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THE WORKING CLASS

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LONG LIVE MAY DAY 1999



COM SUKHDEV SINGH

Com. Sukhdev Singh, a member of the UP State Committee of CITU and a frontline leader of the BHEL employees at Jhansi, died in a tragic accident on 6.4.99. Com. Sukhdev's scooter was knocked down by a car inside the BHEL Township, while going to work in the morning and he got severely injured. He was taken to medical college hospital at Jhansi immediately where he breathed his last. He was only fifty and left behind his wife, three sons and old parents.

Com. Sukhdev Singh played an important role in organising the BHEL employees in Jhansi and consolidating the CITU union there against many odds. Under his able leadership, the BHEL Mazdoor Union (CITU) ranked first in the secret ballot held two years back. He also played crucial role in drawing other unions in BHEL, including the INTUC, in joint struggles and strike action at the call of CPSTU and NPMO. His activity was not restricted to BHEL alone but also extended to organising the workers in adjoining areas.

Com. Sukhdev commanded immense popularity among the BHEL workers irrespective of affiliations. Almost the entire plant including workers, officers and supervisors and also from other industries and mass organisations thronged in thousands in the funeral procession of Com. Sukhdev Singh on 7.4.99 and the whole township was plunged in sadness.

His funeral procession was attended by Jibon Roy, MP and Tapan Sen, both Secretaries, CITU, Daulat Ram, President of UP State CITU, Dinesh Byas, Secretary, Janawadi Lekhak Sangh, Jhansi and also the leaders of almost all trade unions in BHEL, Jhansi.

On 8.4.99, a condolence meeting was held at the gate of BHEL, Jhansi, which was addressed by the leaders of all the seven unions. On 12.4.99 a condolence meeting, organised in the union office was attended by hundreds of workers and addressed by the peasant leader Jamuna Prasad Jogi, besides the leaders of BHEL Mazdoor Union (CITU). The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay respectful homage to the memory of Com. Sukhdev and convey heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

YUGOSLAVIAN EMBASSY THANKS CITU

MK Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, had in a message to the Ambassador of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia condemned the brazen military offensive launched by NATO forces against Yugoslavia.

M Udovicki, Deputy Chief of Mission, Yugoslavian Embassy, had reciprocated the message. His reply to the CITU reads as under:

"Thank you very much for your kind letter of support in condemning the flagrant aggression by NATO against our sovereign country.

India and Yugoslavia are forefront leaders in opposing violence against humanity and wishing freedom to all people and nations of the world.

Obviously, NATO has picked out Yugoslavia to demonstrate their destructive might in achieving a strategy of imposing global obedience.

We are most grateful for your support, for recognising the injustice and for standing up against a mechanism of violence, killing and destruction".

THE WORKING CLASS

CITU ORGAN

MAY 1999

Here & Now

Sudhir Tantieng



At this rate, the cost of having
an election will be less than
that of not having one!

Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*

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TO THE PEOPLE FOR A NEW MANDATE!

After a hectic drama in the capital, commencing from two of the Cabinet Ministers from Tamil Nadu exiting from the coalition government at the Centre, a photo-finish defeat of the Vajpayee Government in Lok Sabha, parleys and politicking in search of an alternative government and lastly the dissolution of the twelfth Lok Sabha - the ball is now back in People's Court.

The arithmetic of the 12th Lok Sabha was *ab-initio* such that adding any number of parties would not total upto five years. A measure of instability inherent in the composition of the House has finally led to the mid-term poll.

The working people must seriously ponder over the gravity of the present situation.

What are the issues before the vast multitude of Indian masses on which they would, sooner than later, be called upon to pronounce their verdict?

The BJP and its allies - the old as well as the new "found" ones - are readying to appeal to the sentiments of the people with a facade of injured innocence, trotting Vajpayee as some one who has been wronged and sinned against by those opposed to him.

But the fact remains that the mandate of the people in the 1998 elections was not in favour of the BJP, as is sought to be claimed now. The BJP cobbled up a majority by hijacking support of parties like the TDP and National Conference. The multi-headed monster, misnamed as BJP coalition, had only one factor unifying the allied parties - the lust for power and greed to stay on to exploit the spoils of power. It collapsed when the second largest party of the coalition pulled itself out.

Does the BJP have any moral or political right to expect the opposition to bail it out, to stay in power for the rest of the five years? Did the BJP do it - when V P Singh or Deve Gowda or I K Gujral as Prime Ministers, were forced out of office?

During BJP rule, it was not five years of tenure of a Lok Sabha at stake. The interests of the nation, in every respect, was at stake in grave danger at every minute of Vajpayee bandwagon rule, or rather misrule, and non-governance.

The mid-term elections offer a golden opportunity to the people to

- * reject the communal forces lock stock and barrel
 - * preserve the unity of the people
 - * clear the economy from the crisis in which it has been plunged
 - * defend the national sovereignty
 - * repair the damage of India's image before the international community
- and
- * strengthen the left and secular democratic forces, who alone can accomplish these tasks.

The working people and the trade unions must be in the forefront of this impending all important political fight!

CITU MANIFESTO FOR MAY DAY 1999

On the last May Day of this millennium, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions extends revolutionary greetings to the working class fraternity around the world, fighting against the global offensives of imperialism.

The CITU greets the working class and the people of the socialist countries, who keep the banner of socialism fluttering, despite setbacks in certain other parts of the world.

The CITU greets the working class of the advanced capitalist countries and those in the erstwhile 'tiger economies' of South Asia, who had been on the path of struggles against the challenges unleashed in the process of neo-liberal globalisation.

The CITU pledges solidarity with the fighting brethren in the third world countries in their fight to safeguard national sovereignty, self-reliance, trade union and democratic rights, which are under constant attack under the IMF-WB-WTO dispensation.

The CITU emphasises the need for all anti-imperialist forces to unitedly raise their indignant protest against the imperialist violations of the United Nations charter, as demonstrated by the recent NATO air-strikes against Yugoslavia, and the continuing offensive against Iraq and blockade of socialist Cuba. The US administration, with the help of its allies, is trying to fully exploit the present unipolar international situation in the post-Soviet era to pursue its goal of global hegemony. The working people, all the world over, must unite to give a fitting rebuff to these imperialist offensives.

This May Day is witnessing a new turn in the national political situation. The coalition Government at the Centre, led by a rank communal party, had to bow out of office after it was voted out in Parliament. The country and the people, have no doubt, got a respite from the rule by forces of fascistic '*hindutva*' ideology, that did everything to rip apart the secular fabric of the polity. Yet, the grave threat to the unity, integrity and pluralistic character of the country, has by no means vanished.

In the thirteen months of BJP led government, the *Sangh Parivar* mounted barbaric assaults against the minorities - particularly targeting christians during this spell, penetrated into all institutions - academic, social political and cultural, shattering all the past traditions of secular governance. The federal polity of India, was taken for a ride. Intrigues amongst the partners of the motley coalition pushed the government into total non-performance.

There was an all round failure which left every section of Indian society thoroughly dissatisfied. The economy was loose shunted on rails to utter ruination. The 'jingoism' resorted to after the Pokhran II blasts, followed by the launching of the Agni II missile, made India vulnerable to pressures on the international front. The much tom-tommed 'Bus to Lahore' notwithstanding, the inevitability of the spiralling of arms race in the region has come true with Pakistan immediately responding to it.

The IMF-WB-WTO regime found a pliant and command obedient administration, which faithfully carried out its *farmans* on international trade, opening up every sector of the economy, and what not.

With the dissolution of the 12th Lok Sabha and impending mid-term elections, the Vajpayee Government continuing as a caretaker in office, the current situation is marked by instability.

While the secular minded citizens can hope that the communal and fundamentalist forces could be kept at bay, they may have nothing to cheer up on the economic front, even in the post-BJP fall.

The working people should bear in mind that the thirteen-months long BJP rule, witnessed the main opposition, Congress, egging on and colluding with the government, to push through the Patents Amendment Bill and get the stage cleared for passage of Insurance Regulatory Authority Bill. All in the interests of the MNCs out to gobble up every avenue to plunder profits at the expense of our national economy and the people, and to undermine the national sovereignty.

The communal forces, furious as they are that their

government at the Centre had to stage an ignominious exit just after 13 months, will be out to create communal tensions and riots, now that even the little restraint they had to exercise in the interest of keeping their government in office is off.

The working people and trade union movement in the country must continue to keep its vigil and carry forward the relentless fight against the twin dangers of the Fund-Bank dictated economic policies and communalism.

Eight years of the economic liberalisation programme, implemented with steadfast devotion, by the successive governments at the centre, had done immense harm to the Indian economy, the people and the working class.

In their pursuit of mindless privatisation, the successive rulers have virtually embarked on liquidating the public sector, handing over on a golden platter the profit-making ones to private hands and closing down the non-profit making ones, without even a semblance of an attempt to rehabilitate them. Several lakhs of jobs have been lost and the mechanism of National Renewal Fund has been used only to finance the so-called voluntary retirement scheme to retrench workers in thousands. In the process, one fundamental source of strength of our economy is being pulled down.

Despite talk of India being offered as a most attractive destination for investment, there is a slow-down of industrial growth. Sickness that has afflicted Indian industries is menacingly spurring closures and loss of jobs. Thus, there is neither new employment generation nor protection of existing jobs.

The labour legislations are in a state of total collapse. More and more sections of labour are sought to be taken out of the purview of industrial legislations. In the name of adjusting the legislations to the era of globalisation, the labour market is totally being deregulated. Labour is reduced to just yet another commodity and not treated as a social partner.

The rural India presents a picture of abject poverty and misery. The extension of liberalisation policies to the agricultural sector, leading to change in the cropping pattern in the country and failure of crops due to patented seeds, is driving the peasants to

suicide in different parts of the country.

The vast multitude of agricultural workers are targets of both merciless exploitation and inhuman social oppression. Attempts to rise in resistance against these are met with murderous onslaughts by the upper caste dominated rural gentry. The much awaited Agricultural Workers' Bill is yet to see the light of the day.

Our women folk, who bear the brunt of the burdens inflicted by the disastrous economic policies, are targets of sexual assaults as well, throughout the length and breadth of the country. Despite platitudes by everyone, the women are denied their due place in decision making bodies.

Students and youth in the country are faced with a bleak and uncertain future, thanks to commercialisation of education and dwindling job opportunities.

The poor and the commoner in the country has no relief in the face of ever-increasing prices. The Public Distribution System is a poor shadow of what it was intended to be. In the name of targeted PDS, by interpreting the poverty level definitions, even the skeleton arrangements for supply of essential commodities at affordable prices is sought to be dispensed with.

While this situation calls for united resistance and struggle by all sections of the people, their unity is sought to be fractured by communal and caste mobilisations by vested interests.

On the May Day, the CITU calls upon the working class of the country to further build up and consolidate the unity of all masses - agricultural workers, peasants, women, youth, students and all patriotic forces - and unleash powerful struggles to defeat the disastrous economic policies and the divisive forces of communalism! Let us renew our pledge to safeguard the economic self reliance, sovereignty and integrity of our great country and its society! Let us carry the struggle to further heights, mobilising larger and larger sections of the masses!

Long live May Day

Long Live Working Class Unity

Long Live International Solidarity of the Working Class

Down with imperialism

Down with communalism

Long Live Socialism

WORKERS' SIDE PROTESTS 'TALKING SHOP' EXERCISE

The Government of India under the BJP-coalition, after sitting silent without initialing tripartite consultations on labour matters for over ten months, suddenly woke up from its deep slumber, to convene meetings of the Standing Labour Committee (SLC) in February 1999 and the Indian Labour Conference (ILC) on the 3rd and 4th April 1999.

Even the previous meeting of the ILC held in December 1997, with a lame-duck United Front Government initiating the next round of Lok Sabha election, had regretfully observed the decline in observance of the ethos and culture of tripartilism both at the Central and State levels. The SLC which met on 6.2.1999 exclusively discussed 'tripartilism in India.'

WORKERS' SIDE INDIGNANT
Yet the action taken report presented to the 35th session of the ILC revealed that the casual and indifferent attitude of the Government towards the highest tripartite body in the country did persist, without an iota of change, "**Noted**", "**Brought to the notice of concerned Ministries**", "**Communicated to all State Governments**", "**Proposals are at advanced stage of consideration**", "**Proposal not agreed to but again taken up with the Ministry of Finance**",

and similar remarks were all that one could witness under the "action taken" column against 36 items decided/recommended by the 34th session and 6 other items carried over from the 32nd and 33rd sessions of the ILC, consuming full 67 pages of the agenda papers placed at the meeting!

The workers' side comprising eighteen delegates and equal number of advisers representing eight central trade unions, viz, the BMS, INTUC, CITU, HMS, AITUC, UTUC (LS), UTUC and NFITU met prior to commencement of the ILC session and decided to voice their indignation over the callous treatment meted out to the tripartite forum and its decisions. The formality of inauguration by K.C.Pant, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and the Presidential address by Satyanarain Jatiya, Labour Minister, were gone through and the ILC reassembled after a tea-break for the working session. The workers' side unanimously expressed thorough dissatisfaction and resentment over the cavalier fashion in which the Government handled matters of concern to labour. **Over the period, the status of the ILC has been undermined and its sessions have come to be reduced to a mere 'talking shop'.** Practically none of the

decisions of the ILC had seriously been taken up for implementation. The Ministers from the employing ministries in the Government had neither bothered to attend the ILC sessions nor pay any heed to its recommendations. The Ministry of Labour has ceased to play its role by involving itself in decision making process in various ministries on matters relating to labour. The Labour Ministry has relegated its status to that of a post office 'communicating and forwarding' proposals, which the other ministries did not care even to acknowledge, much less respond. In this backdrop, the workers' side strongly felt it was useless to participate in the deliberations of the ILC.

The following issues were highlighted by the trade unions in this regard:

* The Government of India had reneged on its assurance to enact a comprehensive legislation in respect of agricultural workers guaranteeing them minimum wages, fair conditions of work, welfare measures etc.

* The wage ceiling existing in various labour laws like the Payment of Bonus Act, Payment of Wages Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, etc have not been reviewed and trade unions' demand for abolition of such

ceilings have been put in cold storage.

* Policy decisions concerning labour are announced by other Ministers in the Government over the head of the Labour Ministry and without any consultations with the central trade unions; the latest instances being the Commerce Minister declaring that labour laws will not be applicable in the renamed Free Trade Zones and the Social Welfare and Empowerment Minister recommending 30% of Provident Fund and Pension amounts to be invested in private sector loans/shares.

* The unanimous recommendations of the SLC, made as early as in 1997, for enhancement of the rate of interest on PF money, held by the Government in public account, had been negated by the Ministry of Finance.

* The rising graph of industrial sickness resulting in huge loss of employment called for rapid measures to prevent sickness and rehabilitate the sick units; the Government is only a silent spectator to the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) performing the role of a liquidator.

* Central trade unions have not been consulted on the composition and terms of reference of the proposed Second National Commission on Labour.

In fine, the workers' side urged the Labour Minister to adjourn the ILC session for a brief period, take up these and other pressing issues at appropriate levels in

the government and reconvene the session with a real action taken report.

The employers' side also echoed the feelings of the workers' side on the efficacy and role of the ILC, though for different reasons and directions, but appealed for going ahead with the deliberations.

The Labour Minister adjourned the session for 30 minutes; but the time had to be extended beyond two hours. After the workers' side had long

deliberations separately, the Labour Minister met the trade union leaders and pleaded for continuing in the ILC session. He assured that he would take up their concerns with the Prime Minister and other related Ministries and ensure implementation of the ILC decisions. The Minister repeated his assurance publicly at the working session, which commenced later in the evening. Thus the ILC session had a stormy start.

CITU HIGHLIGHTS WORKERS' RESENTMENT

M K Pandhe, who led the CITU delegation in the ILC, pointed to the acute discontent prevailing among the workers because of the rigid attitude of the Government. He urged the Labour Minister not to delay settlement of the issues raised by the workers' side and call a meeting at the earliest.

Dwelling at length on the items listed in the *so-called* action taken report, M K Pandhe deprecated the Government pronouncement of a floor level minimum wage of Rs 40 without consulting the trade unions. He urged that composition and terms of reference of the second National Commission on Labour must be decided after a consultations - meeting with the unions. Pointing to the fact that in the inspections, stated to have been carried out in various Export Processing Zones, trade union representatives were not involved, Pandhe deplored that the EPZs are sought to be converted into 'labour-laws free zones.' Instructions regarding child labour were merely on paper and the Government does not involve the trade unions. There are also instances where funds have been misused by NGOs in the name of child labour. He termed the guidelines issued by the Department of Public Sector Enterprises as impractical and ridiculous and demanded early meaningful negotiations on wage demands in the PSUs. Functioning of the industrial tribunals leaves much to be desired and due to lack of adequate staff, even cases referred as far back as in 1985 had not come up for hearing in some instances. He highlighted the plight of unorganised sector workers and deplored that the Government had not gone beyond issuing of circulars in the regard. He called for a mechanism to monitor the work of the NGOs. He also recounted the problems faced by the working women and pointed out that the Supreme Court verdict on sexual harassment had not been acted upon. Similarly the apex court judgement on contract labour also has not been taken up for implementation.

INDUSTRIAL SICKNESS AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION: STRIDENT CRITICISM OF GOVT INDIFFERENCE

The ILC had two important items on its agenda - (i) measures to reduce industrial sickness and to increase production and productivity and (ii) measures to increase employment opportunities. For the first time, the ILC broke itself into two separate committees to discuss the two agenda items, to present their conclusions in the final plenary session.

LACK OF SERIOUSNESS

How serious the Government was on these vital issues is reflected in the Presidential Address of the Labour Minister. Jatia said: **"The problem of industrial sickness results in unemployment causing social problems in the society. Also in the context of globalisation, increase in production and productivity assumes special significance even from the point of view of survival itself. We are alive to these problems."**

But what are the measures contemplated by the Government which is alive to those problems? Jatia answers: *"Six industrial committees have also been reconstituted to discuss the specific issue of industrial sickness industrywise. Jatia added: "The Government its also alive to the problems of unemployment faced by the youth of our country." Action by the Government? "It has been decided to set up task force for*

the purpose of creation of new employment opportunities," Jatia proudly asserted!

REVEALING STATEMENTS

The BJP led Government thinking on industrial sickness was more elaborately revealed by K C Pant of the Planning Commission, in his inaugural address. He recounted the magnitude of the problem in the following factual statement:

"While "industrial sickness" affects both the worker and the entrepreneur, the degree of flexibility in adjustment which is available to the worker is often much less than for the entrepreneur. The BIFR data, which pertains to the organised and the non-SSI units, shows that some 12 lakh workers were involved in the 3441 references of sick units received in the Board till the end of November, 1998. Even though only 10% of the units affected were from the Public Sector (about 6% from the State Public Enterprises and about 4% from the Central Public Enterprises), the number of affected workers of sick public enterprises was nearly 50% of the total number of workers in such enterprises. Thus, the number of public sector unit workers affected by the incidence of industrial sickness is around six lakh."

He went on to narrate how the Ninth Plan document addresses the phenomenon of industrial

sickness comprehensively and postulates its approach. He said: *"While it is recognised that the BIFR procedures have been time-consuming and require revamping for the quick disposal of cases, a large number of sick Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) are potentially "unrevivable" and may need to be closed." Given the constraint of resources to accommodate very substantial fund requirements in the Plan, the strategic sale, with transfer of management of potentially viable PSEs, emerges as an option for which speedy decisions are called for. The Ninth Plan Document inter alia, notes that the response to Voluntary Retirement Schemes (VRS) has not been satisfactory and that concerted measures are necessary to reduce the size of the workforce."*

Implementation of VRS, restructuring the enterprises and pursuing the privatisation route are seen by K C Pant as a "practical plan of action for the central PSUs!"

On employment generation, here is what the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, inter alia, said:

"The creation of employment opportunities is crucially linked to the overall growth of the economy and its sectoral composition.... During the Ninth Plan, the dimensions of this

challenge would be even larger since the growth of the labour force is expected to reach a peak level of 2.5% per annum during this plan period, the highest that it has even been."

How the government propose to tackle the challenge of this dimension?

K.C Pant mentioned: "The Ninth Five Year Plan assigns sizeable resources for generating employment through Programmes to create employment directly and to support activities whose primary objective relates to the growth of labour-intensive sectors. While programmes, like the Employment Assurance Schemes (EAS) and the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) are designed to promote wage-employment, the Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY), the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) encourage self employment. The schemes of the Khadi and Village Industries Corporation (KVIC) will also sustain labour-intensive activities in the rural areas."

Experience of these "Rozgar

Yojanas" are there for everyone to see. Does this Government believe that these will provide "sustainable employment?" Does it make any sense to talk of overall growth of economy without large investments in physical infrastructure? It is sheer deceit! Besides these two speeches, elaborate notes were also placed by the Ministry of Labour for discussion on the two agenda items.

TAME AND HURRIED END

Strident criticism and flaying of Government policies were to the fore during the discussions in the two committees. From the CITU K N Ravindranath, Kanai Baenjee, and K Hemalatha participated in the deliberations in the committee on "employment generation". Chittabrata Mazumdar and W R Varada Rajan took part in the Committee on Industrial Sickness.

But, the draft conclusions from the two committees, which were read out in the plenary session, woefully failed to reflect the trend and tenor of the discussions. Rather they tended to tow the line enumerated in the agenda notes. Though the ILC discussions did not get off to a

start in time because of the protest voiced by the workers' side and subsequent adjournment, separate discussions etc on the first day, the Labour Minister, who chaired the ILC session, persisted with the time table circulated to bring the session to a conclusion by lunch-time on the second day. This stifled the debate on the draft conclusions, which were not even circulated to the participants in the ILC. At one stage, loud protests had to be voiced by the workers' side when the chairman sought to disallow M K Pandhe (who was in the drafting committee on employment issue) from pointing out the omissions and inadequacies in the draft. Though the Minister later relented, it is extremely doubtful, whether the final conclusions, that may be circulated later by the Ministry, will do justice to the points raised in the session. For the record, the Indian Labour Conference has met. One more 'talking shop' session has "successfully" been concluded. But the problems will linger, become more acute in the days to come and the government will continue its procrastination.

CITU GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING

28-30 MAY 1999, GHAZIABAD

For the kind attention of Comrades:

1) Comrades arriving by trains via Ghaziabad may get down at Ghaziabad Railway Station itself.

2) Reception Committee Office:

MEENAMAL KI DHARMSHALA
HAPUR ROAD, GHAZIABAD

3) Venue of Meeting:

AGRASEN BHAWAN
LOHIA NAGAR, GHAZIABAD

4) CITU GHAZIABAD PHONE NO. 793 073

(A critical appraisal of the view points put forth by the Government of India and the much needed alternative approach was incorporated in the speech of **Santi Ghatak** and **Md Amin**, Ministers from **West Bengal**, circulated to the 35th session of the ILC. (**Md Amin** attended the ILC and he was a Vice-Chairman, representing State Governments). Here are a few excerpts from the speech - Editor)

ALTERNATIVE APPROACH OUTLINED BEFORE ILC: "REVIEW POLICY OF MINDLESS PRIVATISATION AND LIBERALISATION"

The main concern of this conference should be to review the present system of increasing trend of workers being thrown out of employment from the organised sector. The new employment, if any, has been only in the unorganised sector over the last few years. This is a trend which needs to be arrested in order to ensure minimum wages and social security benefits to the workers. One of the basic tools providing such protection is the responsibility to fix, notify and enforce minimum wages in various employments. Unfortunately, many such notifications have been stayed by the courts at the instance of the employers. *We have been repeatedly taking up the issue of including the Minimum Wages Act in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution so that the courts are prevented from intervention in this important legislation. Unfortunately, there has been no progress in this regard.*

Though not in clear terms, the agenda notes point towards a necessity of amending various labour laws to benefit the labour. These relate to the compelling necessity to revise the wage ceilings under various Acts to

provide for security and benefits of the labour force. Very little has been done on this front. We had repeatedly suggested to the Govt of India to raise the wage ceiling for the purpose of payment of bonus so as to cover all workers and employees in general. But that has not been done. As a result, a large number of workers have been deprived of bonus. On the other hand, press reports and various statements by the Union Ministers indicate a move to amend the labour related Acts to reduce the benefits and rights in general and security of jobs in particular. It is a matter of grave concern to the delegates here that moves have been made to tighten labour laws to benefit the employers only. If any amendments to the labour laws are contemplated by the Govt of India, that should be done only on the basis of consensus arrived at in consultation with the State Governments and the Central Trade Unions.

The West Bengal Government has since notified the rules for election of bargaining agents in various industries. This long awaited system of having elections for recognition as bargaining agents, we believe,

will go a long way in ensuring industrial peace and harmony.

INDUSTRIAL SICKNESS

The notes on the agenda item have dealt with the issue of industrial sickness at length. Of the reasons identified for sickness, it is gratifying to note that labour militancy or low productivity of labour have not been cited as reasons. But it is most unfortunate that sickness, whatever the cause may be, affects the labour primarily and most seriously. Instead of addressing the problems to work out long lasting solutions, the efforts invariably are towards reduction of workforce as if this is the only solution possible and available.

There is no step to view the problems of labour from a humanitarian point of view and initiate measures to ameliorate the hardship. The creditors are entitled to some kind of recovery by way of one-time settlement, etc. But the workers stand deprived forever of their livelihood and statutory benefits. *BIFR appears to have become a convenient forum for the industrialists to evade creditors and avoid payments to workers.* Besides the inherent weakness and loopholes in the Act itself

and the lethargic pace of functioning, the BIFR has taken away the right to the legitimate dues of the workers. It is high time that the Act is amended so as to ensure that workers' dues are taken outside the purview of the virtual "stay" by the BIFR. Moreover, the statutory dues of the workers have to be made the first charge in preference to the creditors.

The sickness in CPSUs has become a convenient excuse to reduce workforce drastically. These are units which were started with social objectives for the economic development of the country. Many of them are sought to be liquidated, wound up or sold off in the name of competition, unviability, etc. Even the units in core sectors like Coal, Power and Heavy Engineering are also on the chopping block. Most of these units are large employers and the immediate adverse impact is on the workers and the local economy. The way in which the Union Government is proceeding, one gets the impression that all their social and economic responsibilities are sought to be given up. *It is high time, the Union Government reviewed their policy of mindless privatisation and liberalisation in order to ensure that interest of the labour are not affected.*

WB, A FORERUNNER

The problem of sickness in industry has to be addressed on various fronts starting with change in policies. But no thought has been given to the adverse impact of sickness on

labour. Indian Labour Conference should deliberate on this and articulate the need for protecting the labour force. The Central Government should take into consideration all the above factors in dealing with sickness in industry and frame policies accordingly.

As in the past, we, the Government of West Bengal, have been the forerunner in providing some relief to the workers of units closed for more than a year as a result of lock outs. Under this scheme, all workers of such units which are closed for more than a year are given Rs 500/- per month as relief. We have covered about 28,000 workers of 190 units in 1998-99 and disbursed about Rs 17 crores. We have extended the scheme for 1999-2000 also. In addition to the reliefs we extend as a part of our commitment in BIFR packages, we have made a budgetary provision of Rs 100 crores in 1999-2000 to be given as loans to the sick industries to ensure their revival. These provisions reflect the concern of the State Government in reviving the industries so as to protect the units as well as employment, irrespective of the reason of sickness. We hope and wish that the Union Government would also support the sick industries and extend concessional finance in the process of revival of these industries.

EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

The notes for the agenda item, though written cogently, starts on a wrong assumption and ends with a flawed conclusion.

The figures of open unemployment placed at 2.56% of the total labour force and under employment at 6% of the unemployed labour force are neither believable nor based on ground realities. *The conclusion that labour laws are responsible for fall in employment growth is without basis and appears to be an echo of the voice of interested capitalists.*

Despite all the good intentions and objectives of successive Five Year Plans, there has not been any significant growth in employment. The increase in employment in the organised sector has been abysmally low. On one hand, India is touted to have the advantage of low cost labour. On the other hand, the economic growth, if at all there is any, in the organised sector is concentrated in areas where there is minimal involvement of work force. It is extremely unfortunate that the present economic policies have led to growth without any increase in employment opportunities. We are of the firm view that such growth without corresponding growth of economic status of individuals is ruinous in the long term for the country.

The issue that is of vital concern is one of increased casualisation and contractualisation of labour by the organised sector thus pushing the labour force into the unorganised sector without minimum wages and social security benefits.

The present atmosphere of high unemployment, few opportunities and deliberate anti labour policies is not conducive and radical change is called for.

CRISIS OF INDIAN RAILWAYS AND THE STATUS PAPER

The editorial of an established economic daily has captioned its editorial on this year's railway budget as "A first class crisis". It opens with the statement "Along with the rest of the economy the railways are on a worrisome down hill course." After a brief analysis of the state of affairs prevailing in railway economy and the impact on it of the present budget, the editorial concludes "This is a first class crisis," but the budget "does not betray any hint that he (the Railway Minister) is aware of it." (Business Standard, 26 Feb, 1999).

The root of the crisis, however, goes a bit deeper. It is not such as can be remedied by effecting some slight twists and turns in current financial or other arrangements. Basic policy questions are involved, without attending which the system cannot finally get over the crisis. Instead of attempting an analysis of the current rail budget, therefore, we propose to concentrate on the central issue.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Ministry of Railways issued a document in the month of May last year: "Status Paper on Indian Railways. Some issues and Options". The document correctly identified some "areas of concern". These are,

1. Traffic flow imbalance
2. Loss of Market share
3. Cross subsidisation of Passenger by Freight services
4. Passenger services
5. Suburban services
6. Track renewals
7. Rolling stock maintenance
8. Safety
9. Unmanned level crossing.

It is not difficult to see that all questions raised in the document ultimately hinge on the question of balancing public utility with commercial concern. But this is not just an economic issue, not a matter of balancing the budget, or the two dies of the

account book. It is essentially a policy question on which the state has to take its stand.

Let us see what the status paper has to say on some of the areas of concern.

1. Some extremely high traffic density sections have developed which are "today totally saturated and needs massive doses of investment in its basic infrastructure..."
2. Inadequate investment has resulted in limiting the growth of freight traffic in alignment with GDP of the national economy. Through saving of diesel alone Rs 5,300 crores of foreign exchange can be saved.
3. It may not be fully feasible in our country with a substantial chunk of population below poverty line and the consequent social necessity to minimise their burden.
4. Constraint of line capacity....overriding priority to freight traffic leading to planning of passenger services below demand...inevitable consequence of non provision of requisite number of coaches has been drawing down of the maintenance and traffic spares leading to unreliability of assets and also running of trains with less number of coaches, declining standard of maintenance.
5. Arrear in track renewal kilometres to remain due to paucity of funds (In the beginning of VIII Plan = 9595 kms in the big of IX plan = 10957 km).
6. For rolling stock maintenance flow of fund is coming down. Greater outlay with larger capital inflow from general exchequer is essential.
7. Safety remains a priority management area unmanned level crossings are being progressively manned subject to availability of fund.

MASSIVE INVESTMENT NEEDED

Indian Railways have nearly reached a plateau as far as improvements in productivity of existing assets are concerned and further increment in transport output can be achieved only by massive capital inputs in capacity generation projects.

The position is absolutely clear from the above. Unless investment is undertaken on a massive

scale, not only the railway system will be in extreme crisis but serious bottleneck will also be created for the country's economic development. Now, the question is, where will the fund come from?

First, for the most justifiable reason stated above, there is a limit beyond which passenger fare cannot be increased and in almost every budget and even outside the budget the railways increase fare to the highest possible limit. Any attempt to stretch it further is bound even economically to be counter productive, not to speak of the socio-political aspect.

Secondly, the same is equally true for freight. Already there has been a major shift away of goods traffic to the roads.

These are practically the only sources of revenue for the railways. As the railway minister has correctly stated in a TV programme, the railways do not collect tax, they charge price for service. Clearly there is limit.

Some economy can be achieved by raising the standard of efficiency of management and particularly by plugging the holes which undeniably exist in abundance. But compared to the enormity of the scale on which resources are needed in order to prevent the crisis, quantum of savings thus achieved will not be of much significance.

The status paper has also shown that commercial borrowing provides no way out. Even the effort to attract private interest through BOLT and similar schemes have not succeeded. After all this experience, can we call commercialisation a practicable proposition for the railways?

FUND-BANK PRESCRIPTIONS

Cure-all prescription of the fund-bank combine in every sphere has been the drastic reduction of work force along with privatisation. Fantastic figures of surplus workers are shown in expert reports produced by the World Bank and other agencies and released in newspaper columns from time to time.

It is strange that the status paper which recognises various political compulsions of the govt, failed to recognise that providing employment to the people is one of the most pressing compulsion of any govt today. It states, "the Railways can no longer be seen as vast reservoir for providing additional

employment." It is not likely that the authors of the Status Paper do not understand that in a developing country like ours with growing unemployment a govt cannot govern without accepting responsibility not only for maintaining employment potential in the country but also enhancing it. Perhaps the authors of status paper have their own compulsion to write such staff. Similar compulsion must have made the authors write about "shedding off non-core and ancillary activity". However, the status paper does not seem to have shown much enthusiasm about it. But how can the Planning Commission afford to forget it? So it has issued reminder on this issue.

FUNDING BY GOVT.

It is more or less a correct approach on the part of the Status Paper when it asserts that "it is imperative for the Central Govt to supplement the efforts being pursued internally by the railways to tap non-traditional sources of funding particularly in the context of the need to service the 7% to 8% growth in GDP. Additional inflow of subsidised loans from the General Exchequer to the extent of at least 35% from the existing level of 23% is extremely necessary particularly in view of the Indian Railways having a natural advantage because of

a) average of movement on Indian Railways being over 675 kms. International experience shows a cost advantage to the economy in favour of rail for leads beyond 350 kilometers, and

b) superiority of the rail mode in the areas of energy and land use efficiencies as also social cost advantages in the areas of safety and environmental pollution.

Again, it is on the right track when it states that "....Railways require to be compensated for the social obligations discharged by them. Indian Railways incurred losses to the tune of Rs 1800 crores in 1996-97 for public service obligation discharged. It is an accepted principle on all developed railway systems to grant subsidies for this, but not in India".

And, lastly, the much debated issue of payment of dividend to the General Revenue requires a review. It is now high time that the question of freeing the Railways from this burden, which is the legacy of colonial rule, is seriously considered.

EMPLOYEES STATE INSURANCE SCHEME (ESI) - NEED FOR SPEEDY OVERHAULING

KALI GHOSH & ARDHENDU DAKSHI

The ESI Scheme which provides medical and social security benefits to workers, has completed 50 years of its existence. It is a matter of regret that despite spending a lot of money, the operation of the scheme is far from satisfactory. ESI Corporation always draws a barrage of criticism from all quarters. In the last Standing Labour Committee meeting, even Ministers from different states castigated the authorities for flawed operation of the scheme and urged immediate overhaul.

The problems can be divided into 3 major areas:
1) Organisational
2) Operational
3) Supervision and review mechanism

ORGANISATION

One wonders why this fundamental problem of dual administration, partly by ESIC under Central Govt. and partly by State Govts, has been allowed to cripple this organisation so long.

The dichotomy in administration has done maximum harm to ESI not only in reaching the benefits to those who deserve them, but also remained an easy and clever ploy to cover inaction, indecision and poor service. The sick and disabled workers have become the worst sufferers on account of this administrative infirmity. To give ESIC a greater mobility, this vexing problem must be solved at the earliest.

OPERATIONAL ASPECTS

On the operational side, the picture almost universally is :-

- a) Hospital buildings have been constructed but not commissioned for years.
- b) Diagnostic machines are there - operators/technicians not recruited.
- c) Doctors are there - nurses, other staff not recruited.
- d) Nurses, para-medical staff are there - no doctor is there.
- e) All are there - no medicine is available.
- f) The rule book is there but hair-splitting arguments go on for years.

As a result, big hospitals are there with only a few patients, probably those who have no other place to go. Patients' confidence is lowest, treatment is uncertain, official paraphernalia is unending, getting reimbursement is a cumbersome process. A service intended for the sick and the needy does not provide relief but harms them physically and mentally. There is no reason to believe that things cannot be improved if the ESI Corporation has the desire and will to do it.

REVIEW MECHANISM

In this era of super fast communications there is no reason why periodical review cannot be conducted and corrective measures undertaken. The administrative machinery, the operational set up, the demographic (patient)

dispersal are not uniform everywhere. While reviewing the functioning, one has to feel the need to have a dispensary network and diagnostic centres nearer the localities inhabited by workers and on the other hand there is need for super-service specialised centres of excellence to deliver modern day sophisticated medicare, at least one in each state. An efficient, mobile and receptive supervisory and reviewing machinery can turn this into a quality service. This upgradation is necessary for the benefit of all. MBBS doctors also should not feel a tenure with the ESI to be a punishment posting. While these problems have persisted ever since the commencement of the ESI Scheme, there had also been no dearth of committees appointed to study these problems, from time to time. But the recommendations of those committees have not been implemented.

Two more of such exercise had been gone through recently. First, a Perspective Planning Committee was appointed (as an internal committee of the ESIC) to review the functioning of the ESI scheme. Second, the Government of India, in July 1998, appointed a committee of experts with S.R. Sathyam, retired Secretary to Govt., as Chairman. The Committee was required to look into the general

quality of services, of medical equipment and supplies, of drugs etc., and the level of satisfaction among the beneficiaries.

Both these Committees have come out with their recommendations.

RETROGRADE STEPS

Two major policy planks dealt with by the Sathyam Committee will definitely meet with stiff opposition from the trade unions. One relates to the concept of the Scheme. The Sathyam Committee had *regretfully* observed that the Scheme, which was originally envisaged to provide a medical cover with the stipulation of only 'reasonable medical cover' had, over the years, been enlarged to represent 'full medical care'. Commenting that there can be no insurance scheme in which there is no correlation between the premium paid and the level of service assured, Sathyam had advocated reverting back to 'reasonable medical care' stipulation. He has also sought to remove the subjectivity relating to interpretation of the expression 'reasonable' and prescribe a ceiling limit on expenditure per IP (Insured Person). Sathyam has also sought to restrict the definition of family to four (IP, spouse and two children) only and suggested higher contribution at the rate of 0.45% for every additional member. The trade unions would oppose these and rather urge further expanding and strengthening of the Scheme. Second part of the Sathyam Committee policy postulate that merits outright rejection is the

prescription of different models for privatisation of management of ESI hospitals, citing under-utilisation of their capacities as the reason. The under-utilisation of ESI hospitals is the result of low quality of service and several other shortcomings. Privatisation mania should not be allowed to sneak into this vital area of providing health care for the most disadvantaged sections of our society.

The Sathyam Committee has also recommended: a) free scope for employers and workers to get exemption, b) three options to deal with the dual control aspect and c) matching contribution by the Central Government. These issues also require an in depth study and debate for arriving at proper conclusions.

WELCOME SUGGESTIONS

The Sathyam Committee has made quite a good number of reasonable suggestions. In some other cases the observations are too swift and require further study.

The Committee has suggested introduction of photo identity cards, medical booklets, documented medical records etc., which obviously should be supported. We believe that computerisation will be both efficient and cheap.

Sathyam Committee has stressed the need to strengthen the ESIC in all areas, right from dispensaries to well equipped hospitals in such a manner that load dispersal is manageable, workable and cost-beneficial. Tie-up arrangements for super-speciality treatment has to be simplified and expanded. There

can be no two opinions on it. In matters of supply of drugs and other materials, a strict vigil on cost, quality and delivery schedule should be maintained. The suggestions for checking and cross-checking, getting the services of govt. testing laboratories and all other qualifying certificates and empowerments by respective authorities are to be strictly followed, are all welcome. Our experience is that suppliers of spurious medicines manage to evade punitive actions for years and escape it because of delayed reports.

About training and re-training of technicians, we welcome the suggestions and believe that this scheme can be further developed. A ESI cadre can be created where the technicians are trained in multi-skill operations. Refresher courses and exposure for professional updating for doctors, nurses, para-medical staff are also needed. About acquiring of modern equipments/ facilities, we only suggest that it should be done speedily and process of discarding of old/ obsolete equipments also to be done in a simplified manner.

On the question of service conditions of doctors and other para-medical staff, we demand that they should get the same pay and facilities like those in the Health Department.

The Perspective Planning Committee Report and Sathyam Committee Report should be discussed widely, to rectify the shortcomings, and build the ESI as a premier medical and social security organisation.

'OASIS': A CODE NAME FOR MILKING WORKERS' FUNDS TO QUENCH THE GREED OF BIG BUSINESS

W R VARADA RAJAN

The BJP-led Government at the Centre had commissioned a Project OASIS (Old Age Social and Income Security) under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The Ministry also appointed an organisation named the Invest India Economic Foundation for coordinating the project.

'The basic mandate of the Project,' says Maneka Gandhi, the Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, 'is to make concrete recommendations for actions which the Government of India can take today, so that every young person can genuinely build up a stock of wealth through his or her working life, which would serve as a shield against poverty in old age.' Laudable indeed! She also manifests her concern for the elderly: "The least noticed of the destitute in India are the elderly. Millions of elderly in India are trapped in misery through a combination of low income and poor health." "The fact that 1999 is being observed as the International Year of Older Persons has enhanced the topicality of the Project OASIS," she eloquently argues!

DAVE COMMITTEE

One would have expected Maneka Gandhi to go about doing something great with the poverty alleviation programmes directed at the aged, for whom she has expressed profuse concern. But alas, her concern ends with constituting an Expert Committee headed by Dr S A Dave, a former Chairman of the Unit Trust of India.

The Committee has segregated its 'research and recommendations' into two phases.

The first phase aimed to cover existing mechanisms for social security - Provident Fund, Pension Schemes and Public Provident Funds. The Second Phase would cover other issues including a new voluntary pension scheme, Regulatory Authority for the Pension Fund Industry, etc.

The Phase I report, datelined 1st Feb 1999 was presented to the Minister for Finance, Yashwant

Sinha on 17th Feb. In her introduction to the Report, Maneka Gandhi notes that it "recommends: (a) limit early withdrawals, (b) deploy superior financial portfolio management and information systems, so as to obtain high rates of return, (c) expand the coverage of existing provident fund systems so as to reach more workers, and (d) improve the customer service of the existing provident fund systems."

WITHOUT JURISDICTION

The above aspects covered by the Phase I report are obviously subjects falling within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour. The Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and the Employees Pension Scheme (EPS) are administered by a Central Board of Trustees, which is a tripartite body-an autonomous one, at least for the record. Why is it that the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has been allowed to brazenly trespass into a territory that does not belong to it? The Phase I report has also notified that the Phase II would focus, among others, on non-contributory Govt pensions (Central and State Govts), railways, armed forces as well as P&T). This again means further transgressions into HRD and other ministries.

The BJP coalition has no qualms of infringing the time honoured jurisdictional divisions in the governmental set up. It is for our Parliamentarians to ponder whether such exercises are in conformity with constitutional provisions!

Yet another disturbing aspect of the 'OASIS' venture is that the Chief Provident Fund Commissioner, R S Kaushik, is a member of the expert committee and a party to the Phase I Report. He has abdicated his responsibility to safeguard the authority and jurisdiction of the EPF Organisation.

RETROGRADE RECOMMENDATIONS

Let us now have a look at the observations/recommendations of the Dave Committee report.

i) Contribution rates to PF, pension and other

social security systems are already quite high. There is no need to step them up further.

ii) Premature withdrawals should only be permitted in the event of permanent disability, death or for specific purposes relevant for old age income security (e.g. housing).

iii) Premature withdrawal (before age 60) should attract a flat 10% withdrawal tax, deductible at source.

iv) PF withdrawal should also be taxed at the rate of 10% after retirement over and above an initial exemption of Rs 1 lakh.

v) Fresh PF accretions, as well as earnings from investment of existing funds should be managed by professional, competent fund managers registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

vi) Initially, investment guidelines should be modified to allow investment of upto 20% of the funds into investment grade corporate debt and upto 10% in domestic equity.

vii) The presently limited, assured returns should be replaced by market-determined rates of return.

viii) The Government contribution of 1.16% towards pension accruals should be gradually withdrawn over a period of three years. In the interim, the contribution should be credited to a National Senior Citizen's Fund. (This Fund is to be set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with a view to encourage, catalyse and complement all private sector efforts to betterment of life of senior citizens.)

ix) The vesting period for pension should be 10 years.

The retrograde, anti-labour and private sector friendly nature of these recommendations are too obvious for any one to see.

The report has made some positive recommendations as well. They are:

a) The existing restriction limiting PF contributions to 177 industries/class of establishments be abolished. All establishments be covered by PF.

b) The minimum number of employees in an establishment (for PF coverage) to be lowered from 20 to 10 and eventually to 5.

c) The wage ceiling of Rs 5000 be abolished.

d) The present tax on earnings (PF interest) over 12% should be abolished.

REJECT IT OUTRIGHT

But these are mere sops. The main thrust of the Dave Committee report is to restrict withdrawals, eliminate govt subsidies and handover the PF and Pension Funds - hard earned savings of the workers to private plunderers and stock market speculators to quench their greed.

The Dave Committee ironically term their exercise as one of 'empowering' these funds and their members. It only seeks to 'empower' the Ministry of Social Justice to poke its ugly nose into the workers' funds. It aims at replacing the existing tripartite arrangements for monitoring and administering PF and Pension funds with the so called 'professional fund managers' registered with SEBI, which is nothing but an euphemism for the stock brokers-the bulls and bears.

The trade union movement must demand of the Govt. to outright reject the Dave Committee report and terminate the 'Project OASIS' itself.

Diversion of PF/Pension Funds to Private Sector Mutual Fund flayed

The Finance Ministry while notifying the pattern of investment of Provident Fund and Pension Fund contributions, effective from 1.4.1999, has provided for (i) 10% investment in private sector bonds/securities and (ii) investment in units of private sector Mutual Funds which have been set up as dedicated funds for investment in Government securities. (40% of PF and Pension funds must be invested in the Central and State Govt securities and this can go up to 60% even).

There is only one Mutual Fund answering the Finance Ministry description of "dedicated fund." That lone private sector Mutual Fund has also been in existence only for 3-4 months!

The Finance Ministry has indulged in this exercise of diverting the PF/Pension funds to private sector Mutual Fund, overlooking the decisions of the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) in this regard.

Deploring the Finance Ministry deciding such policy matters bypassing the CBT, W R Varada Rajan, Secretary, CITU and Member, CBT, had urged the Labour Secretary to take up the matter with the Government. The Labour Ministry has also been advised not to act on the notification.

SOUTHERN INITIATIVE AGAINST GLOBALISATION

The Regional Co-ordinating Committee of the Indian Ocean Region Trade Union Conference met at Fremantle, Western Australia, on 29-30th March, 1999 and discussed the preparation of the 5th Conference, going to be held sometimes in October, 1999 in South Africa. COSATU has taken the responsibility to host the conference. The exact dates for the conference will be finalised in consultation with COSATU.

Fourth conference was held in Calcutta, India, on 17-22nd February, 1997, hosted jointly by the National Trade Union Centres and Industrial Federations, Which discussed the impact of globalisation on Workers' rights and union organisation. The conference forwarded a direction could involve the trade unions into a more campaign-focussed initiative. 165 delegates attended fourth conference from 14 countries and 13 observers from 7 countries and WFTU.

The Regional Co-ordinating Committee was attended by Yoon Youngmo (KCTU), Chittabrata Majumdar (CITU), Bill Mansfield and Tony Cooke (ACTU), Brian Frederics (International Metalworkers' Federation), Ma Wei Pin (IUF), L Bhan (PSI), Paddy Crumlin (ITF) and Rob Lambert (Regional Co-ordinator). Due to preoccupation, Bangumzi Sifingo (COSATU) could not be present in the meeting.

The meeting discussed various adverse impact of globalisation and de-regulation of economy on the working class and toiling masses in general. It has led to serious attack on the working and living conditions, service security and the trade union rights of the working class of the 3rd world countries in particular. Therefore it has been decided that the main thrust of the conference will be to oppose globalisation and de-regulation of economy.

Building up of solidarity among the working class against the set design of globalisation and de-regulation, both at national and international level will be the main objective of the Conference. To achieve this, sharing of information on (i) the outcome of contemporary campaigns and struggles, (ii) Trade Union organisation and its

expansion and (iii) case studies will be stressed. Trade union organisation, collective bargaining, contractualisation and casualisation, social protection, training and skill development, hour of work, sexual harassment at the work place, child labour etc. has been identified as some of the key issues in globalised environment. Some of these issues will also be taken-up for discussion in the Conference. Apart from these, issues like racism, peace and disarmament etc. were also discussed. Observance of May Day 2000 as global action day may also be taken-up. The Conference will be held both in the form of workshop and plenary session.

Since inception, from 1991, the Indian Ocean Region Trade Union Conference was never confined within the jurisdiction of Indian Ocean Region. The question of re-naming the Conference and its further expansion also came in the meeting. The Co-ordinating Committee decided that as the attack following globalisation and de-regulation in not confined within the jurisdiction of Indian Ocean Region only, the initiative should be widened further and be re-named as Southern Initiative (or Conference) against Globalisation and Trade Union Rights. COSATU has been given the responsibility to involve the Trade Unions from Latin American countries in the Conference.

When the purpose is to oppose globalisation and de-regulation of economy, the character of the Conference needed to be as broad as possible. Hence, avoiding major points of difference, the main agenda of the Conference will be confined to the common issues only. This will help the Trade Unions fighting against the very design of globalisation and de-regulation of economy with different political, ideological and organisational inclinations, to come together and take part in the Conference.

The number of delegation has been fixed at 120, 50 percent of which will be from South Africa. Over and above 20 observers will also attend the Conference. Various International Trade Union Centres and Industrial Federations will be present in the Conference as observer.

NATIONWIDE STRIKE OF COAL MINERS ON 11-12 MAY

M K PANDHE

All the five federations of coal mine workers representing six and a half lakh workers all over the country have decided to go on two days nation wide strike on 11 and 12 May 1999 in support of 13 point Charter of Demands opposing privatisation and demanding dropping of the proposed Bill in this regard. (The dates originally decided as 3-4 May had since been changed in view of national level meetings of BMS and INTUC).

The united convention of coal miners held at Asansol on 2nd April 1999 reflected the growing unity of the coal miners to launch a joint nationwide movement of coal workers. It was participated by All India Coal Workers Federation (CITU), Indian National Mine Workers Federation (INTUC), Indian Mine Workers Federation (AITUC) Akhil Bhartiya Khadan Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Hindi Khadan Mazdoor Federation (HMS) as well as unions of UTUC and UTUC(LS).

The convention demanded: stop privatisation of coal mines including exploration and excavation; restore the custom duty on imported coal to the level of 1989-90; withdraw railway freight concession offered in the recent Railway budget to foreign multinational companies exporting coal to India; reorganise coal industry by making it a unitary company like SAIL with full autonomy; stop selling of coal by companies who have been granted permission on the plea of being captive mines of power plants; stop closing of mines having sizeable reserves; no retrenchment of workers or forced retirement in the name of voluntary retirement scheme; immediate finalisation of Sixth National Coal Wage Agreement; payment of arrears of interim relief without any delay; withdraw the amendment bill to privatise coal mines; appointment of High Powered Enquiry Committee to find out the causes of heavy losses of ECL, BCCL and CCL and take immediate remedial measures and enhancement of PF contribution to 12% without any further delay. Besides the two day strike, the coal miners will block the despatch of coal from 13th May onwards throughout the coal industry till the demands are

met. Notice of strike and blockade were given all over India on 16-4-99. Coal unions will also organise demonstrations, dharnas, rallies etc throughout the country.

The CIL management has proposed to the unions in ECL to accept DA and wage freeze, retrenchment of about 20,000 workers, withdrawal of concessions like LTC, LLTC.

The trade unions criticised the policies of liberal imports of coal and rampant corruption prevalent in ECL mines while theft of coal is taking place in broad day light. The mismanagement of the ECL has resulted in non-payment of the following statutory dues:

1. Interim Relief	Rs 123 crores
2. Pension fund	Rs 177 crores
3. Cess to West Bengal Govt	Rs 184 crores
4. Other liabilities a/c non-payment to labour	Rs 43 crores
5. Other liabilities	Rs 102 crores
Total	Rs 629 crores

The Board of Directors of the ECL decided on 22nd October 1998 to close down 64 mines and retrench 72,000 workers. Due to strong resistance by the workers, the management was forced to hold back the move.

As a result of less off-take by the power projects and import of 20 million tonns of coal, the demand for coal has fallen and the CIL is now reducing production by 10 million tonnes. The current year is likely to further reduce the demand for coal. The management is posing a threat of further retrenchment and closure of mines.

Though nearly 3 years have passed, after expiry of last wage agreement, there is no sign of any progress in wage negotiations. Arrears of interim relief are not paid. The CIL management is reluctant to call, even, the JBCCI meeting.

All these issues have evoked strong resentment among the coal miners all over the country. The Asansol Convention, therefore, was an important step to mobilise the workers for a country wide action.

If the Government of India does not take expeditious step to protect the public sector coal industry, it will have to face massive united struggles of the coal miners all over India.

CITU HIMACHAL PRADESH DECIDES FUTURE ACTION

The State Committee meeting of Himachal Pradesh CITU held on 10-11 April '99 at Shimla has made a thorough review of the activities during past few months and identified the progress made in various areas and organisational shortcomings in various fronts. The meeting was presided over by Rakesh Singha, President of Himachal State CITU. Tapan Sen, Secretary, CITU attended the meeting from the Centre.

Kashmir Singh Thakur, General Secretary, HP State CITU submitted written report on the activities. The report dealt with the decisions of the two day state level convention held on 2-3 January '99 to revitalise the organisation at various levels and also on their implementation.

It was reported that the total membership of HP CITU is expected to reach around 10,000 as per annual return of 1998 as against 5746 in 1997. In 1999, membership will further increase, particularly from Anganwadi and the Power Project Construction Sector, where workers from other unions are coming to CITU in the process of bitter struggle braving retrenchment and repression.

It was also reported that circulation of 'CITU Mazdoor' in the state has increased by 230 during January-March 1999 and organised drive was going on to increase the circulation further. As on date, total 418 copies of CITU

Mazdoor are circulated in Himachal Pradesh. The state committee decided to further increase it by 400.

The decision of the organisational convention of January 99 to hold district committee meetings within two months to plan for renewed organisational drive and build up movements was also reviewed. During deliberations, it was reported that in four Districts, Committee and activist meetings could be organised.

Meetings are planned in other districts as well.

In Solan district, which has concentration of many industrial units, the phenomenon of closure and sickness is gaining ground due to prevailing recessionary situation and competition from foreign companies. A detailed document would be prepared on the real roots of the crisis in various industrial units of Solan district. A broad based convention of workers and common people will be organised in the district, to build up united struggle against the policies responsible for the crisis in industries leading to sickness and closures.

The call for observance of all India protest day on 2nd February as per the call of Ahmedabad Working Committee meeting of CITU was carried out in all the districts through dharna before District Headquarters.

The two months long strike

struggle of the construction workers in Naphtha Jhakri Power Project braving severe police repression was reviewed by the state committee. Around 2000 workers, earlier associated with INTUC, switched over to CITU and joined the strike. Despite frantic efforts from contractors, NJPC management, state administration etc., the all out unity of the striking workers could not be disrupted. In the process of the struggle, contractors and management could be compelled to negotiate with the CITU on workers' demands and strike was withdrawn. It was notable that thousands of peasants in the adjoining areas came forward in support of the striking workers and also arranged shelters for them and joined the rallies of the workers.

Solidarity actions were organised in support of the strike all over the state. On 16th March rallies and dharna of workers were held in most of the districts. On 26th March, workers in Shimla went on strike, while dharna and demonstrations were held in other districts. This struggle has helped the CITU to spread its influence all over the state in a big way. The state committee planned to consolidate it in terms of organisation.

The Construction Workers' Federation of India has given a call for observance of all India

REPORTS & EVENTS

Solidarity Day in support of struggle of the Naptha-Jhakri Workers on 21st April. It was decided that on 21st April, demonstration and rallies would be organised in all the districts and workers in Shimla District would go on strike on that day. The workers of Naptha Jhakri project would also observe one day strike. The state committee observed that several new construction projects are to be undertaken in H.P. With the increasing influence among the project workers, the state CITU chalked out plans for expansion in the new

project areas as well.

The state committee also discussed the programmes of the National Platform of Mass Organisations and planned for its implementation.

It was decided that as per NPMO call, the May Day will be observed in all the districts and the project centres as massive demonstrations against globalisation and communalism. In particular, in Solan district, a centralised rally will be held in industrial centre of Baddi, where CITU is now working for expansion among the textile workers. Similar massive

rally will be held in Naptha Jhakri Power Project, mobilising the workers & peasants in the adjoining areas.

CITU state committee endorsed the call of one day strike on June 9, 1999 by Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union on their demands. The state committee also decided to conduct trade union classes from district to unit levels, details to be worked out by the district committees. The state committee will also provide trade union literature to the activists at every level.

STEEL WORKERS FEDERATION CONFERENCE

The national conference of Steel Workers' Federation of India (SWFI) was held on 28-30 March '99 at Visakhapatnam.

253 delegates from all the steel plants in Public Sector. TISCO and Iron Ore Mines attended.

Chairman of the Reception Committee and District Secretary of CITU CH. Narasingha Rao welcomed and N Prasad Rao, Vice President, CITU greeted.

MK Pandhe, President of SWFI, spoke on the international and national developments in the background of which the domestic steel industry and the steel workers have been confronting a crisis and attacks.

In the General Secretary's report the outgoing General Secretary of SWFI, Ardhendu Dakshi, highlighted that despite

improvement in productivity and efficiency and quality, the domestic steel industry is being pushed towards severe crisis by the disastrous economic policy of the Government of India. Jibon Roy, MP, Vice President, SWFI also addressed.

The Conference adopted unanimously a DECLARATION on future perspective of struggle by the steel workers, moved by Mrinal Banerjee, Vice President and seconded by Tapan Sen, Secretary, SWFI. The conference unanimously elected 22 office bearers and 65 member strong working committee with MK Pandhe as President, Dilip Mazumder as Working President and PK Das, as General Secretary and Pranab Chakraborty as Treasurer.

NEWSPAPER EMPLOYEES STRIKE

The daily newspapers published across the country failed to reach the stands on 23.4.99, as the employees of newspaper and news agencies struck work on 22.4.99. The Indian Newspaper Society (INS), the main body of newspaper employers, had pleaded incapacity to pay, and the wage Board Secretariat adopted their points in their working paper. The one-day strike was against the anti-labour policies of the INS and Wage Board Secretariat.

ALL INDIA LOCOMEN MEET

The 15th Biennial General meeting (BGM) of All India Loco Running Staff Association (AILRSA) was held at New Jalpaiguri, from 21st to 23rd February, '99, participated by 2009 delegates from all the 9 zones of Indian Railways.

The BGM was inaugurated by Samar Mukherjee, Vice-President, CITU, who explained at length the political situation and task of the locomen in the development of railway trade union movement, S.K. Dhar, Secretary General, placed the report and Jit Singh Tank, Treasurer, the accounts.

A mass rally participated by more than 60000 workers was addressed by Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister, West Bengal; Ashoke Bhattacharya, Minister, West Bengal; Samar Mukherjee; Minati Sen, M.P.; S.K. Dhar and Dewan Mahammed Ali of Bangladesh. Jyoti Basu emphasised the

importance of the railway trade union movement and recalled his association with it as the Vice President of AIRF.

Kanai Banerjee, veteran railway trade union leader and Secretary CITU, inaugurated the session on 22.2.99. He recounted the completion of 25 years of 1974 railway strike and the role played by AILRSA in 1973 which created confidence amongst the railwaymen.

A 21 points charter of demands was formulated, which included fair wage scale for locomen, stopping all sorts of unsafe working conditions and ensure accident free train operations, classify locomen as 'Intensive' and reduce duty hours to 6 hrs. at a stretch. The meeting called upon the Locomen to prepare seriously for direct action including stoppage of work, if the demands are not met. A phased programme of preparatory actions have also been planned.

The AILRSA also decided to celebrate the 25th anniversary of 1974 historic railwaymen strike.

A women's convention was also held on 22.2.99 participated by 350 women mostly from the locomen's families. The convention, inaugurated by Minati Sen, M.P., deliberated the draft declaration placed by S.K. Dhar, Secretary General, AILRSA.

The get together of all the Railwaymen organisations was arranged on 22.2.99 where, after a detailed discussion, some points of weakness in the Railway Trade Union movement were identified and steps to rectify those decided. A call to re-unify and strengthen the AIREC in all zones to build up united struggle of railwaymen and joining with the general movement for the working class was given. The meeting re-elected L. Mony as President, S.K. Dhar as Secretary General and Jit Singh Tank as Treasurer.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' CONFERENCE

Three day national conference of Construction Workers' Federation of India was held at Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, 5 to 7 April, 1999.

More than 25,000 workers including a good number of female workers participated in a colourful procession on 5.4.99 along with the delegates from Australia, England Egypt and

Bangladesh.

The conference was inaugurated by M K Pandhe.

He highlighted the current socio-political scenario in the country and outlined the tasks of working class ahead. He pointed out that allocation of funds for developmental activities is being increasingly reduced by the Government of India in every

annual budget. This is contributing to sharp decline in construction activities, affecting severely the Indian construction companies in a big way.

He urged the delegates to fight against these anti-people economic policies of the Central Government and many State Governments as well, to save our national economy.

Debanjan Chakraborty, General Secretary, placed his report along with three other very important published documents on Wage Agreement, Acts and Rules concerning the construction workers and on construction statistics. S B Karamkar, Treasurer, placed the accounts.

269 delegates attended the conference, inclusive of 11 women. 26 comrades from 10 states participated in the deliberations.

The conference elected a new working committee with 49 members, including 13 office bearers. M K Pandhe, Debanjan

Chakraborty and S B Karnakar were re-elected as President, General Secretary and Treasurer. The conference adopted the following action-programme:

1. 21-4-1999: To be observed as NATHPA JHAKRI WORKERS NATIONAL SOLIDARITY DAY by holding gate meetings, workers' rallies, etc. and by sending protest telegrams to Chief Minister, HP State Government to stop repression on NJJV workers. A solidarity fund call was given. During the conference itself Rs 21,000/- was collected to help the struggling workers.

2. A national consultation with all the central trade unions will be organised to prepare a NATIONAL CHARTER OF DEMANDS for construction workers.

3. A joint national convention will be held involving all central trade unions to give call for (a) State Capital march and (b) one day all India strike.

4. On 26th July 1999, Welfare Fund Scheme Day will be observed by holding state level rallies to submit memorandum to the respective Chief Ministers, demanding framing of State level Welfare Fund Scheme for construction workers.

RAJASTHAN: CITU WORKSHOP ON ORGANISATION

Rajasthan State Committee of CITU organised its first ever workshop 'On Organisation' in Jaipur on March 20-21, 1999. After CITU's Bhuvanewar document on organisation, it was the second attempt by Rajasthan State Committee to review its own functioning, identify its weaknesses, find ways and means to overcome those and develop a collective way of functioning.

The workshop was attended by members of the State and district committees of CITU - besides representatives from State federations and unions having membership of 250 or more. Swadesh Dev Roye, Secretary, CITU inaugurated the workshop. In all, 57 comrades participated in

the workshop.

One unique feature of the workshop was that the State Committee had undertaken serious preparations to make the workshop a success. To facilitate a fruitful and structured discussion, detailed questionnaire was prepared in advance by the State Committee in which the CITU centre was associated from the beginning. It was sent to all district committees, federations etc. for their reply or reports based on their experience and practice. Remarkably, all the district committees had sent back detailed notes on the questionnaire, which helped the State centre to prepare the base paper for discussion. The workshop held separate

discussions on 9 different industry/organisation related matters

1 Traditional labour intensive industries in Rajasthan.

2 High technology based industries

3 Central Public Sector Units

4 State Public Sector Units

5 Working women - Anganwadi, Beedi and others

6 Membership, annual returns affiliation and fees, CITU Mazdoor, BTR Memorial Fund, etc

7. Collective functioning - district committees / industrial federations

8. Work of whole timers & cadre building

9 State Centre

REPORTS & EVENTS

The workshop took stock of the organisational position in different sectors and evaluated the difficulties and possibilities. It went into finer details and set targets in every respect, based on objective study of the ground realities.

The workshop made a special study of the progress of organising Anganwadi and other women workers, in beedi etc. industries. In most of the districts, a modest

beginning has been made. In Sriganganagar and Jaipur, some progress has been achieved. There are about 4 lakh women workers in beedi industry alone in Rajasthan. The potential for growth was tremendous and an action programme was drawn.

The workshop set a target of enrolling of 55000 membership in 1999 (from 40,000 in 1998).

It was decided that the outcome of this workshop would be

carried below to each union and all efforts made to improve functioning of the union committees. The workshop has created great enthusiasm among the participants. They discussed critically all their shortcomings and weaknesses. The workshop forged a common understanding among the comrades and would help the Rajasthan CITU to make big strides in future.

HP: ANGANWADI WORKERS

Himachal Pradesh Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union have decided to go in for statewide strike on 9th June 1999 to press their burning demands. In the meeting of the working committee of the union held on 9-10 April 1999, this decision was taken.

The major demands of the Anganwadi Workers are, *inter alia* (1) No privatisation of Anganwadi Projects and same should not be handed over to Panchayats etc. (2) Reservation of 85% post of Supervisers for promotion of Anganwadi Workers. (3) Regularisation of Himachal State CITU, and Avtar

Anganwadi Workers & Helpers as Govt. employee pending which they should be paid monthly salary of Rs.2000 & Rs.1200 respectively, besides all other benefits as Govt. employees. (4) Reservation of 40% of the posts of J.B.T., Gramsewika etc. to be filled up from Anganwadi workers (5) Additional wages to be paid to Anganwadi Workers & Helpers for additional work being undertaken by them. (6) Payment of fuel charges for Anganwadi work.

On 9th April '99 a delegation consisting of Kashmir Singh Thakur, General Secretary,

Kaur and Devki Sharma, President & General Secretary of the Anganwadi Union met the Social & Women Welfare Minister of H.P. Govt. at Shimla and submitted the charter of demands. On 9th June, striking Anganwadi Workers will stage demonstrations before the District Headquarters in all the districts in H.P.

The working committee meeting of Anganwadi Workers & Helpers Union also reviewed the past activities, including progress of implementation of the decisions taken in state level organisational workshop held in January 1999.

Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions

Notice

On receipt of suggestion from Various Public Sector Trade Unions, and in view of the changed and uncertain political situation and declaration of the mid-term-poll under a caretaker Govt. at the centre, the extended meeting of CPSTU which was planned to be held on 4th May'99 at New Delhi to decide the future course of action programmes is hereby postponed. Inconvenience caused is sincerely regretted.

TAMILNADU: CITU - ILO TRAINING CAMP

The Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees (COTEE) organised a trade union training camp at Tiruchirapally from 23rd to 27th March 1999. This was the second CITU programme under ILO project for Workers' education assistance in select Asian countries.

The training programme was inaugurated by V.K. Gopinath, General Manager, BHEL, Trichy. T.K. Rangarajan, General

Secretary of CITU- TN, presided. D.P.A. Naidu, Sr. Specialist, ILO was the Chief Guest.

The training programme was attended by 28 state/district level functionaries of COTEE, who were also leaders of district committees of CITU.

The training materials were translated in Tamil for the benefit of the trainees.

The programme was conducted by S. Pancharatnam, General Secretary of COTEE and W.R.

Varada Rajan, Secretary, CITU. A.K. Padmanabhan, A. Soundararajan, D. Janakiraman, all office bearers of CITU-TN and Prof. Hema chaired some of the sessions. The participants were divided into 4 groups and very useful group discussions and interactive presentations marked the successful training activity.

C.S. Venkat Rathnam, representing the ILO delivered the valedictory address on 27.2.99.

DEMANDS OF SAIL CONTRACT WORKERS

A high level delegation from ASWFI led by M K Pandhe, President, met Director (Personnel), SAIL in New Delhi on 8.4.99 on contract workers' problems in steel industry.

A memorandum highlighting the contract workers' demands for better wages and service conditions was presented.

The memorandum contained a detailed account of the anarchic situation faced by workers in plants, mines, townships under

SAIL.

There is no parity in wages, in some cases they are paid below the govt notified minimum wage, statutory benefits like PF gratuity, workmen's compensation, bonus, etc, are denied to them. Even minimum civic amenities like water supply, schools, medical centres are non existent in most of the mines.

The ruthless exploitation and rampant corruption by the contractors, with some executives

of SAIL also in league, made the lives of workers miserable.

The delegation demanded reinstatement of 337 contract workers in central stores department of Bokaro who have been illegally thrown out of job in Bokaro since July 1998.

It was emphasised that SAIL cannot avoid the responsibility as Principal Employer.

The SAIL management had agreed to call a meeting to discuss the issues raised.

HIGH COURT REINSTATES CONTRACT WORKERS

Rashtriya Chemicals and fertilisers Ltd (RCF), Mumbai, is a public sector company. It has engaged in contract workers in its Horticulture Departments who had put in over 20 years of service. On 1-4-1998, they were all removed from service, as the new contractor did not want to pay them wages as per agreement covering those workers. Mumbai Shramic Union (CITU) moved the Bombay High Court and the workers were taken back in service from Nov. '98. But they were paid lower wages and benefits. On further efforts by CITU, the Bombay High Court had passed an order to the effect that the workers would remain continuously in job till their matter is considered by the Contract Labour Advisory Board. The Court also directed the workers to be paid as per Union's agreement with the RCF. The loss of wages during "forced unemployment" between April and Nov. 98 would be decided when the case would finally be disposed off.

(Report from V.C. Monteiro)

Consumer Price Index Numbers for Industrial Workers on base: 1982 = 100

Sr. No	Centre	Dec 98	Jan 99	Feb 99	Sr. No.	Centre	Dec 98	Jan 99	Feb 99
1	Gudur	442	437	428	45	Amritsar	387	380	374
2	Guntur	421	407	406	46	Ludhiana	390	383	372
3	Hyderabad	399	390	388	47	Ajmer	406	401	399
4	Visakhapatnam	409	404	400	48	Jaipur	397	387	385
5	Warangal	415	409	403	49	Chennai	449	443	438
6	D D Tinsukia	387	376	366	50	Coimbatore	403	395	390
7	Guwahati	431	423	419	51	Coonoor	426	414	411
8	Labac-Silchar	371	359	356	52	Madurai	429	420	407
9	Mariani Jorhat	427	419	406	53	Salem	425	415	401
10	Rangapara-Tezpur	423	397	393	54	Tiruchirapally	476	465	446
11	Jamshedpur	414	399	393	55	Agra	400	392	391
12	Jharia	376	359	355	56	Ghaziabad	437	427	426
13	Kodarma	391	381	368	57	Kanpur	427	418	417
14	Monghyr Jamalpur	423	417	412	58	Saharanpur	395	385	382
15	Noamundi	393	375	368	59	Varanasi	470	460	457
16	Ranchi-Hatia	433	412	406	60	Asansol	411	397	386
17	Ahmedabad	424	414	410	61	Calcutta	461	429	419
18	Bhavnagar	449	441	432	62	Darjeeling	400	380	375
19	Rajkot	420	410	405	63	Durgapur	451	430	423
20	Surat	439	430	423	64	Haldia	468	452	446
21	Vadodra	407	401	391	65	Howrah	491	471	459
22	Faridabad	436	432	422	66	Jalpaiguri	407	389	384
23	Yamunanagar	497	386	386	67	Raniganj	388	373	366
24	Srinagar	437	461	487	68	Chandigarh	441	434	432
25	Bangalore	405	398	397	69	Delhi	464	472	472
26	Belgaum	443	454	458	70	Pondicherry	485	469	462
27	Hubli-Dharwar	430	426	432					
28	Mercara	443	440	441		All India	429	420	415
29	Alwaye	416	416	416		Additional Series of Labour Bureau			
30	Mundakayam	427	427	438					
31	Quilon	410	416	419	1	Kothagudem	440	406	410
32	Thiruvananthapuram	450	451	463	2	Himachal Pradesh	403	400	402
33	Balaghat	386	370	371	3	Bhilwara	423	413	412
34	Bhilai	377	362	360	4	Chhindwara	426	416	413
35	Bhopal	452	443	440	5	Tripura	419	399	388
36	Indore	428	418	412	6	Goa	471	464	471
37	Jabalpur	434	436	425					
38	Mumbai	475	467	462					
39	Nagpur	446	439	438					
40	Nasik	443	441	440					
41	Pune	469	468	463					
42	Solapur	479	472	449					
43	Barbil	398	385	381					
44	Rourkela	413	497	389					

Government of India
Ministry of Labour
Labour Bureau
Shimla - 171 004

INTERNATIONAL DEMAND FOR HALT TO LIBERALISATION, REVIEW OF WTO ROLE

In November 1999 governments plan to meet in Seattle for the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Third Ministerial Meeting. A number of these governments, including those in the European Union, Japan and Canada, are already calling for a further Millennium Round of trade liberalisation negotiations to be launched at that meeting, in addition to any negotiations and reviews already mandated as part of the WTO's "built-in agenda". The general impression given is that there is no alternative and that a Millennium Round will go ahead.

Several non-trade union organisations collectively styling themselves as "members of international civil society" have jointly called for a halt to the liberalisation process and in depth review of the process, its benefits and its beneficiaries.

This joint statement is signed by:

American Lands Alliance, United States

A SEED, Europe

BUKO Agro Coordination, Germany

BUND, Friends of the Earth Germany

Church of Sweden Aid / Lutherhjaelpen, Sweden

Corporate Europe Observatory

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Friends of the Earth Finland

Friends of the Earth United States

Komitee Widerstandgegen das MAI, Germany

MAI niet gezien! anti-MAI campaign, the Netherlands

Oxfam-Solidarity, Belgium

Oxfam-Wereldwinkels (Belgium)

People's Forum 2001, Japan

The call is significant. Here are a few excerpts:

The members of the civil society opposed to any new and comprehensive round of trade negotiations. They observed that there has been no review of the social or environmental impacts of the Uruguay Round and many developing countries find themselves unable to consider any further commitments at present. In addition, the WTO process continues to promote trade liberalisation at the expense of society and the

environment and remains firmly weighted in favour of stronger economies. Opposing the move they signed the following statement calling other non-governmental organisations to join this call to reject the Millennium Round proposal.

We oppose any effort to expand the powers of the World Trade Organization (WTO) through a new comprehensive round of trade liberalisation. Instead, governments should review and rectify the deficiencies of the system and the WTO regime itself.

"The Uruguay Round Agreements and the establishment of the WTO were proclaimed as a means of enhancing the creation of global wealth and prosperity and promoting the well-being of all people in all member states.

"In reality however, in the past five years the WTO has contributed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich few; increasing poverty for the majority of the world's population; and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

"The Uruguay Round Agreements have functioned principally to prise open markets for the benefit of transnational corporations at the expense of national economies; workers, farmers and other people; and the environment.

"In addition, the WTO system, rules and procedures are undemocratic, untransparent and non-accountable and have operated to marginalise the majority of the world's people.

"The governments which dominate the WTO and the transnational corporations which have benefited from the WTO system have refused to recognise and address these problems. Instead, they are pushing for further liberalisation.

"We call for a moratorium on any new issues or further negotiations that expand the scope and power of the WTO. During this moratorium there should be a comprehensive and in-depth review of the system will provide an opportunity for society to change course and develop an alternative, humane and sustainable international system of trade and investment relations.

SUPREME COURT UPHOLDS CONTRACT WORKERS' RIGHT TO REGULAR JOB

The Supreme Court in a ruling favouring lakhs of contract labourers, has held that they have a right to be absorbed in regular service after working for over 240 days a year in an establishment.

"Is it permissible in the new millennium to decry the cry of the labour force desirous of absorption after working for more than 240 days in an establishment and having their workings supervised and administered by an agency within the meaning of Article 12 of the Constitution - the answer cannot possibly be in the affirmative," the Court observed.

Haryana State Electricity Board (HSEB) had engaged 42 safai karmacharis for one year through a contractor for keeping, cleaning its Panipat power plant.

These safai karmacharis sought to be absorbed permanently in the service of the Board on completion of 240 days of their working in the plant and their contention was favoured by the labour court as well as the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Upholding the High Court verdict, a division bench of Justice S B Majumdar and Justice U C Banerjee referred to Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 and said "judicial pronouncements on the subject were unanimous that if contract labour was employed in an establishment for seasonal workings, question of abolition would not arise."

The bench, however, said "In the event of the same being perennial nature, the Legislature is candid

enough to record its abolition since, involvement of contractor may have its social evil of labour exploitation."

The Court said the maintenance of the Panipat plant of HSEB "cannot by any stretch be ascribed to be of seasonal nature but a continued effort to achieve the purpose of its existence in terms of the statute."

The Court said, thus, the contractor ought to go out of the scene bringing together the principal employer and the contract labourer rendering the employment as direct, and resultantly a direct employee.

The bench favoured, giving widest possible meaning to the expressions used in the legislation, as otherwise the 1970 Act would lose its efficacy and contract labour would be left on the mercy of the intermediary.

Referring to the socialist concept enshrined in the Constitution, the bench said Apex Court has frequently noted that socialism ought not to be treated as a mere concept or an ideal, but the same ought to be practiced in every sphere of life and "it is the bounden duty of the law courts to give shape and offer reality to such a concept."

It said, "the primary impact of socialism as a matter of fact is to offer and provide security to life so that citizens of the country may have two square meals a day and maintenance of a minimum standard of life, it is expected, would lead to the abridgment of the gap between haves and have-nots."

DENIAL OF SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE, INHUMAN: SC

The Supreme Court has stated that a suspended employee must be paid subsistence allowance by the employer during the period of suspension. The principle was stressed in the case of an employee of the Bharat Gold Mines at Kolar, in Karnataka. It compared the failure to pay subsistence allowance to "slow-poisoning" as the employee would gradually starve himself to death.

The Judgement said: "Suspension notwithstanding, non-payment of subsistence allowance is an inhuman act which has an unpropitious effect on the life of an employee. When the employee is placed under suspension, he is demobilised and the salary is also paid to him at a reduced rate under the nick-name of subsistence allowance, so that the employee may sustain himself".