint meeting of trade unions and the labour minister (31st March 2004) the Labour Secretary, spoke about 'hire & fire' provisions for establishments employing up to 300 while thanks giving. CITU immediately protested this.

Two Bills, both pertaining to basic labour rights have been introduced in Parliament without any consultation with the trade unions. The Bill titled "The Labour Laws (Exemption from Furnishing Returns and Maintaining Registers by Certain Establishments) Amendment and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2005" provides for exemptions to employers in furnishing various returns, registers, statements, mostly pertaining to employees and employment conditions, under various labour laws thus empowering the employers to violate them in a big way. Moreover, the Bill empowers the Governments both at the centre and in the states to exempt any establishment from whatever obligations remain with the employers even after various exemptions under the newly legislated Act.

Another Bill titled, "Small and Medium Enterprises Development Bill 2005" contains dangerous provisions for taking away a large section of workers engaged in the Small and Medium Enterprises out of the purview of most of the crucial labour laws. The small and medium enterprises has been so defined in the Bill both in terms of investment and employment, that it will take away the majority section of the workforce in the organised sector itself.

In the second phase, the Labour Ministry has recently circulated a note reportedly prepared by the Prime Minister's Office among the some members of Parliament and the State Governments. This contains certain retrograde proposals to amend Industrial Disputes Act and Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act. The proposals are all in tune with the urge for labour-market flexibility as expressed by the Prime Minister in his recent utterances to Mckinsey journal.

The note circulated by the Labour ministry, inter alia, contained proposals:

- To amend Industrial Disputes Act to allow retrenchment and closure in all establishments employing up to 300 without any prior permission
- To empower the governments to exempt all industrial undertakings from all or any provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act
- To allow deployment of contract worker/employee in all permanent jobs pertaining to regular repair/maintenance of plants, machineries and equipments and other regularly supportive jobs, loading-unloading, sweeping-cleaning, security, transport, information-technology, education and training and in all the jobs in export oriented units etc
- Doing away with the system of Inspection on implementation of labour laws and instead reliance on "self-certification" by the employer (to be treated as prima-facie compliance of labour laws), that too not mandatory and need not be signed by CEO of the establishment.

The NDA Government during its last days issued the executive order through Gazette notification to introduce provision of "fixed term employment" (by amending the rules under Standing Orders

Act) empowering the employers to employ workers for fixed terms and retrench them without any compensation at the end of the term. Entire trade union movement opposed such notification. After UPA's coming to power, in response to a demand made on the floor of Parliament in July 2004, the then Labour Minister, Sis Ram Ola, announced that the said notification will be rescinded. But that announcement made on the floor of Parliament was not given effect to. And after passage of more than one year, the note circulated by the Labour Ministry noted: "...there has been pressure on the government to roll back this amendment (on Fixed term Employment) on the ground that it would discourage regular employment. Consequently an assurance was given in the Parliament by the then Labour Minister Sri Sis Ram Ola in 2004 that this facility of including fixed term employment would be rescinded. It has not been rolled back as yet and it is proposed not to do so in public interest."

The game plan is that the employers will be freed from all their obligations under labour law. And simultaneously, the employers, who are the biggest violators of labour laws are being allowed "self-certification' facility.

These moves assume further significance in the context of the belated convening of the 40th session of the Indian Labour Conference on December 9 – 10, 2005. (It is to be noted that the Indian Labour Conference session was postponed last year and it has been reconvened after a whole year!) The agenda includes "Amendment of Labour Laws", besides the issues related to unorganised sector workers. The Ministry of Labour in its notice has proposed to constitute two separate "Conference Committees" on this agenda alone – one on "Amendment of Wage Related Laws" and another on " Amendments relating to industrial relations".

The working class movement cannot accept such a situation lying down. We denounce such conspiratorial move of the UPA regime. The working class of the country must voice their determined resolve to defeat the nefarious design of the Government.

SINGAPORE: SPENDING FOR EDUCATION

During his budget speech on February 28, 2005, P. Chidambaram, Minister of Finance said: "At the recent meeting of the Finance Ministers of G-7 countries, to which India and China were invited, the Finance Minister of China looked in my direction and told the gathering that China had received US$ 500 billion worth of foreign investment since China opened its economy in 1980. " The context was obvious – to push further for indiscriminate opening for the FDI.

But, here we have another voice, which we would very much wish P.Chidambaram to listen. Singapore's Minister for EducationTharman Shanmugaratnam was in Chennai. In an interview to The Hindu, dated September 14, 2005, he answered a few questions. We quote from the interview:

"About four per cent the proportion of your GDP that goes towards educational spending. Defence comes at five per cent, the highest component. Health and education continue to be top priorities. There is no free education as such though heavy subsidies and bursaries are in place. **Singapore education is entirely government-funded and there is no private education stream.** We allow some independent schools to charge higher fees to improve resources. But that does not mean any compromise on the delivery of education. Some of our average, mainstream government schools can compare to or better what the West has to offer. **We have never been fiscally constrained in spending on education.** (Emphasis added)

".... We have made it compulsory for every child to be enrolled in primary school. We even go by birth records to achieve this. Social counsellors visit every family persuading them to enrol children in schools and, after a point, we even get tough with those parents who resist. We also ensure that children with severe disabilities are enrolled in special schools. The basic premise is to ensure that students are given something they can cope with and do well."

Surely, spending on education is social sector expenditure. Will our Finance Minister borrow a page from the copy book of our next door neighbour?

UNDP REPORT-2005

UNABATED DOWNHILL PATH

Ardhendu Dakshi

Picture One: German novelist Bruno Apitz has immortalised the saga of saving a child's life in a German concentration camp in his novel Naked Among Wolves . The tiny toddler was saved by the prisoners from the preying eyes of Nazi soldiers in unbelievable ways while facing brutal torture, hunger, electric shock, even death. When the Soviet army crashed the gates, the semi-dead prisoners came out rushing rejoicing not for their freedom but they held the child up as their trophy. The child was saved, finally. Thank goodness, fascism was defeated.

Picture Two: UNDP report - 2005 tells us another story, not of one more child but about children for whom nobody writes novels. 1200 children all over the world, specially in the developing countries, are dying every hour, uncared, unknown, unreported by the glare of media. 1200 every hour, nearly 9 lakh every month, more than a crore every year. UNDP report says it will take 3 Tsunamis every month to match these figures. Those innocent tiny toddlers die silently because of the single killer—POVERTY, which is preventable. Tsunami is not preventable but relief can be reached promptly to the survivors, the victims. The rich do not care to look at the hapless children of the poor. Some of them die of diarrhoea because there is no clean water, some others die of pneumonia because there is not enough clothes, but biggest killer is hunger, there is no food even for nominal sustenance. The world is so poor that it cannot give them two morsels of food everyday. They die before they reach the age of 5.

This world is governed by "Democracies"!

Indictment

UNDP-2005 is not a mere document full of statistics. It is an indictment against the rich and powerful who have indulged only in hypocrisy, double talk and shedding of crocodile tears for the poor of the world.

The foundation of United Nations was marked by the speech by Secretary of State of America that "The war has to be fought on two fronts, first front is for security and the second front for freedom from want". American Presidents, even George W Bush, never failed to make high sounding pledges to remove poverty. And what they have done in practice? UNDP 2005 says – since 1990 per capita income of rich countries, particularly America has gone up by 6070 dollars per year, and by this time their aid to the poor has come down by 1 dollar per head per year.

For every dollar of extra aid to the poor the rich countries add 10 dollars to military budget. They give roughly 1 billion dollar to poor countries as help towards agriculture per year while they pay a subsidy of 1 billion dollar per day, to their own farmers. In actual terms, United States of America, Japan and Italy, have reduced aid to the poor over the years. In 1990 rich countries promised to spend 0.7 per cent of their Gross National Income for the aid of the poor. After 12 years, the total aid has not crossed 0.3 percent, may be it is close to 0.25 per cent of their gross national income. In Indian terms 25 paise out of 1 hundred rupees. It is not aid but alms. In this unequal world it is the poor peoples money that goes up to the rich but does not come down and we remain poor. The report says that 500 rich individuals have a combined income greater than the income of 41 crore 60 lakh poor people put together. A fraction of their income that could change the lives of the poor. 100 crore people have no safe drinking water, 260 crore people live in filthy squalor amid human wastes because there is no sanitation worth the name.

The poor suffer the indignity throughout their life. This report is an indictment in strongest terms against the rich and powerful.

AIDS and Aid

Americas greatest contribution to mankind in recent times is HIV/AIDS. Developed in laboratory, first administered in the body of convicted criminals, finally the virus has found its way out and

is now killing millions of people worldwide. Now America and Americans are posing as saviours and are giving a lot of aid to fight AIDS. But what is the reality? In America 100% HIV/ AIDS patients can get treatment, in Africa it is less than 4% and in India it is barely 5% because the medicines, are so costly. AIDS can be good business, too. The impact of HIV/AIDS is becoming severe worldwide. **Human un-development has started.**

AIDS is pulling down Human Development in Sub-Saharan Africa where there are less people to work in fields or factories because from 1990 to date 2 crores of people have died. Now it is spreading fast in East Europe and former Soviet Union, India, China, Latin America. Soon 1 lakh people will die helplessly everyday. UNDP report says that they hope to reverse the trend only by 2015 if a serious effort can start now. But there is no sign of abatement of this pandemic as yet.

Hypocrisy unlimited

In the year 2000 leaders of 189 countries under the auspices of United Nations made some solemn promises to the poor of the world through the Millennium Declaratoin-2000. The 8 point pledges are known as Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the target date of achieving the goals had been fixed at year 2015.

It was decided that the progress would be reviewed in September 2005.

They have reviewed it. By the good grace of the rich countries the targets have been reduced to half, so the new target date will have to be fixed. By the present trend it can safely be said that the new date may be in 22nd century.

The report has exposed the myth that globalisation, open liberalized trade, even development aid which, more often than not, is tied with strings, can lead to prosperity and human development. "For the majority of the countries globalisation story is one of divergence and marginalisation," the report says.

The Shame of India

India, the information technology giant, the would be super power by 2020, is at 127th position among 177 nations, 34 steps below Sri Lanka, 64 steps below Brazil and 42 steps below China. The startling fact is that in terms of child birth, child mortality rate Bangladesh has shown remarkable progress, much better than India and our progress is slowing down.

15 years back India decided to immunize 100% of children. In 2005 the achievement is only 42%. The result is that one in 5 children dying in the world is an Indian. 25 lakh children die every year before they are 5.

On the economic front rural economy is stagnating, rural wage is falling and jobless growth has led to serious unemployment.

The most dangerous trend is jobless growth. During 1980s and 1990s for every 1% rise in Gross Domestic Production (GDP) there was 3% rise in employment. The value of 1% GDP was around Rs 16000 crores on average in those years. At the constant price level now 1% GDP means extra Rs 25000 crores of production but UNDP-2005 says that job growth in 21st century is zero. All the wealth generated is being cornered by a few who have become fabulously rich, whereas every year 50 to 60 lakh boys and girls join the queue in the job market.

India has the shameful distinction of being the most brutal with our girl children. 1 lakh 30 thousand girls are "missing" every year, either terminated from their mothers' womb, or by pushing salt through their mouth at birth, or by not calling for the doctor when they are sick. Girls are neglected in every sphere, in the matters of education, health care, jobs, in every aspect boys get a better treatment than girls – a crime that no other country is at par with India.

UNDP-2005 has exposed the real world around us, the world of 300 crores of people suffering from poverty, hunger, disease, discrimination, living a sub-human life, waiting patiently for justice. They are not victims of fate but victims of the system that is cruel, capricious and careless. Media, as a ritual, make a small report, often distorted, that tries to hide more than to tell the truth. To them, development means shopping malls, modern airports, and expressways to drive their cars.

It is our duty to see that real development of India takes place by all means. UNDP-2005 has steeled our resolve.

ON UNORGANISED SECTOR WORKERS' BILL

All the Central Trade Union Organisations (CTUOs) viz. the AICCTU, AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS, INTUC, TUCC, and UTUC (the UTUC- LS has sent in a separate communication but in agreement with the other CTUOs) had sought synchronising of the ongoing efforts to arrive at a consensus draft on the Unorganised Sector Workers' Bill.

The CTUOs had jointly offered their detailed comments on the draft Bill circulated during June, 2003 and September and October 2004.

Recently, the Ministry of Labour sought comments on two other drafts, one in June 2005 and another in August 2005. While the first one contained a further amended version of the Bill, the latter forwarded a draft prepared by the National Advisory Council, which had been considering the proposal.

The first communication claimed that the draft Billl had been revised and suggestions of CTUs had been incorporated in the draft Bill to the extent possible.

Meanwhile, two different Bills – one on Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security and another on Unorganised Sector Workers' Conditions of Work and Livelihood Promotion – have been put up on the website of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS). Obviously, the NCEUS has opted to structure the draft Bill in an altogether different fashion.

SYNTHESIS NEEDED

Noting these developments, the CTUOs in their joint letter dated Sptemebr 2, 2005, conveyed the following observations to the Ministry of Labour:

Though the Government of India has accommodated, in the revised draft Bill, a few of the suggestions put forth by the CTUOs in their earlier communications, yet, several other important suggestions relating to the core aspects of the legislation and the working conditions of the unorganised sector labour have not found a place in the revised draft.

The draft put up by the National Advisory Council addresses mainly the social security concerns and seeks to outline a framework and a structure for providing the same to the unorganised sector workers.

On the other hand, the two drafts put up by the NCEUS on its website have in our opinion correctly bifurcated the twin aspects of Social Security and Conditions of Work and Livelihood of the unorganised sector workers, with further distinctions between agricultural and non-agricultural workers insofar as the latter aspect is concerned. The NCEUS draft on 'Unorganised Sector Workers' Conditions of Work and Livelihood Promotion Bill', however, needs to be improved with more specific and concrete provisions on 'protection against retrenchment/ dismissal', appropriate compensation therefor, working hours, labour inspection and appropriate dispute/grievance settlement machinery, punishment for contravention/violation of the Act etc.

There is a need to synthesise the two draft Bills of the NCEUS with the revised draft Bill of the Ministry of Labour (forwarded with the June 2005 communication) and dovetail the unanimous inputs provided by the CTUOs into it. While doing so, utmost care should be taken to factor in the unanimous conclusions arrived at the National Seminar on Unorganised Sector Labour held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on November 7 – 8, 2002 and the comments and suggestions so far furnished by the Central Trade Union Organisations jointly and severally.

OMISSIONS POINTED OUT

In this communication the CTUOs have drawn attention to some of the glaring omissions in the revised draft Bill, as under, which need to be sorted out through in depth discussions with the CTUOs.

* In the preamble to the Bill the word "protect" should be prefixed to "regulate".
* In the definition of the word "employer", "contractors" as employers and "principle employer" also should be included and appropriately defined.
* The functions of the Central Board (in Chapter II) shall incorporate the following: "The Board shall perform the following functions, namely

–

a) Advising the Central Govt., either on its own motion or as the Central Government may call upon it, on

i. Administration and coordination of this Act, at national level

ii. Application of various provisions of this Act to any particular class or classes of workers in any scheduled employment or classes of employments and their employers and framing schemes to be notified under this Act.

iii. Receiving from the Central government contributions, grants and loans and application of the same for its own purposes and for allocation to the concerned Fund.

iv. Administration of the concerned Fund directly or through a Board of Trustees.

* The application of funds, as laid down in Section 25 (2) (a) and (c) under Chapter III includes the salaries, allowances and other remuneration of the members, officers and employees of the Board and any other expenses of the Board. These should be borne by the Central Government.

* Similar provisions, as above, should be incorporated in relation to establishment of State Boards in Sections 20 and 21.

* The composition of the Board should expressly provide for representatives of the Central Trade Union Organisations, to be nominated by them. The NGOs have been accorded equal number of representatives as the central trade union organisations. This does not reflect the ground reality that the NGOs are mostly not Membership Based Organisations and in any way they do not match the central trade unions in terms of the membership of the unorganised sector workers. This anomalous provision should be corrected. If at all there is need to associate the NGOs, any academician or expert working with the NGOs can be considered as associate member or consultant.

* There should be provision for initial allocation of funds by the Central Government for the successful launch of the schemes under the legislation(s).

* The entire cost of administration of the Act(s) should be borne by the Central Government at least for the first five years and the position could be reviewed and revised commitment worked out after this specified period.

* The minimum basic welfare and pensionary benefits like minimum pension per month, medical benefits, provision for premature pension payment owing to disability arising out of accident or ailment, accident insurance etc., to be extended through the schemes under the Act(s), should specifically be incorporated in the Bill itself.

* Wherever the employer is not identifiable and/ or the worker is compelled to change employment frequently, the contribution of the employer should be borne by the appropriate Government or the Board or shared by the Central and State Government on a 3:1 ratio.

* The Central Government should allocate at least 3% of the GDP annually for social security and it should progressively increase till satisfied level in social security is achieved.

* There should be dispute resolution mechanism in the Act itself for resolving the grievances of the unorganised sector workers.

* The contribution from the unorganised sector workers cannot be as a percentage of wages but should only be specified nominal amount towards registration/annual renewal fee.

* There should be appropriate provisions for refund of the contributions by the workers on leaving the scheme as well as for portability of the contributions on their migration to other schemes like those under the Employees' Provident Fund act, 1952.

* The suggestions made by the CTUOs regarding imposition of penalties, for offences under and/ or contravention of the provisions of the act(s), should be incorporated in the draft Bill itself.

* The workers in the unorganised sector should also be extended the benefits under other industrial legislations like Industrial Disputes Act, Trade Union Act, Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, Contract Labour (R&A) Act, Maternity Benefit Act, Employees' Provident Fund Act, Employees State Insurance Act etc. and the applicability of /coverage under these legislations should be made universal at least in phases.

WHAT AILS COAL INDUSTRY?

M K Pandhe

Non-availability of land is a big problem for open cast mines. The decision of government not to give job to persons whose land is taken over by the management is resulting in several disputes with land losers. There is a minimum scale, below which opencast mine does not become viable. However, the managements are taking a shortsighted policy and continue to ignore the development of underground mines. This is affecting the growth of coal production in the country. The neglect of underground production and emphasis on open cast production during the last 5 years reflects the slow growth of coal production in the country.

RAW COAL PRODUCTION BY CIL
(2000-01 to 2004-05)

(in million tonnes)

Year	Underground	Open cast	Total
2000-01	50.55	217.59	268.14
2001-02	49.22	230.43	279.65
2002-03	48.42	242.27	290.69
2003-04	47.45	258.92	306.36
2004-05	47.04	276.53	323.58

Unless Coal India gives necessary importance to develop underground production the requirement of country cannot be fulfilled. In China bulk of the coal production is from underground mines, which only highlights the sad neglect done by CIL to develop underground coal production to meet national requirement.

UNSAFE MINING CONDITIONS

The violation of safety rules by the Coal India management is leading to loss of precious life of coal miners every year. During January-June 2005 alone there have been 35 fatal accidents responsible for killing of 37 coal miners. This excludes 14 fatalities at Central Sounda mine in CCL. Thus the total fatalities in the first half of the year 2005 amount to 51.

Repeated Court of Enquiries have pointed out the causes of the accidents but due to callous attitude towards safety rules and non-observation of the same safety rule by the CIL management accidents occurs frequently. The number of workers getting injured in mine accidents is in hundreds undermining the unsafe conditions in the coalmines. Many accidents are not reported which makes the official statistics gross underestimations.

The Safety Board in Coal India is a defunct body and management is not making serious efforts to develop internal safety organisation. The Pit Safety Committees and provision for workers inspectors have become mere rituals in coal industry due to the attitude of the managements. Thus the unsafe mining conditions have become a bottleneck in higher rate of growth of coal output.

ILLEGAL COAL MINING

Trade union leaders pointed out that millions of tonnes of coal is produced in the country illegally with full knowledge of Coal India management and local administration. Since several unemployed persons are getting a source of livelihood in these illegal mines it has become a social problem in the coal belt. The coal is sold illegally in the market but the local administration is behaving like a silent spectator. The contractors who indulge in this practice are offering kickbacks to coal managements and local administration, which enables them to carry forward their illegal activity without any penal action.

As if this is not enough, theft of coal is taking place in broad daylight in most of the coal companies. It is stated that about Rs 1000 crore worth coal is pilfered in coalmines with full knowledge of Coal India and local administration. A well-planned organisation is operating illegally all over India and several mafias are involved in its operation. Trade unions demanded that these anti-social activities must come to an end and all gangs operating in colliery areas should be dealt with severely without any delay.

FALLACY OF SURPLUS MANPOWER

As per government directive Coal India management have been taking steps to downsize manpower by declaring surplus manpower in each coal company. The BCCL management has declared 9234 manpower surplus despite drastically reducing the manpower during the last

couple of years. The CCL management in a similar manner has declared 8387 manpower surplus while ECL has declared 5228 manpower surplus. While the regular manpower is declared surplus their jobs are being done by contract workers through outsourcing. This is a clear method of reducing regular manpower and increasing contract labour with low wages. In the last decade CIL has reduced more than one lakh manpower and it further continues reduce it through VRS. This VRS is not at all voluntary since workers are forced to leave through various dubious methods adopted by the management. The BCCL, CCL and ECL have fixed the target of 1000 each to be reduced through the VRS route, which clearly indicates the game of the CIL management. The posts lying vacant due to normal retirement are not filled in which results in further reduction of manpower in coal industry.

ROLE OF MAFIAS

Handing over the operation of coalmines to mafias has resulted in open induction of gangsterism in coalmines. The workers are paid paltry wages of about Rs 50 per day and no labour laws are implemented in these mines. Trade union movement is suppressed with the help of muscleman engaged by mafias. The Labour Ministry has exempted BCCL and ECL from the purview of some important sections of the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act.

Several blocks are earmarked by Coal India for handing over to the private contractors who are mercilessly exploiting the workers and making quick money at the cost of living conditions of workers. The extent of controctorisation in the nature of outsourcing is so widespread in coalmines that out of 325 million tonnes of coal produced by Coal India during the last year 165 million tonnes have been produced by outsourcing! In Mahanadi Coal Field two third of coal is produced through contract workers.

The close link between coal India officials and contractor-mafias has been established to share the booty. Hence CIL officials are taking more and more interest in handing over the mining operation to contractors. This has resulted in CIL blatantly ignoring the implementation of its responsibility as a principle employer under Contract Labour (R&A) Act.

The talk for improving the production and productivity of coalmines does not yield any result unless Coal India management stop the present policy of controctorisation and patronising the coal mafias in the industry. Without a strong trade union movement in coal industry it will not be possible to achieve change in the policy of the government towards this crucial sector of our economy.

All the coal mine workers must united to build a powerful movement so that coal industry in India is properly geared up to meet the challenges of the present situation.

(This is the second part of the article by Com. M.K.Pandhe. The first part appeared in the September issue of 'The Working Class)

MEETING OF THE CITU WORKING COMMITTEE

BHOPAL, M.P.

December 28 - 30, 2005

The Madhya Pradesh State Committee of CITU has agreed to host the next meeting of the CITU Working Committee in Bhopal on December 28 - 30, 2005. While the formal notice for the Working Committee meeting will be issued in due course, the members of the CITU Working Committee are requested to note these dates, so that they can arrange their work plan accordingly and participate in the meeting. As there is likely to be the Christmas – New Year peak traffic during that period, the members of the CITU Working Committee may please book their journey tickets in advance at their own end.

MEETING OF THE CITU SECRETARIAT

A meeting of the CITU Secretariat will be held on November 26 - 27, 2005 at B.T. Ranadive Bhawan, 13 A, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi 110 002, to discuss matters related to the holding of the CITU Working Committee. The meeting will start at 11.30 a.m. on November 26th and continue till the next day evening. All members of the CITU Secretariat are requested to ensure their participation in this meeting.

WANTED SOME *'DESI'* COST ACCOUNTANT

Dipankar Mukherjee

After ignoring the concrete alternatives, suggested by the Left parties to avoid price hike in petrol and diesel, government and the corporate media are engaged in justifying the price hike in diesel and petrol based on fact and figures which can be probably understood only by World Bank trained economists——not by those who deal with available figures and accounts. Here are some samples:

The public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) are incurring loss of Rs 40,000 crore which are to be equitably shared. The consumers' share is Rs 5,000 crore only, through the price hike in diesel and petrol.

Fact: Rs 40,000 crore is under-recoveries, i.e estimated loss of the public sector oil companies vis-à-vis selling cost of their products against global price. This is a notional figure and not actual. For example, under-recoveries for OMCs in 2004-2005 was Rs 19,910 crore. But can the same figure be treated as loss for the OMCs? No, because in 2004-2005, Profit After Tax for IOC alone was Rs 4,850 crore. It was Rs 7,004 crore in 2003-2004 when estimated under-recoveries was Rs 9,370 crore. There is no denying the fact that because of high crude price the public sector OMCs was going in red but figures should not be distorted to this extent. What are the actual losses this year suffered by these companies? Government figures speak for itself:

Losses in First Quarter 2005-06
(April – June 2005)

IOC	-	Rs. 54 crore
HPCL	-	Rs. 508 crore
BPCL	-	Rs. 431 crore
IBP	-	Rs. 234 crore
Total	-	Rs. 1227 crore

Yes these figures are alarming. But does it mean notional losses have to be highlighted as actual losses?

The under-recoveries because of subsidy in pricing and high price of crude is being shared by all stake holders, i.e., government, oil companies and consumers.

Fact: No, the government, the public sector OMCs and consumers have shared the burden of high oil price. But the private oil companies including the biggest one at Jamnagar, refining about 35% of petroleum products in the country, have not shared any burden. On the contrary, they have been allowed to earn windfall profit out of the existing pricing policy regime.

From an average of 4 to 5 dollar/ barrel refining margin in 2001-2002, the private refining major of the country is now earning a refining margin of about 10-12 dollar/barrel, because of the present high global crude and product price, making windfall profits during last three years. Left parties in their note dated 18.5.2005 to the Government pointed out the same and asked for a cap on refining margin. This fact was glossed over by World Bank pensioners and penpushers. Now the French Prime Minister and EU Finance Minister have threatened such refining companies in their countries with a windfall tax on their extra profits. Could not the Indian government do the same?

Left's suggestion to adjust the cess charged on crude oil produced by ONGC and Oil India as per Oil Industry Development Act, 1974 for a price stabilisation fund is not possible as this is being used for paying fertilizer subsidy.

Fact: The amount collected against OID Act, 1974 for the current year is Rs. 5,400 crore, which is enough to neutralize the price hike of Rs. 5,000 crore, sought to be raised through price hike. Firstly this is not only Left's demand, but a recommendation given unanimously by the Standing Committee on Petroleum comprising all political parties. When the OID Act was passed in Parliament in 1974, there was no fertilizer subsidy in the country. Fertilizer subsidy was started in 1977–78. How could an Act of 1974 levy a cess for paying fertilizer subsidy which was non-existent? This must be also an after thought of a World Bank specialist.

There should not be roll back on taxes or cess which would have its impact on the budgetary estimates, increasing fiscal deficit because of the revenue loss, etc, etc.

Fact: Left had asked for withdrawal of additional

road cess of 0.50 paise/litre imposed in this year's budget. This amounts to Rs. 1,500 crore for the remaining 6 months. They had also asked the government to forgo the increased customs duty and excise duty amount on account of increase in crude price from 40 dollar/barrel in February 2005 to 70 dollar/barrel in August 2005. This amount is roughly about Rs. 4,300 crore. The total amount is about Rs 6,800 crore. This was not agreed on the plea of "revenue loss". But what happened after last year's budget when a tax of 0.6% was levied on stock market transactions? This was to fetch Rs 24,000 crore to the exchequer. There was a hue and cry from the share market brokers and the Finance Minister had to rush to Mumbai and ultimately settled for 0.15% tax. What was the loss of revenue against the budgetary estimate – Rs 18,000 crore. Thus a roll back is okay for 2 million share market participants. But it is fiscal blunder if increased customs duty and excise duty is annulled for the sake of poor and common man of the country. 'Subsidy' for Kerosene and LPG are serious fiscal aberration but export benefit of Rs. 2000 crore to the biggest private refiner is an 'incentive', not a subsidy.

It is surprising that even the Prime Minister also talks of loss of dividend and corporate tax from the public OMCs as justification for non-rationalisation of present tax structure as it may lead to revenue loss. It appears that World Bank economists have not appraised the Prime Minister about the rate of dividend thrust on public sector OMCs during last two-three years, which was as high as 100-150% in some cases. Many of those including the Prime Minister whose heart bleed for public sector OMCs, will definitely wonder if such a rate of dividend is given at a minimum by any private sector and can this rate be treated as a normal source of revenue? The following figures speak for itself.

Contribution to central exchequer by oil PSUs

Rs./crore

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Corporate tax	5791	10,0249	10,0038
Dividend	3090	5806	6320

The dividend paid for the year 2004-2005 is Rs 6,888 crore. Both the corporate tax and dividend have doubled during last three years. If this year because of the global price hike, this goes to 2001-2002 level, will it be treated as revenue loss? Any professional cost accountant would be able to identify such gross incongruities in the facts and figures in government pricing and taxing policy in oil and petroleum sector, which is leading to high product price and cascading impact on inflation. But such analysis is not possible if you depend on World Bank trained economic advisers who have only one focal point on how to help the private corporate and multinationals. The country wants some 'desi' cost accountants for plain-speaking rather than the pen-pushers of World Bank theories.

RBI REPORT: 'MAJOR CONCERNS REMAIN'

Among the major areas of concern, are the constraints in stepping up the growth rate of the agriculture and allied activities. The growth rate of this sector decelerated sharply to 1.1 per cent in 2004-05 from 9.6 per cent a year before. This brings to the fore, yet again, the continuing rain-dependence of Indian agriculture and underscores the urgent need to step up public and private investment in the sector, particularly in irrigation projects.

The approach to the development of rural infrastructure would need to stress the importance of water management, criticality of assured power supply, high quality of inputs and risk management strategies. The RBI Report also expresses concern over the low and shrinking capital outlays that are constraining the expansion of infrastructure and realisation of the full potential of the economy. ...

Dwelling further on infrastructure constraints, the Report points out that the increasing demand-supply gap in the availability of power is becoming the most critical issue in the future of India's economic development. Inadequate power generation capacity, lack of optimum utilisation of existing capacity, insufficient inter-regional transmission links, slow pace of rural electrification and inefficient use of electricity by the end consumer have tended to exacerbate the absolute shortages.

(Excerpts from the Reserve Bank of India's Annual Report for 2004-05)

ECONOMY: REALITY CHECKS

PSUs OUT PERFORM PRIVATE UTILITIES IN POWER DISTRIBUTION EFFICIENCY

...In power distribution, the public sector is clearly ahead of the private sector in efficiency.

The state owned utilities of Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka have outperformed by a wide margin compared to private distribution companies operating in Delhi and Orissa in terms of reducing aggregate commercial and technical (AT&C) losses during last two years, according to data compiled by Power Finance Corporation and the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions.

Leading the public sector brigade is Jaipur Vidyut Vitaran Nigam Ltd (JVVNL), Rajasthan....which has brought down AT&C losses by nearly 21 percentage points during 2001-02 and 2003-04. During the same period Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board brought down AT&C losses by 20.10 percentage points, ... with loss level plummeting to 9 per cent, that too on a comparatively lower base. Andhra Pradesh Northern power Distribution Company Ltd (APNPDCL), one of the four state owned utilities in AP, has brought down losses by nearly 16 percentage points during the two year period.

The performance of private companies is pale in comparison. Reliance Energy controlled NESCO in Orissa have managed to bring down such loss by 10.12 percentage points whereas the performance of the three private distribution utilities in Delhi, in terms of bringing down losses , has been around just 3 percentage points....

(Business Line, 29-08-2005)

PRIVATISE, PERFORM AND BE EFFICIENT?

Official data released by Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) show that average technical and commercial losses (AT&C) of the privatised distribution companies (discoms) at Delhi at the end of 2004-05 stood at 40%. Delhi's losses are higher than states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab where such losses are around 15%. The losses stand at 33.79% for the Tata owned NDPL, 50.12% and 40.64% for the two Reliance Energy owned BSES Yamuna Power (BYPL) and BSES Rajdhani Power (BRPL).

(The Financial Express, 31-08-2005)

PRIVATISATION AND COMPETITION ? PRIVATE PLAYERS CONTINUE TO ENJOY GOVT SUBSIDY & PROFIT

Reformers preach privatisation for generating competition and attaining efficiency.

But in practice, privatisation, almost in all cases transfers monopoly powers from the Govt to private hands, thereby transferring resources from public exchequer to chosen private players. Delhi Vidyut Board was privatised to end the monopoly of Govt in power distribution and to replace the same by three private discoms enjoying monopoly control on power distribution in their respective areas in Delhi. The Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) of Delhi agitating against power-tariff hike has rightly pointed out : Privatisation without Competition is a Fraud on People *(Times Of India, 31-08-2005)*.

So far as efficiency is concerned, private power utilities are least efficient compared to state-owned set-up, according to data compiled by Power Finance Corporation and the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions *(Source: Business Line, 29-*

08-2005). And they are enjoying encashing their inefficiency either through tariff hike (looting the consumers) or through Govt subsidies (looting the public exchequer). The private discoms of Delhi first tried to encash the huge AT&C losses by managing a hefty 10% tariff hike through Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commissions (DERC). In the face of popular discontent and civil disobedience, the Delhi Govt rolled back the tariff hike but took special care to keep the masters in the private discoms unaffected. Now the private discoms will get Rs 160-180 crore subsidy from Govt kitty to pay for the inefficiency of their own. (Source: Times of India, 31-08-2005). This is what is privatisation or reform—whatever name one may call it.

On Privatisation of Delhi Vidyut Board:

DRAFT CAG REPORT WAS SCATHING ON IRREGULARITIES FINAL REPORT WHITEWASHED....

'The draft CAG report on Delhi Vidyut Board (DVB) privatisation' was scathing in its indictment of the entire exercise, right from the selection of the consultant to the concessions made available by Delhi Govt to the private distribution companies (discoms), while the final document, tabled in April last year, let off Sheila Dikshit with just a gentle rap up', according to a detail report published by The Economic Times dated 30th August 2005.

It appears, during the time lag between the draft report and the finalisation thereof, the privatisation lobby worked hard to push the mess and scandals under the carpet to make the privatisation-exercise look 'not so bad'. But the comments and observation made in the draft report of CAG thoroughly exposed corruption and irregularity in the entire exercise and the post-tariff-hike happenings in Delhi and the foolish reaction of the Delhi Govt to the same also vindicated where the things went wrong.

The draft report of CAG states, "the actual implementation of the privatisation process was not in full conformity with the initial inception report as approved by Govt of National Capital Territory of Delhi....the selection of consultant as well as bidding process suffered from major infirmities, which cast an additional financial burden on the DVB....Critical records and working papers relating to valuation of assets and liabilities. calculation of receivables etc., were not furnished to audit despite repeated requests, resulting in audit not being in a position to verify the assertions and assumptions based on which the distribution of assets and liabilities was made.....The private discoms were also afforded substantial undue benefits on account of non-observance of terms of the Transfer Agreement relating to disposal of unserviceable stores and realisation of receivables...."

"More fundamentally, the calculation of T&D losses which are critical to the realistic fixation of reasonable tariffs and for improvement of efficiency were not in consonance with initial assumptions and resulted in there being no real effort for the reduction of non-technical losses which was, in fact, one of the primary objectives of the entire process of privatisation of the distribution system." *(Source: The Economic Times, 30-08-2005)*

And in this manner, the factual observation of CAG on corruption and irregularities in the privatisation process of DVB as made in its draft report has been dropped in the final report to legitimise all corruption and irregularities and also to conceal that the much-pleaded objectives of privatisation of improvement of so called efficiency in distribution system stands totally defeated by the privatisation process itself.

REACHING THE UNREACHED:

THE JOURNEY THAT WAS FLAGGED OFF BY BTR

CSK Singh*

The present Bank-Fund propelled global market regime is often hailed as provider of both challenges and opportunities. This is true for capital and untrue for labour. The simple logic is that capital thrives on competition and labour on combination. The competition mantra is minimisation of production cost: 'So, minimise the labour cost'. This necessarily entails deunionisation of labour. Such a situation is not only ruinous to labour but to the economy as a whole. For, it leads to the shrinkage of the wage goods market, which is vital to any economy. This situation is of collective suicide. This crisis is inherent in capitalism.

CASUALISATION, IMPOVERISHMENT

The precarious situation of labour is so evident today that the so-called employed workers are mostly casual workers and those falling below the calorie based poverty line even if in regular employment. Note, this criterion is instead applied to measure 'destitution' in a country like Indonesia.

Thus for more than a decade the workers with regular wage continue to be around 14 per cent. The share of self-employment is 53 per cent; Casual workers who constituted 23 per cent in 1972-73 increased to 33 per cent in 2000.

From the poverty line angle, causal workers account for 55 per cent of the households below the poverty line in the rural areas and 50 per cent in the urban areas. Among the self-employed workers, the households below the poverty line constitute 22.5 per cent in the rural areas and 26 per cent in the urban areas. Finally, those with regular wage or salary employment constitute the households below the poverty line to the extent of 15 per cent in the rural areas and 11 per cent in the urban areas.

All these categories of workers obviously represent unorganised sector, with no employment protection, no minimum wage protection and no social protection.

A MISPLACED ARGUMENT

The massive unemployment, which is due to demand constraints, is instead attributed to shortage of educated and skilled workers. India's employment planners argue that contrary to many East Asian countries and even to the countries of Sub Saharan Africa, India has a shortage of vocationally trained and educated labour. The Special Group on Targeting Ten Million Employment Opportunity per year (Planning Commission, 2002) has compared India (with 5.35 per cent of vocationally trained youth of 20-24 age group) with two sets of countries. It has stipulated that the Indian figure compares quite unfavourably with 22.42 per cent in Botswana, 28.06 per cent in Columbia, 36.08 per cent in Mauritius and 27.58 per cent in Mexico and 99.86 per cent in Korea. Australia has a share of 64.11 per cent of such labour cohort.

This is a highly misplaced argument. Skill formation of workers is conditioned by job opportunities. The process of globalisation has provided opportunities for the high-end labour market, at the cost of jobs of the educated and skilled workers.

The question arises if there is really skill shortage in India? The answer to this requires that the term 'shortage' be rationally conceptualised. There has been a quite detailed work by Kenneth Arrow, in the context of manpower-planning. To sum up the varying nature of shortage:

a) Dynamic shortage such that there is steady upward shift in demand curve. The wage being offered is the same, which is being paid to others of the same type and quality, vacancy remaining unfilled. But the elasticity of supply is low, particularly for a short period.

b) Price rise type of shortage, in that the average price of the particular type of manpower is so high that there is a shortage of demand.

c) Production shortage so that the economy has not produced as much quantity of manpower as is the demand of that economy.

d) Finally, the Second World War time servant shortage in the US where higher wages in the alternative lines of employment induced

domestic helps to withdraw from their existing occupations.

None of the above types of shortage exists in the Indian situation. Instead it is the low demand elasticity, as borne out by the unemployment situation of the skilled and educated labour force that keeps them as surplus.

The National Sample Survey data suggest that the cohort constituting graduated and above has the highest incidence of unemployment, similarly, a high rate of unemployment among the technically educated persons. It is also much higher than the unemployment rate of the secondary and above educated youths. Only one exception is the urban sector in 1983 in which case the unemployment rate of the technically educated group is lower by 6 per cent. Otherwise there is substantial increase both in rural and urban areas.

Given the employment opportunity there are enough skilled workers. The National Sample Survey has enumerated the share of skilled hired workers in unorganised service sector. Of nearly 67 per cent hired workers in the urban areas, about 71 per cent were skilled. Likewise, of nearly 71 per cent hired workers in the urban areas, 67 per cent were skilled.

BTR's CONTRIBUTION

The journey for reaching the unreached as flagged off by B. T. Ranadive, popularly called BTR, the highly acclaimed founder-president of the CITU and an economist in his own right, emphasised way back in 1980s, the need for organising the unorganised sector workers. BTR in his presidential address in the Kanpur session of the CITU noted with satisfaction the 'spurt in the activities of the workers in the unorganised industries' he cautioned, if the trade unions did not pay attention to the cause of those workers, it would result in the alienation of a section of workers whom he considered 'militant', 'heroic' and 'a strong contingent of the common movement'. In due course of time, BTR acknowledged the successful efforts of some of the state committees of the CITU in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Delhi for organising the unorganised sector workers. He cited the instances of some successful struggles: In Karnataka 30,000 unorganised sector workers were arrested when they picketed the government offices in 1985. Almost around the same time labour disputes of the contract labour engaged in the steel plants and metro railways in West Bengal also developed. The contract labour under the Assam Oil Division and Panipat Fertilizer Project too launched their struggle.

BTR also expressed the vital need for organising the unemployed. Marx suggested a regular combination of the employed and the unemployed; BTR, on the same line, offered the strategy of organising 'Hunger March' of the unemployed, raising the direct demands for immediate relief under the guidance of the organised trade union movement.

PERCEPTIBLE PROGRESS

Within a short span of time the trade union have brought under its fold a vast segments of the unorganised sector workers. The CITU constituted an All India Coordination Committees for unorganised sector in 1991. The decision of the CITU General Council meeting in Chennai to form state level coordination committees and sub committees for monitoring the organisational work of the unorganised sector workers have largely fructified. Field investigation suggests that there is hardly any sub-sector of the unorganised sector where there is no union activity. There are unions of mid-day meal workers, Anganwadi workers, hawkers and venders, construction workers, brick-klin workers, beedi workers, handloom workers, loading and unloading workers, transport workers including auto-drivers and rickshaw pullers, to mention only a few. Unorganised sector contributes around 50 per cent to the total membership of the CITU. Desegregated at state level it is even 80 per cent in some states.

Regarding organisation of unemployed workers too, the CITU has followed the path laid down by BTR; through its Convention on Right to Work held at Durgapur on 2-3 April 1990. Recently held Kolkata Convention on Right to Work on March 12-13, 2005. There is an inherent contradiction between capital and labour. Trade union is a natural outcome of this contradiction, an indigenous institution of the working class. Any onslaught of neo-liberalism against trade union movement with a design to foreclosing the voice is bound to cause social strife.

*{*The author is a labour researcher and a member of the faculty of the V V Giri National Labour Institute}*

REPORTS & EVENTS

FCI WORKERS MARCH TO PARLIAMENT

FCI workers staged a Parliament March on August 17th (Tuesday) 2005 under the auspices of the All India Mazdoor Federation which consists of various trade unions affiliated to the CITU, INTUC and AITUC. About 10,000 workers mainly from West Bengal, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Delhi, Kerala and Tripura participated in the rally. The rally started from the FCI Head Quarters at Barakhamba lane at 11.30AM. From the rally, a delegation comprising H.P. Singh, Asim Bala, Raghunath Singh, Rajdeo Goala, A. Sampath and other six members of the working committee met the Chairman cum Managing Director FCI, V.K. Malhotra and handed over the memorandum of the demands. The important demands were:

1. Departmentalisation/ regularization of all FCI workers
2. Strengthen public distribution system in all States
3. DPS workers should get medical benefits from the FCI
4. Scrap Mackinsey report and stop privatization in the FCI

The Delhi police blockaded the rally at Patel Chowk at Parliament Street. A meeting was held at Patel Chowk, which was addressed by various leaders of the FCI Mazdoor Federation. Chittabrata Majumdar, MP, Varkala Radhakrishnan MP and Sunil Khan MP addressed the gathering.

The All India FCI Mazdoor Federation has decided to participate in the All India strike on 29th September.

BIHAR STATE CONFERENCE OF CITU

The Bihar State Conference of CITU was held on 14-25 August 2005 at Patna. M K Pandhe, President, CITU, inaugurated the conference. Pandhe in his inaugural address called upon to build up widest unity of the people in the struggle against globalisation. He also called upon the working class to make the general strike of 29th September a total success throughout Bihar.

The conference was greeted by Manjul Kumar Das (State Govt Employees Federation), B Prasad (Bank Employees Federation), Jagannath Singh (Confederation of Central Govt Employees) and R N Thakur (AITUC).

Chandi Prasad delivered the Presidential address in the conference and Arun Kumar Mishra, General Secretary of the state CITU, presented the report. 150 delegates and 50 observers attended the conference. 28 comrades took part in the deliberation on report and made useful contributions. Sukomal Sen, General Secretary, All India State Govt Employees Federation also addressed the conference.

From the Conference a 31 member State Committee, 14 member Secretariat was elected with Chandi Prasad as president and Arun Kumar Mishra as General Secretary.

Prior to the CITU conference, a conference of the working women was held on 13th August in the conference venue in which 100 working women took part. The working women's conference elected a Coordination Committee of Working women with Rampukari Devi as convenor.

SECOND ALL INDIA CONVENTION OF WORKERS OF UNORGANISED SECTOR (CITU)

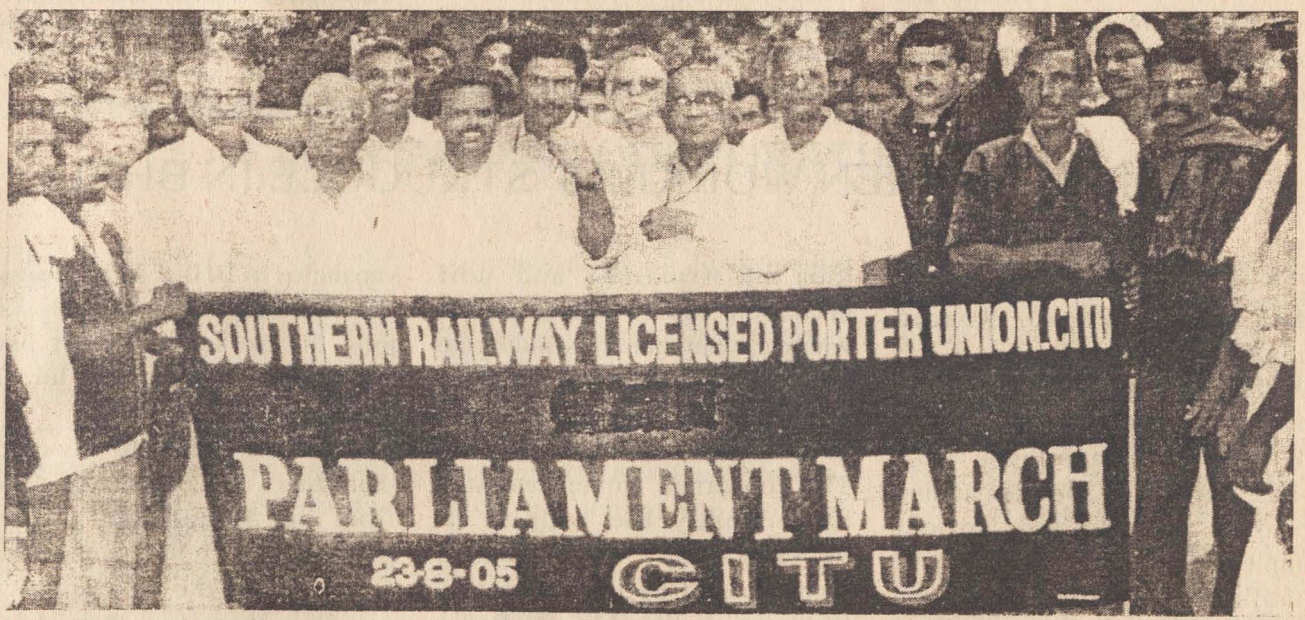
The second all India Convention on Workers of Unorganised Sector (CITU), is being held on October 3 – 4, 2005 at Firozabad in U.P. Md Amin, Secretary CITU and Minister of Labour, Government of West Bengal will address the mass rally on Oct. 4, besides other leaders of CITU. A detailed report will be carried in our next issue.

-Editor

RAILWAY LICENCED PORTERS PARLIAMENT MARCH

Hundreds of railway licenced porters from Kerala held a Parliament march on 23.8.05 demanding to stop privatisation of parcel loading and unloading work, entrust the work back to licenced porters, for social security scheme such as PF, pension welfare fund, reservation of certain percentage of railway posts while recruiting group D categories and job security to porters. The march was organised by Southern Railway Licenced Porters Union (CITU). The job security of these porters is now in danger after the NDA government privatised the parcel service and entrusted the work to contractors. These contractors engaged their own workers for loading and unloading work in parcel van forfeiting the work of licenced porters. This policy of privatisation has threatened the livelihood of railway porters in the country. Even though the porters expected a review of this policy after the UPA Government came to power, the railway authorities still continuing the same policy. It was under this circumstances the licensed porters came to Delhi for holding the Parliament march after local level dharnas and demonstration in front of Railway Stations.

The march was inaugurated by Kanai Banerjee, Secretary, CITU, and addressed by Ajayakumar MP, President, SRIPU, R G Pillai, and KA Ali Akbar among others. Several MPs from Kerala also addressed the rally. Later a delegation under the leadership of Basudev Acharya, MP, met the Railway Minister and submitted a memorandum. The Railway Minister gave assurance to the delegation he will look into the grievance of the porters.



STATE LEVEL JOINT TU CONVENTION AT LUDHIANA

Ludhiana, 12th September 2005, a thousand strong militant mobilisation of workers and employees from all over the state held the state level joint trade union convention in preparation to the countrywide general strike on 29th September. The State level convention on 12th was a

culmination of similar joint conventions held in all the districts and major industrial centres in the state during August 2005.

The convention was organised by National Platform of Mass Organisations comprising trade unions and mass organisations of peasants agricultural workers women, students and youth. The convention was held at Nehru Sidhant Kendra at Ludhiana. A Presidium comprisisng Balwant Singh, President, Punjab State CITU, Rachpal Singh, President, Punjab Kisan Sabha, Bant Barar, General Secretary, Punjab State AITUC, AND Maha Singh Rory of PSSF.

M K Pandhe, President CITU addressed the convention and congratulated the NPMO, Punjab for holding such massive convention. In his address, Pandhe has exposed the anti-people character of the economic policy of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation and called upon the working people to continue determined struggle for reversal of such policies. It appears that the UPA Govt at the centre, nor the Congress Govt in the state have not taken any lesson from the ouster of the BJP led NDA combine since they are following the same neoliberal policies despite strong oppositions from the trade union and democratic movements, Pandhe stated. The General Strike of 29th September will express the collective warning to the UPA Govt for changing the anti-people economic policies and taking immediate steps for implementation of the pro-people commitments made in NCMP. At the instance of the employers, the state govt in Punjab has been carrying onslaught on labour rights which must be fought back resolutely by the working class, Pandhe asserted.

The convention was also addressed by Raghunath Singh, General Secretary of Punjab State CITU, Balwant Singh, Convenor of Punjab NPMO, Bant Singh Barar, General Secretary, Punjab State AITUC and also the leadership of other mass organisations and trade unions.

(Note: As per information received on 15th September 2005 afternoon from Punjab, there have been huge demonstrations in all the districts of Punjab except Moga district on 15th by the workers. After serving notice to the respective employers at the workplace, the workers converged in huge rally before the district headquarters to submit similar notice to district administration for the General Strike on 29th September.)

BHOPAL: WOMEN WORKERS' STRUGGLE IN BHEL

257 women workers' working in the Masala Papad Kendra operating under Ladies Club Welfare Society, Helping Hand run by the wives of BHEL officers have been on tool-down strike since 2nd August 2005 demanding proper wages and proper implementation of the State Govt's notification regarding Minimum Wages. Whatever be the name of the Kendra, the most of the workers from that centre, 226 in number have been actually working in the main production process of BHEL, Bhopal in the jobs of Armature and coil insulation, coils winding, copper winding, aluminum file winding etc and their productivity and efficiency are comparable to that of the regular workers.

The concerned women workers were mostly the widows or dependents of the deceased employees of BHEL, Bhopal nd this agency like Masala Papar Kendra etc historically emerged in BHEL, Bhopal to accommodate the dependents of deceased BHEL employees in the background of non-availability of suitable regular vacancies in BHEL as a stop-gap measure. Despite doing mostly skill jobs, the workers are being paid the Minimum Wage rate for the unskilled workers.

The women workers organised themselves and started tool-down from 2nd August after all their pursuasion with the management failed to make the management to act. Only thereafter, they jointly approached CITU for support to their struggle. BHEL Kamgar Trade Union, Bhopal extended all support to their struggle and demanded upon the management

to concede to the just demands of the workers. M K Pandhe, President CITU took up the matter with the Director (HR), BHEL on 15th September and the D (HR), while appreciating the justness of the demands of the concerned workers assured to find out amicable solution to the problems at the earliest. On the basis of this assurance, the tool-down action by the workers have been posponed.

MAHARASHTRA: STATE LEVEL JOINT CONVENTION

Mumbai, September 3, 2005—the state level joint trade union convention was held AT raja Shibaji high School in support of the call for countrywide general strike on 29th September against the anti-people economic policies and demanding implementation of pro-people commitment made in NCMP. The Joint Action Committee of Trade Unions sponsored the convention.

R G Karnik leader of State Govt Employees Federation and convenor of the JAC chaired the convention. M K Pandhe, President CITU addressed the convention and called upon the workers and unions to make the call of general strike a complete success. He also stressed upon the need for popularizing the 16 points demand adopted in the National Convention of Trade Unions, which, in essence calls for reversal of the anti-people economic policy of liberalisation. The convention was also addressed by R G Karnik (AISGEF), S K Vyas (Confederation of Central Govt Employees and Workers), D K Rahate (NFPE), Narayan Ghagre (AITUC), K K Thekadeth(BUCTU), A D Golandaz(MSEB), M J Damle(AIIEA), Y G Joshi(NRMU), Nitin Yadav (AAIEU), M A Patil (Sarv Shramik Sangh), Naresh Lal (ACEU), P R Krishnan (CITU) and others.

Security Press and Government Mint:

CITU OPPOSES CORPORATISATION

On September 2, 2005, the Union Cabinet approved the setting up of a wholly owned corporation (tentatively named as the Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India). The new Corporation would take over the assets, liabilities, functions and employees of all the nine units. The Cabinet also decided for providing interest free loan in the form of working capital of Rs.700 at the initial stage.

The CITU views with concern this decision of the Government of India. It is public knowledge that the previous cases of corporatisation of departmental undertakings had just been preludes to eventual privatisation. That the working capital of the new Corporation would only be provided as "interest free loan" by the Central Government bears the intention behind the move to corporatise the mints and security press.

The stated objective of the move is: "overall improvement in decision making process, operational flexibility coupled in the commensurate accountability, fostering efficiency and higher productivity in the units". There is no reason why these objectives could not be accomplished even while keeping these units as departmental undertakings of the government.

In the backdrops of the recent "Telgi affair", there is an imminent need for the government to exercise more vigilance and stringent control over these sensitive units. It is also widely acknowledged that the fake currencies circulating inside the country have all been printed by private currency printing units outside India.

The CITU has, therefore, demanded that the Cabinet decision to corporatise the Security press and government mints should forthwith be reversed and steps initiated to enhance all round efficiency under the exiting set up.

Haryana:

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS FOUGHT FOR ACCIDENT RELIEF

On 12th July five construction workers died while working owing to collapse of a two-storey building at the workplace in Gobindgarh market at Hissar. The Bhawan Nirman Kamgarh Union (CITU) reached the spot and demanded compensation for the deceased workers' family. As there was no response from the district administration, on 13th July, the union led a huge procession of construction workers from the Civil Hospital to the office of the Deputy Commissioner along with the deadbodies of deceased workers started staging demonstration there. Ultimately the District administration had to call the leadership for negotiation. Ultimately the district administration had to agree for paying Rs 2,15,000 each to the family members of all deceased workers owing to the accident. From the same demonstration demands was raised to constitute Construction Workers' Welfare Fund as per the provision of the Central Act for Construction Workers.

TAMILNADU: TRANSPORT WORKERS' RALLY

At the call of All India Road Transport Federation, a state wide campaign was undertaken during second week of August by the state unit of the federation which includes unions in state transport, goods transport, tempos, vans, Taxis and auto rickshaws. Campaigns were undertaken in all the units with Van Jathas, distribution of handbills, street corners and vehicle stand meetings. In South Chennai, the campaign went on for 4 days and in North Chennai for 3 days. CITU leaders addressed meetings at various centres.

The demands included amendments to Motor Vehicles Act, social security to Transport workers, implementation of labour laws. The issues taken up for campaign include: petroleum prices and various policies of central and state governments including privatisation of Transport corporations.

On 16th August a massive procession was taken out in Chennai. Leaders including A.Soundararajan, A.P. Anbalagan, M.Chandran, S.Thangam, M.S.Rajendran and Jeevakumar led the procession. A memorandum on the demands was submitted to the Hon'ble Transport Minister of the state government.

ORISSA

CONTRACT WORKERS FIGHT FOR TU RIGHTS

The contract workers of JK Paper Mill, Rayagada, Orissa have been struggling against victimisation and for trade union rights. A highly profitable concern, JK Paper Mill, owned by Singhanias employ 1100 regular workers and around 3000 contract workers all of whom are

paid much less than the statutory minimum wages. In October 2004, the workers formed a union –JK Paper Mill Contract Shramik Sangh and shortly thereafter, the General Secretary of the union, A Ganeswar Rao was dismissed from service. The workers have carrying on agitation since then. Despite failure of conciliation at the labour deptt level, the labour ministry has not yet referred to illegal dismissal case to tribunal for adjudication even after lapse of 9 months. The Orissa State Committee of CITU has taken up the matter with the Chief Minister and Labour Minister of Orissa but still no action has been taken against the illegal victimisation. Despite all these, workers are unitedly carrying on their struggle under the leadership of the union.

NAGPUR: ALL TU CONVENTION

An all trade union convention in support of the September 29 strike was held in the Ahyapak Bhawan in Nagpur on September 18, 2005. The CITU, AITUC, HMS, UTUC, UTUC-LS, State Government Employees' federation and other organisations jointly sponsored holding of this convention.

W.R. Varada Rajan, Secretary, CITU and Saral Dev, leader of the UTUC and a former Minister in the Left Front Government of West Bengal addressed the convention, besides other leaders from all the sponsoring organisations.

The convention unanimously condemned the unprovoked firing resorted to by the Security office of the Indo Rama factory, when a meeting of the contract workers was held at the factory gate on September 17, 2005 and demanded action against the guilty.

STATE LEVEL CONVENTION IN UTTARANCHAL

The State level convention of trade unions in support of 29th September general strike was held on 28th August 2005 at Dehradun. The Convention was addressed by Tapan Sen, secretary CITU, H Mahadevan, Dy General Secretary AITUC, R A Mittal, Secretary HMS, Sukomal Sen, General Secretary All India State Govt Employees Federation and others The Convention called upon the workers and employees to make the General Strike a total success. The Convention also passed resolutions in support of the struggling workers in Divya Yoga Pharmacy at Haridwar and BSNL contract workers at Tehri.

BOKARO: VICTORY OF CONTRACT WORKERS

About 800 contract workers in Bokaro Steel Plant have achieved a big gain when the steel plant management had to concede a rise in their monthly wages by Rs 929.00 from 1st July 2005. These workers are working in permanent sites for many years and are organised under the leadership of CITU union, namely Ispat Mazdoor Morcha (CITU). Steel Workers Federation of India had put consistent pressure on the steel management for their wage revision. Finally, the big rise has created enthusiasm among the contract workers in Bokaro Steel. There are many more contract workers in Bokaro steel who are working in temporary, sporadic, irregular jobs and their wages are very low because of the main reason that in Jharkhand the minimum wage is only around Rs 68/- and there is no notified wage for contractors workers in a big industry like steel. These workers

are now preparing for a revision of their wages and benefits, social security medical facilities, etc.

NPMO CONVENTION AT CHANDIGARH

Chandigarh, 10th September 2005, a joint convention was held under the banner of National Platform of Mass Organisation at Cheema Bhawan at Chandigarh in preparation to 29th September General Strike. The convention was conducted by a presidium comprising Md Shenaj Gorsi, President, Chandigarh Dist CITU, Devi Dayal, Secretary, AITUC(Chandigarh) and Rakesh Kumar, Convenor, Coordination Committee of UT Employees, Chandigarh. Around 500 representatives of various unions attended the convention.

The Convention called upon all the unions and the working people to intensify grass-root level campaign to make the General Strike of 29th September a total success. The convention was addressed by Raghunath Singh, General Secretary, Punjab State CITU, Devi Dayal of AITUC, nad leaders from various trade unions and mass organisations attending the convention.

HARYANA

JOINT TRADE UNION CONVENTION AT GURGAON

The workers of Gurgaon in continuity to their spirited struggle against the Honda-Huda combine in July last, resolved to join effectively the call for countrywide general strike on 29th September. In a thickly attended joint convention at Gurgaon, the workers coming from various industrial units of Gurgaon pledged to make the General Strike a complete success on 29th Sept in the entire industrial area. The Central Trade Unions and the Sarb Karmachari Sangh have jointly sponsored the convention at Gurgaon on 11th September. The convention was addressed by Dipankar Mukherjee, MP, Secretary CITU, D L Sachdeva, Secretary AITUC, Satvir Singh, General Secretary, Haryana State CITU besides leaders from Sarb Karmachari Sangh and other trade unions.

Madhya Pradesh:

JOINT TRDAE UNION CONVENTION AT GWALOR

A joint trade union convention was held at the auspices of Gwalior United Council of Trade Unions in support of the call of General Strike on 29th September. The convention was held on 6th September 2005 at Income Tax Bhawan at Gwalior.

The convention was addressed by A K Shukla, CZIEA, Rambilas Goswami, Secretary, MP state CITU, B P Sonia, m k Jaiswal and O P Tiwari –all from GUCTU, D S Raghubangshi (BSNLEU), and other leaders from various organisation. The convention called upon the working people to make the call of general strike on 29th September a total success.

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GUJARAT:
PEOPLE'S MARCH BRAVING BRUTAL POLICE ATROCITY

Police brutally lathicharged the peaceful procession of the workers and common people at Bhavnagar on 13th September injuring many. The procession of several thousands people led by CPI (M) commenced from Motibag and was scheduled to go to District Headquarter to submit memorandum to District Collector on people's pressing demands for land, employment and food. The marchers also raised slogan for making the call for General Strike on 29th September successful in the state. The procession was advancing peacefully but in the midway, police started lathicharge on the people without any provocation and arrested thousands of people including a large number of women. Arun Mehta, Secretary of Gujarat State CPI (M) and Nalini Jadeja, Scretary of Bhavnagar Dist CPI(M) and the SFI leader Ivan Idris were also severely injured.

MUMBAI: BEST PRIVATISATION OPPOSED

The BEST Kamgar Sanghatana in Mumbai organised a convention on August 25, 2005, in the Vanmali Hall in Central Mumbai. This was against privatisation of Public Sector Transport network in Maharashtra.

The Bombay Electric Supply and Transport Undertaking, which is popularly known as BEST, is one of the pioneer transport network systems in this premier city. This is a century old semi government enterprise owned and operated by the Greater Bombay Municipal Corporation. This is one of the best transport systems in Indian cities and towns.

As in the case of other state government establishments, the plans and the schemes for privatising BEST are mooted by the World Bank on the spurious plea that these are old enterprises, which required renovations and modernisations, and for that private capital is needed.

Once the door is opened for this privatisation, there would be large scale reduction in the staff strength and cut in services. People in the remote villages in the state and far off slums in cities and towns will be the victims.

The meeting started with an introductory speech by S.K. Rege, Secretary of BEST Kamgar Sanghatana. Uday Bhat of BEST Kamgar Sanghatana presided. The main speaker on the occasion was K.K. Diwakaran who is one of the national secretaries of CITU and general secretary of All India Transport Workers Federation. Diwakaran called for united actions to thwart the attempts of the authorities propounding privatisation. Hanumant Tate of HMS and General Secretary of Maharashtra State Transport Kamgar Sanghatana, Mukta Manohar, convenor, Pune Mahanagar Vahatuk Kamgar Kruti Samiti, Jag Narayan Kahar, General Secretary of BEST Kamgar Sanghatana, Narsayya Adam Master M.L.A. from Solapur, Sunil Ganacharya, President of BEST Kamgar Sena, Dr. N.Y. Rajeshirke of Kolhapur University and Siddappa Kal Shetty, General Secretary, Solapur, Lalbauta Parivahan Kamgar Sanghatana addressed the convention.

The meeting decided to conduct a vigorous campaign against the danger of entry of private capital in the public transport sector.

(Report from P.R. Krishnan)

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

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Jun.'05	Jul.'05
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	492	495
	2	Guntur	516	521
	3	Hyderabad	533	533
	4	Visakhapatnam	529	528
	5	Warangal	561	562
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	446	453
	7	Guwahati	532	536
	8	Labac-Silchar	414	411
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	442	445
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	433	441
Bihar	11	Monghyr	496	516
Chhattisg	12	Bhillai	470	486
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	514	530
	14	Bhavnagar	530	556
	15	Rajkot	493	511
	16	Surat	497	508
	17	Vadodra	496	517
Haryana	18	Faridabad	539	556
	19	Yamunanagar	510	523
J & K	20	Srinagar	625	632
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	503	516
	22	Jharia	436	455
	23	Kodarma	465	470
	24	Noamundi	478	480
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	491	510
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	525	535
	27	Belgaum	581	590
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	538	545
	29	Mercara	488	489
Kerala	30	Alwaye	540	548
	31	Mundakayam	512	516
	32	Quilon	543	554
	33	Thiruvananthapura	609	610
Madhya Pradesh	34	Balaghat	462	476
	35	Bhopal	559	565
	36	Indore	534	541
	37	Jabalpur	531	553
Maharastra	38	Mumbai	591	603
	39	Nagpur	545	556
	40	Nasik	565	577
	41	Pune	577	587
	42	Solapur	530	537
Orissa	43	Barbil	477	485
	44	Rourkela	470	479
Punjab	45	Amritsar	481	493
	46	Ludhiana	494	504
Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	524	535
	48	Jaipur	485	491
Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	565	558
	50	Coimbator	501	501
	51	Coonoor	508	510
	52	Madurai	503	506
	53	Salem	479	488
	54	Tiruchirap	572	571
Uttar Pradesh	55	Agra	505	518
	56	Ghaziaba	549	555
	57	Kanpur	512	523
	58	Saharanp	496	503
	59	Varanasi	566	579
West Bengal	60	Asansol	511	513
	61	Darjeeling	434	439
	62	Durgapur	584	596
	63	Haldia	616	630
	64	Howrah	615	623
	65	Jalpaiguri	445	455
	66	Kolkata	582	592
	67	Raniganj	468	474
Chandigarh	68	Chandigar	610	624
Delhi	69	Delhi	640	650
Pondicherry	70	Pondicher	562	571
ALL INDIA			**529**	**538**

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State		Centre	June 2005	July 2005
Andhra Pradesh	1	Kethgudem	540	544
Himachal Pradesh	2	Himachal Pradesh	501	509
Rajasthan	3	Bhilwara	523	532
Madhya Pradesh	4	Chhindwara	468	478
Tripura	5	Tripura	467	466
Goa	6	Goa	631	635

WHITHER GLOBALISATION!

HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS DECLINE

For the first time in several years, net financial savings of households declined during the financial year ended March 2005. A large 65% increase in the financial liabilities of households was the reason behind the decline.... According to Dr Mahesh Vyas, Managing Director and CEO, Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, increase in financial liabilities represents a rise in consumerism...

UNEMPLOYMENT : ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

...unemployment reached a new record high in Asia-Pacific region while job growth remained disappointing, says a new report from the International Labour Office (ILO) issued here.

The Report, "Labour and Social Trends in Asia and the Pacific 2005" says, "new data show that some three-quarters of the world's poor –or close to 2 billion people subsisting on less than the equivalent of US$ 2 a day –live in Asia..."

The new ILO study provides a stark analysis of growing "employment gap" in the Asia region. Creation of new jobs has failed to keep pace with the region's economic growth. Between 2003 and 2004 employment in Asia and the Pacific increased by a disappointing 1.6 per cent, compared to the economic growth rate of over 7 per cent. During the same period, total unemployment edged up by half a million reaching 73 million, the fifth consecutive year-on-year increase in unemployment since 1999. In addition, underemployment remains widespread. Millions are working less than full time or are taking jobs much below their qualifications or skills.

Young people aged 15 to 24 are bearing the brunt of this employment deficit, accounting for a disproportionate 49.1 per cent of the region's jobless, although they make up only a 20.8 per cent of the labour force.... Moreover, there is coexistence of youth unemployment with child labour; millions of young people are jobless or while many jobs are filled by children who should be attending schools.

"...Working poverty remains a serious problem. Some 355 million in the region receive inadequate incomes from their labour, which leaves them and their families below the US$ 1 a day poverty line. The ILO report also pointed out that 48 million primary school age children in the region are not enrolled in school—out of a global total of 103 million. The majority of these children are working...(ILO Press Release dated 12th September 2005)

INDIA : JOBLESS GROWTH, LOW INCOME

The ILO Report says that the economic growth has not resulted in a corresponding growth in employment.

The Indian economy has grown by 23.5% during 1999-2003 but employment growth has only been 9.5%.

Given the fact that 36% of India's workforce was earning less than equivalent of US$ 1 a day and a shocking 81% less than equivalent of US$ 2 a day, the Report advocates policy measures for creating jobs in productive formal sector as opposed to the informal sector in order to improve both quantity and quality of jobs.

Interestingly, of all the countries in the Asia-Pacific region, real wages declined in three countries during the period 1990-99 and India was worst off—real wages in 1999 declined to 68.7% of the 1990 levels. (The Times of India, 14-09-2005)

DISTRESSING AND DISASTROUS

...What is more distressing, is that while such countries (richer countries) are not giving their agreed share of aid, the poorer countries are sustaining the richer countries in their present growth path with a robust reverse flow of capital from countries such as China, India, Russia and other economies, which, ironically enough, comprise the bulk of world's deprived and poor.

Disastrously telling are the HDR (Human Development Report) data on the priorities of spending by the developed countries...for every dollar invested in development assistance, another 10 dollars are spent on the military budget....That ratio (between military spending and development assistance) rises to 13:1 for United Kingdom and 25:1 for United States, figures no doubt...Such an absurd ratio of military spending to developmental aid makes no sense,.

(S Venkitaramanan, Business Line, 19-09-2005)

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JUDICIARY AND LABOUR

EDITORIAL, MONTHLY REVIEW, MAY 2005

In recent months the Supreme Court of India has delivered several judgments hostile to labour, which according to The Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) are "landmark" judgments establishing "significant" precedents. We agree with Assocham that these decisions are indeed significant, and it is yet more important for employees than for managers to draw a lesson from them.

Some of the many recent orders, amounting to a judicial anti-labour wave, are as follows:

- In a case relating to the dismissal of two Bennett, Coleman and Company Limited (BCCL) workmen for fighting with their officers, the Supreme Court ruled that not only could the employee be dismissed, even his gratuity could be forfeited.
- Reinstating an order dismissing an employee of Madhya Pradesh Electricity Board (MPEB) who had fought with an officer, a Supreme Court bench sternly pronounced that discipline is the "sine qua non for the efficient working of the organization". "Obedience to authority in a workplace is not slavery.." the court said.
- In another case, the Supreme Court upheld the Bharat Forge Company Ltd. dismissal of an employee who had fallen asleep. The bench made the sweeping statement that falling asleep at work amounted to a level of misconduct that could justify dismissal.
- Allowing an appeal filed by Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, the Supreme Court has recently upheld the company's decision to dismiss an employee for using "Filthy" language against his boss II years ago. According to the judgment, using abusive language against a superior at the workplace is reason enough for dismissal.
- A Supreme Court bench upheld the dismissal of a group of employees of a Faridabad-based private company who had gheraoed their senior officer. The court said "Once the participation of the employees in the gherao had been conclusively proved, they would not be entitled to any relief in an manner...."
- In keeping with this trend, at the end of April a bench of the Supreme Court warned the media against reporting criticism of the judges and the judiciary. While sentencing Rajendra Sail, a close associate of trade union leaders Shankar Guha Niyogi, to seven days imprisonment for criticizing the acquittal by the Madhya Pradesh High Court of the accused in that murder. Noting that the accusation that the judiciary is "not powerful enough to punish wealthy people" would bring the administration of justice into ridicule and disrepute. "Such tendency desrves to be firmly curbed."

The Supreme Court and various High Courts have sought to curb the right to protest and the right to strike. The Supreme Court upheld the Kerala High Court's judgement in 1997 that purported to bar bandhs. The Tamil Nadu High Court stated that government employees "under no circumstances have any fundamental legal or moral right to go on strike.... Even the trade unions, who have a guaranteed right for collective bargaining, have no right to go on strike."

From the time the Indian ruling class adopted the new economic policy in 1991, the prejudices of the rich and comfortable have begun to emerge. What the highest level of the judiciary said only at home they now feel free to state from the bench.

Jyoti Basu put it bluntly: trade unions will have to get together to get "the Supreme Court to change its views". In the name of "investor friendly" environment or to not destabilize the government, this disastrous policy must be openly challenged if the class enemy is to be forced to respect democratic rights. That the time has come for labour to teach a lesson to the judiciary.

(abridged)

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