THE VOICE OF

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THE WORKING WOMAN



Dear Reader

With this fourth issue of *The Voice of the Working Woman*, we are going over to printing our journal. From a paper of a mere 500 copies at the time of our first issue, our distribution has now risen to nearly 1500, because of the generous support and response we have received from you, our friends and our well-wishers.

Women are increasingly coming into the labour force, driven both by economic necessity as well as by a desire for economic independence. But the burdens they have to face thereby are multiplied, not lessened. No woman's magazine has so far reflected the specific needs and aspirations of this growingly larger section of our women. *The Voice of the Working Woman* is the only such journal which tries to express the cares and the demands of the working woman, to explain why and wherefrom this increased burden arises, to articulate her hopes and dreams, her struggles to make employers and male workers accept her as an individual in her own right and as an equal with the same rights and opportunities.

This is our purpose. Only your continuous support will enable us to fulfil it. We would very much welcome your suggestions. criticisms and contributions, to make our journal a true voice of working women.

With warm regards,

Sincerely Yours,
The Editor.

Full Support to AUGUST 17—BLACK DAY

The National Campaign Committee (N.C.C.) of Central Trade Unions, consisting of the CITU, AITUC, HMS, BMS, INTUC (Dara), UTUC, UTUC (Lenin Sarani) and TUCC, has appealed to all the trade unions in the country, irrespective of their affiliation to immediately and unitedly launch a massive movement of protest against 'The Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance, 1981', promulgated by the Government of India, to culminate in the observance throughout the country of August 17—the opening day of Parliament—as a BLACK DAY.

This Ordinance is the worst attack the present Government has mounted on the working class—not only has it banned strikes in the services listed in the Ordinance, but it has also given itself the power to declare any industry an essential service. Thus the working class is totally deprived of the right to strike.

The All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women appeals to all working women to give their whole-hearted support to this protest movement, and to ensure full participation of all working women on August 17, with the rest of the working class of India.

HOW DO YOU GO TO WORK ?

ALL the major cities of the country share one problem in common—a woefully inadequate and inefficient transport system. The country's capital is no exception; in fact, compared to other metropolitan cities such as Bombay and Calcutta, it is far worse. The Delhi commuter is a daily victim of a callous bureaucracy—and the plight of women commuters is the worst.

To try and shake the transport authorities into bringing some improvement in the situation and stricter implementation of their own rules, the Delhi Janwadi Mahila Samiti and the Delhi Coordination Committee of Working Women, jointly ran a five-day campaign culminating in a four-hour dharna on July 10, outside the offices of the Delhi Transport Corporation, in the heart of New Delhi's shopping and commercial centre.

Few Ladies Special

For a population of 6,500,000, there are only 2,732 buses. Of these only 40 are 'Ladies Specials' and only one of these goes to the far-flung resettlement colonies where thousands of working women live and from where they have daily to commute to and fro work, travelling distances of 10 to 20 kms. each way.

Instead of a strict and regular implementation of the system of reserved seats for women, the DTC authorities have introduced a 'cage' inside some buses by removing two of the reserved seats and enclosing the space with bars. This in fact has resulted in further harassment, besides reducing the number of seats for women.

During the campaign, handbills were distributed at almost all the major bus stops; and members visited the offices and workplaces to discuss the commuters' problems. The major thrust of the campaign was in the resettlement colonies, where the problem is most acute. The experience at one such depot in Jehangirpuri is typical—over 1000 commuters collect at the bus stop at any given time during peak hours. When a bus arrives a struggle takes place among the commuters. Women, (many, for lack of creches, carrying their children) are pushed aside, often falling to the ground. The next bus will come after may be, one hour.

All the women complain that the delay caused by the transport problem results in loss of their daily wages. They said: "We have to go to work to feed our families, and that too is a problem because we cannot get into a bus, if it arrives at all. We live the most unsettled lives in these resettlement colonies."

Many middle-class women use chartered buses which are expensive, but they too point out that it is lack of 'Ladies Specials' and the irregular bus service which forces them to use such facilities. As they observed, "You cannot imagine the mental tension involved for women who work. If we are late for work we get pulled up. If we return home late it creates problems, and besides there is all the housework to be done." Even where the queue system exists and women are able to board the bus too often there is the sexual harassment to be faced in the crowded vehicle.

Day-Long Dharna

At the dharna were nearly two hundred, mainly working class women, joined during the lunch hour by women from nearby offices, or those who came for a little while to express their solidarity. The dharna was addressed by Vimal Ranadive, Secretary of the All India Coordination Committee; Rita Karat on behalf of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, Ranjana from the Delhi Coordination Committee, Rama Dixit on behalf of women in

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CALL OF UNITED T.U. CONVENTION

OVER three thousand delegates, representing eight Central trade unions and forty industrial federations met in a Convention on June 4, 1981 in Bombay's well-known Shanmukhananda Hall. These delegates had come together from all parts of the country and from all organised industries, representing in all a T.U. membership of over one crore of workers. There were steel, coal, electricity, railway, post and telegraph, defence, port and dock, road transport, chemical and pharmaceutical, plantation, bank and insurance workers, college and university teachers, Central and State Government employees.

The common theme running through all the speeches of the delegates was exposure of the desperate attempts by the Government of India to pass the burdens of stagnating production and inflation on to the shoulders of the working people. On the one hand high prices and wage-cuts, unemployment and growingly ruthless suppression of all resistance and struggles with the help of the police and the hired goondas of the management On the other, substantial concessions to the Indian monopolists and foreign multinationals.

Attacks To Come

P. Ramamurti, General Secretary CITU, moving the main resolution, spoke of the need to unleash a powerful campaign to change these policies of the Government. But for this the entire working class and working peasantry must be mobilised against these policies He warned that more and more attacks were likely to be made on the working people, and "unless the working class resists the offensive with all its strength their standard of living will be considerably eroded".

Demands

To fight the price increase the Resolution suggests three concrete measures for immediate implementation, viz.,

1. Sale of all essential commodities through the public distribution system under the control of popular committes.
2. Remunerative prices to the peasants and higher wages to agricultural workers.
3. Stringent measures against blackmarketeers, etc.

Simultaneously the Resolution calls for the greatest possible unity in support of the urgent needs of all the working people pertaining to their economic and trade union rights. They include :

1. Need-based minimum wage for all.
2. Full neutralisation in the cost of living
3. Bonus for all workers.
4. Minimum wage for agricultural workers and security of employment.
5. Ban on retrenchment and closures; unemployment allowance
6. Withdrawal of all victimisation measures against workers and trade unions.
7. Recognition of trade unions through secret ballot.
8. Full guarantee of collective bargaining and trade union rights.
9. Repeal of National Security Act.

One-Day Strike

In support of these measures and demands, the Resolution gave a call for a one-day strike. The call was received with prolonged applause by the Convention.

As a preliminary to the strike and to ensure that the report of the Convention reaches to all parts of the country, to men and women workers in all industries and occupations, conventions are to be called at the regional and State level in the next three months. The questions raised at the Convention affect all working people, are common

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MADHYA PRADESH

SLOW MARCH TO DEATH

THE slate pencil industry of Mandsaur District in West Madhya Pradesh is of many years' standing. The stone used to be cut and broken by hand. About 20 years ago this manual cutting was replaced by electric cutters, with fatal effects on the 3,700 men, women and children who earn their livelihood in these quarries.

Unlike in hand cutting, the electric saw emits clouds of fine silica dust, which is constantly inhaled by the workers. The dust enters their lungs and reduces their elasticity, causing lung fibrosis. Silicosis has killed at least one member of each family employed since the introduction of mechanisation.

Repeated disclosures of hundreds of such deaths have been made and forwarded to the State Government, but so far no action has been taken.

Two years ago in 1979, the Environmental Monitoring Laboratory of the Industrial Texicology Research Centre of Lucknow, carried out an intensive study of industrial hygiene in about 147 slate pencil units. Their study showed that the silica dust affected not only the workers in the slate quarries and factories, but also the peopleliving in the area. The fine dust, once blown upwards, remains suspended in the air for some time before settling down. The silica concentration in the dust was found to be as high as 40% to 47%.

These 147 units employing about 2,200 workers have an annual turnover of more than Rs. 10 lakhs, and meet the entire demand for slate pencils in the country. Each unit employs about 20 to 25 workers, including women and children, and each worker gets Rs. 2 for cutting and rounding a box of 1,250 pencils. The average output of a worker is six to eight boxes a day.

The ITRC laboratory suggested some measures to control silica dust, such as : rigorous dust control measures, change of the cutting process, complete enclosure for the cutter, and periodic isolation of the workers. In January of this year, the State Government woke up from its lethargy only sufficiently to warn the owners of slate unit factories to install exhaust machines by March 15, or face closure After this it has gone back to its stupor. March 15 has come and gone. Only 80 out of the 147 units have installed such machines, but no closures have been reported Once again, threats and promises have been used to try and fool the workers, give an alibi to the Government and act as a green signal to the employers to carry on "business as usual". □

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to all; all are vitally interested in their resolution. Therefore the maximum number of people must be mobilised behind these demands.

All trade unions have pledged to immediately take up the tasks outlined in the Resolution, in order to forge a mighty unity of the working people. These planned actions from the regional to the all-India level cannot become total and of maximum effectiveness unless working women, wherever they are, in the factories and fields, offices or classrooms, also join wholeheartedly in this struggle, both as workers and also as women who have a far greater stake in the general struggle for greater democracy and full equality. □

RAILWAY RESERVATION CLERKS

HARASSMENT—

AT the time of the Janata Government, it was decided that in view of the prevailing corruption, it would be better to appoint women as the reservation clerks at railway stations. In Bombay this decision was implemented quite extensively so that a very large number of women run the reservation department offices as well as the counters. As revealed recently in the Delhi press, at the New Delhi Railway Station, the situation is very different. The women are much fewer in number and great advantage is taken of this. Exposed to corruption, blackmail and even molestation at the hands of the supervisors, the women are living in a climate of nervousness and fear, constantly and daily harrassed in one form or another. Sexual demands are made on them and when they refuse to comply, trouble of some sort follows.

—THE UNWRITTEN TERMS OF SERVICE

One of the most serious such incidents occurred on March 31, this year, on the Holi holiday. A number of the supervisory staff locked one of the lady clerks into a room and attempted to rape her. Seen by another woman employee the lady clerk was able to be saved. The matter was reported to the police and a case registered, whereupon both the women employees were promply transferred. Now a campaign of maligning is being carried on against them in an attempt to paint them as being of "bad character". Another young employee, studying privately in the evenings, applied for leave to sit her exams. Her supervisor agreed to grant leave but only on condition that she "co-operated" with him.

Framed In False Cases

In cases where the girls refuse to be a party to the corruption indulged in by some of the supervisory staff and male reservation clerks, they have been "framed" in cases.

Another form of harassment of women clerks, it was discovered, is to remove tickets from the tube where they are stacked, and then force the women to pay for the missing tickets. Again, it is only those women who refuse to 'co-operate' with the supervisory staff, who 'lose' tickets, and almost all of them have had on numerous occasions, to pay for such tickets.

In another incident a group of supervisers and male reservation clerks got drunk around midnight, and were rude to the two women on duty, threatening them with action that would "ruin their chances of getting married", if they did not agree to issue tickets by advised. Written complaints were made after the incident, but no action has yet been taken.

These offenses and the offenders have became so brazen that it is alleged that a particular room in a secluded corner had to be closed because it was being used for illegal activities.

Deaf Ear To Appeals

The women railway employees have made appeals to several senior officials. But as yet have not been able to get any action initiated against their tormentors. The women have met the Deputy Minister for Railways, Mr. P. Mallikarjun, the Divisional Railway Manager, the Superintendent of the Delhi area and the District Traffic Superintendent —but with no effect. Worse still, the supervisors' behaviour has became even more demanding after seeing that the women's

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A GRIM BUT SUCCESSFUL STRUGGLE

J. V. Electronics—Faridabad **—From Ranjana**

TRADE union struggles in Haryana are fast becoming known for two things: the feudal barbaric repression with which managements supported by the police and Government always try to break any strike and browbeat the workers into submission; and on the other side, the courage and determination with which the workers, women as well as men face these attacks. Recently in the J. V. Electronics factory in Faridabad, the workers faced such a situation, and for two months, grimly fought on.

The factory, producing mica components for a good export market, with good profits, employs 259 women and 70 men. When the workers presented a charter of demands with the focus on recognition of their union, the management responded with the suspension of four union activists, threatened lay-off of fifty more workers and without notice, declared lock-out, early in the morning of April 5. Wages normally paid on the 4th of every month, were also withheld.

Immediately the men and women, hailing from all parts of India, sat on dharna at the factory gate. In the blazing summer heat of northern India with the temperature rising to 110⁰ F, the management refused any drinking water from the factory premises. But workers from a nearby factory looked after their needs.

To break the workers' unity the management suspended another five union activists, and, as has become the practice now in Haryana, sent goondas to threaten and harass the women workers, and sent their staff to the workers' houses to try and pressurise their families into forcing the workers back to work. They were asked to sign a humiliating undertaking abjuring all their trade union rights.

When after 50 days of dharna these tactics still did not succeed, the management tried drafting new staff into the factory at night, with police assistance. Whereupon the dharna was extended to the night also. During the day the women workers kept their babies and and children with them; at night the male family members came to sit with them. During this whole period, the workers received the unstinting help and support of all the workers and unions from nearby factories.

On the fifty-seventh day of the dharna the management again tried to take on black-legs and new staff into the factory, this time with the help of a 300-strong police force. While four women police detained their union leader, the policemen led by the SHO brutally beat women workers at the factory gate, and hurled them to the ground, and the new labour was taken in over their prostrate bodies. Many women lost their jewellery and their watches; many were injured, of whom two had to be hospitalised. While the police refused to register cases on behalf of the workers, false cases against them by the management were duly registered and four women and twenty four men were arrested.

While the Kamgar Mahila Samiti had all along given full support to the women workers, it was now decided to make an appeal to all the trade unions in Faridabad. A massive joint gate-meeting was held on June 3 in which the CITU, AITUC, HMS, Bank Employees and other unions took part. On June 9 a joint procession was taken out to protest police intervention in industrial disputes, in which the BMS also joined.

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KRISHNAKALI ASSAM

THE BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS,

IN recent months a series of attacks has begun on the workers in the Krishnakali and Chapar Tea Estates in Goalpara and Kokrajhar districts of Assam in the form of large-scale dismissals, physical torture, forcible occupation of workers' residential quarters, prevention of access to drinking water from the Company's wells, arson, and ultimately, molestation and rape of women workers, or the wives of workers. Rape is now an all too familiar weapon increasingly used by employers and the police, to try and cow down the workers. It is particularly frequently used in the more backward rural areas.

The tea workers of Assam have a long and glorious tradition of struggle, going back more than a hundred years to the days of the British rule—and an equal history of exploitation and repression which has not ended to this day. In the last few months a veritable reign of terror has been let loose, following the special convention of tea workers held in Kokrajhar on February 14 and 15 last, on the issue of bonus.

Office bearers of the Akhil Bhartiya Chai Mazdoor Sangh (ABCMS) have been arrested, severely beaten up by the police and kept in the police lock-up without medical attention. After one such instance, more than 500 women workers of the tea garden held a protest demonstration in front of the manager's office, and later observed a one-day's total hartal throughout the estate.

On the evening of March 27, around 7 p.m. the police arrested Nihal Urang, President of the Krishnakali Tea Estate ABCMS, entering his house without any warrant, first abusing his wife in vulgar language, then molesting her. Together with Narayan Bhakat, Vice-President of the Union and Mangra Orang, an active union worker, the three were taken to the manager's bungalow. After a severe beating, they were sent to jail. On the same night the houses of other activists were broken into.

Night Of Atrocities

On the night of March 30, a number of serious atrocities took place :

At about 10 p.m. the police went to the house of Nazir Hussain, searched it in his absence and molested his wife. Sibah Prasad Sharma,a school teacher at the Chaibari Tea Garden was also arrested, and beaten up.

The Manager, Krishnakali Tea Estate, in police uniform, along with other policemen went to Chapar Tea Estate, Goalpara and dragged out Phul Singh Sikbasaik, Vice-President of the Chapar Tea Garden Workers' Union, and his brother Shyamsundar. They were brought to the Krishnakali Manager's bungalow, continuously and mercilessly beaten all the way. In the bungalow harsh punishment was inflicted upon these two workers. The fingers of Shyamsundar were hammered with rods and damaged for life; there was no place unmarked by injuries on the bodies of both of them, as the Judge testified when they were produced before him. Even their 70-year old mother was not spared, nor the wife of Shyamsundar who was brutally assaulted by both the Manager and police, nor his 10-month old son, struck a police lathi blow on his tender back.

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BEHIND THE "CUP THAT REFRESHES"

THE HEINOUS TERROR AND THE VALIANT WOMEN OF W. BENGAL

As is well known, on April 3, 1981, the Congress(I) gave a call for a West Bengal Bandh. And to make it a success they indulged in unheard of barbaric violence and terror when they found that the ordinary people of West Bengal ignored their call and went about their business or to work, as usual. On that day 27 men, women and children were killed. The perpetrators of these acts can only be called despicable.

One of these incidents took place at 4 p.m. in the city of Calcutta. A passengerladen bus, Route No. 6, was passing through Tollygunge area towards Garia. Near Charu Market some Congress(I) members suddenly and without warning, hurled powerful petrol bombs at the bus. At once there was an outcry of pain. There were many women passengers in the bus and their condition was most pathetic. Their saris caught fire and at once the fire spread all over their bodies. Seven passengers succumbed to their injuries, burnt or blasted to death, five of them women, and one a young school boy. Their only offence was that they had not heeded the bandh call by those who would like to overthrow by undemocratic and violent means, a democratically-elected Government. On the contrary, they felt it their duty to attend their respective duties.

The women were

SHANKARI CHAKRABORTY—Hospital Nurse and a widow.

ILA ROY—a State Government Employee.

KALPANA CHAKRABORTY—a Hospital Staff Nurse.

NILARANI BHADRA—a mother of three childreh.

JAMUNA DAS a pregnant mother.

GITA CHATTERJEE—A Central Government employee—wounded.

We can only say in the words of Rabindranath Tagore. :

"Give me a voice of thunder
That I may hurl imprecations
Upon this cannibal whose gruesome
HUNGER
Spares Neither Women Nor Children".

How Do You Go To Work ?

(From Page Three)

LIC; Mrs. Subramaniam from the Reserve Bank, and Mrs. Anand from the office of Small-Scale Industries in Delhi.

A delegation met a senior official of the DTC and presented a memorandum. While the official admitted the genuineness of all the demands, he pleaded 'lack of funds' for non-implementation of some. Officials will be sent to the resettlement colonies and other areas to study the need for 'special buses'. Ways and means of seeing that women are able to avail of the seats reserved for them will be considered, including the possibility of some deterrent punishment.

The demands around which future mobilisation will take place are :

1. More 'ladies specials' to cover all major routes, and particularly the resettlement colonies.
2. Scrapping the 'cage' system and strict implementation of the seat reservation for women. Introduction of reserved seats on inter-State routes.
3. Strict implementation of the queue system.

Visakhapatnam

The same problem faces working women in Visakhapatnam, an industrial city of Andhra Pradesh—an inadequate number of buses, and irregular service. As a result, women unable to get into the bus, have frequently to miss their duties. The working women have made strong protests through demonstrations and dharnas. Finally on May 19, the Convener of the Visakhapatnam District Unit of the Working Women's Coordination Committee, D. Sharada, along with Baby Rani, Vice-President of the Sea Foods Exporting Company Union, a subsidiary of the Union Carbide Company, and other Union leaders went in deputation to the District Manager of the Andhra Pradesh State Transport Corporation, demanding special buses for women, and reduction of fares in RTC buses. As a result, since June 1, Ladies Specials have started plying.



WAR OR PEACE?

THE ARMS RACE — WHO PAYS ?

IN recent times the newspapers have been full of talk on the questions of war, defence build-up and the arms race. And it is true that trading in armaments on a world scale has expanded to the point of posing a serious threat to mankind. The main source of these arms is the United States whose arms sales have shot up 12 times since the early 1970s, from 11.2 billion dollars to 23 billion dollars in 1981. This makes the sale of arms nine times greater than the amount of 'aid' given by this country. Needless to say, such sales have proved a veritable goldmine for the U.S. monopolies who produce these arms, and their profits have soared astronomically. Naturally they want a continuation of this expansion.

And the U.S. Government led by their newly elected President, Ronald Reagan, is obliging.

The total amount that mankind spends on armaments everyday equals the aggregate income of the population of the three poorest countries of the world.

Only recently this Government sanctioned 20 million dollars for the development of what are known as biological weapons—weapons which kill by means of spreading disease among human beings, animals and plant life. Not only have such weapons been universally condemned by international public opinion, but specific international treaties exist prohibiting these very weapons. All this however, has not stopped the U.S. Government from carrying on this terrible work. Simultaneously the U.S. has embarked on a nuclear programme including development of the neutron bomb (see March 1981 issue of *The Voice of the Working Woman*), that is the largest in its history.

Thus armaments have proliferated throughout the world. Countries and governments which previously possessed only conventional arms in moderate degree, are today buying up, or being forced to equip themselves with the more sophisticated—and far more deadly—armaments.

Significance For The People

But what does this arms build-up signify for the common people, men and women, and their families ? It signifies two things : Firstly it means that money and resources which could and should have been spent to feed, clothe and house the world's poor, and they form the majority, are now being diverted to build weapons of mass destruction. And it only eventually leads to a further pushing up of prices of all the essential commodities which the poor need, and for lack of which they are literally dying in hundreds. This is so on a world scale and in each individual country in the capitalist world, advanced as well as backward.

Secondly, it brings much closer the possibility of war. Once the armaments are there, the temptation to use them by unscrupulous elements, dictators who care nothing for people, for the men, women, children, young people, who may be killed or maimed by such weapons. Take for instance the F-16s with which Israel recently bombed the Iraqi nuclear

The annual outlays on armaments are equal to the cost of goods produced in one year by 2000 million people in the developing countries.

installations that were being erected for proclaimed and testified peaceful purposes. The attack was totally unprovoked and without just cause. These aircraft had been but recently supplied to Israel by the United States. And it is this same aircraft which the U.S. is now offering to sell to Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan together with stock piling of arms and help to build an Atomic Bomb. Three times in the last 30 years India and Pakistan have been at war with each other. And each time the military conflict has followed the

The arms race is eating up around 500,000 million dollars a year. About 1000 million people in rural areas in the world lack fresh water supplies; as a result 25,000 people die annually. Just 3000 million dollars would be sufficient to solve this problem by 1990. Another 4,000 million dollars would be sufficient to provide a normal diet for 250 million starving children in developing countries.

purchase of arms by Pakistan from the U.S. in the name of "modernisation of its defence forces", alongwith the political collaboration that is always part of an arms deal with that country.

Women For Peace

War spells disaster for all people, and it is but natural that women will be among stoutest opponents. That is why the World Congress of Women, to be held later this year in Prague, capital of the Czechoslovakian Socialist Republic, from October 8 to 13, has been called around three main slogans—Equality, National Independence and Peace. All over the world, ever more women are becoming aware of the fact that the problems of social development, including the problems connected with the situation of women and children, cannot be solved without peace and disarmament. Whatever else may be the situation, it is clear that problems such as ensuring supplies of oil, raw materials, or the problems of energy, water and air pollution, etc.. cannot possibly be solved by war, far less the problems facing women.

Thus it is, because of the above developments that in the world of today, the struggle for the independence and full and equal participation of women in the life of society has become inseparably linked up with the active struggle to safeguard peace and put an end to the arms race.

Women everywhere must know this. Working women especially, who have come out of their homes and are more aware of the situation and the problems around them, must take the initiative in rousing the concern of their colleagues and sisters, so that eventually concern can be transformed into concrete mass action against war and the dangers of war. □

FOREVER AFTER.....

Radiation—electro magnetic quanta or corpuscular emission — penetrates human embryo cells and affects the DNA molecules which are the bearers of heredity As a result, babies are born mentally and physically handicapped. Even today, 10.5 per cent of new-born babies suffer from such hereditary defects. Imagine what will happen if, as a result of nuclear bomb explosions, the planet becomes contaminated with radio-nuclides. Even if a certain part of humanity survives a nuclear war, its terrible aftermath will affect future generations and the human race may cease to exist.

Repression In Krishnakali

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On the same night, five other activists of the Union, Narayan Urang, Luis Urang, Lahra Khikbaraik, his son Jit Nath, and Phillips Orang, all of Krishnakali Tea Estate —were brought to the same bungalow. After their hands were tightly tied with rope, they were beaten with iron rods by the Manager. When they became unconscious, they were revived with cold water and beaten again. Not satisfied with this, the Manager urinated on the head of Luis, then poured urine from a bottle into the mouths of all four workers. And all these brutalities were committed with the police O.C. standing by, enjoying what was being done.

This brutal oppression still continues, and telegrams continue to arrive at the office of the All-India Plantation Workers' Federation, revealing more instances of arrest, torture, molestation and rape.

Retrenchment The Goal

The situation now is so grim that all male workers have been forced to flee and the police and goondas deputed by the Manager, are directing all manner of nefarious activities against the helpless and distressed female workers, with the aim of evicting all militant workers from the Gardens. Members of the ABCMS are being refused employment at a time when the number of unemployed among the tea worker population in Assam has swelled to more than three lakhs (300,000). They have work for only five or six months in the year during the plucking season, and that too as temporary, contract labour.

An Advocates' Committee has now been formed to defend the Krishnakali comrades in the various cases filed against them. The General Secretary CITU, has telegraphically informed the ILO of the contravention of workers' rights, as well as the Trade Unions International of Agricultural, Forestry and Plantation workers.

Maharashtra Shramik Mahila Sangh

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sheet within 10 days, because her employer felt that he had been humiliated "by a mere woman".

The Warli Adivasis from the hill belt, led by Sarpanch Hemlata Kaur, narrated the long strikes by agricultural workers in the fruit orchards and farms for a minimum wage of Rs. 4 a day. Where the movement is weak, the wage remains less than Rs. 4. This is land which originally belonged to them. Now the women are planning a struggle for two new, and for them, novel demands: maternity leave and creches for their children.

The resolutions of the conference, reflected not only their protest against all these conditions, but went further afield. They condemned the anti-reservation agitations in Gujarat; the fiscal and pro-trader policies of the Government resulting in the rising prices; social practices such as sati and dowry; demanded amendments to the existing rape law, and family courts for deciding cases of divorce, dowry, alimony and custody of children.

The conference ended with the largest procession of women seen in Kolhapur, culminating in a public meeting at Bundu Chowk, addressed by Ahilya Rangnekar, Prabha Sawant and Subhasini, Jt. Secretaries, and Tara Valanju and Hemlata Kom, Vice-Presidents of the newly-elected Committee, and presided over by Shevantibai Rajgiri.

SECOND CONFERENCE

Shramik Mahila Sangh

THE Shramik Mahila Sangh which counts among its members agricultural workers, beedi workers, tobacco pounders, Adivasis, jhopadpatti dwellers, teachers, nurses, professors and salaried employees, held its Second State Conference in Kolhapur on May 29 and 30, 1981, under the Presidentship of Ahilya Rangnekar. The delegates who gathered there were fired by the bitter struggles through which they had passed, and this was reflected in their speeches and discussions.

Militant Struggles

Beedi workers from Miraj and Sangli spoke of their prolonged struggles including strike, to obtain implementation of the statutory minimum wage of Rs. 6 per 1000 beedies, as also to win the Bonus payment due to them under law. Because they won, in retaliation, a number of 'Kotas, (beedi factories) downed their shutters; others started giving insufficient materials so that many who had been rolling more than 1000 beedies a day, could now turn them out only in hundreds. Their earnings dropped to Rs. 12 a week; many had been without work for the previous three months. While many of the women are married to men engaged in the same trade, a significant number are either widows, or deserted wives, and the heads of their households. Despite this, during their struggle, so few had surrendered to the beedi owners, so few agreed to work for less than the minimum. Their unity was total—Hindu and Muslim, be it Noorjehan Mohammed Inamdar, or Akkabai Nanguskanji, they were one in their struggle.

The powerloom workers of Ichhabkaranji work up to 16 hours a day with no overtime payment. Lack of creches and child-care centres means that their tiny babies have to lie on heaps of cotton waste by the side of their mothers; and the cotton dust breeds illness and weakness. Sufficient time even to feed their infants is not given to these women. From Bhiwandi, came Bhamumati Sonavane, a union activist, arbitrarily dismissed from her job after one year, subsequently reinstated by Court order, but again served with a charge-

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WOMEN IN MAHARASHTRA

ANTULAY CABINET GHERAOED

JUNE 9, 1981 marked the completion of one year of the rule of the Maharashtra State Government. Chief Minister Antulay decided to celebrate with an extended 'Anniversary' Cabinet meeting on June 10 at the Mantralaya in Bombay. The Women's Anti-Price Rise Joint Action Committee decided to assist him to remember the achievements on price-rise, unemployment and law and order.

Led by Ahilya Rangnekar, Mrinal Gore, and Manju Gandhi, about fifty women reached the room of the Cabinet meeting by different avenues, blocked the two main doors leading into the meeting hall and started shouting slogans. Their demand was a meeting with the entire Cabinet in order to place the people's demands and present their memorandum. Antulay refused to meet them, as he and his Civil Supplies Minister have refused for the last few months. Instead, orders were given to remove the women by force. However, the gherao went on for two hours till the women police arrived, when the fifty women were bundled into the lifts and the waiting police vans. At the police station they were booked and asked to appear in Court the next day.

AIR HOSTESSES

SHOCKING SUPPORT TO DISCRIMINATION !

THE All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women strongly condemns the recent statement made by the Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, which appeared in a section of the press, regarding air-hostesses.

Mrs. Gandhi's statement upholds a patently wrong approach which not only discriminates against women employees of the airlines, but also treats them as sexual objects.

The efficiency of airhostesses is in no way dependent on their good looks or figures. It is a function of their training and experience which would obviously improve with age.

Moreover, would it not make more sense to measure the efficiency of an airhostess in terms of prompt, courteous and cheerful service, and the ability to remain calm and act swiftly in times of crisis rather than in terms of glamour and attraction ?

The very argument that efficiency is impaired by the age of 40 is shown to be baseless by the existing 58 years' retirement age for men employees and the different retirement age for women employees recruited abroad in the same air lines. Our Constitution upholds equal rights for men and women in employment but in Air India women are forced to retire at 35 years whereas men retire only at 58 years of age, which blatantly violates this provision.

Again, in Air India air hostesses recruited in London are governed by IATA rules which allow them to continue in service after marriage and pregnancy, but recruits from India are forced to resign under these conditions, and are thereby penalised for these normal functions. It is obvious that the attitude of the airlines' managements towards women employees is discriminatory and feudal and treats them as sexual objects used to lure male passengers, rather than as professionally trained employees of the airlines.

It is shocking that the Prime Minister, herself a woman, who frequently claims to be the foremost champion of women's rights in India, should endorse and perpetuate such sexist attitudes, which are found only in the most backward sections of society and management.

We demand that the P.M. withdraw these statements and direct the airlines managements to stop these unfair practices which discriminate against women and exploit them on the basis of their sex.

The Delhi and Madras Coordination Committees of Working Women have issued statements and resolutions, condemning these remarks of the Prime Minister. The various constituents of the Madras Coordination Committee—P & T, State & Central Government Employees, Banks, Nurses and teachers, etc.—have called on women to send protest cards, resolutions, wires, to the Prime Minister.

The All India Coordination Committee Secretary, Vimal Ranadive, has called on all branches to register their protest. □

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J. V. ELECTRONICS

The demonstration of solidarity had its effect and the management agreed to negotiations with a joint trade union team (CITU, HMS and AITUC) and a settlement was arrived at.

The workers are now back at work, with some demands conceded, others yet to be won. But these women and men are ready to do battle again if management again becomes intransigent and their legitimate trade union demands are not met, among which are demands specific to the women workers. □

IN KARNATAKA

WOMEN PARTICIPANTS IN THE 77-DAY STIRKE

From M. Rajamma,
BEL Employees' Union

FOR the past six months a wage dispute has been continuing between the workers and managements of four public sector undertakings based in Bangalore—Hindustan Aeronautics, Indian Telephone Industries, Bharat Electronics and Bharat Earth Movers. Nearly 7000 workers had gone on a 77-day strike in support of their demand for wage parity with employees of BHEL, also a Central undertaking, as per an earlier agreement signed with the Government. The strike ended after the Centre agreed to start negotiations on the demand. But for six weeks there were no signs of negotiations. This prompted the leaders of the Joint Action Front to go on an indefinite hunger strike. Their arrest a week later on charges of attempted suicide, angered the workers. The managements promptly declared a lock-out on the same day, and continued it for another 28 days.

Ultimately on June 9, an interim agreement was signed before the State Labour Commissioner, pending a final agreement on the original demand. The agreement awards a lump sum payment of Rs. 700 to each worker, a Rs. 25 raise in monthly wages, and extension of the existing wage pact, due to end on June 30, upto December 31, 1982.

Proud Record

There are a large number of women employed in BEL, and it is their proud record that except for ten, all the lady employees supported and participated in the strike. Even these ten were the family members of some officers, forced to attend duty by their husbands or brothers.

The striking lady employees were approached, personally, by management representatives and requested to join work, and even offered a lump sum payment and conve yance, as an inducement. In the housing colonies, it was the police going from house to house trying to persuade the women to come back, but in vain. The women were confident, with morale high showing particular courage and initiative in coping with the budget difficulties at home, in some cases more so than the men.

As yet no Women's Committee has been set up in BEL, though hundreds of women work in the factory, have wholeheartedly supported the agitation and struggle and are members of the Union. In the past, one or two women have become members of the Executive Committee of the Union, but only once in a while. The women workers themselves are now beginning to take the initiative to increase their mobilisation in their Union and draw more and more women into more active involvement in the day-to-day activities, and to persuade the Union leadership to set up a Women's Committee.

Karnataka Coordination Committee of Working Women

The Karnataka Coordination Committee of Working Women was set up in Bangalore on June 4. Vimal Ranadive, Secretary of the All-India Coordination Committee also attended. Rajamma of the BEL Workers' Union was elected Convenor, and the Committee is now contacting other working women and chalking out its future programme.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

We are very happy to print below an abridged version of an article on the present situation of working women in agriculture in the world, sent to us from the Trade Unions International of Agricultural, Forestry and Plantation Workers, (T.U.I.A.F.P.W.).

IN many countries of the world, rural women who make a major contribution to agricultural production, are even more discriminated against in all spheres of life, as compared to working women in the towns. Today women engaged in agricultural production make up 60-80 per cent of all the rural labour force in Africa, 40 per cent in Latin America and 73 per cent of the 300 million "economically active" women in Asia. Their situation is aggravated by the policies followed in and by the developed capitalist countries, and the growing poverty, unemployment, underemployment, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy and the economic and technical backwardness that characterises all developing countries today. Millions of peasants are losing their most important productive asset, their land, and turning into agricultural workers, joining the ranks of the unemployed or underemployed. Such workers now constitue one third or more—sometimes even one half—of the rural population in the developing countries, able to work.

Even in the developed capitalist countries, where protective legislation for workers has existed over a long time, often the agricultural workers are excluded from such legal protection and are not covered by social insurance schemes. In some cases where social welfare and labour legislation exists,it is not applied to women. For example in Italy, one and a half million out of the two and a halt million women engaged in agricultural production are not covered by the labour contracts. This means they can be fired at any moment, and have no right to a pension. In other countries, while the labour contract makes work obligatory for all members of the family, only the head of the family is paid.

Eat Less Work More

Everywhere the work of women in the households to grow the vegetables and fruit for the family, look after the animals, etc., is not socially recognised and not remunerated in any way, *In general, the rural woman eats less and works more.* And all these and other duties in the family she fulfills under conditions of almost total absence of community services, medical care, child-care system, etc., aggravated even more by the patriarchal systems and discrimination practised within the family.

In many parts of the rural world, rural women constitute the majority of the illiterate people, without the opportunity to radically change this situation.

(on facing page)

Extract from the letter of the General Secretary Gerard LAUGIER, to the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women :

"We acknowledge with thanks the receipt of *The Voice of The Working Woman*, and of the news given by the wide coverage in the journal relating to the struggle waged by the working women in different areas in India, as well as in other countries of the world.

"We always follow very closely the problems of the working women, especially in agriculture.

"...Looking forward to our future co-operation.

Yours sincerely,
Sd/- Gerard LAUGIER.

A WOMAN ADVISER TO ILO

FOR the first time in the history of the New Zealand trade union movement, a woman trade unionist, SONJA M.L. DAVIES, has been elected by the New Zealand trade unions, by ballot, to represent them as an Adviser at the June 1981 meeting of the International Labour Office. Ms. Davies is presently the Industrial Advisory Officer, Wellington Shop Employees' Union, Establishing Officer, New Zealand Working Women's Council, and National Advisor to the New Zealand Association of Child Care Centres. Ms. Davies is also currently a member of the Committee appointed by the Minister of Labour to review and report back to the Ministry, on the final implementation of Equal Pay, and on action considered necessary to remedy apparent defects.

Our felicitations go to Ms.Davies on her election, and we wish her all success in her work.

Which is The New Zealand Woman ?

SHE is too often referred to and planned for in terms of stereotypes instead of being recognised as an individual with an individual's attributes and needs.

Happy and contented wife and mother, frustrated and neurotic housewife. educated and articulate career woman, 15-year-old school-leaver without educational qualification, grandmother closely involved in the life of her family, lonely and neglected old woman—all of these and many other phrases can be used to describe New Zealand women, or even one woman at different times in her life. The statistics can be assembled and they do not always support the most popular assumptions about women, but what do women themselves think is important ?

Many New Zealand women spoke up during International Women's Year, 1975, in the United Women's Convention, to the Select Committee on Women's Rights and in the fourteen seminars which discussed that Committee's report. And there were many other groups which met either formally or informally right throughout the country. Emphases varied, but common themes emerged—the consequences of the persistent assumption that all women are economically dependent; frustration at the relative exclusion of women from policy-making; the shortage of good and varied child-care facilities; the need for employment patterns which in practice ensure equal opportunity; and, above all, the necessity for effective anti-discrimination legislation. □

Women in Agiculture

(From Facing Page)

But rural women, together with men, are realizing more and more, the necessity of fighting for such development of agriculture as will bring benefits and positive changes for the millions and millions of rural workers. Female farmhands and peasants are increasingly struggling for their right to organise themselves in trade unions and peasants' organisations, demanding the implementation of radical democratic land reforms, state loans to state co-operative farms and peasant households, remunerative salaries and incomes, and development of rural infrastructure. They are insisting more decisively on the participation of all representative rural organisations in policy-making and implementation, and sharing in the benefits of all development plans.

The situation of rural women all over the world requires that greater attention should be paid by women's organisations, trade unions, peasants' organisations than hitherto and their closer co-operation in dealing with problems concerning this category of workers —women and men—who provide mankind with its most indispensable product—food. □

AROUND THE WORLD

SWITZERLAND—Equal Rights

Being European and a relatively advanced capitalist country, is far from synonymous with an advanced status or role for women. In some ways they are more backward than the less developed capitalist countries. However, under the pressure of the now world-wide women's movement for equal status in all aspects of life, the more patent forms of discrimination are having to give way. In this light stands the recent constitutional amendment adopted by referendum in Switzerland.

It was only ten years ago that women in Switzerland acquired the right to vote—not fully, for there are the 'half cantons' (municipalities) of Appenzell in far eastern Switzerland, where women are still barred from voting on cantonal issues. The late date for granting the vote, testifies to the strong resistance put up against allowing women to step out of their bondage and inferior status.

The present constitutional amendment proposing equal rights for women required six years of drafting and debate before reaching the voters. What the people were asked to vote on were the three issues :

* Men and women are equal in rights.
* The law provide for equality, in particular in the domains of family, instruction and employment.
* Men and women have the right to equal salaries for jobs of equal value.

The measure won a popular majority of 797,000 to 525,000, a margin of 3 to 2. Support was heaviest in metropolitan regions, and in French-speaking cantons (Switzerland has three official languages—French, German and Italian) : Nevertheless there was a sizeable vote against, and it is significant that it was precisely the Appenzell half-cantons that recorded the widest margins in voting against equal rights. Which only points out to the spadework which still requires to be done among women themselves.

ITALY—The Abortion Law

ITALIAN women notched another victory when, through a referendum held in May, this predominantly Roman Catholic country rejected by a two thirds majority, a move by the Roman Catholic Church to reduce the possibility of legal abortion to a minimum and bring back legal sanctions for offenders. The Pope had actively intervened in the campaign, to exhort the people to vote against legalised abortion. But even in his own diocese of Rome, only 27 per cent of the v ote could be mustered against abortion, well below the national average. In the referendum, just over ten million voted against abortion, and just over 21 million for leaving the law as it stands.

The figures show a stronger feeling against The Church's suggestion than in the 1974 referendum on abrogating the law on divorce, when the Church was able to gather some 42 per cent of the vote.

DEVELOPED COUNTRIES—
Job Opportunities

IN 1973 in the U.S. the rate of unemployment among WOMEN ENGINEERS & SCIENTISTS with Ph. D.s, was *four times higher* than that for men.

—in Japan, the proportion of women graduates in 1976 who found a job at the end of that year, was 57.6 per cent, as against 74.5 per cent for men.

—In the U.S. the proportion of women graduates from higher educational establish-

On Thired Cover

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS TO JOINTLY FIGHT PRICE RISE

Representatives of a number of women's organisations, meeting in New Delhi on July 21, condemned the recent hike in the prices of petroleum products and called for continuous campaigns and necessary actions to force the Government to revise its wrong economic policies.

The meeting decided to launch some powerful joint actions in the capital, including militant actions like courting arrest in front of the Finance Ministry. Details of the action will be discussed at the next meeting.

The meeting was attended by Aziza Imam, M.P., Ambika Soni, Vimla Farooqui, Vimal Ranadive, Manmohini Sehgal and other representatives of the National Federation of Indian Women, All-India Democratic Women's Association, Stree Sangharsh, Action India, Janwadi Mahila Samiti, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Manushi, All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women and the Congress(U) Mahila Samiti.

Around The World

(From Page Eight)

ments compelled to take jobs for which they were overqualified, quadrupled between 1960 and 1975, while for men it trebled.

Rly. Reservation Clerks

(From Page Six)

efforts at official intervention have failed, and no punishment is coming their way.

The Delhi Co-ordination Committee of Working Women is now taking up the case of these women workers with the railway authorities and the Union, with the aim of initiating joint actions and obtaining a guarantee that women will be assured dignified working conditions.

The 'Anti-Inflationary' Price-Rise

Within hours of the Prime Minister's assertion at her news conference that the Government would check inflation, the Government announced its "anti-inflationary package". In the very first week after announcement of the "package, Government figures released at the end of July showed a record increase of 5.1 points in the wholesale price index. These "anti-inflationary" measures, including the hike in petroleum, diesel and kerosene prices, came during the week ending July 11. The very next day the wholesale price index went up to 284.6 points, representing the record increase of 5.1 points—the highest weekly jump in the year so far.

However, even this does not represent the full import of the petroleum price hike; the increase is yet to be reflected in transport and industrial products, and will be felt only in the coming weeks.

It is surprising that the rise should be so steep when agricultural production has been satisfactory, there has been a record production of sugar and the monsoons have been good. Despite this, food articles have registered a price increase from the highest for fruits and vegetables to smaller increases for butter, bajra, ragi, gram, urad, rice jowar, maize and masur. These figures relate only to the wholesale prices. The prices at which the housewife actually buys in the shops are of course, much higher

With the probability of higher procurement prices for the coming paddy and rice crops, there is talk in official circles, not of taxing the higher incomes in agriculture and industry to meet this extra expense for the Government, but of raising the 'issue price' of rice. In other words the consumer buying at the so-called 'Fair-Price shops' will have to pay more.

REGD. No. 37205/81

DID YOU KNOW ....?

...that during the first three months of this year in Lucknow alone, there were as many as 32 dowry deaths ?

...that in 1980 the Delhi police recorded the staggering number of 394 cases of women's burning, mostly suspected to be dowry-related, over three times the number of cases recorded in the previous year ?

...that the official number of cases of wife-burning increased from 670 in 1975, to 1676 in 1979—not including the cases of suicide by newly married women, which increased from 12, in 1977, to 22 in 1980. These figures of course record only the reported cases ?

...that of these 1676 cases, 744 were reported from Uttar Pradesh, 362 from Maharashtra, 249 from Andhra Pradesh, 148 from Delhi, 98 from Rajasthan, 48 from West Bengal, 23 from Punjab, 2 from Tamil Nadu and 2 from Karnataka. Only Kerala has no such incidents ?

...that the parties involved in most of such incidents are unwilling to invoke the protection of the Dowry Prohibition Act, and in ten States there was only one case of prosecution ?

...that everyday at least 2 women commit suicide and one is murdered in Madhya Pradesh, but only one death has been recorded in the State in the three years ending June 1980, notwithstanding the registration of 2169 cases of women's suicides and 1016 cases of women's murders during the period.

...That in most cases the tormentors of brides and wives are relatively educated husbands, and in recent months, among others, a school-teacher, an automobile parts dealer, a bank clerk,a small-time businessman, a government college lecturer and a police Sub-Inspector have been held responsible for committing or abbetting atrocities on their spouses.

* * *

Pakistan Women Protest Ban

Eighteen women's organisations of Pakistan, including the All Pakistan Women's Association, have strongly protested against the ban on female models in Pak television, proposed recently by the Government as part of its programme to enforce Islamic tenets in the country. General Zia-ul-Haq has been asked to intervene.

A joint meeting of the eighteen organisations presided over by Begum Liaquat Ali Khan, widow of the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, has protested against the "discrimination" against female models in the media.

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