



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

50 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

E BALANANDAN

{E. Balanandan M.P. and President, CITU raised a discussion on the working of our Parliamentary Democracy in the last 50 years in Rajya Sabha on 29-8-97 Here is an extract from his speech (Editor)}

Today, while we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Independence, we are engaged in a debate about the working of the Parliamentary system in the country. This opportunity provided through this Special Session is utilised to make an objective analysis of the gains that we have made and the drawbacks that have to be overcome to enable us to work out a correct perspective.

This is a solemn occasion to remember the immense sacrifices made by countless people belonging to different streams of national movement in the cause of freedom. Valiant fighters have laid down their lives and we also record the sufferings that thousands of people had to undergo to liberate our motherland from foreign yoke. Braving brutal violence and military bullets thousands upon thousands went to jail and made tremendous sacrifices. It is through this struggle and sacrifices that the country attained freedom.

While various streams combined together to make the national movement a success, the role played by Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, in our national movement, needs a special mention. It is Mahatma Gandhi who mobilised millions of people throughout the country and rallied them in the struggle for freedom.

Though there are several limitations, the Constitution framed by the elder statesmen of our country, has

stood the test of time. This is not to deny the fact that it has at times been subjected to severe strain. The working of the constitution or amendments made during the period need no mention. However, the important among these are, the 42nd Amendment on socialism, secularism and unity and integrity of the nation and the 44th Amendment omitting the right to property from the Fundamental Rights.

A note prepared by the Lok Sabha Secretariat gives a short description of the working of the democratic polity. It has made a reference to the dark days of Emergency. It has also mentioned the assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and the assassination of the Father of the Nation on 30th January, 1948. He fell victim to the bullets of a religious fanatic for trying to quell the flames that were lighted in the aftermath of partition. These black spots, in our post-independence history, nobody can forget.

Glaring Inequality

The Constitution, basically, is a people's covenant where there is the charter of freedom and the blue print for their future. Our constitution is envisaged to be an instrument for economic growth and social change. The achievement of social and economic democracy as much as political democracy has been one of the cardinal concerns of our constitution. Details of the efforts made to achieve the above goals need not be gone into. The point is about its total impact on the people of the country. This is a point which needs some explanation.

Today, 40% of the population is living below the poverty-line, only 10% of the people are among the

affluent sections and the rest are somehow pulling on. Among the affluent sections, there are big capitalists who have amassed huge wealth. To be precise, take the example of big business houses. The captain of industries, Tata, had assets of 62.42 crores in 1939, but now, in 1997, it is Rs. 37,510 crores; Birla had assets worth of Rs.85 crores in 1939; now this group of companies is having assets of more than Rs.27,000 crores. There are 100 monopoly houses whose accumulated assets more than Rs.1,00,000 crores. So, the working of our parliamentary system developed economic inequality and large areas are even today suffering from wants and miseries. This is one part of the working of our Constitution. There is the other part. From nothing rather, from next to nothing we have built an economic infrastructure which is supposed to be one of the first ranking infrastructure in the comity of nations, built within a short span of time.

We have also made very important advances in the field of science. Dr. Raja Ramanna, who is here as Rajya Sabha member is an expert. Like him there are experts in their own field. They have made a tremendous contribution in the scientific field.

Global Economy Today

Of late, a new situation has come. It is said that there is no other way than globalising our economy. Globalise or perish. This is the kind of argument advanced by certain people. I have no objection to globalisation. But before going in for that, we should understand the exact position of the global economy today. This is a vast subject in itself. The 1996 World Development Report has given a figure. This is very important. The total national income of the world for 1993 was 23 trillion dollars. Out of this 18 trillion dollars went to the developed countries where only 15 per cent of the people live. Only 5 trillion came to us. This means, 85 per cent of the world's population got only 5 trillion dollars. This is the position of world economy today. It presents a very disturbing picture. The increasing unemployment, misery etc., which are the resultant effects of the capitalist system are there for everyone to see.

We were told that new economic tigers were rising in the Asian region. It is a fact that these economies had developed speedily. But today they are facing a serious crisis. A number of economies in South-East

Asia which have been held up as a model for the entire world and which could, indeed, experience a remarkably high growth rate for the last several years are now in the mist of a crisis. A crisis in relation to capital flight, reluctance of fresh capital to flow into the region, and weakening of their currencies. This is true not only of Thailand, Malaysia and Philippines; but it is also true in the case of South Korea which is supposed to be a big tiger in this region. Therefore, we should have an understanding of what is happening around us, before globalising. Today, the world has developed a great potential. The computer networking and the information technology have dramatically improved the intellectual productivity of mankind and are revolutionising the production process itself. It is an accepted fact. But what has been the consequence? Giant multinational corporations which control 25 per cent of the world's economy, of the world economic activity, are producing a surplus of industrial goods and financial assets. They are now hunting for markets for their goods and safe areas where they can invest their capital. They choose under developed countries where the emoluments are exceptionally low, for amassing huge profits.

They want to de-industrialise these countries in order to relocate their industries for which the slogans of globalisation, free-market etc. are being made as a cover. They are doing this under the hegemony of the United States. We should not forget this part.

Second Freedom Struggle?

Inaugurating this Special Session of the parliament the Speaker of the Lok Sabha reminded that we should start a second freedom struggle. In a way, this is an apt statement. One point has to be included in the second freedom struggle. Investment of foreign capital into our country, in effect, compromises our economic activity and goes against our freedom itself. Therefore, when we say "Freedom first and freedom last," we will not allow any country in the world to touch our freedom. So, intervention of imperialism in our economic sphere is to be resisted by one and all. Today our trade unions are quite vocal against privatisation. They are forced to say that this company or that company should not be privatised; the core sector should not be privatised; electricity should not be privatised, banking industry should not be

privatised etc. Somebody will give the argument that they are saying so because of their concern for wages. Of course, without wages no one can exist. Therefore, the workers are forced to say that. But the main contention of the working class is that the new policy which we propose to follow goes against the national interest. We are trying to protect the national interest. This kind of action has to be supported by all. Workers, who are demanding this belong to various trade unions affiliated to different political parties. They have come together in making this demand. This is a national demand and everyone it is hoped will fully agree with their demand.

Challenge of Corruption

We are saying new challenges are coming up. One of the greatest challenges is the challenge to fight corruption.

A statement published in the *Investment Week* says that the total black money in circulation in the country is Rs.5,77,383 crores. This, has given rise to a parallel economy. If at all we are serious in fighting corruption, where from should we begin? Are we to begin from NGOs taking Rs.2/- as bribe or from the black money of five lakh and odd crores of rupees.

To fight corruption, does not mean we only create a legal mechanism. It will not be sufficient. A consciousness has to be developed amongst the citizens, especially the political leaders of the country that corruption of any type will not be pardoned by the people.

New World Economic Disorder

We are having a parliamentary system. Here is a

system of plural democracy in which capitalism is there. But we have said it under the Constitution, our goal is socialism. The capitalist system the world over has proved beyond doubt that it cannot give a justifiable society. So, they claim that they are going to build a new world economic order. But, they are building a new world economic disorder by which a large part of society, 95 per cent, is living in poverty and in pecuniary conditions and want.

Only 2-5 per cent of people amass a lot of wealth. This is the disease of the capitalist system. Many friends here want capitalism. The system itself is afflicted with this kind of a disease. We should ponder over whether the capitalist system can give the answer to our difficulties. No. It is not possible. The only salvation for the country is socialism with democracy, with liberty. People might say, "Immediately stop this or that". That is an old theory. We do not want that. We are only saying that our people, our nation, are to be protected. We want a better life for them. It cannot be provided within the framework of capitalism.

We should come together to see that India is made the biggest country, the strongest country, of the world. We are not pigmies. We are a country next only to China in size. We are a country having 95 crores of people. We are a country having the biggest scientific personnel in the world, perhaps next only to one or two countries. This way, our country is a big country. The talent, history and culture which we have inherited are not small. They are big. Therefore, we should make a collective effort to build a new and prosperous India.

(-Labour cont. from page 5)

Most of the 60 tripartite committees formed in the Ministry of Labour have become defunct. Some of them have not met for the last 3 years or more. It was, therefore, demanded by both the workers' and employers' representatives that the Government should not allow a decline in tripartite machinery in India. They also criticised the non-implementation of the decisions of these meetings whenever they are taken.

On behalf of CITU, M.K.Pandhe, General Secretary and Suryanarayana Rao, Vice President, attended the meeting.

Mother Teresa

The entire world and the humanity felt orphaned at the demise of Mother Teresa, a great humanitarian who dedicated her entire life to serve the poor and needy across the world. The Missionaries of Charity founded by the Mother with its headquarters at Calcutta had been rendering yeomen service to the suffering humanity. The CITU and The Working Class deeply condole the death of Mother Teresa.

M.K. PANDHE

The 34th Session of the Standing Labour Committee held in New Delhi on 19.9.1997 reflected the strong resentment of the workers against the impact of the economic policies of the Central Government and failure of the Union Labour Minister to implement the decisions taken by the previous Committees.

The Trade Union representatives strongly criticised the Government of India for its failure to remove the ceiling in the Payment of Bonus Act which has resulted in a large number of workers going out of the purview of the Act. Even Productivity linked bonus scheme has been brought under the ceiling which has adversely affected the productivity of the workers in several industries. The employers' representatives, however, opposed the removal of ceiling and wanted a complete review of the Payment of Bonus Act. They even demanded linking of bonus with productivity while the Courts have held it a deferred wage. Despite a great deal of debate, no conclusion could be arrived at in the meeting. The Union Labour Minister only agreed to consider the issue but no firm commitment was given to take steps to remove the ceiling on bonus.

As a result of enhancement of the ceiling of ESI to Rs.6,500/-, a large number of workers were deprived of the existing medical benefits of the employees. The trade unions demanded that they should be allowed to get the medical facility as in the past without any contribution to the ESI Corporation. The ceilings imposed by the Government and some of the Acts have become so obsolete that no worker is covered by the legislation, thus making a mockery of the entire legislation. For instance, the Industrial Disputes Act covers the Supervisory staff drawing wages upto Rs.1,600/- per month while the Plantation Labour Act excludes all workmen and supervisory staff whose wages are above Rs.750/- per month. In practice, not a single worker is getting covered under this Act. This was criticised by the trade unions and they wanted the ceiling should be removed in these laws.

The Labour Minister, however, did not give any firm commitment except promising to review the whole matter. The delay on the part of the Government in introducing and passing the Agricultural Workers Bill in the Parliament despite this being part of the Common Minimum Programme of the UF Government, was also strongly criticised by the Trade Union representatives. The failure of the Government to introduce legislation providing for secret ballot for recognition of trade unions and adopt the Workers' Participation in Management Bill pending for the last six years, was also criticised.

The Government's official approach to the question of Bonded Labour was also strongly disapproved by the Standing Committee. The refusal of the district administration in several States to identify the bonded labours was pointed out and the attempt of some of the State Governments came up for sharp criticism. The Government's arbitrary fixing Rs.35/- as the floor level minimum wage was strongly disapproved by the Trade Union representatives. Even some of the State Governments are paying wage much below this level while no definite criterion was fixed for fixation of minimum wages at the Central and at the State level. The question of linking minimum wages with price index also remains unimplemented in several States. Above all, even the minimum wages fixed are not implemented. It was decided that the Government should prepare a note on this subject for final discussion in the next session of the Indian Labour Conference to be held in the last week of December this year.

The CITU criticised the non-functioning of the Advisory Committee under Equal Remuneration Act. The Committee was not reconstituted since 1992 and it has not met for a considerable length of time. The CITU was not included in this Committee by the Government while NGOs were given undue representation. The Minister agreed to reconstitute the Committee at an early date and make it functional. The last session of the Indian Labour Conference

discussed the question of delay in commencing wage negotiations in Public Sector Undertaking. The Department of Public Sector Enterprises has not issued any guidelines for negotiations though the new wage agreements are supposed to commence from 1.1.97. The managements of Public Sector Undertakings are hesitating to commence negotiations in the absence of any guidelines from the Government. The trade unions demanded that the wage negotiations should commence in all PSUs so that the settlements are arrived at without any further delay. The Labour Minister agreed to take up the matter with the Department of Public Enterprises.

The non-implementation of the NTC agreement by the Government was strongly condemned by the trade unions and the proposal of the Government to prepare a new scheme without discussing with the trade unions was also pointed out. The trade unions demanded that handing over the Textile units to the State Governments without giving financial assistance will not lead to revival of these units. The workers' representatives, therefore, demanded that the policy changes should not be made without discussing with the trade unions representatives.

The last Session of the Indian Labour Conference decided to constitute a Bipartite Committee on Industrial Relations Law. That Committee failed to come to any conclusion due to obstructive tactics adopted by the employers' representatives who wanted the entire liberalisation policies to be included in the Bill.

The Government's assurances in the CMP were not implemented and remained on paper. While the trade unions pressed to get the Bill passed at an early date, the employers' representatives opposed this suggestion and wanted that after liberalisation measures, the Bill has lost all meaning. The reply of the Labour Minister was evasive and he did not spell out what actually the Government wanted to do in the matter. It appears that the proposal is likely to be shelved despite being part of the CMP.

The Trade Unions and employers' representatives criticised the stand of the Government on the Ministerial Level Meeting of the WTO at Singapore held in last December. Though the social clause and its linkage with the WTO was a topic to be considered

in this meeting, the Indian Labour Conference recommended that the workers and employers should be associated in the official delegation. The Government, however, let the matter to be decided by the Ministry of Commerce and did not include the representatives of employers and workers. It was observed that several Governments which participated in the WTO Conference at Singapore included representatives of workers and employers in the delegation.

The last session of the Indian Labour Conference recommended that the representatives of the trade unions should be associated in monitoring the Child Labour programmes of the Government. The Central Government did not take any steps to include them in any manner. The Labour Minister agreed to consider this aspect in future.

The working and living conditions of workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) was also discussed at length by the meeting. The CITU pointed out that the wages paid are extremely low and the Labour laws are openly violated in these zones. The decision to associate trade union representatives while conducting inspections in these areas was also not implemented in its true spirit. The workers are mostly exploited and genuine trade unions are not allowed to function in these zones. The Labour Minister agreed that the matter will be studied by the Government and a detailed note will be presented for tripartite consultation.

The proposal of the Central Government to have composition of the Indian Labour Conference, identical with the Standing Labour Committee was opposed by both the workers' and employers' representatives and the Labour Minister had to agree to make necessary change in the matter. The Labour Minister informed the Committee that the proposal to constitute the Second National Commission on Labour was turned down by the Ministry of Finance on the ground that it would cost Rs.5 crores. The Minister proposed that the Government will appoint a High Power Committee to consider the labour problems in general. This would lead to inordinate delay in settling a number of issues which require immediate attention by the tripartite machinery in India.

(cont. on page No.3)

CITU DELEGATION VISIT TO CHINA

WR VARADA RAJAN

Following up the visit by a delegation of All-China Federation of Trade Unions to attend the CITU 9th Conference at Kochi, the ACFTU invited a 4 member delegation from CITU to pay a week long visit to China. This was with a view to further strengthen the friendship and understanding between ACFTU and CITU.

Accordingly a four-member delegation from CITU visited China from 28.7.97 to 6.8.97. The delegation comprised:

WR Varada Rajan, Secretary CITU and leader of the delegation, Manik Sanyal, Working Committee Member from West Bengal, Dr. K. Hemalatha, Working Committee Member from Andhra Pradesh, U.K. Vellingiri, General Council Member from Tamil Nadu.

The CITU delegation visited BEIJING, SHENZHEN, SHUNDE, ZHONGSHAN, GUANGZHOU and other places in GUANGDONG PROVINCE.

Arriving in Beijing on the evening of 29.7.1997, the CITU delegation met their ACFTU counterparts on 30th July and held discussions for over 3 hours.

Prof. Li YONGAN, Member of the Secretariat and Ms. XIA XIAOMEI, Director, International Liason Department, represented the ACFTU at the meeting. The venue of the meeting was ACFTU HOTEL, a three star hotel owned by ACFTU itself. The hotel consists of 424 rooms, meeting centre, entertainment centre, business centre, shopping hall besides dining hall.

Welcoming the CITU delegation, LI YONGAN thanked the CITU for extending warm hospitality to the ACFTU delegation to Kochi conference.

Describing China and India as two great countries in Asia with a long, ancient civilisation, populace and developing, having identical and common points and traditional friendship Li Yongan looked forward to maintaining and further strengthening of good neighbourly relationship between the two countries and the people. Yongan was happy that ACFTU and CITU have a long history of friendship and cooperation. On several occasions at the international

arena, the CITU had extended strong support to ACFTU, Yongan remembered with gratitude.

Li Yongan then proceeded to give a resume of the present situation, economic development and trade union activities in China. Political stability, economic development and national unity were the main themes dwelt upon by the ACFTU leader. (See Box Item on page No.7)

Com. Harisadhan Mitra

One of the senior leaders of trade union movement in West Bengal, veteran freedom fighter, and the former Working Committee member of CITU, Com. Harisadhan Mitra died on 25th August 1997. He was 79 and has been ailing since long.

Born in 1918, Com. Harisadhan Mitra joined freedom movement in his student life itself. He joined trade union movement in his early youth and played an important role in building up trade unions among the jute mill and engineering workers in Howrah district of West Bengal since 1940s. He was imprisoned many times both before and after independence. Till death he was vice-president of West Bengal State Committee of CITU and was All India Working Committee member of CITU till 1994. CITU Secretariat pays homage to the memory of Com. Harisadhan Mitra and sends condolence to his family members and comrades.

The ACFTU spokespersons enquired about the situation in India and evinced very keen interest in the activities of the CITU. They also patiently answered queries by the CITU delegation.

The ACFTU leadership was keen that the Socialist consciousness of the workers must not be allowed to be eroded in the context of opening up of the economy. The ACFTU was engaged in a regular trade union education programme covering all provinces and industries. They emphasised that the distinctiveness of building socialism with Chinese

(cont. on page 8)

CHINA : ACFTU OVERVIEW

China had achieved the targets for planned economic growth slated for the year 2000, 5 years ahead of schedule in 1995 itself. Completing successfully the 8th 5 year plan, the country has started implementation of the 9th plan from 1996.

In greens (agricultural) production China achieved a record high production of 490 billion kgs in 1996.

The import-export trade touched a new high of 289.9 billion US \$ in 1996. The foreign exchange reserve in the State Exchequer was 105 billion US \$ and will go up to a very comfortable 110 billion in 1997.

In an endeavour to constantly raise the standard of living of the people both in rural and urban side, 58 million out of a total 65 million people living in poverty have been covered by poverty alleviation programmes. By the year 2000 poverty will be totally eliminated.

On the economic front the twin objectives were (i) to transform China into a socialist market economy and (ii) to ensure intensive and extensive economic development.

Science and technology is applied to rejuvenate the economy.

The state owned and joint enterprises are in the process of transformation to modern management system.

While on rapid economic development, China adheres to two basic things - environmental protection and protection of natural resources free from pollution.

The foreign investments allowed into China so far only constitute 7.2% of the total industrial investment in the country. The net assets holding by foreign enterprises is only 3%.

In consumer electronic industry China has masterminded modern expertise and its products are entering foreign markets taking China to the status of a major exporter. Developed capitalist countries are adopting dumping strategy. Though China has emerged as one among the top 4 countries in the colour film industry. Fuji\Kodak films are sold 5 US\$ less than the price in US itself. So China is readjusting tariff as an anti-dumping strategy.

The All China Federation of Trade Unions has 31

provincial units and 16 industrial federations. It has a membership of 103 millions in 600,000 units.

Focusing on employment and social security, the Chinese trade unions are devoting to economic development, safeguarding the rights and interests of the workers and the general interest of the Chinese nation.

When industrial units are being transformed into companies/corporations as part of the economic reforms, the essential function of the trade unions is to safeguard the workers.

The ACFTU Executive Committee will have a special session in Sept. 1997, to discuss the theory of reforms.

In all the enterprises democratic evaluation/appraisal and participation of workers in the Board of Directors is ensured.

The other task of the trade unions is to work for collective agreements through a process of consultations. Any agreement must be approved by the workers' congress in each factory.

In the new economic zones, the ACFTU has now taken up the task of establishing trade unions in the foreign funded enterprises and joint ventures. In more than 80% of these enterprises trade unions have already been established.

While participation of women in leading bodies of trade unions has consistently been encouraged, grass root level committees of working women are formed. Special protection of working women is an important work of the Chinese trade unions.

The rate of unemployment is 3% in China. This is partially the result of over heating of the economy, which is now being softened. For instance in textiles the installed capacity is 4 times higher than the required production which has rendered a large work force redundant. They have to be reemployed. In industries which have mainly seasonal operations, the stability of work force is a problem to be tackled. Retraining and reemployment of workers is a major task. The workers remain unemployed between 3 to 10 months, before getting reemployment. Trade unions help the workers and their families during such difficulties.

(visit to china cont. from page 6)

characteristics was pervading all their endeavors.

Our delegation reiterated the CITU proposal for strengthening the ACFTU-CITU relations by exchange of delegations/study visits between industry wise federations in both the countries. The ACFTU spokespersons assured that they were receptive to the idea and assured to take it up for consideration in the ACFTU secretariat. They also mentioned that interactions between provincial organisations of ACFTU and state organisations of CITU could also be considered.

The subsequent days of our visit was a meticulously drawn up programme of visits to industrial enterprises, various cities, historic spots, etc.

Wherever our delegation visited there was a discussion with the local leaders of ACFTU. The visit of our delegation was within weeks of the reunion of Hongkong with mainland China. The euphoria and a sense of national pride over the great event could be witnessed amongst all the people we met during the entire visit.

In Beijing city, it was a matter of regret for our delegation that MAO Mausoleum was closed for renovation.

We visited the Imperial Palace or the Forbidden city, Great wall of China, Dr Sun Yat Sen's ancestral house, the Opium war museum, China Miniature Scenic spot, China Folk culture villages, etc. which helped us to acquire a glimpse of the history and culture of the great Chinese nation. We also visited several tourist spots.

The 'Special Economic Zones', where a number of joint venture industrial enterprises have sprung up, following the opening up of Chinese economy, were located in Shanghai and Shenzhen, besides other cities. In Shenzhen city, we visited a number of such enterprises, medium and large-scale. The industries our delegation visited, presented an amazing and splendid profile with a state of the art technology manufacturing facilities, housing, canteen and entertainment facilities for the workers etc.

We spent most part of our visit in the GUANGDONG province, which was far ahead of other provinces in China in industrial and economic development. Even the rural households we visited presented a sign of prosperity. Even in the high-tech industrial zones, the greenery was amazing. The emphasis was on protection of environment, free from pollution.

The China we visited never bore any semblance of a third world country or a developing economy, in comparison to what is obtaining in India. China is capable of competing with any other industrially advanced country on equal terms. But the trade union leaders of China, wherever we met them, asserted all humility that theirs was still a backward economy and they were only trying to overcome their backwardness as fast as they could.

"Externally, customer is our God, internally, so are the employees" was inscribed in the folder published by one of the new enterprises. And it was no exaggeration!

Com.N Vasudevan

The President of Andaman & Nicobar island Coordination Committee of CITU, Com.N Vasudevan expired on 4th September 1997 after long sufferings from cancer at the age of 57 years.

Com.Basudevan played an important role in organising trade union movement in the Andaman & Nicobar and the movement of the govt employees in the islands.

His death would create a void in the trade unions and democratic movement. CITU Secretariat in a message sent to A& N Coordination Committee of CITU conveyed homage to the departed leader and condolence to his bereaved family and the comrades.

Com. M. Farooqui

Com. M. Farooqui, Secretary of the National Council of Communist Party of India died on 3rd September, 1997. Com. Farooqui started his public life even as a student. He was the leader of all India Students Federation and a freedom fighter. His contribution to the working class and left movement in Delhi and the whole country is invaluable. Com. Farooqui was an ardent supporter of working class struggles. He dedicated his life to the cause of socialism, working people and left unity.

The CITU and 'The Working Class' Pay homage to the immortal memory of Com. Farooqui.

Revolutionary Role of Working Class

SUKOMAL SEN

In the text book history of India's freedom movement, the role played by the working class and other toiling sections of the masses was mostly ignored except some passing references. But working class played a revolutionary role in attaining India's freedom.

In the first decade of twentieth century, the working class of India had just begun to emerge and enter the arena of economic struggle, the struggles being limited to the new industrial centres only.

From the outset, the workers had to confront two basic antagonistic forces-imperialist political rule and economic exploitation by both national and foreign capitalists. Consequently, the trade union movement of India could not but be interlinked with the political movement for national liberation.

Only after the birth of its own political party and an alternative path to both national freedom and its own emancipation was chalked out, could the working class attempt to play an independent role, howsoever limited, in the national liberation struggle.

Working class came early on political issues when the first political strike was organised in Bombay in July 1908, protesting the arrest of Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

July 22 was the concluding day for Tilak's trial and he was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. The Bombay workers came out with a programme of action against this sentence, and decided on a six-day general strike against the six years of imprisonment for Tilak.

One lakh workers joined the political strike which began on July 23. From July 24 the encounters between the armed police and army-men started and a street battle ensued. The entire city reverberated with these pitched battles fought by thousands of workers.

MASS STRUGGLES DURING 1928-31

The working class of India began to play an increasingly important role in the freedom movement during the new phase of mass struggles in the period between 1928 and 1931.

The Indian National Congress never put labour on its economic or political agenda except for lending support to certain working-class economic struggles aimed mainly against the British capitalists.

Appearance of the working class in the battlefield as an independent social force, in part under Communist influence, in part outside of it, taking the initiative, lent the anti-imperialist struggle a new dimension.

The impact was felt in the stormy situation created by the workers' strike, mass demonstrations and militant youth and student movement against the Simon Commission.

The Bombay Municipal Workmen's Union took the lead in the protest against the Simon Commission, on February 3, 1928, the day the commission landed in India.

In fact it was a day of political strike by the working class to demonstrate their will to overthrow British imperialism.

Newspapers reported massive working class participation in all protest hartals, demonstrations and meetings that took place in Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, Lucknow, Delhi and other principal cities of India.

COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE DEMANDED

When at the Calcutta session in December 1928 Gandhiji moved a resolution on Dominion Status as recommended by the Nehru Committee and approved by the Working Committee, demanding its establishment by December 31, 1930, there was general uproar. In a bid to mollify the strong opposition, Gandhiji reduced the period of waiting from December 31, 1930 to the same date in 1929. Thus was the resolution on complete independence shelved.

It is against this background the far-reaching implications of the working class political initiative towards achieving full independence has to be understood.

The mammoth and unprecedented working class demonstration before Congress pandal during the Calcutta session demanding that the Congress adopted the resolution for complete independence was part of the programme. About 30,000 workers, belonging to several trade unions of Calcutta, Howrah and nearby areas, led by leaders like Muzaffar Ahmed, Bankim Mukherjee, Sibnath Banerjee and others—all communists and left nationalists—demonstrated in the streets of Calcutta with slogans like 'Workers of the World Unite', 'Long live an independent India Republic' and 'we have nothing to lose by our chains', before reaching the Congress pandal. Ignoring the resistance by the Congress volunteers, thousands of workers entered the pandal and held a meeting. Jawaharal Nehru had to preside and the following resolution was passed: "This mass meeting of the workers and peasants from all industries declare that we the workers and peasant of the land shall not rest content till complete independence is established and all exploitation from capitalism and imperialism ceases.... We do call upon the National Congress to keep that goal before them and organise the national forces for that purpose."

WORKING CLASS MILITANT ACTIONS

After the prevarication of 1927-28, at its Lahore session in December 1929, the Congress ultimately set the attainment of complete national independence, as its goal. But the question was: In what manner was this to be attained; through the non-violent path as envisaged by Gandhiji, or through a different path directly opposed to Gandhiji's scheme of things?

The Congress perhaps, did not properly realise the mass enthusiasm that the resolution for complete independence would evoke. In fact, the risings of the Indian people that began to break out in various parts of the country, far transcended what Gandhi and the National Congress had envisaged.

Gandhiji ultimately came out with his much-publicised Salt March to Dandi alongwith a select band of followers on April 6, 1930. A nervous government arrested him. But they were totally unprepared for the militant mass protest action against Gandhiji's arrest. An unnerved government resorted to cruel repressive measures on the masses

throughout the country.

SHOLAPUR EVENTS

On May 9, 1930, the working class of Sholapur rose in action. Grave rioting broke out and the police was attacked. Police chowks and the sessions court were burnt. The fury of the mass was such that some policemen were even murdered and burnt on public streets. The police fired twice on the mob. Four were killed and fourteen injured.

The civil administration in Sholapur collapsed and the workers and peasants kept the city under their control.

The Government proclaimed martial law and the city was given over to the charge of the military.

After a heroic week-long battle the resistance in Sholapur collapsed in the face of heavy military reinforcements. How many sons of the working class attained martyrdom in the battle of Sholapur is not yet known. These countless sons, it seems, are condemned to remain unknown as neither the official record nor the bourgeois historians ever bothered with their particulars.

The four accused of the Sholapur case—Dhun Shetty, Sarda, Shinde and Kurban Hussain were hanged in the early hours of January 12, 1931 at Yervada jail.

WORKING CLASS MILITANCY IN THE LAST PHASE

The war-time advance and achievements of the Indian working class movement will undoubtedly be regarded as a memorable phase in the history of the Indian labour movement. The defeat of fascism and the end of the war saw the emergence of the Indian working class as a highly organised, class-conscious and uncompromising fighting force against imperialism.

But when the British Government was busy in simultaneously adopting divisive tactics and taking advantage of the disunity and vacillations of the upper level leadership, the many at the bottom again burst out in an unprecedented upsurge. Defying death and indiscriminate firing by police and the troops, and carrying Congress, Muslim and Red Flags in some cases, thousands of workers, students and middle class people joined in stormy demonstrations in Calcutta, Bombay and other cities and industrial centres demanding India's freedom.

The ratings of the Royal India Navy, who were highly aggrieved in consequence of a long series of unremedied grievances rose in open revolt against the British regime. The Central Naval Strike Committee which was set up by the rebellious ratings appealed to the civilian masses to organise powerful strike and hartal in reply to the threat to crush the revolt.

At a time when the expressly critical situation demanded unstinted help and support from the forces of the national movement. Vallabhai Patel on behalf of the Congress and serving their class interests, refused not only their support but even opposed it. But the call of the Naval Strike Committee evoked an immediate response from the Communist Party and the trade unions of Bombay, and enthusiastic and angry support from their class brothers. On February 22, the working class and wide sections of the toiling masses of Bombay organised strike and hartal, facing indiscriminate police and military firing. In the struggle that raged for three days from February 21 to February 23, according to conservative official figures, 250 patriots sacrificed their precious lives at the brutal hand of the British Army which drove in lorry loads through the streets of Bombay indiscriminately firing their tommy guns. In Calcutta, Madras, Karachi and other places too popular demonstrations were held in support of the naval

ratings' struggle.

NEW CLASS ALIGNMENT

The events of this period 1945-46, clearly revealed the new alignment of class forces in the political arena of India. Defying communal conspiracies, the unity and cohesion of the entire working class, its inspired participation in the political mass struggles, together with the uncompromising resoluteness of the peasantry, the students and the middle-class elements, raised the tempo of the anti-imperialist struggle to a challenging and irreversible height.

Thus the political struggle for India's freedom followed contrasting paths: one followed by the enlightened and propertied class who were in the leadership of the national movement, and the other by the working class. The former constantly vacillated even on the question of adopting a clear line on the achievement of complete independence. The workers on the other hand, were not only clear in their line of political action, they also closely linked their economic demand with the political struggle for freedom. And they showed the deep understanding, and the courage that arises from it, that without the readiness to die, no goal can be achieved. It is on their sacrifice that we stand free to-day. And the lesson they imbibed and left behind still holds to-day.

(ABRIDGED. Courtesy : Employees' Forum)

AGAINST FRAUDULENT GOVT PENSION SCHEME MASSIVE PARLIAMENT MARCH OF WORKERS ALL INDIA STRIKE ON 17TH DECEMBER

Tens of thousands of workers from all parts of the country converged outside the Parliament, at Patel Chowk, New Delhi on 2nd September '97, in a mighty show of anger and protest against the imposition of a fraudulent Govt. Scheme on the workers in the name of Pension. The workers rally resolved to step up further protest actions culminating in a countrywide strike action on December 17.

The Parliament march and the massive rally took place at the call of four Central Trade Unions viz ; CITU, AICCTU, UTUC and UTUC(LS). But workers affiliated to other organisations, even of belonging to those supporting the Govt. Pension Scheme joined

the rally in a big way.

A major section of participants were from the low paid unorganised sector, who according to the supporters of the retrograde scheme were supposed to be benefited by the Govt. Scheme.

Thousands of beedi workers from Madhya Pradesh, UP, Karnataka and West Bengal, brick-klin workers from Haryana, contract workers from Bhilai, Raipur and Korba, construction workers from Punjab and the big contingent of unorganised sector workers from Delhi, Ghaziabad and Faridabad, joined the rally travelling all the way from distant corners of the country. They exposed clearly that the claim of

the protagonists of the Govt. pension scheme it benefitted the workers of unorganised sectors, could find no takers among the workers of unorganised sector itself.

At 11.30 a.m. a huge colourful procession of around fifty thousand workers started from Ramlila Ground to reach Patel Chowk where the leaders addressed the rally.

CITU General Secretary, Dr.M.K. Pandhe while introducing the Declaration, stated that during last two years' operation of the fraudulent Govt pension scheme, all the commitments of the Govt. regarding annual review of the scheme and the provision of exemptions etc. have turned out to be sheer bluff, reasserting the fraud underlying the entire govt scheme. He called for carrying the struggle against the design of loot on the workers PF and for a genuine pension scheme as third retirement benefit to further height by making the strike of December 17 a massive success.

E. Balanandan President CITU urged for thorough

preparatory campaign to draw the entire working class including those beyond the influence of the sponsoring trade unions into the strike action.

Jibon Roy MP, Secretary CITU, stated that the grass root level workers irrespective of affiliation and even the members of those Central Trade Unions that supported the govt design of confiscation of workers PF in the name of pension, are opposed to the disastrous scheme.

Among others who addressed the rally and endorsed the strike call were Dipankar Bhattacharya (AICCTU), Bhagawan Singh (UTUC) and Achintya Sinha (UTUC-LS).

After the rally a delegation from all the organisations went to the office of Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma to submit the mass petition demanding withdrawal of the Govt. Scheme and introduction of pension as a third retirement benefit signed by twenty lakh workers.

The Declaration adopted in the rally is published hereunder:

PENSION : MARCH TO PARLIAMENT ON 2.9.97 DECLARATION

The massive rally of workers held on 2nd September 1997 vehemently denounces the imposition of the most retrograde 'Employees Pension Scheme' on the unwilling workers, designed for pocketing almost half of the provident fund of the workers by offering a paltry pension.

The entire working class, irrespective of affiliations have time and again demonstrated their opposition to this loot of workers' PF, despite support given by leadership of some Central Trade Unions. This opposition of the mass of workers was seen in massive countrywide strike action of 23rd February 1996. Over and above this, several spontaneous actions by the workers of all affiliations all over the country have taken place, and numerous court cases pending, challenging the scheme.

Last two years experience of operation of the Pension Scheme proved beyond doubt that the real intention behind the scheme is not paying pension to the workers but getting access to workers' hard earned savings at cheaper rate of interest for Government expenditure. The commitment of the Govt. for yearly review of scheme has already proved to be sheer bluff.

Further, the provision laid down in the scheme of granting exemption to the establishments evolving separate pension scheme has also turned out to be a hoax. Pension already released to a number of retirees as per the scheme, is a meagre percentage of total number of retired workers. The incompetent and incapable administration of scheme by PF organisation will inevitably lead to accumulation of several thousands of crores of rupees in pension fund accompanied by non-payment to eligible pensioners as in the case of earlier family pension scheme.

The massive rally of workers and petition of workers signed by several lakhs of workers being submitted to Lok Sabha once again reiterate the firm determination to continue fight with more vigour against this loot on the workers and for pension without touching the provident fund of the workers. This rally of workers demands upon the govt. not to impose the existing Employees Pension Scheme on the working class and review the entire scheme to ensure pension as a third retirement benefit.

The rally denounces the Govt. of India for their refusal to take into consideration the widespread

opposition of the workers at the grassroots level and declares that workers will not accept this imposition. This rally also calls upon the working class and the trade unions of all affiliations to carry forward the struggle on the following demands:

- 1) Pension should be a third retirement benefit.
- 2) Pension Scheme should be made optional.
- 3) Pension amount should be linked with price index.
- 4) Pension Scheme should be administered by separate Joint Trust and expenditure should be borne by Govt.
- 5) Pension Fund should earn higher rate of interest.

The rally appeals to all the Trade Unions and workers to strengthen the struggle on pension through a phased programme of action:

1) Holding state/regional and industrywise conventions and sending resolutions adopted therein to the Prime Minister of India.

2) Organising dharna/demonstration and rally in major industrial centres/district headquarters.

3) Serving strike notice to the respective management and employers on 2nd December 1997.

4) ONE DAY ALL INDIA STRIKE ON 17TH DECEMBER 1997.

The rally appeals to all the trade unions and the workers and employees irrespective of affiliation to make the strike action a massive success and give a fitting reply to the Govt. machination to impose the retrograde scheme on the workers.

CPSTU MEET IN NEW DELHI

PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS ON TO A NATIONWIDE STRIKE STRUGGLE

An extended meeting of the committee of Public Sector Trade Unions, held at New Delhi on 19-20 September, 1997, had called for a nationwide struggle, including two days strike during budget session of Parliament.

THE PROGRAMMES OF PROPAGANDA, AGITATION AND DIRECT ACTION DRAWN UP BY THE CPSTU ARE AS UNDER:

TWO DAY NATION-WIDE STRIKE BY ALL THE CENTRAL PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS DURING THE NEXT BUDGET SESSION OF PARLIAMENT.

For preparation of the strike, the following propaganda and agitational programmes are to be implemented including any further additional programmes according to local situation.

Gate meetings to explain the decisions of the CPSTU meeting to be organised during the 1st week of October, 1997.

Joint Convention to be followed by massive demonstration at unit level during last week of October/first week of November, 1997.

National meeting of the unions of the industries referred to the Disinvestment Commission to be organised at Bangalore on 29-30 Nov '97. If possible this programme may be organised under the aegis of all the Central Trade Unions.

State/Regional level joint conventions during the months of November and December, 1997 in all the State capitals and major PSU centres. Some such centres are as follows:-

(a) Bangalore (b) Hyderabad (c) Chennai (d) Kochi (e) Vizag (f) Dhanbad (g) Durgapur (h) Calcutta (i) Lucknow (j) Bhopal (k) Delhi (l) Chandigarh (m) Mumbai (n) Guwahati (o) Bhilai (p) Ranchi (q) Nagpur (r) Rourkela (s) Patna (t) Vadodara and others.

Defend Public Sector Day all over the country by wearing Badge, organising demonstration and procession on 6th January, 1998.

Day long dharna before the respective Raj Bhawan of the States and submission of Memorandum to the Governor (Common draft to be prepared by the CPSTU) on 27th January, 1998.

On the same day, dharna to be organised at all the Public Sector Industrial Centres away from the State capitals.

The meeting of the CPSTU was attended by about 125 leading trade union representatives who came from all over the country representing all the major Public Sector industries. The Presidium of the meeting comprised P.K.Ganguly (CITU), P.Nageswar Rao (AITUC), A.D.Nagpal (HMS), Michael B.Fernandes (JAF Bangalore) and G.Narsingh Rao

(PSU Coordination Committee, Hyderabad). More than 30 representatives participated in the discussion. On the basis of the deliberations and suggestions of the representatives, the CPSTU, while reiterating its commitment for improving performance in Public Sector, has adopted the above programmes of propaganda, agitation and action to defeat the anti-Public Sector policies of the Government.

The meeting also focussed on the long pending urgent issues of the Public Sector Workers as under:

1. Expeditious revival of all sick PSUs; Govt. must act as promoter and give necessary financial assistance.
2. Scrapping of SICA Amendment Bill introduced in the Parliament.
3. Embargo on wage revision of the PSUs referred to BIFR and also on payment of slab system VDA should be withdrawn immediately. The 67 PSUs under Central Govt. DA should also be granted wage revision.
4. Pending Wage negotiations in all PSUs where the tenure of previous agreement has expired must be started forthwith in the right earnest without attaching any conditions.
5. No privatisation of Public Sector units.
6. Stop disinvestment of PSU shares and scrap

Disinvestment Commission.

7. No deployment of contract workers in permanent
9. Enhancement of ceiling on payment of Gratuity to Rs.3.5 lakhs.
10. Existing medical and other facilities in PSUs should not be curtailed/withdrawn on the plea of extension of ESI coverage and deduction should not be made from the salary.

11. PSUs should be allowed to devise separate Pension Scheme without diverting compulsorily any fund from contributory PF scheme.

It was also decided that the extended meeting of the Core Group of CPSTU shall be held in the last week of December, 1997 to finalise the dates of the strike and further associated programmes to be observed during February/March, 1998.

The CPSTU extended support to the joint strike call of all the unions on 11th November, 1997 in Fertilizer Corporation of India and Hindustan Fertilizer Corporation and decided that telegrammes to be sent by all Public Sector Trade Unions to the Prime

Minister of India on that day saying "ALL SUPPORT TO STRIKE BY FERTILIZER WORKERS (.) DEMAND REVIVAL OF ALL FERTILIZER UNITS WITH BIFR".

Accord on Pay Commission

KANAI BANERJEE

The protracted negotiation between the JCM Staff Side, and the Govt. held under the shadow of the strike notice served by the employees organisations, ended with the conclusion of an agreement between the two. This considerably mitigated the serious tension prevailing in the sector of govt. employment over the past months. Three major trade unions viz AITUC, CITU and HMS congratulated the employees for the solid unity they had demonstrated, which enabled them to achieve some improvement over the position initially taken by the govt. They also appreciated the positive attitude shown by the govt side during the last phase of the negotiation.

Not all are satisfied, however. Some organisations have expressed their displeasure - BMS, among

central trade unions, and some organisations of the central govt. employees. Certain categories of employees such as the loco running staff of the railways are also not happy. The motormen of Mumbai suburban train services have reportedly demonstrated protest by taking mass causal leave which paralysed the entire suburban services of Mumbai. However there is probably a sense of relaxation among a major segment of the central govt. employees.

To recall the sequence of events in retrospect, the publication of the Pay Commission Report sparked off wide spread resentment. Immediately the JCM staff-side demanded specific modifications of several recommendations. The govt. was moving slow, further straining the already taxed patience of the workers.

As the agitation was mounting - the JCM staff side had taken decision to go on indefinite strike on and from 24.9.97. The govt, towards the end of August, assured the staff side that not only they would soon take decision on the recommendations, but would also have prior consultation with them. The reaction was expectedly sharp when the govt decision came out in the Press and there was no consultation as promised. Moreover, in some cases, the modification decided upon by the govt. was more retrograde than the recommendations themselves. The provocative statements issued by bureaucrats further incensed the workers. Strike notice was served on 4.9.97. It was only then that a serious dialogue was initiated by the govt; it started on 6.9.97. The govt. set up a group of Ministers to negotiate; the group included senior Ministers like the Home Minister and the Railway Minister along with others. The discussions took place on the basis of the Staff side charter listing the modifications they demanded in respect of the govt decisions. The talks ended with the conclusion of the agreement late in the night on 11.9.97.. The highlights of the agreement are:

1. Improvement in minimum pay and/or rate of

- increment in five lower scales and one higher scale.
2. Fitment benefit raised from 20% to 40%.
3. While need based recruitment will continue in various departments, the recommendations for downsizing strength by 30% will not be accepted by the Govt.
4. PLB/adhoc bonus for this year to all Group 'C' and 'D' employees as was done in the last year. Extension to group 'B' non gazetted employees will be recommended to the Cabinet for acceptance.
5. Payment of arrears in cash will be made in instalments.

The agreement indeed reflect some real improvements upon the Pay Commission recommendations as also upon the original govt. package in respect of some items. Even so, it will be wrong to dismiss the persisting grievances of different sections of employees as completely imaginary and the organisations will be advised to take care of them. Moreover, the workers are perhaps in need of carrying out, with an eye to the future, some serious exercise involving comparison between what they have demanded and what they have got. Apparently the gap between them is too wide.

THE ECONOMIC REFORMS AND WORKING WOMEN IN ASIA

Dr.K. HEMALATHA

(The Committee for Asian Women (CAW) organised a workshop in Hongkong from 5th to 10th August, 1997. The participants were organisers of working women from 12 countries - South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hongkong, Thailand, Philippines, Srilanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India. The CITU was the only union invited from India. 22 women and 2 men, including translators and facilitators participated, in the workshop. Dr. K. Hemalatha, Secretary, Andhra Pradesh state committee and Member, working committee of CITU, participated in the workshop. Here is a report.)

The structural adjustment programme of Globalisation, Privatisation and Liberalisation - the all in one prescription of the World Bank and I.M.F. for all the economic ailments of the third World

Countries has been initiated in our country by the Govt of India under Cong. (I) about six years back. The progress is there for all to see. For the majority of the people, the treatment was worse than the disease and they decided to 'treat' the Cong.(I), by giving it a record low number of seats in the last parliamentary elections. But, unfortunately, the U.F. Government, which came to power last year, also appears to be more determined in implementing the so called 'reforms' than on the implementation of its own Common Minimum Programme. The people are being told that this is the only way the countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Korea etc. developed. What this development meant to the workers, particularly to the working women of these South East Asian Countries, got an exposure in the workshop held recently at Hong Kong. The workshop

discussed the impact of structural adjustment policies and globalisation on the conditions of Working Women in Asia, and the difficulties faced in organising working women in this situation.

Adverse Effects of Economic Policies

The outcome of the discussions in the workshop was very interesting. The Governments of all these countries have embarked upon economic reforms at the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF. And as delegates from country after country narrated the conditions of the workers and particularly of the working women, the story was the same everywhere. In spite of the socio-economic and cultural differences, the effects of these policies on the masses was the same.

Each and every participant stressed that these policies only benefited the multinationals and big capitalists, while the plight of majority of the people, the workers and the small peasants and ordinary people, became worse. Working Women bore the brunt of the adverse effects of these policies most.

It was observed that the common features of these policies in all these countries are - a) Privatisation leading to displacement of Public Sector employees: b) Closures or shifting of factories to areas or countries with cheap labour: c) Closures due to losses or diversification: (d) Mechanisation: (e) Labour flexibility: (f) using patriarchy for more intense exploitation of women and (g) establishment of Export Processing Zones or Free Trade Zones, where labour laws are not implemented and trade unions are not tolerated.

Women losing Jobs

As a result, there is an increase in unemployment. In Taiwan in 1996 alone, about 80,000 workers lost employment due to closure of factories. 80% of them were women. Women's employment is considered secondary or supplementary and they are the first to be retrenched. In South Korea, women are not included in the official figures on unemployment. In Nepal, with the introduction of the 'One family-one Job' policy, the job usually goes to the man, although jobs are not available to all families.

The numbers of regular workers is coming down. More and more work is being done through casual, contract, part time, piece-rate and home based workers. Most of the women are concentrated in these

irregular jobs, where no labour laws or social benefits are implemented. They have no job security. In South Korea, in the garment industry where thousands of women are employed, the multinational companies have drastically reduced the number of regular workers and are getting the jobs done through contractors and sub-contractors. Instead of employing workers directly, workers are hired through labour agencies. Local factories are locked out and shifted to rural areas or to countries where cheap labour is available. Hundreds of factories have been closed in the recent period, throwing thousands of workers to the street. The same situation exists in Indonesia, Hongkong, Thailand and the Philippines. The employers use the irregular workers to divide the working class. Whenever the regular workers resort to strikes or struggles, the irregular workers are employed in their place. The trade union movement also gets weakened by these tactics. Again in South Korea, the membership of one union in garment industry which was 2,000 in 101 factories in 1989, came down to 70 in 4 factories, as factories were closed and work was distributed to home based workers.

Many women, who have put in 10-15 years of service are losing their employment because of closures. As most of the companies, particularly in the service sector, prefer only young women, those women who are above 30 years find it very difficult to find alternative employment. In Hongkong, such women work as part time cleaners, baby sitters, dish cleaners and garbage collectors, at very low wages. In spite of working for 10-12 hours a day, they find it very difficult to maintain their families, with the fast rising cost of living.

Equality Denied

Though there is statutory provision for equal wages for men and women in all the countries, nowhere is it being implemented. In industrially developed South Korea, in the manufacturing sector the jobs of women and men are mostly segregated. Women are employed in the lower levels with low wages. Men do the skilled jobs with higher wages. Even when they do the same work, women get less, about 55% of men's wages - In the service sector like banks etc. women get only 70% of men's wages, for the same work. Training and promotion opportunities are denied to women.

Creches are not provided. In South Korea, according to law of the land establishments employing 300 women, should provide Creche. But very few managements provide creche, that too only in the service sector. In the manufacturing sector, creches are not provided. As the cost of private creche would be around 50% of the monthly earnings of an average women worker, most of the women are compelled to quit their jobs, after they have babies.

Sexual Harassment

There is an increase in the trend of commodification of women's bodies and sexual harassment of working women at the work place. It is so rampant that women have to satisfy the sexual demands of contractors, supervisors etc. to get employment, to get promotion and even to get leave. In Bangladesh, in the garment factories, supervisors withhold the monthly wages of some women and pay the arrears only if they satisfy their lust. In Indonesia, women have to show their undergarments to male supervisors, to get their leave on menstruation. In the LG Industrial Electronics Company of the multinational LG Group, in South Korea, the supervisors use most vulgar language and sexually offensive action. In spite of repeated representations and agitations by the women employees, the management tries to protect the supervisors and the police only try to make a compromise. In Thailand and the Philippines, due to unemployment and poverty, women are forced into the sex trade which is promoted in the name of tourism.

Women, up in protests

In spite of innumerable difficulties, more and more women are coming out to resist the exploitation and to protect their living conditions, against closures, and for job security, minimum wages and social benefits. They are participating in the various struggles of the trade unions against the repressive laws, as in South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia. In Taiwan, when a textile company was closed down and the management tried to escape without paying the workers their dues, the women launched a long struggle for 6 months. They led processions to the residences of the Prime Minister and the President. They picketed before Government offices and held the General manager as captive in his office for 40 hours. The management tried to scare them by letting

loose a truck load of alsation dogs on them and the security guards. But the women stood firm and confronted. In Bangladesh and the Philippines also women are participating in large number in various struggles.

Intensify Struggles

The workshop felt that these struggles should be further intensified and efforts should be made to bring all the working women into struggles, to resist the onslaught of the multinational companies on the living conditions of workers. It was felt that working women's struggle should be part of the struggles of the working class and in co-ordination with peasants and other oppressed peoples. The urgent necessity of frequent exchanges of the experiences in the struggles and organisation of working women in the countries of the regions and of solidarity action was stressed by the delegates from the participating countries.

GOVT. NOTIFICATIONS AND ORDINANCES

Government of India have issued notifications and promulgated ordinances as detailed hereunder:

(i) Notification dated 20.8.1997

By this notification the Payment of Gratuity Act has been made applicable to trusts or societies in which 10 or more persons are employed.

(ii) Notification dated 26.8.1997

By this notification the P.F. Scheme has been amended to the effect that claims shall be settled and benefits paid within 30 days. The P.F. Commissioner has been made liable.

(iii) Ordinance dated 22.9.1997

By this ordinance the P.F. contribution has been raised from 10% to 12% w.e.f. 22.9.1997. The PF Act will apply to industries and establishments from the time of inception, the infancy period of 3 years withdrawn.

(iv) Ordinance dated 24.9.1997

By this ordinance the gratuity limit has been raised from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2.5 lakhs. The gratuity law will also apply to schools, societies and trusts.

MAHARASHTRA

STRUGGLE OF 40,000 POWERLOOM WORKERS IN ICHALKARAJI

Fifty years after Indian Independence, and 111 years after the first observance of May Day around the main demand of an eight-hour working day, nearly five lakhs powerloom workers of Maharashtra are still forced to work for 12 hours a day by rapacious big powerloom owners, backed by successive Congress and Sena-BJP state governments. The workers have also been denied minimum wage and are forced to work for a pittance.

These unorganised workers are concentrated in four main powerloom centres viz. Ichalkaranji in Kolhapur district, Solapur in Solapur District, Malegaon in Nasik district and Bhiwadi in Thane district. The CITU has strong influence in the first two of these four centres.

Recently, the CITU-affiliated Lal Bavta General Kamgar Union led a massive and militant struggle of over forty thousands powerloom workers in Ichalkaranji. The two main demands taken up were an eight-hour working day and the declaration and implementation of minimum wage.

It began with a one-day token strike which was a total success. The enraged workers were in a mood for a decisive struggle for both the demands. The indefinite strike began in June 1997. The tempo of the struggle was magnificent, with huge working class marches every morning and massive public meetings every night, attended by 20,000 to 30,000 workers.

When the strike was at its peak, the state labour minister Shabir Sheikh was forced to hold talks with the CITU delegation led by President Prabhakar Sanzgiri, General Secretary K.L. Bajaj, Joint Secretary Suryaji Salukhe and State Council Member Datta Mane. The Minister asked the CITU to accept his "offer" of a ten and a half hours working day, which was rejected and the strike continued in full force. With the workers showing no signs of backing down, and after the CITU gave a call for a three-day Ichalkaranji bandh, the Congress-affiliated powerloom owners finally relented and a meeting was held with the district administration.

The 11-day strike and its total success yielded the following interim agreement. For the next three months, there would be a 10-hour day with one hour of rest, meaning nine hours work. An arbitration panel consisting of the representatives of the government, trade unions and owners will submit recommendations on the two questions of an eight-hour day and the minimum wage within three months. Failing a satisfactory solution within this time-frame, the CITU will intensify the struggle further. A huge victory rally of nearly 40,000 workers was held which ratified this interim agreement and

decided to temporarily withdraw the strike. However, the rally also warned that if the pending issues were not settled, the struggle would be taken to new heights after September 1997.

MAHARASHTRA CITU TO LAUNCH STATE WIDE CAMPAIGNS

A meeting of the Maharashtra State Committee of CITU held at B.T. Ranadive Memorial Hall, New Bombay on 12.9.1997, decided to organise a state wide campaign from 19.11.97 to 26.11.97 on the issue of implementation of Minimum Wages, Contract Labour, P.F. Scheme, Gratuity and ESIC Scheme. The campaign will build support for

implementation of legislation, assurances and promises of the State and Central Governments. It appealed to like minded Trade Unions and Organisations to join the state wide campaign. On the issue of new Maharashtra Industrial Relations Amendment Bill the CITU state committee is of the view that except for the provision of Secret Ballot,

the new MIR Act is only the BIR in new guise. CITU has submitted numerous and substantial amendments to this proposed legislation. This issue will also be

taken up during the campaign from 19th November to 26th November 1997.
(Report from P R Krishnan)

TAMILNADU

STATEWIDE STRIKE IN UNORGANISED SECTOR

In response to the call of CITU, nearly 10 lakh workers in unorganised sector went on a successful state wide strike on 9.9.1997. Workers in various industries including Beedi, Handloom, Powerloom, Construction, Matches, Fire Works, Cashew, Hosiery, Loading-Unloading, Auto Rikshaw, Tempo and vans, Utensil manufacturing, Shops and establishments and the contract workers in state electricity board and other Public and Private Sectors participated in this strike.

A massive preparatory campaign preceded the strike. 75,000 copies of a booklet, explaining the charter of demands and the exploitation going on in unorganised sector was brought out by the Tamilnadu CITU. Preparatory committees at the state and district levels were formed. Hundreds of meetings in various centres were held to prepare for the strike. In majority of districts, special conventions were held. Meetings of state level Federations/Co-ordination Committees of industries in unorganised sector, CITU State Secretariat, District secretaries were held. Working Womens Co-ordination Committees at state and district levels also participated in the campaign. The 18 point charter of demands, included fixation of minimum wages of Rs.1050 with Dearness Allowance of Rs.1.65 per point above 800 points and its proper implementation, implementation of Statutory benefits, separate industry wise formation of Welfare Boards, abolition of contract, casual and NMR systems, safety for working women at work spots etc.

Thousands of hand bills and posters were brought out by unions and district committees. Some of the unions in the organised sector also expressed their solidarity and joined the campaign.

The strike day witnessed massive rallies in all the district centres and in some other industrial centres. In Chennai, large number of men and women marched to the state secretariat under the banners of North and South Chennai district committees. Various

unions of Auto Rikshaw drivers in the city had jointly decided to participate in the strike in support of the charter and against the hike in prices of Petroleum Products. Almost all the Auto-Rikshaws were off the Roads in Chennai and in many other towns. The rally was addressed among others by W.R. Varda Rajan, Secretary, CITU and M. Chandran, State Secretary. They also led a delegation to State Labour Minister and presented a memorandum.

In Kanyakumari district, more than 30,000 women cashew workers participated in the strike. In Tirupur and surrounding areas nearly 75,000 workers belonging to hosiery industry went on strike. In Thirunelveli and Vellore districts, large number of beedi workers had observed strike. Head load workers in Erode and Salem belonging to various unions, participated in full strength. More than 10,000 contract workers in distribution circles of State Electricity Board participated in strike.

Participation of Construction Workers was notable in all Centres. Tannery workers in Dindigul, Handloom workers in Madurai, Dindigul, Kanchipuram and other centres also participated in large numbers. participation of powerloom workers was considerable in Erode and Nammakkal district. Reports of huge participation have come from Coimbatore, Tuticorin, Madurai, Hosur, Dindigul, Theni, Trichy, Cuddalore, Thiruvarur etc.

CITU State Committee has called upon the workers to continue the struggles till the demands are achieved and also to strengthen their organisations.

Meanwhile, state government has formed 3 Tripartite Committees to look in to various issues connected with the working conditions in the unorganised sector and to recommend steps to be taken. While the first committee is to deal with the issues connected to Agricultural workers, the other two committee are for workers in unorganised sector who have statutory benefits and to those who do not have any statutory

benefits. The first committee has a representative of All India Agricultural workers union and CITU has representatives in other two committees. These

committees are to submit their reports to the Government within four months.

Tamilnadu Sugar Workers Conference

The third conference of Tamilnadu Sugar Workers Federation was held at Villupuram, near Chennai on 31.8.97 and 1.9.97.

The conference was presided over by K. Vaithyanathan, and T.K. Rengarajan, General Secretary, Tamilnadu CITU inaugurated. P.K. G. Menon, Organising Secretary, INTUC greeted the conference.

176 delegates participated in the conference from 28 Sugar Mills from Tamilnadu and Pondicherry out of 36 Mills, from co-operative, public as well as from private sector.

The conference criticised the mal-functioning and mal-administration of co-op. sugar factories and demanded of the state government to take corrective measures to run the mills efficiently.

The Conference demanded of the State Government to take action against the mills who have not paid to the sugar cane growers. Arrears were mounting to

the tune of Rs.93 crores. It also demanded of the State Government to fix the Sugar Cane Price (SAP) well in advance as per the demand for Rs.750/- for 8.5% recovery of sugar.

The conference protested against the steps taken by the sugar commissioner curtailing the medical facilities and asking the workers to sacrifice their facilities so as to get over the financial difficulties of co-op mills and demanded to withdraw such notices. These were all in violation of existing agreements.

The conferences elected a new executive committee with C. Govindarajan as Hon. President, K. Vaithyanathan as President, V. Udhayakumar as General Secretary and N. Rajamani as Treasurer.

A rally was taken through the main streets of Villupuram town in which thousands of Sugar Workers participated.

(Reports from A.K. Padmanabhan)

JHANSI

BHEL WORKERS OBSERVE MARTYRDOM DAY

LATE COM. BUNDI WAL REMEMBERED

September 9, 1997, BHEL workers at Jhansi remembered Late Comrade Bundiwal, who was beaten to death by CISF at the BHEL Township on 9th September 1979 while leading a workers' rally.

The programme taken by BHEL Mazdoor Union, Jhansi included cultural and sports competition among the workers' children and mass meeting in the afternoon at the main gate of the BHEL plant.

The meeting was presided by Sukdev Singh, President, BHEL Mazdoor Union and addressed by Shyam Budholia of Northern Railwaymen's Union, Jhansi, J.P. Khuswaha, General Secretary, BHEL Mazdoor Union, Dinesh Byas, of Janawadi Lekhak Sangh, and the peasant leader Jamna Prasad Jogi. The speakers while remembering the heroic sacrifice of late Com. Bundiwal in the cause of working class,

stressed the urgent need of united struggle of the people against the disastrous economic policy of Govt of India. The effigy of Govt. Pension Scheme was also amidst hailing the call of countrywide strike action on 17.12.'97.

After the meeting, workers marched to the union premise where statue of Late Com. Bundiwal was installed.

Ajij Siddiqui of BHEL, Mazdoor Union, Jhansi, anchored the programme.

Editorial Board

M K Pandhe (Chairman)

P K Ganguly (Working Editor)

Niren Ghosh, M M Lawrence,

Vimal Ranadive, Ranjit Basu

NATIONWIDE STRIKE BY ELECTRICITY WORKERS

Several apex organisations of the electricity employees including Electricity Employees' Federation of India (EEFI) have jointly decided to go for one day token strike during the month of November '97 in support of their demands for changes in the pro-private sector - specially favouring the MNCs - power policy of the Government and more prominent role of public sector in power industry.

The decision of was taken at a national convention held on 19.9.97 at the Mavalankar Hall, New Delhi. It was attended by more than 1300 Delegates who came from all over the country representing the different organisations in the industry. A number of senior retired power engineers and economists also participated in the convention. The convention of was presided over by E. Balanandan. The resolution was moved by K. Ashok Rao and apart from other speakers, A.B. Bardhan also spoke in support.

The resolution came down heavily against the anti-national power policy of the successive Governments at the centre. While severely criticising the deviations from the listed objectives, the resolution noted, "These objectives continue to be valid today ... Disruption in the fulfilment of these objectives would

not only lead to power shortages but also acute food shortage as well, besides causing a setback to every economic activity."

The adverse impact of the power policy under the NEP has been that 41.1% slippage in the actual achievements against the set targets, out of 100 MOUs signed and eight 'fast track' projects only one or two have been executed, the states are generally facing power crisis etc.

The resolution, adopted unanimously, put forward the principles for an alternative policy perspective detailing the role of SEBs, External financing, Energy/Power planning, Central Public Sector, CEA. It further suggested that "there should be a National Standing Advisory Council consisting of representatives of SEBs, CEA, Experts, Parliamentarians to study the various alternatives for improving the working and efficiency of the Boards." However, the immediate task of the advisory council was identified to, "review the changes made in the industry since 1991 with specific reference to the future of the SEBs and benefits to the consumers."

(Report from K R Unnithan)

Martyrs Day Observed in Dugda Coal Washery, BOKARO

Hundreds of Coal workers remembered the Martyrs of Dugda Coal Washery on August 21, 1997 in Dugda who were killed while picketing during the strike in 1995. The workers assembled on the main road of Dugda residential colony and proceeded in a big procession to the Martyr Columns. Chandi Prasad, the president of Bihar CITU unfurled the red flag.

The programme was organised by Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union (CITU). The leaders viz. Baijnath Kewat, Ramchander Thakur, B.D. Prasad, Pradip Kumar Bishwas, Shyam Sundar Mahto, R.D. Yadav, Ghuran Prasad, G. Pandey, C.S. Tiwari, Sandhya Bakshi also garlanded the martyrs column.

3 DAY'S BANK STRIKE IN DECEMBER

United Forum of Bank Unions comprising nine organisations viz., AIBEA, AIBOC, NCBE, BEFI, AIBOA, INBEF, INBOC, NOBW and NOBO representing 100% of 13 lakhs bank officers and employees, staged a two days successful bank strike

on 28-29 August 1997. The Forum has decided to further intensify the agitation and called for three days strike from December 3 to December 5, 1997 preceded by a programme of withdrawal of extra cooperation with effect from 17.11.1997.

FERTILIZER WORKERS TO STRIKE ON 11.11.1997

Fertiliser workers in the public sector units of fertiliser corporation of India (FCI) and Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation of India (HFC) will go in for a nationwide strike on 11-11-1997.

The strike call had been given by trade unions affiliated to major central trade unions as well as other unaffiliated unions. The unions cover the states of Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, U.P. and West Bengal besides the New Delhi headquarters.

A joint consultation meeting held on 1.9.'97 in New Delhi, participated by these unions, gave the call for strike. The meeting was attended by Ramakant Pandey (FWFI) Raja Kulkarni (INCWI) and M K Pandey (CITU) besides others.

The strike is on the demand for revival of FCI and HFC.

All other unions in fertiliser industry will hold solidarity demonstrations the same day, throughout the country.

The background to the strike call is as under.

It may be recalled that on 20.4.1995 the Group of Ministers (GoM) approved the revival package for the plants of FCI and HFC. Subsequently as per decision of the Committee of Secretaries (CoS) chaired by T.S.R. Subramanian, the matter was referred to a PSU Consultancy Firm, FEDO, for technical appraisal and the scheme has been updated both technically and financially.

But it is a matter of great surprise and serious concern the same CoS, again chaired by Subramanian, in their meeting on 21.4.97 decided to close down all the units except two. At the same time the CoS has asked the Department of Fertiliser for "announcement of such a policy to encourage domestic as well as foreign private investors to consider investment in this sector" and also prescribed that "the policy should lay down

the facilities that would be offered to the investors." It was claimed that the retention price in the revived units would be Rs.11,160/- per tonne of urea compared to the weighted average landed cost of imported urea of Rs.9,290/- per tonne.

But the Secretary of the Dept. of Agriculture challenged the figure on the ground of factuality. He cautioned that urea imports were going up and over dependence on imports may not be desirable. According to him "the landed cost of imported urea should be compared with the weighted average retention price of the units proposed for revival which was Rs.7,965/- per tonne in the case of HFC and Rs.9,392/- per tonne in the case of FCI".

The weighted average cost of imported urea is higher than that of the revamped plants of FCI and HFC. Besides experience shows that the price of urea which was only 135 US dollars in the year 93-94 shot upto 240 US dollars per tonne in the subsequent years. There is an inevitable trend of enhancement of price of urea in the international market. Again the average retention price of urea from the grass-root plants is slightly less than Rs.12,000/- per tonne. Thus the outgo for subsidy and foreign exchange is much higher compared to that of the revamped plants.

In view of the foregoing facts, the trade unions in the industry have demanded that the revival schemes for both the FCI and HFC plants prepared by FEDO and submitted to Govt. in May, 1997 must be implemented. They call for a stop to the move to close down the Haldia, Gorakhpur, Ramagundam, Talchar plants and Fertiliser Promotion and Agricultural Research Division and to revive these units as well.

(Report from Swadesh Dev Roye)

NTC MILLS

Govt. Goes Back on turn around strategy

Union Textile Minister R.L. Jalappa and Textiles Secretary Prabhat Kumar announced on 11.9.97, that the central government had initiated a move to hand

over all mills under the National Textiles Corporation to the state governments for revival. Speaking to the economic editors, the Government (cont. on page 24)

Consumer price Index Numbers for Industrial Workers

(Base 1982=100)

| State | Sr.No. | Centre | June'97 | July'97 | State | Sr. No. | Centre | June'97 | July'97 |
|-------|--------|--------------------|---------|---------|-------|---------|---|------------|------------|
| AP | 1 | Guḍur | 354 | 355 | PB | 45 | Amritsar | 308 | 310 |
| | 2 | Guntur | 357 | 355 | | 46 | Ludhiana | 309 | 315 |
| | 3 | Hyderabad | 330 | 329 | RAJ | 47 | Ajmer | 360 | 359 |
| | 4 | Visakhapatnam | 337 | 337 | | 48 | Jaipur | 343 | 342 |
| | 5 | Warangal | 339 | 337 | TN | 49 | Chennai | 376 | 374 |
| ASM | 6 | D D Tinsukia | 315 | 320 | | 50 | Coimbatore | 350 | 349 |
| | 7 | Guwahati | 351 | 360 | | 51 | Coonoor | 372 | 370 |
| | 8 | Labac-Silchar | 316 | 321 | | 52 | Madurai | 354 | 352 |
| | 9 | Mariani Jorhat | 337 | 338 | | 53 | Salem | 360 | 358 |
| | 10 | Rangapara-Tezpur | 335 | 341 | | 54 | Tiruchirapally | 396 | 394 |
| BHR | 11 | Jamshedpur | 334 | 338 | UP | 55 | Agra | 329 | 339 |
| | 12 | Jharia | 297 | 306 | | 56 | Ghaziabad | 342 | 344 |
| | 13 | Kodarma | 302 | 315 | | 57 | Kanpur | 346 | 356 |
| | 14 | Monghyr | 313 | 323 | | 58 | Sharanpur | 318 | 320 |
| | 15 | Noamundi | 333 | 333 | | 59 | varanasi | 366 | 377 |
| | 16 | Ranchi-Hatia | 331 | 338 | WB | 60 | Asansol | 316 | 326 |
| GUJ | 17 | Ahmedabad | 357 | 363 | | 61 | Calcutta | 356 | 364 |
| | 18 | Bhavnagar | 375 | 385 | | 62 | Darjeeling | 299 | 302 |
| | 19 | Rajkot | 348 | 362 | | 63 | Durgapur | 356 | 377 |
| | 20 | Surat | 372 | 375 | | 64 | Haldia | 380 | 388 |
| | 21 | Vadodra | 350 | 354 | | 65 | Howrah | 363 | 366 |
| HRY | 22 | Faridabad | 354 | 354 | | 66 | Jalpaiguri | 306 | 314 |
| | 23 | Yamuunanagar | 329 | 336 | | 67 | Raniganj | 310 | 315 |
| J&K | 24 | Srinagar | 339 | 340 | CHD | 68 | Chandigarh | 343 | 348 |
| KAR | 25 | Bangalore | 362 | 361 | DEL | 69 | Delhi | 378 | 382 |
| | 26 | Belgaum | 381 | 381 | PON | 70 | Pondicherry | 429 | 426 |
| | 27 | Hubli-Dharwar | 364 | 362 | | | | | |
| | 28 | Mercara | 367 | 372 | | | ALL INDIA | 355 | 358 |
| KER | 29 | Alwaye | 373 | 378 | | | | | |
| | 30 | Mundakayam | 394 | 390 | | | Additional Series of Labour Bureau | | |
| | 31 | Quilon | 391 | 394 | | | | | |
| | 32 | Thiruvananthapuram | 390 | 399 | | | | | |
| M P | 33 | Balaghat | 336 | 345 | AP | 1 | Kothagudem | 365 | 362 |
| | 34 | Bhillai | 322 | 323 | HP | 2 | Himachal Pradesh | 331 | 339 |
| | 35 | Bhopal | 379 | 375 | RAJ | 3 | Bhilwara | 345 | 347 |
| | 36 | Indore | 358 | 358 | MP | 4 | Chhindwara | 353 | 357 |
| | 37 | Jabalpur | 353 | 354 | TRI | 5 | Tripura | 335 | 337 |
| MHR | 38 | Mumbai | 403 | 402 | GOA | 6 | Goa | 421 | 425 |
| | 39 | Nagpur | 362 | 367 | | | | | |
| | 40 | Nasik | 371 | 376 | | | | | |
| | 41 | Pune | 385 | 385 | | | Government of India | | |
| | 42 | Solapur | 371 | 364 | | | Ministry of Labour | | |
| ORI | 43 | Barbil | 343 | 351 | | | Labour Bureau | | |
| | 44 | Rourkela | 341 | 347 | | | Shimla | | |

(cont. from page 22)

spokesmen said that the centre will write off Rs.4000 crores invested in these mills and also bear Rs.122 crores towards statutory dues to the employees of NTC mills.

Jalappa said that a communication on these lines had already been sent to Maharashtra government and other governments would also be addressed soon. Jalappa also said, that his ministry was facing several problems in rehabilitating all the mills.

The Joint Action Committee of Textile Workers comprising the CITU, AITUC, INTUC, HMS, BMS and UTUC vehemently opposed the Textile Ministry's decision. The JAC pointed out that Rs.4000 crores offered to be waived off is the amount spent by the Centre mainly on VRS. This amount the centre has spent from the NRF, which can not be treated as loans. This amount also includes wages to workers which is also centre's responsibility. The other amount of Rs.122 crores offered to be waived off, relates to the wages of the workers which is due. The Turn Around strategy of 1995 was based on the unanimous agreement arrived at with the trade unions

in the Special Tripartite Committee. This was based on reports of the four Textile Research Associations who were appointed by the then Government to give the viability report of the sick NTC mills. But the present government blatantly violated that agreement and unilaterally and arbitrarily constituted a committee of Secretaries to prepare another report, which is deemed to be "secret", about the techno-economic viability of the sick NTC mills, and recommended closure of 70 NTC mills and retrenchment of 67,000 workers.

In this background the trade unions and a number of MPs had a long discussion with the Prime Minister on 20.8.97, where the Textile Minister and other officials were present. The Prime Minister assured to have another round of discussion after 26.8.97. But no meeting has been called after that. The present statement by the Textile Minister, is totally unilateral and arbitrary. The trade unions reject this decision and demand implementation of the unanimous agreement. The centre cannot shift its responsibility to states for revival of the NTC mills.

BIHAR: RALLY AGAINST PETROL-PRICE HIKE

At the call of Co-ordination Committee of Unions and Associations, Patna, a Mass demonstration of employees and workers was held on 2.9.97 at Patna. Chandi Prasad, Vice President, CITU, Sachchidanand Singh (AIIEA) Bijay Kant Thakur, General Secretary, Bihar State Kisan Sabha,

Mithilesh Kumar Singh, General Secretary, Insurance Employees' Association, Patna Division, Ram Bahadur Singh, Bihar State Non-Gazetted Employees' Federation, Naresh Thakur, confederation of Central Government Employees and Workers addressed the rally.

VIZAG INFERNO

The major fire disaster at Visakhapatnam in the Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Refinery on 14.9.97 was the result of total failure of the plant maintenance system and utter collapse of safety measures. The CITU, Vizag district committee, while pointing to this, had demanded a judicial enquiry of a Sitting Judge of the High Court.

The CITU has also recalled that earlier on 8.11.96 there was a gas leakage resulting in the death of an executive and a worker. That incident was itself a grave warning of the failure of maintenance system. The CITU also criticised the resort to contract system in the all important plant maintenance. The contract

workers outnumbered permanent workers and they had no knowledge or training about maintenance. Deepankar Mukherjee, Member, Rajya Sabha, visited the site on 16.9.98. He wanted the Government to probe whether there was any built-in safety mechanism for preventing such a disaster was there or not. He also criticised the state labour department for not carrying out systematic safety checks.

The district CITU, while demanding appropriate relief measures to the victims of the disaster, urged the government of India to rebuild the refinery at the earliest.

(Report from G. Narsingh Rao)