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NATIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING OF TRADE UNIONS

New Delhi, 12 March, 2003

RESOLUTION

This national consultation meeting of trade unions, participated by the representatives of national/ State/Regional level trade unions, industrial federations and all India organisations of employees, held in New Delhi on the 12th March, 2003, unanimously endorses the call for an all India general strike against the Government of India's disastrous anti-people, anti-worker and anti-national policies, as given by the workers march to Parliament staged on February 26, 2003.

This consultation meeting further endorses the following eight point demands formulated jointly by all the central trade unions and independent unions and federations in the country:

- ⊖ Halt to privatisation of profit making and potentially viable public sector undertakings
- ⊖ No Change in the labour laws in favour of the employers and against the interest of the workers
- ⊖ Immediate enactment of comprehensive legislation for agricultural workers
- ⊖ No to policies leading to severe aggravation of joblessness and unemployment
- ⊖ Widen comprehensive social security schemes for all, including workers in unorganised sector
- ⊖ Restoration of quantitative restrictions on imports
- ⊖ Amendment of Payment of Bonus Act by removing all ceilings
- ⊖ Restoration of 12% interest rate on P F Deposits.

This consultation meeting notes with indignation that the Government of India has failed to pay heed to the demand by all sections of the working

people for total reversal of the anti-people policies. This consultation meeting calls upon the working class and the toiling people to stage a massive countrywide general strike on the 21st May, 2003, preceded by intensive joint campaigns and preparatory action programmes. The notice for the general strike will be served jointly in all establishments on 6th May, 2003, through massive demonstrations.

This consultation meeting appeals to all workers and unions, irrespective of affiliations, to make the all India general strike a telling success.

ON OTHER PAGES

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. May 21: Forward to All India General Strike - <i>W R Varada Rajan</i> | P - 4 |
| 2. Arbitray & Whimsical Ways of Labour Ministry | P - 9 |
| 3. Report of the 2nd World Conference of Oil, Gas & Refinery Trade Unions - <i>Swadesh Dev Roye</i> | P - 10 |
| 4. Economy Derailed | P - 14 |
| 5. Excels in Deception of the People - <i>K Hemalata</i> | P - 16 |
| 6. Blood Thirsty War for Iraq's Oil - <i>M K Pandhe</i> | P - 18 |
| 7. Reports & Events | From P - 20 |
| 8. Price index | P - 26 |
| 9. South Asian Regional conference of Women Trade Unionist | P - 27 |

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THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

APRIL 2003

ALL IN THE GAME



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EDITORIAL

HALT THIS GLOBAL GANGSTERISM

The Bush-Blair caucus is now going for all out war against Iraq, ignoring the world opinion, in arrogant refusal to respect the authority of the United Nations,

The devils have no dearth of pretensions to cloak for their satanic deeds with false justifications. First it was Iraq's alleged underground stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

When the combing operation of the entire Iraq by the team of UN arms-inspectors failed to discover any WMDs, the US administration took a complete u-turn and brought forth a new condition that either Saddam Hussain and his family leave Iraq or face war.

Blair echoed the same line immediately along with its Spanish counterpart. The US Govt, talking so much about democracy and sovereign rights did not bother to ponder as to who is he to ask for a governmental change in another sovereign country.

Does Bush administration have any moral right to point fingers at Iraq? Is it not a fact that the U.S.A. is the biggest stockist of the most horrifyingly destructive weapons in the world? Can the world forget the U. S. applying those at ease on the humanity as seen in Vietnam in the sixties, Kosovo Iraq and Afghanistan in the nineties? Has any UN arms-inspectors ever undertaken visit to the U.S.?

But what do the world community do in the face of such arrogant demonstration of gangsterism. No doubt, overwhelming majority of national Governments opined against war on Iraq. Apprehending a defeat in UN Security Council, the US and its cohorts withdrew their resolution proposing war on Iraq. But those nations, which rightly opposed the war on Iraq, will end up as mere onlooker to the unilateral arrogant war-machinations by the Bush-Blair combine on Iraq? Will they just allow the United Nations to be pushed to irrelevance? This is the million dollar question now.

Here the gangsterism of neoliberal globalisation comes to surface, which is making most of the nation states succumb to US arrogance. By surrendering to the dictum of neo-liberal globalisation piloted by the international financial institution, dominated by the US imperialism, the developing nations as well as some developed ones undermined, rather weakened their own sovereignty. Similarly they succumbed to the dictates of the WTO.

But the conscience of the people world wide is now awakened. They have come out against war through massive demonstrations, including in USA and UK.

Let the Indian working class join the rest of the world humanity to force the US-UK administration, the worst enemy of the humankind to beat a retreat from their inhuman ploy of genocide at Iraq.

NO TO WAR!

NO TO GANGSTERISM OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALISATION!

MAY 21

FORWARD TO ALL INDIA GENERAL STRIKE!

W R Varada Rajan

Yes, the date has now been decided. The Indian working class will take its fight against the powers that be once again to the streets, by staging a glorious countrywide general strike on the 21st May, 2003 against the anti-people anti-national and anti-labour policies of the Government of India.

The NDA Government, which doled out innumerable promises to the people, has reneged on every one of them. It has derailed the entire economy. The growth rate has slowed down. Agriculture, industry, trade - all are in deep crisis. The rural poor are reeling under the impact of draught, famine and penury. The Government record on the employment front is one of dismal failure. In utter desperation, the Vajpayee regime has mounted an all-out attack on the democratic rights of the people. It has specifically targeted the working people of the country for its onslaughts for it is they who have been in the forefront of the struggle against the bankrupt policies of the NDA Government.

The 26th February, 2003 Workers March to Parliament sent out a serious warning to the Vajpayee Government - Totally reverse your disastrous policies or else face the indignant wrath of the whole people!

The first half of the budget session of Parliament has just

concluded. There is yet no sign of the Government rethink on any of its policies. Rather, the NDA regime is seeking to divert the attention of the people away from its failures on all fronts, to non-issues creating a deadly divide within the society.

The national consultation meeting of trade unions, held on the 12th March, 2003, has responded to the task mandated to it in the declaration adopted by lakhs of workers on 26th February. It has fixed 21st May as the date of all India general strike. It has once again endorsed the eight point demand, all related to basic policy issues relevant to all sections of our society.

RALLY ALL WORKERS!

It is unfortunate that the leadership of two of the central trade unions viz. the BMS and INTUC have chosen not to be part of the present call for strike. But, it needs to be remembered that these are the very same demands, which they had also put forth along with the other central trade unions for over two years now. They were also parties to the decision to call for a countrywide strike in pursuance of these demands, the date of which was agreed to be announced during the joint demonstrations staged on 24th July, 2001. While the BMS pulled out on the eve of the National Assembly of Workers held in

Delhi on July 15, 2002, the INTUC chose to abstain from the national consultation meeting on 12th March, 2003. They may put out their own explanations. But, the fact remains that this call for strike on 21st May is just a carry forward of the relentless campaign on these united demands of the entire spectrum of the trade union movement in the country.

CAMPAIGN INTENSIVELY

We are confident that the workers of this country will respond to the call for action and contribute to make the 21st May strike a magnificent success. To ensure that all of us must carry on a sustained campaign on these demands and reach out to every worker, cutting across affiliations, and reach the message of united action!

*** Halt to privatisation of profit making and potentially viable public sector undertakings**

Privatisation has become a mania with those in the governance of the country. The NDA Government is in an unseemly haste to privatise the profit making and potentially viable central public sector undertakings, handing them over to pre-determined 'buyers' just for a song. India has the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world to have a separate Ministry for Disinvestment and the present

incumbent in office has authored a Manual as well to privatise our valuable assets. For every successive financial year budgetary targets are fixed for realisation of proceeds through disinvestment. Every one of the deals, worked out for offering valuable national assets on a platter to the most favoured corporate lobbies, has turned out to be a scam, earning strictures even from the Comptroller & Auditor General. The present Government has scant regard even for the security of the country as revealed by its moves to resort to disinvest even in strategic sectors like oil, defence, air & sea ports etc. With the new found assertion, after the BJP victory in Gujarat, the Prime Minister is giving a go ahead to a series of privatisation deals, brushing aside muted protests from the allies in the ruling coalition even.

What is going on in the name of privatisation or disinvestment is sheer looting of the national wealth. The trade union movement must mobilise all sections of the patriotic people of this country to stop the present Government in its tracks and uphold our sovereignty and self reliance.

The Governments at the Centre and several States are also resorting to corporatise several departments, as a first step towards privatisation. Outsourcing the functions of government departments is also being resorted to in a big way coupled with moves towards downsizing the workforce. The Government is also resorting to

fast track privatisation of the insurance and banking sectors. The employees of the Central and State Governments, and the financial sector have also launched struggles to resist these policies. The general trade union movement must also come forward to extend solidarity with these sections of employees.

*** No Change in the labour laws in favour of the employers and against the interest of the workers**

Armed with the retrograde recommendations in the report of the Second National Commission on Labour, the Government is moving ahead to bring in legislative changes adversely affecting the interests of the mass of workers. In the face of united opposition voiced at the meeting of the Indian Labour Conference held in September, 2002, the Labour Minister is reneging in his commitment to have an in depth discussion on the report in the tripartite forum. The recommendations of the Labour Commission, if allowed to be implemented, will put the trade union movement in straight jacket. Onerous working and living conditions will be imposed on the working class. Social security benefits of the workers would be drastically curtailed and right of hire and fire will be given on a platter to the employers in India.

The Group of Ministers, which deliberated the issue, has chalked out plans to introduce amendment bills to the Industrial Disputes Act and the Contract Act, giving a free hand to

employers for retrenchment of workers and closure of establishments. The attempt is to take away the hard won trade union and democratic rights of the workers and place them at the mercy of the employers.

The trade union movement will have to wage a determined struggle to defeat this offensive of the Government, which is in league with the employers, to impose conditions of slavery on the working people. They have to defend their hard earned right to organise, bargain and strike through bitter struggle only.

*** Immediate enactment of comprehensive legislation for agricultural workers**

Out of the total work force in the country, almost 60 per cent are agricultural workers. This huge work force has no legal protection. They are denied even the minimum wage. They are also grossly under employed due to the seasonal attributes of agricultural operations. The policy of liberalisation has led to a negative growth rate of agriculture. Even the talk of land reform is now given a go by. Corporate farming is being promoted. The small, marginal and middle peasants who are evicted from their lands are swelling the ranks of agricultural labour. Drought and failure of crops are driving the rural labour to migrate to cities.

Added to this is the menace and disaster perpetrated on the agro/rural industries owing to withdrawal of quantitative restriction on imports leading to sharp decline in the non-farm employment in the countryside.

This has created a severe downward pressure on agricultural wages spreading destitution all around.

The trade union movement has for long been demanding enactment of a comprehensive central legislation to guarantee minimum wage and give social protection to the vast multitude of agricultural labourers. An Agricultural Workers Bill had also been drafted and kept lingering for years. But, the NDA government has refused to bring in this legislation. The Second National Commission on Labour had, though passingly, recommended introducing the pending Agricultural Workers Bill; but, it has not attracted any attention from the Government. The trade union movement must jointly mount pressure on the Government to enact this comprehensive legislation without any further delay.

*** No to policies leading to severe aggravation of joblessness and unemployment**

Even according to the Government of India, the employment in Public and Private organised sector had not registered any significant change over the years since 1996. In a written reply in Parliament, the then Minister of State, Ashok Pradhan, stated that total employment in the organised sector was 279.86 lakh in 1995 while in the year 2000 it was 279.60 lakhs. It was also admitted that 4.23 lakh employees were sent out on 'voluntary retirement' up to 31.3.2002.

Recently, the Prime Minister, Atal

Behari Vajpayee, replying to the debate on motion of thanks to the President for his address in the Lok Sabha, claimed that his Government had more or less fulfilled the National Democratic Alliance's promise of providing one crore jobs a year. Refuting the Opposition charge that the NDA had failed to keep up its promise of creating one crore jobs a year, he indulged in some tongue twisting that the promise was not to create one crore "government jobs" but jobs in public and private sectors.

Mocking at the loud assertion of the Prime Minister, the recent Economic Survey had exposed the absolute decline in public sector employment by 0.9% and only 0.1% growth in private sector employment, which together means absolute decline in total employment, not to speak of creation of one crore jobs. Added to this, the sharp decline in rural employment's share in total employment testifies to the unalloyed falsehood in Prime Minister's assertion. That the entire tenure of Vajpayee regime has contributed towards destroying more job opportunities than creating new ones is also decisively proved by the sharp decline of the employment elasticity from 0.52 to mere 0.16 during 1994-2000. In the context of such ground realities admitted by the Government agencies themselves, such a false claim by the Prime Minister, however loudly made, can fool none.

The trade union movement has been in the forefront of the struggle against the

Government move for downsizing the workforce and non-filling up of vacancies. It has demanded replacement of the policies aimed at 'jobless growth' by those aimed at employment generation and promoting labour intensive industrial activities. The working people of the country will mobilise the youth and students of the country on the demand for right to work and unemployment relief.

*** Widen comprehensive social security schemes for all, including workers in unorganised sector**

The vast majority of the working population in the country comprise of unorganised workers. They are not covered by the existing social security schemes. The Government, while shedding copious tears for the miserable lot of the unorganised workers is not prepared to put in place a comprehensive social safety net for all workers. Even the present budget proposal of Jaswant Singh envisages the unorganised workers to buy insurance cover, with the Government proposing a pittance of Rs. 100 as subsidy. Even for the organised sector workers, the Government has already initiated measures to dilute the existing social security schemes. The new recruits to the Government service will not be extended pension out of consolidated fund of India, but will be covered by a new contributory scheme.

The ESI and the EPF schemes are also sought to be tampered with in the name of unpacking

the benefits, with moves towards privatisation of ESI hospitals and driving the P.F. and Pension funds to the speculative stock market.

The draft of the Unorganised Sector Workers Bill, 2003 circulated by the Government is just a skeleton, with no concrete provisions for either income or social security. Even though the central trade unions had unanimously rejected the draft and sought substantial changes aimed at improvement, the Government is keen on arbitrarily going ahead with the Bill.

The liberalisation process has led to proliferation of the informal sector and employers are pushing more and more workers into the unorganised sector, by increasing resort to contracting and outsourcing of jobs. In this situation, it is imperative for the Government to extend comprehensive social security schemes for all, including unorganised workers, covering all contingencies viz., sickness, old age, maternity, involuntary unemployment, accident, death etc.

The vast majority of the working population in the country comprise of unorganised workers. They are not covered by the existing social security schemes. The Government, while shedding copious tears for the miserable lot of the unorganised workers is not prepared to put in place a comprehensive social safety net for all workers. Even the present budget proposal of Jaswant Singh envisages the unorganised workers to buy

insurance cover, with the Government proposing a pittance of Rs. 100 as subsidy.

*** Restoration of quantitative restrictions on imports**

As a part of the new economic policies, the Government of India has embarked on implementation of the dictates of the World Trade Organisation. It has removed the quantitative restrictions on imports of a very large number of commodities and has also lowered the import tariff. These measures have resulted in immense harm to the national economy, by making imports cheaper and domestic produces costlier. Agriculture, traditional and small scale industries are worst affected in the process. Peasants are forced to commit suicide. Industrial sickness is proliferating, leading to closure of thousands of units. Foreign multinational companies are acquiring patent rights for our traditional products and force indigenous producers out of the market, both internally and in exports.

The NDA Government had been in undue hurry to remove quantitative restrictions and reduce import tariff much ahead of even what had been committed to the WTO. While the developing countries continue with huge subsidies for their own products, they dictate Indian Government to slash down subsidies for our products. Successive rounds of negotiations in the WTO forum are utilised to turn the terms of international trade more favourable to the developed countries. The negotiators on

behalf of Indian Government meekly surrender to such dictates.

The entire trade union movement is demanding restoration of quantitative restrictions on imports in order to save our own industry and agriculture from utter ruination. The Government must also be prevented from surrendering to the developed countries and further compromise our interests during the forthcoming WTO Ministerial meeting at Cancun, Mexico.

*** Amendment of Payment of Bonus Act by removing all ceilings**

The present provisions in the Bonus Act, with the income ceilings for eligibility and calculation of Bonus, have virtually turned out an overwhelming majority of workers, almost the entire organised sector, outside the purview of the Bonus Act. Every year, the Government calls for comments from trade unions, employers and State Governments on the question of enhancing the ceiling limits, which is nothing but an eye wash.

Recently, a private member Bill was moved in the Parliament proposing the removing the existing ceiling of Rs. 3500 wages as eligibility to bonus and extending the coverage to every employee in the undertaking. But, the Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), articulating the views of the trade and industry, said that in the present intense competitive environment where many marginal units are

struggling for survival the proposed amendment will be disastrous. While the employers are pressing for amending the labour laws to confer on them the right to 'hire and fire', they are opposing even the limited recommendation of the Second National Commission on Labour for raising the ceiling level for payment of bonus from Rs. 2500 to Rs.3500 and for eligibility from Rs. 3500 to Rs.7500.

But, the trade union movement has unanimously demanded for total removal of all the ceilings in the Bonus Act.

*** Restoration of 12% interest rate on P F Deposits.**

The Government during the course of the last few years has reduced the interest rates on small savings, provident fund etc from 12 per cent to a mere 8 per cent in this year Budget. The Government is the sole beneficiary in this process, as it

has benefited by way of reducing its interest burden, depriving the workers of adequate return on their life long savings. While the Government has been conferring huge benefits by way of incentives and tax concessions to the rich, running to several lakh crores of rupees, it is cheating the workers. The lower interest rate regime has not resulted in any new investment or employment generation, but has only helped the employers to maximise profits even with a reduced turnover. On the other hand, the small scale and traditional sector industries, which are in deep crisis, do not get access to Bank credit, in the context of rigorous norms applied by the Banking industry.

The trade union movement has, in one voice, demanded that the interest rate on P.F., as also on small savings, should be restored to 12 per cent in the

least. These are the common minimum demands unitedly placed by the entire spectrum of the trade union movement in India. Besides these common demands, the trade unions in various industries, regions and States have come together to carry on joint struggles on their several other sectional demands. The May 21 general strike is the culmination of all these struggles and workers toiling in factories, offices and fields must all be rallied to join this mainstream struggle, so that the Government of India is forced to rethink on their disastrous policies and bow down to the pressure of the united working class movement. To this end, wide campaign and preparatory actions should be planned and implemented all over the country during the intervening period.

On to the 21st May all India general strike!

U.S.: 1 million to Lose Unemployment Benefits

Jo-Anne Hurlston can't find a job after nearly six months of searching, even with her master's degree and experience in education, human resources and the hospitality industry.

She's one of nearly 1 million unemployed workers across the country who will start losing jobless benefits three days after Christmas because Congress failed to grant an extension before leaving for the year.

"All the money that's being spent on homeland security and we're left stranded," said Hurlston, 47, a single mother with a 12-year-old daughter. "If they want more money for homeland security, we have to be able to work to pay taxes."

Congress passed a 13-week extension in federal benefits in March, on top of the maximum 26 weeks that laid-off workers typically can receive through states. But the extension benefits start expiring Dec. 28. Without congressional action, an estimated 820,000 people will lose benefits that day, with an additional 95,000 each week...

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney criticized House Republicans for "turning their backs on unemployed workers" while approving perks for drug companies and insurance companies in last-minute legislation before adjourning.....

(By LEIGH STROPE, AP Labor Writer. 21 Nov. 2002)

ARBITRARY & WHIMSICAL WAYS OF LABOUR MINISTRY

The CITU denounces the utterly arbitrary and anarchic acts of the Union Labour Ministry trampling under foot the basic norms of tripartism. It is just hobnobbing with the Employers' lobby, or sheer servility to the employers.

Despite clear commitment made in the Indian Labour Conference on the joint discussion with the trade unions on the issues pertaining to Labour Law amendments as recommended by the National Commission on Labour before its finalisation, the labour Ministry is just moving in the opposite direction. The Group of Ministers have already finalised the draft amendment bills at the dictate of the employers' lobby on the Industrial Disputes and Contract Labour Acts to allow complete liberty to the employers on 'hire & fire' regime and totally contractorise the workforce.

While doing so, the Labour Ministry has resorted to worst kind of hypocrisy and deceptive tactics. In the communiqué by the group of ministers on amendment of Contract Labour Act, decks have actually been cleared for allowing deployment of contract workers in all kinds of work without exception although it posed to have allowed contract work only in 12 items. In its shameless servility to the employers' class, the Labour Ministry has gone to such atrocious extent that the Principal employers, who are the real beneficiaries of contract system, have been completely freed from any obligation whatsoever for the well-being, regular payment etc to the contract workers.

The Labour Minister has also indulged in hypocrisy of the highest order when he made loud statement in the Press regarding "profit sharing" by workers while ignoring the long pending demands of the trade unions for removal of ceilings in the Payment of Bonus Act to ensure that the workers really can share the profit and gains of productivity.

The Labour Ministry has also trampled underfoot the basic democratic principle that the selection of the representatives of workers/unions in any statutory committee should be the sole right of the concerned workers/trade unions. It has, in a most obstinate manner, sought to deprive the

Central Trade Unions of their absolute right to decide their nominees in various statutory committees. It has demanded from all the Central Trade Unions a panel of three names for every seat in the Central Board of Trustees of EPF Organisation, for the Labour Minister to choose according to his own likes and eliminate whom he dislikes. Such a move is the aftermath of the failed attempts to misuse the accumulations in the Employees Provident Fund owing to intervention of some of the workers' members in the Central Board of Trustees. This move is also for decreasing again the rate of interest on PF without any opposition from within the CBT.

The CITU refused to oblige the Labour Minister and mortgage its right to decide its own representatives. In a brazen display of vindictiveness the CITU nominee had been kept out of the reconstituted CBT. The Minister was intolerant of the consistent intervention by the CITU representative (W.R.Varada Rajan), as a result of which the CBT unanimously opposed the moves to reduce the interest rate on PF last year and also blocked many attempts by the Minister to misuse the PF money for cheap political stunts and park the fund for stock-market speculation. The only other central trade union to be deprived of representation in the CBT is the AITUC. It is this Minister, who is indulging in empty rhetoric over workers' participation in management!

The CITU notes that the EPF Organisation is having a huge corpus of over Rs. 1 lakh crore. It is the only fund which is administered by a tripartite body, including the trade unions representatives. It is the only fund free, as yet, from any scam, quite an exception to the general phenomenon noted under the BJP regime. Those in governance, in their desperation to have unfettered power over administration of this huge corpus of fund, have reconstituted the CBT with the handpicked nominees of the Labour Minister. The CITU condemns and denounces such unscrupulous move and calls upon the working class to unitedly resist the evil design of the Govt.

(Excerpts from the Communiqué issued by M.K.Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, at a press conference held in New Delhi on 17th March, 2003)



To fight global capital global unity of workers

2nd World Conference of Oil, Gas and Refinery Trade Unions
March 8-10, 2003 Kolkata, India

The concluding call of the conference are to widen and strengthen further the unity of the oil, gas and oil refinery workers and their trade unions all over the world to fight against the machinations of the imperialist forces and organise united struggles against the onslaught of the Multi-National

Companies. The conference further decided to launch an International Forum of Oil Industries Trade Unions for consolidating and broadening the co-operation and solidarity amongst the trade unions of oil industries world wide.

The Configuration of the Conference

The 2nd World Conference of Oil, Gas and Oil Refinery Trade Unions was held in Kolkata on 8-10 March, 2003. Incidentally the 1st conference was held in Paris on 18-20 October, 1999. The International Organising Committee for the conference consisted of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), India, CGT National Union of Chemical Industries, France, Union of Mediterranean Oil Workers' Organisations, Tripoli and International Energy and Mines' Organisation, Paris. 124 delegates from different countries including India attended the conference.

Apart from the Inaugural and Valedictory Sessions, there were seven working sessions in the conference. The subjects deliberated upon in the working sessions were (1) The Energy Reserves,

Refining and Technology - the Prospects & Challenges; (2) Pricing and Marketing - A People Friendly Initiative; (3) Safety and Environment - In the Industry and Beyond; (4) Worldwide Struggles Against Monopoly Capital led my MNCs and Backed by Imperialists; (5)

Resolutions on Iraq and Palestine; (6) Trade Union Perception, Initiatives and Actions; (7) Adoption of Declaration. While the inaugural and the concluding sessions were chaired by M.K.Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, the different working sessions were chaired by eminent trade union leaders from India, France, Libya, Russia, Norway, Africa and Bangladesh. The theme papers were presented by Robert Ippoliti and Emmanuel William, France, S. Dev Roye, Tapan Sen and Dipankar Mukherjee, India, Terje Nustad, Norway, Mohammad Abusata, Libya. The resolutions on Iraq and Palestine were moved by M.K.Pandhe, India and Md. Alam, Bangladesh. The Declaration of the conference was presented by Com.Chittabrata Majumdar. Comrade Jyoti Basu, Vice President of CITU delivered the inaugural speech and Shri Ram Naik, Union Minister, Petroleum and Natural Gas addressed the inaugural session as the Chief Guest. Comrade Md. Amin, Minister of Labour, Government of West Bengal delivered the valedictory address. An open session of oil

Swadesh Dev Roye

workers and a cultural programme were also organised on the occasion.

The issues in Focus

The foremost issue was relating to reserves. Any development relating to production and availability and price of oil can shake the entire globe. Therefore it is dangerous for the world community to allow the bulk producing countries to be the reservoirs of the bulk consuming highly industrialised countries. At the same time the producing countries must not be allowed to take the entire world at ransom out of their oil power. What is required is a balanced and mutually supportive approach in the operation of the oil sector for the greater interest of the humanity but that is not automatically expected of the MNC tycoons operating in the field. The working class and the trade union movement in the industry can play a role in the matter.

The other question prominently figured in the conference is the machinations of the imperialist forces led by the US regimes to keep the oil rich developing countries as primary exporters, instead of going in for value addition through expanded manufacturing base. The issue most vociferously voiced by the delegates was the US war cry on Iraq and middle-east, US backed genocide in Palestine, US engineered game of insurgencies and coup in the Latin America.

Salient Features of the major Presentations

One of the most important features of the world oil industry is the peculiar situation concerning reserve and consumption. Oil and gas reserves are heavily concentrated in the Middle East. The distribution of proved oil reserves at the end of 2000 is - Middle East 66%, Central & South America 9%, Africa 7%, Former USSR 6%, North America 6%, Asia-Pacific 4% & Europe 2%. (BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 50th edition) In recent years, a rising portion of oil production has come from offshore. Although oil production is growing year by year, the volume of new reserves discovered annually is shrinking (ILO sectoral activities programme) At the end of 2000 proved natural gas reserves distribution is 38% former USSR, 35% Middle East, 7% Africa, 7% Asia-Pacific, 5% each North America, Central & South America, 3% Europe. (BP World Energy, 50th edition). While overwhelming maximum

reserves of oil and gas are in the developing countries, the consumption situation is altogether different. It is fascinating to note that 60% of the world oil import is done only by seven industrialised countries namely; USA, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, Republic of Korea and Spain.

Contrary to above noted reserves situation, the refining capacity situation is altogether different. During 1996 the share of world refinery capacity was as follows: North America - 24.1%, South and Central America - 8.2%, Europe - 21.1%, Middle East - 7.1%, Africa - 3.7%, Asia Pacific - 22.6%. It is said that, "the difference between capacity and thorough put is a crude measure of excess capacity." Judged from this norms the distribution of excess capacity throughout the world has been as follows: 55% CIS countries, 23% Central and South America, 15% in Africa, 11% in Europe, 11% in Asia Pacific, 8% in North America and only 3% in the Middle East.

The other important factor is the mind-boggling advancement in oil technology. The significant change in the drilling technology came with the arrival of 3D seismic imaging in the late 1980s and 1990s. Recently the E & P Company of Shell drilled an elaborate multi-directional well that "twisted and turned its way to a giant pocket of oil 28,000 feet away from the Ursa platform in the Gulf of Mexico". The ultra-deep-water platforms and the "next generation" seismic-imaging techniques that allow reservoirs to be visualised on a screen in minutes rather than the months it would have taken a few years ago, has already been pressed into operation. More advancement, obviously, are in the offing. One ExxonMobil researcher has even declared that oil detection technology is being developed, "that will accurately locate hydrocarbons with 100% certainty."

With their control on the technology and capital, the TNCs are making rapid inroad into the oil industry across the globe. However, it is important to note that overall operational cost is really reducing. According to a online oil technology journal "Thanks largely to technological advances, the average finding and development cost of oil has fallen to a third of the \$20 a barrel it was two decades ago. Meanwhile, the average lifting cost

has fallen by half, to less than US \$4 a barrel." (www.euro.ecb.int of 19.12.01). Added to this is the onslaught of huge Mergers and Acquisitions. Mega-mergers have created huge giant companies as ExxonMobile, Chevron Texaco, BP Amoco and TotalFinaElf. Merger is also providing cost rededication, but major part of the burden of cost reduction is put on the shoulder of the workers through increased workload. With the further intensification of the grip of TNCs in the world oil industry, the cartel controlled pricing mechanism has already impacted the oil market. On the other hand, these merged oil companies are attaining monstrous monopoly scale

While oil and gas reserves are mainly in the developing countries, the major refining capacities are with the developed capitalist countries, which are also the major consumers and the oil MNCs controls the technology. The oil rich developing countries are the victims of imperialist machinations. The imperialist powers and the Multi-national Corporations are in unholy league. The former is desperate to establish political hegemony over the countries having the major oil reserves to ensure assured supply to their countries and latter is for whole-sole privatization of oil industry and out to grab the oil fields to go for profit-quest-operation on a global scale and quench their thrust for unlimited profit at the cost of people of both the developed and developing countries.

The US war cry on Iraq and middle-east, or in that matter US backed Israeli massacre in Palestine, US piloted insurgencies and coup conspiracies in Venezuela, operation of US agents in Columbia etc are all supplementary parallel initiatives alongside the machinations of neo-liberal imperialist globalisation. The neo-liberal imperialist globalisation want to convert the workers into slaves, the workers organisations into non-entity and ultimately enslave the mankind to subordinate their lives to the super profit motive of the world-wide corporate and the TNCs. The imperialist offensive is designed to fasten this process by force, by brutally subduing any dissent and undermining the sovereignty of the nation states. The direction is towards recolonisation of the world under few super powers or more appropriately a few corporate majors.

Attack on Employment and TU Rights

Massive retrenchment and consequent large scale reduction of employment in the oil sector has attained alarming proportion throughout the world. There have been several waves of refinery closures. In the United States about 100 small refineries closed in the early 1980s, and 29 closed between 1990 and 1997. In the European Community there was a capacity closure of 5 million barrels per day or about 30 per cent of peak 1977 capacity, between 1977 and 1985. There was a further 409,000 barrels per day capacity closure during an 18-month period in 1994-95. These closures have resulted in retrenchment of thousands of employees.

The ILO huge has expressed concern at the retrenchment of workers arising out of mergers, acquisitions, privatisation, outsourcing and business restructuring has been taking place in the oil industry. The ILO report has noted: "tens of thousands of jobs have been cut in the past five years, mainly due to mega-mergers in the United States and Europe." (Para 1.1). The onslaught of privatisation in oil and petroleum industries particularly in the developing counties are deepening. "The state-owned oil and gas companies have experienced a wave of privatisation and deregulation over the past decade" (1.1.3) The countries mentioned are Hungary, Austria, Spain, Argentina, Malaysia, Thailand, CIS countries. "Privatisation always carries with it the threat of unemployment" the ILO report noted. In the United States alone, employment in the oil and gas industries slumped in eight year from a peak of 1.65 million workers in 1982 to roughly 640,000. In Canada, 2,250 jobs were lost in 1998 when oil-drilling activity fell by 10 per cent. The situation was equally bleak in other regions, according to ILO report between the years 1998-2000, employment in the Norwegian oil industry declined by 20 per cent. Outsourcing is contributing in retrenchment of workers in the oil industry. ILO report has noted that of the 382,000 jobs in the U.K. offshore oil sector, 219,000 belong in the contractor sector. Trade Union rights have come under severe attack. "Governments in several oil and gas-producing countries have imposed restrictions on freedom of association." (Para 2.1) The report

continues to say, "Non-observance of basic workers' rights, such as freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, which had been an issue of concern at the previous meeting in 1998, still gave cause of concern." Right to collective bargaining is coming under heavy attack forcing decentralization of negotiations and prolonged tenure of the agreement thereby imposing uncertainty on the question of future wage negotiations. The report noted, "... there is increasing flexibility in collective bargaining. Decentralization is mainly driven by employers, who feel that it gives them room to maneuver in response to international competition and technical changes. Generally, decentralization is disadvantageous to workers because they lose bargaining power." (4.1)

The declaration noted that "This conference has arrived at a clear understanding that the developments in the international scenario in economic and political front exposed clearly the design of the imperialists block to install a new world order, their desperate global pursuit for

constantly multiplying profit for the Trans-National Corporations (TNCs). The mounting pressure on the developing nations to hand over precious natural resources to the monopoly control of the TNCs and their junior partners through privatisation, dismantling of the domestic industrial base, liberalisation and deregulation, launching attack on trade union rights of the workers worldwide is the proof of their design. The Governments of many developing countries are succumbing to such pressure. In India, the Multinational Oil Cartels who had been driven out from oil sector are now being given red carpet welcome to take over the nationalised oil companies. It is noted that any opposition to such design is being sought to be tackled by arrogant military attacks in defiance of the UN resolutions and world opinion, just what is happening in Iraq. Oil and energy, being the life line of the economy, have been made the target for monopoly control by the imperialists, which the trade union movement in oil and energy sector must resist by all means.

The Declaration

The draft declaration was prepared by a committee with representatives from India, France, Libya, Greece, Norway and IEMO, Paris and was adopted by the conference with slight modification. The declaration has incorporated the following demands in particular:

- 1) Any act of aggression against Iraq, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or any other country by US/UK combine must stop forthwith
- 2) The right to work and end of unemployment
- 3) A right of energy to be accepted as human right in all countries
- 4) The right to establish and maintain workers union of their own choice without any interference by governments or TNCs
- 5) An end of inequality in the living standards of people in developed and under-developed countries
- 6) The huge debt burden of developing countries must be written off
- 7) Unlawful blockades against Cuba, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and DPRK must be withdrawn immediately
- 8) An end of the Palestine crisis and formation of independent Palestinian State, and withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestine land
- 9) End of cross-border terrorism in all countries including India and arrive at peaceful solution to the problem in Kashmir through negotiations between India and Pakistan.
- 10) Abolition of Child Labour
- 11) Equal Rights for men & women at work and end of all gender based discrimination
- 12) We reaffirm our resolve to fight against all forms of racism, fascism and terrorism.

The conference resolved to widen and strengthen further the unity of oil, gas and refinery workers and their trade unions all over the world to fight against machinations of hegemonism and the TNCs. The conference decided to launch International Forum of Oil Industries Trade Unions for consolidating and broadening the co-operation and solidarity among the trade unions of oil industries world wide. The details of its aims, specific activities to be pursued, and regulations etc. will be framed in the first meeting of the Forum to be held at the earliest.

ECONOMY DERAILED

NO GROWTH IMPULSES IN BUDGET : NCAER

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has described the budget as "weak on providing growth incentives"...In a critical analysis of the Budget in its latest Macrotrack, a monthly report, the Council noted that "the consequence could well be that while consumer spending gets a fillip, investment does not. This will surely make things even worse as there has been a virtual investment famine for

the last five years."....

On agriculture, the council said that almost all the measures outlined in the budget....are in the nature of intentions that still require concrete steps to be spelt out. For instance,...diversification in agriculture has become a major agenda in all the discourses on agriculture. But there is little in terms of real policy action needed to address the problem, it said.

(Business Line, 18-03-2003)

BUDGET: NO APPLICATION OF MIND : Dr. MANMOHAN SINGH

...The leader of the opposition in Rajya Sabha, and former finance minister, Dr Manmohan Singh said in the first stage discussion on Union Budget, " the way these Budget figures(for Central plan allocation) are emerging, I think, mindlessly, thoughtlessly repeating the Budget figures for the last year does not give me an indication of a studied application of mind in preparing the budget for the current year."...The former finance minister asked thus, " If public sector investments are not going to be encouraged-whether in infrastructure or in social sector-then where is

growth is going to come from, where is social equity going to come from."...While reminding Jashwant Singh about the experience of the Roads sector-the National Highway Programme.... and questioning the very perception of private sector's participation in such infrastructure projects, Dr Manmohan Singh commented, " to imagine that the private sector tycoons will be able to cough up large amount of money (for infrastructure projects) from their own sources is a wishful thinking."

(Business Line, 17-03-2003)

BUDGET FOR GROWING INEQUITIES

The absence of any macro-economic and socio-economic strategy to ensure the minimum needs of the masses is evident in the budget for 2003-04 too...In contrast, attention has been given to the growth— overall or sectoral— of corporate bottom lines and share markets....Thus the budget speech denies that "budgetary exercises float over the wide masses in India, relating to only a few."

The Budget reduces the direct taxes by Rs 2995 crores and increases the indirect taxes by Rs 3294 crores and thus accentuates its long standing

iniquitous thrust. The sting gets worse as an entire array of luxuries, frivolities and products with huge external diseconomies (such as cars, ACs, aerated soft drinks, gold, precious stones, liquors, audio cassetts and passenger baggage) have been picked up for favourable treatment and some popular goods meant for the masses such as edible oil and vanaspati (with their prices already sky-high)buses, trucks, cement, diesels etc have been subjected to excise hike...The budget is full of misdirection of public expenditure at the cost of needy indigent millions....While Rs 507 crore

DOWN THE DISASTER LANE

have been provided for extension of cheap grains to the poorest 50 lakh families, Rs 27800 crore, a nearly 55 times larger provision has been made for holding unnecessary large food stocks.... It is wrong to treat this Rs 27800 crore as consumer

subsidy. Even free distribution of the excess stocks (including the cost of distribution) of cereals to the underfed would have been cheaper than storing them....

(Prof Kamal Nayan Kabra, The Hindu, 18-03-2003)

UNION BUDGET: THE MYTH OF INVESTMENT GROWTH...

...The claim that the budget is 'growth oriented' is based however, on invoking a myth, namely that doling out of concessions to the capitalists(including the foreign ones) ipso facto promotes growth. This self-serving proposition...is utterly vacuous, both theoretically and empirically. Capitalists invest only when demand is sufficiently buoyant ; when this is not the case, no matter how large a transfer is made to them from the

public exchequer, they would not invest. They would simply pocket the transfers, which is why this self serving argument is put forward with particular vehemence precisely in periods of recession when profits are otherwise low. This is borne out by the fact that, during several years now, gross capital formation in the private corporate sector as a proportion of GDP has stagnated, and of late, even come down.

(Prof Prabhat Patnaik, Frontline, 28th March 2003)

JOBLOSSES GALORE

P rime Minister is talking loud on creation of one crore jobs every year and collecting applauses from chosen audience.

On the other hand every day thousands of jobs are being axed through rampant downsizing, closure, retrenchment and lay-offs.

As per statement made by the Minister of State for Labour in Rajya Sabha on 6th March 2003 in reply to the unstarred question no 1644 from Jibon Roy and Prasanta Chatterjee:

- As on 31-03-02, 4.23 lakh employees have lost employment in PSUs through VRS.
- Since last five years (1998 onwards) till 2002, 59,104 workers lost their livelihood because of closures (the reported closures only).
- Since last five years again, 14,406 workers were thrown out of jobs (retrenchment) as per report received by the Govt.
- During the same period, 1,65,487 workers were affected by lay-offs which also means loss of employment and earnings for those workers.

Above are the figures of joblosses owing to "Reported" closures, retrenchments and lay-offs. The number of unreported closures and retrenchments are many times more in the background of widespread connivance between the law-enforcing authorities and the employers lobby with the active patronage of those in governance.

EXCELS IN DECEPTION OF THE PEOPLE

K Hemalata

When Jaswant Singh told that he wanted to put some money in the 'gruhini's' (housewife) purse, obviously he had in mind only the few housewives belonging to the uppermost strata of society. He had amply demonstrated through his first Budget that his definition of a 'gruhini' certainly does not include the vast millions of women in rural India, the millions of women working in the small industries, and the thousands of women forced out of the work force through the 'VRS'. The widows, the old women surviving on the interests on their life time savings are definitely out of the purview of his definition of a house wife. For, he has not put a single paisa in their purse. Rather he chose to snatch away the little money they managed to save through self-denial and taking on further burdens upon themselves.

Much hype was created in the media over the budget to be presented by Jaswant Singh. But for the common masses it failed to bring any cheer. For the country's economy, it does not promise any direction. The Economic Survey, released on the eve of the Budget had admitted of a decline in the growth rate from 5.5% projected in the mid term review to only 4.4%. The Budget has nothing concrete to promote growth, despite the repeated assertions by the Prime Minister of a 8% growth rate during the Tenth Plan period. It does not address the two most important problems-agricultural crisis and unemployment - currently facing the country.

RURAL WOMEN IN DESPAIR

Around 84% of the working women in our country are engaged in agriculture, most of them as agricultural workers, and poor or middle peasants. Agriculture has been reeling under a crisis with agricultural production showing a negative growth of 3.1% and food grain production declining even below the rate of population growth for the first time in independent India. Hundreds of farmers all over the country have committed suicides and hundreds in the rural areas of several States have

died due to starvation. Rural unemployment is on the increase, including among rural women. Women as workers, as mothers and wives are the worst hit by the crisis. Though the finance minister tried to create the impression that he was addressing the concerns of the rural masses, the budget will only help in deepening the crisis further. The reduction in subsidies on the fertilisers and the hike in the price of light diesel oil will push up the cost of agricultural inputs at a time when the prices of agricultural products have been already crashing.

There is only a meagre allocation to the 'Antyodaya Anna Yojana', targeting to cover only 50 lakh families. This will hardly cover around 20% of those officially below the poverty line, while even today around 48 million tonnes of food grain are rotting in the Government godowns. There is no succour to the poor women in the landless families, who will continue to starve and remain malnourished. The high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity due to anaemia and malnourishment will continue despite the Government's declared intentions to bring these down.

CUTTING DOWN ON WELFARE

Allocations to several important schemes have been reduced. Malaria and Tuberculosis are even today widely prevalent diseases in the country, particularly among the poor, which can be prevented, thereby avoiding morbidity and mortality of lakhs of people. Already reduced allocation to public health in successive budgets after the initiation of the so called 'economic reforms' has resulted in a resurgence of these diseases, which had earlier shown a decline for some time. Yet this budget has further reduced the allocation for these two schemes by Rs. 10 Crores. The allocations to rural family welfare schemes have been reduced by Rs. 254.50 Crores, while the total family welfare allocation has been cut down by Rs. 142 Crores. Reductions in allocations for public health services and

collection of users' charges ultimately adversely impact women's health, as women tend to avoid paying for their health care, to save money for the family. The finance minister has announced a health insurance scheme which only means that while the State withdraws itself from its responsibility of providing basic health services, the poor are made to pay for them. This is in line with the World Bank prescription of privatisation of health services and collection of users' charges for all the benefits provided by it.

The finance minister has dealt another blow to the housewives and the women who were forced or lured into taking Voluntary Retirement, by reducing the interest rates on small savings and provident funds by another one percent. The interest on small savings has become a favourite target of the successive finance ministers for quite a few years. As a result, old people and widows who have to depend on the interest on their lifetime savings to see through their old age, find their incomes severely eroded. As the prices of all the essential commodities including medicines shoot up, they could not but feel cheated.

The finance minister has chosen to please the WTO by over fulfilling the commitments of the BJP led NDA Government by reducing the peak rate of customs duty from 30% to 25%. Together with the increase of excise duty on several items, this will only make the domestically produced items costlier and uncompetitive and adversely affect the domestic industry, particularly the small-scale industries sector, which is already facing problems. This will further aggravate the unemployment problem, as small-scale industry is one of the largest providers of employment. The reduction announced in excise duties on some items will mostly benefit the rich consumers and not the common people.

The number of women venturing out in search of jobs and forced to live away from their families has been increasing over time. While the working women have been demanding more working women's hostels, the Government chose to cut down the allocation for working women hostels by Rs. 3.5 Crores. The labour social security has been slashed by Rs. 30 Crores, with the specific schemes for women being reduced by Rs. 8 Crores. The maternity benefit allocation also has

been cut down by Rs. 22 Crores. The beedi welfare fund has been cut by Rs. 2 Crores. The finance minister was all praise for the women in the Self Help Groups, but has not increased the allocation to the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh by even a single rupee.

STEEP PRICE INCREASE

The cess of 50 paise on diesel will have a cascading effect on the prices of all the commodities including in the agriculture sector. The price of cooking gas is predicted to be increased by Rs. 22/- to 25/- per cylinder and that of cooking oil by around Rs. 5/- per Kg. Many other items are sure to follow suit. After the post-budget hike of around Rs.1.50 on petrol/diesel, yet another hike had been effected in the name of rising prices in the international market.

Like the previous budgets, Jaswant Singh's budget is explicitly pro rich and anti poor. It provides major concessions to the big business houses- both national and multinational- and the rich, with further increase in the cost of living of the workers and the peasants. On the other hand their right to organise and bargain to improve their living and working conditions are being snatched away by changing the labour laws. Despite its claim of being innovative, this Budget has followed the same old route of reducing the direct tax revenues- by Rs. 2950 Crores, and hiking the indirect taxes- by Rs. 3294 Crores. While the accumulated tax dues by the big business hover at over Rs. 1, 00,000 Crores, the Finance Minister stated that he would prefer to trust these big business houses to pay up their taxes rather than take any firm action against them to ensure payment. This clearly exposes whom the Government represents.

The basic fact remains that the ruling classes are not interested in improving the living conditions of the common masses nor of solving the major problems confronted by them. Neither is it possible to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment within the framework of the present capitalist system. The entire exercise of the budget in this system is a facade to deceive the people, to create some illusions of giving some relief to the people when elections are around the corner. The sooner the working class sees the system for what it is and unites to change it, the better.

BLOOD THIRSTY WAR FOR IRAQ'S OIL

M K Pandhe

US President George Bush's unilateral call for war against Iraq violating all international laws has evoked strong protests all over the world including USA. Never before such massive protests were held involving millions of people in the recent history of mankind. Yet, George Bush has trampled under foot the international opinion and declared an unjust war against Iraq, bypassing even the authority of UN.

The 1991 war against Iraq was responsible for the death of lakhs of Iraqi citizens, men, women and children. The subsequent blockade affected livelihood of several lakhs of people, children even died due to starvation. The UN inspectors visited on 9000 occasions various sites to find out weapons of mass destruction. No fly zone was declared preventing Iraq from flying aircrafts within their own country. US bombarding destroyed several cultural relics of Iraq's old civilization.

POST-SEPTEMBER 11

The US vindictiveness towards Iraq increased after 11 September attack on World Trade Centre in US. In the name of fighting terrorism US attacked Afghanistan and after occupying the entire country and installing a puppet govt the US army is not leaving Afghanistan which shows the US intention was not to fight against Bin Laden and Taliban but to occupy Afghanistan in their attempt to

control the oil resources in the Middle East.

According to a survey, 40,000 military and 5000 civilian deaths were reported in Iraq during the war. 1 lakh post war deaths resulted because of violence and health conditions. Fifty lakh people became refugees as a result of the war. Five lakh Iraqi children died as per estimate by UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. As a result of rocket attacks 92 per cent of Iraq's power capacity and 80 per cent of oil production capacity was destroyed. It is also reported that 135 telephone networks, more than 100 bridges, hundreds of locomotives, box-cargo full of goods, radio and television networks, cement plants, aluminum factories, textile units, electric cable producing units and medical supplies were destroyed during the war. The Arab Monetary Fund estimated total losses to be \$190 billion. Practically the entire economy was crippled as a result of US military attack against Iraq during 1991 war.

The US owns the largest arsenal of mass destruction in the world. It was the first country in the world to use atom bomb against the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the second world war. It has got military bases all over the world threatening sovereignty of several developing countries. It has developed the anti-missile

defence system to build up military superiority in the world. Though Soviet Union is dismantled, US is still trying to expand NATO and create its hegemony over Europe and adjoining areas. US has imposed blockade against Cuba and other countries throttling its economy. It has taken arbitrary step to declare some states as 'rogue states' and advanced the plea of axis of evil to include states who do not toe the line of servility toward US imperialists. Hans Blix, UN's Chief Weapons inspectors, and his team of hundreds of inspectors could not find any weapons of mass destruction. They could not notice any "smoking gun" as claimed by US Government. Iraq has justifiably claimed that some of the UN inspectors were acting as spies of USA and supplying all types of information to US Government. At times the behaviour of UN weapons inspectors tantamount gross interference in Iraq's internal affairs. However, the Government of Iraq is forced to accept this humiliation to avoid the alternative of facing war. Despite compliance to these derogatory conditions, the US imperialist spokesman Collin Power continues to threaten Iraq with dire consequences.

ALL FOR OIL !

The entire world is now convinced that the real game of President Bush is only to control the huge oil reserves in Iraq. It

is well known fact that the Bush administration has close links with oil cartels in USA. To help these cartels to control over Iraq oil, President Bush is playing the gamble of war on Iraq.

Iraq is having the second largest proven oil reserves in the major oil producing countries in the world. Saudi Arabia is having the largest proven reserve with 261 billion barrels of oil. In case of Iraq it stands at 112 billion barrels. United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Iran, Venezuela and Russia account for less than Iraq as far as proven oil reserves are concerned. Today according to latest data the global reserves of oil are estimated to be about 1 trillion barrels. Thus Iraq's proven reserves account for 11 per cent of the world reserves. According to US Department of Energy the unproven oil reserves in the world will be an additional 100 billion barrels. The quality of Iraq oil is among the best in the world with refining cost works out to only 97 cents per barrel. Due to less sulphur content the Iraq oil is polluting less so far as the environment is concerned.

As noted by Frontline, "Global oil consumption is about 76 million barrels a day and demand is currently growing at 2 per cent of per annum. Consumption is projected to reach 96 million barrels a day in 2010 and 115 million barrels a day in 2020. The US dependence on oil imports is projected to increase from current levels of about 52 per cent to two thirds in 2020". (Feb

28, 2003)

The people all over the world had no interest in such a war. They would be the worst sufferers. Perhaps the only gainers would be the US oil cartels at the cost of killing of a large population. Bush's senseless threats were an affront to human consciousness at the planet earth.

The unprecedented worldwide protest wave against war developed spontaneously challenging hegemonistic machinations of President Bush and his cohorts. Deployment of more than one and a half lakh troops by US and UK in the gulf region with most modern weapons of mass destruction was a clear show of military arrogance which is not to be tolerated. Never before such a gigantic turn-out was witnessed in most of the countries in the world, as in the massive demonstrations against war.

AFFRONT TO HUMANITY

The revolt of 122 MPs of Labour Party in UK against Tony Blair's servility with US imperialists was a significant pointer to the anti-war atmosphere developing in all continents. The historic rally in London with 2 million people shouting slogan against war was highlighting superiority of human consciousness over the mighty military power. Even in USA people revolted in all major cities against Bush's war mongering policies and expressed their firm opposition to his affront to humanity.

The mobilisation of people even before breaking out of war was

much more powerful than the mobilisation during Vietnam war. In case of Vietnam the dead bodies of US soldiers were coming to US in coffins, which roused anger among the people. People do not want a repeat of the same phenomenon in the Iraq war and hence their firm opposition to the war game of President Bush.

When Chief UN inspector failed to find any concrete evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq the insistence of US Government to attack Iraq was a clear design of controlling oil of Iraq at any cost. President Bush and Tony Blair have made the people of the world intolerant to any war machination. However imperialism never bothers about the public opinion. If the US Govt insists on its war plans the popular discontent will rise to a still powerful movement against such inhuman war plan.

Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, condemning war hysteria created by President Bush firmly noted, "Bush undermines United Nations. He acts bypassing the frame of UNO undermining the fact that United Nations was an idea of Roosevelt and Churchill. Tony Blair, as for him, is not any more henceforth Prime Minister of Great Britain but American Foreign Secretary." He further said, "I hope that the people of United States will make Bush understand that he made an error by disdaining the ideal of United Nations. They should use their democracy to get rid of Bush."

Heroic Struggle of APSRTC Staff and Worker's Federation

Hundreds of Road Transport Workers staged militant demonstration suuounding the office of the Transport Commissioner's office at Hyderabad blockading the movement of the officials of the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation on 21st February 2003, at the call of the APSRTC Staff and Workers' Federation. The Federation gave the call to picket the Transport Commissioner's office at Hyderabad and all the Regional Transport Offices at the district headquarters, to protest against the State Government's callous attitude in curbing illicit operation of private buses on the routes of the APSRTC. In Hyderabad hundreds of workers marched in a procession towards the Transport Commissioner's office. The police erected barricades and did not allow the workers to reach the office. Undeterred, the workers tried to cross the barricades. The police resorted to brutal lathi charge on the workers and arrested many of them. In Guntur city, police resorted to inhuman lathi charge injuring 10 workers and arresting 20 activists of the Union. Hundreds of workers were lathi charged and arrested throughout the State.

Around 3 thousand private buses are operated illegally on the routes of APSRTC causing huge loss to the earnings of the Corporation as

well as to the Government exchequer. The Government gave a written undertaking to the unions at the time of the historic 24 days' strike of the APSRTC workers last year to prevent such illegal operation. But the operations have only increased during this period. The Union alleged that this was being done to fulfil the commitment of the State Government to the World Bank to dismantle the State Road Transport Corporation.

These illicit operations by the private bus operators are the main cause for the losses incurred by the APSRTC. The loss due to this is estimated to be around Rs. 800 Crores annually. By curbing the illicit operations, RTC can save enough money to purchase around 4,000 new buses which in turn can provide employment to around 30,000 unemployed youth and better services to the commuters. Besides, the State Government could also earn around Rs. 100 Crores. In spite of these positive effects, the Chandra Babu Naidu Government is not willing to act against the illicit operators. Rather the Government is trying to recover the losses by increasing the passenger fares and cutting down the rights and privileges of the workers. The leave encashment is with held for the past two years. Ex gratia payable in lieu of bonus to workers is not paid. Several privileges and concessions gained through

bilateral agreements are either not implemented or unilaterally abrogated. Pay reductions, suspensions and removals from service are being resorted to by the management to intimidate the workers. Unable to face such humiliating conditions, some workers have committed suicide. The RTC management is planning to close down several bus depots and cancel many services, on the ground of losses. The working hours of the crew is sought to be increased from 8 to 12- 14 hours. Drivers are compelled to perform the duties of the conductors also, by installing Ticket Issuing Machines in the buses, against statutory provisions. These measures are expected to eliminate 24,000 jobs through VRS in 2003. As per the agreement with the World Bank, the implementation secretariat has recommended that 40,000 employees should be removed by 2007 and that RTC should be handed over to private management.

In fact, there is already shortage of staff in the RTC. The existing services are being operated by resorting to 'double duties' because of shortage of drivers and conductors. There is also shortage of mechanical staff. In this scenario, if there is further reduction in the staff strength, many services will have to be cancelled and the maintenance of

REPORTS & EVENTS

buses will also deteriorate, resulting in an increase in failure rates and accident rates. The Government wants to utilise such a situation to privatise the RTC, by blaming its inefficiency, with least resistance from the general public.

R Lakshmaiah, General Secretary of the Union condemned the attitude of the Government and wondered if the demand to implement the provisions of Acts and Rules has become a crime in view of the Government. He

declared that the movement against illegal operations of the private bus operators would be further intensified and that the workers were determined to save the RTC.

STEEL WORKERS IN DHARNA AGAINST PRIVATISATION

Thousands of Steel Workers from all over the country have staged a day-long dharna before the Parliament at Jantar Mantar New Delhi on 25th February, 2003. They come from plants, mines, sales organisations, offices, etc., to cry halt to the nefarious bid of the SAIL management and the Govt to privatize the Salem Steel Plant and close down the Alloy Steels Plant, Durgapur.

The participants were drawn from various unions functioning in the steel industry viz., CITU, INTUC, and those affiliated to ADMK, PMK etc. The Govt of India's gameplan is to hand over both the Salem Steel Plant and Alloy Steels Plant to Ms Jinadai at throw away

prices and the move to sell out Salem is at advanced stage. On the other hand the combined and complementary operation of ASP and SSP can become the most profitable venture for Govt or in that matter public sector SAIL. The NDA Govt has been deliberately closing that route only to benefit Jindals and those handling the deal. This is going to be another big scam. The steel workers voiced their protest to such anti-national move through this dharna.

The dharna has been addressed by a number of Members of Parliament and senior trade union leaders of the country. The dharna started by 10.00 AM at Jantar

Mantar. Among those who addressed the dharna were M K Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, Tapan Sen, Ardhendu Dakshi, both Secretaries of CITU, P K Das, General Secretary, SWFI, P Paneerselvam (SPEU-Salem), B D Prasad (Bokaro), Biman Maity (Rourkela), BM Chakraborty (ASP), besides others. Also, Jibon Roy, MP, Sunil Khan, MP, both from CPI(M) and E Ponnuswamy, MP (PMK) addressed the rally.

A delegation of MP's and senior trade union leaders met the Steel Minister, Govt. of India to submit memoranda requesting him to see that the workers' demands are met and country's interest is upheld and not that of the Jindals.

CHENAB HYDRO PROJECT WORKERS' STRUGGLE

More than 10000 workers of Chenab Hydro Power Project Workers at J&K have been struggling against retrenchment braving the inhuman atrocities by the Police and local administration.

The Hydro Power Project under

NHPL is under construction and hardly 36% of the work has been completed. Despite that around 1475 at Bagliar and Dalhosti sites workers have been retrenched by M/s Jayprakash Industries, the construction company handling the construction jobs. The

retrenchment has taken place on the plea of there being surplus which is not the fact as 64% work of the project is yet to be undertaken. The main game plan of M/s Jayprakash is to retrench the workers and deploy another set for the rest of the job and deny all

REPORTS & EVENTS

statutory benefits to all its workmen in this process. The Construction Company has already earned notoriety in this regard in its handling of various hydro projects in Himachal Pradesh and in every cases the employer company managed to get the state administration by its side by dubious means to get a free hand in violating all labour laws with impunity.

In the instant case, when the mass of the workers held a massive demonstration against unlawful retrenchment on 7th March 2003, state police, instead of booking the Jaiprakash officials, brutally

lathicharged and opened fire on the peaceful demonstrators injuring severely more than 50 workers. Condition of six workers is still quite serious. Since then the work in the two sites came to standstill and the entire workforce along with their family members have been staging round the clock dharna braving inclement weather demanding withdrawal of retrenchment and implementation of Labour Law.

The State administration has openly taken the side of the employer in their gross illegal activities and have been busy in threatening and intimidating the workers,

struggling for the right cause. Police arrested Zaved, leader of the Chenab Hydro Project Workers Union on 7th midnight and implicated in false cases.

Jibon Roy, MP and Secretary CITU visited both the sites on 14th March 2003 along with Yusuf Tarigami, MLA and met the workers and their leaders. In a statement issued on his return, Jibon Roy urged upon the J&K Govt to refrain from such bias and illegality and intervene so that retrenched workers are taken back to job and the Employer company is compelled to implement the labour laws and its basic statutory obligations.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY OBSERVED

The anganwadi workers and helpers in Jalna district observed the International Women's Day on March 8 by holding a meeting at the district committee office of CITU at Jalna. The President of the district committee of Anganwadi Karmachari Sanghatana, Maharashtra, Prof. Sunanda Thidke, presided over the meeting. Around 100 anganwadi workers and helpers from different projects in the district participated in the meeting. Prof. Shobha Bhajwante, who was the chief guest addressed the gathering and spoke on the importance of International Women's Day in today's context and the danger of communalism. Anna Sawant, Secretary, Jalna

district committee of CITU, and other CITU leaders, Gautam Shinde, and Madhukar Mokde also addressed the women. Several anganwadi employees also spoke in the meeting about the atrocities on women and other problems faced by them. They also emphasised the necessity of creating awareness among the women.

IN BIHAR

The International Women's Day was observed on 8th March at the initiative of the Bihar State Committee of CITU. As per the review reports in the meeting of the Secretariat of the Bihar State Committee CITU, the Secretariat members participated in 6 districts - Patna, Muzaffarpur, Bhagalpur,

Gaya, Aurangabad, and Motihari. Women from different sectors - anganwadi, beedi, school teachers, State Government employees, nurses etc- participated in the meetings. More than 100 women participated in the meetings in Motihari, Gaya and Bhagalpur, 75 in Muzaffarpur and around 50 in Aurangabad and Patna. Ram Pukari Devi, Vice President, Arun Mishra, General Secretary, and Yogendra Prasad, Vice President of the State Committee of CITU, addressed the women in Muzaffarpur, Bhagalpur, and Patna respectively. Ambest, State Committee member participated in Gaya. In Muzaffarpur, the women marched in a procession and held a dharna for around 3 hours, in

REPORTS & EVENTS

front of the District Collector's Office.

The speakers explained the importance and relevance of International Women's Day in today's context and criticised the policies of globalisation and privatisation pursued by the Governments at the Centre and in

the State, which increased poverty, illiteracy and ill health among women. They also lambasted the Government for increasing unemployment. The communal forces, like the VHP and the Bajrang Dal etc were trying to divert the anger among the unemployed by raising the issues

of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, cow slaughter etc. They told that women suffered most by the communal violence and urged them to come forward to fight unitedly against the economic policies of the Government as well as the communal agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

ANGANWADI WORKERS' INDEFINITE MASS DHARANA

The Karnataka Rajya Anganwadi Noukarara Sanghatana gave a call for indefinite Mass Dharna Programme from 4-3-2003. The main demands were (1) extension of retirement benefits to Anganwadi Workers, (2) release and disbursal of increased honorarium from April 2002, 3) release of state Governments' additional honorarium of Rs. 250-

00 per month, 4) priority loans to Anganwadi Women, 5) release of 18 months' additional grant earmarked for Stree Shakthi programmes.

In preparation for this massive programme, Taluk and District level meetings were conducted and more than 50,000 leaflets were circulated. Thousands of letters from Anganwadi Workers and Helpers and hundreds of telegrams

from taluk committees were sent to the Government. Despite this intensive programme that went on for 3 months, the state Government did not relent and it showed its marked reluctance to have any negotiations with the union. Intensification of struggle therefore became imminent and as decided by the Union, more than 5000 Anganwadi workers' converged in Bangalore on 4th

RED SALUTE TO RACHEL CORY

On 17th March, 2003, Rachel Cory, an American Lady and an activist of International Solidarity Movement against War & Aggression have been killed being brutally trampled by the Bulldozer of the Israel Army.

She hails from Olympia near Washington, an young lady of 23, and has been active in organizing protest against US Govt's imperialist policies. She, along with other activists of International Solidarity Movement went to Gaja Strip and west Bank area to campaign against the cold blooded massacre against the Palestine civilians, including women and children, being engineered by the Israel Army everyday with active US patronage.

On 17th March, when the Israel army bulldozers were in a demolition spree, on the Palestine refugee camps at Rafa city in Gaja strip, housing thousands of Palestine women and children, who had to take shelter in portable tents after their houses were demolished by the Israel army, Rachel bravely faced the bulldozer and urged upon the operator through her hand-mike not to kill the civilians. The bulldozer didn't relent and crushed Rachel Cory to death.

RACHEL HAS EMBRACED MARTYRDOM WHILE RESISTING US BACKED ISRAEL ATROCITY ON HUMANITY.

Red Salute to comrade Rachel Cory.

REPORTS & EVENTS

March, 2003. They came from about 60 taluks in 14 Districts of the State and sat on a dharna for 2 days and throughout the night. The sheer strength of mass of workers and their rocklike determination unnerved the powers that be and

on March 5th, at 1.30 PM, Union leaders were invited for negotiations. The Government agreed to formulate a new scheme for retirement benefits, release of Rs. 32 crores that is due from Central Government and Rs.1

Crore by the State Government immediately, reserve 5000 houses for Anganwadi workers and helpers under the 'Rajiv Gandhi Housing Scheme', and release 18 months' amount earmarked for Stree Shakthi Scheme.

Corporate Bankruptcies Exhaust US Pension Guaranty Fund

The US Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation has exhausted its entire \$8 billion surplus as a result of a series of big corporate bankruptcies last year, the agency reported last week. The PBGC provides partial protection for private pensions paid to 44 million workers.

Three big steelmakers accounted for most of the drain on the PBGC's resources: Bethlehem Steel, whose pension fund required an infusion of \$3.7 billion; National Steel, which was \$1.1 billion in deficit; and LTV Steel, whose pension bailout (the second in 16 years) cost \$1.6 billion. All three pension plans were bankrupted by the virtual collapse of the US steel industry. Bethlehem, for instance, has 67,000 retirees receiving benefits, 15,000 laid-off workers eligible to receive pensions in the future, and only 13,000 current workers producing profits for the

company.

Even bigger pension defaults could take place this year, with bankruptcy filings by US Airways, United Airlines and Kmart, among other large corporations. US Airways alone is liable for \$3.1 billion in pension contributions over the next seven years, and has sought permission from the federal government to stretch out the payment period to 30 years.

Until 2002 the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation had never handled a billion-dollar bailout. Its largest previous case was the \$841 million takeover of the Pan Am pension fund in 1991, when the airline was liquidated. The PBGC exhausted its surplus in 1992, at the end of the last recession, but rebuilt its reserves during the stock market boom of the late 1990s. The earlier crisis is dwarfed by present conditions. In 1993, the

gap between what companies were obligated to pay in pension benefits and the resources on hand reached a high of \$109 billion. At the end of 2002, the pension funding gap was estimated at over \$300 billion. The whole thrust of administration policy, however, is to plunder workers' retirement benefits in the interests of corporate profits. This is the character of Bush's ongoing plans to privatize the Social Security system, funneling trillions into the stock exchange, and of measures recently announced by the Treasury, which will undermine company-paid pension plans. In December the Treasury proposed new rules to allow corporate employers to convert traditional defined-benefit pension plans into "cash balance" plans that cut the benefits paid to longer-serving workers.....

(By Patrick Martin, 29 January 2003)

Strike Brings Much of Algeria to a Halt

Striking government workers brought much of Algeria - but not its lucrative oil fields - to a halt Tuesday, on 25th February 2003

with no public transport and few flights.

The strike against government privatization plans and for better

living standards forced the cancellation of nearly all of state-owned Air Algeria's services. Private Khalifa Airways also

REPORTS & EVENTS

canceled a large number of flights because airport workers were in total strike. There were no trains or public buses, allowing taxis, which were unaffected by the strike call, untrammelled freedom on the suddenly calm streets of Algiers, the capital. Workers stayed home or took walks with family and friends. Public offices and firms were closed.

Abdelmadjid Sidi Said, head of the General Union of Algerian Workers said fewer than five percent of members ignored the

strike call. The union has around 3 million members. The two-day stoppage began Tuesday.

But the union, Algeria's most powerful, exempted the oil and gas sector from the protest. Oil and gas exports provide more than 95 percent of Algeria's foreign currency earnings - bringing some \$18.5 billion in 2002 alone.

Also exempted were flights bringing Muslims home from this year's pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam's birthplace in Saudi Arabia.

The strike was called to push the

government to give more details about its plans to privatize state-run firms and to protest falling living standards.

The Union threatened renewed and longer strikes, including stoppages in the oil sector, if government officials donot change their policies. about the privatization program.

"This strike is for the dignity of workers whose very survival is threatened by the government's privatization policies," he said.

(The Guardian, February 26, 2003)

SIGTUR STATEMENT AGAINST WAR AND TERROR

SIGTUR, The Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights is a social movement of democratic unions in the south - the south being the most exploited regions of the global economy. The democratic unions in SIGTUR have fought and continue to fight courageously for and with the exploited and deprived working men and women of the south, those in employment and those that are excluded and marginalized.

These unions are fighting movements for justice. They are militant movements for equality and for full participation in political processes. All workers have the right to dignity, to a share in the wealth that they produce and for a direct voice and power in politics.

In this context SIGTUR states its strong, uncompromising opposition to the US led war on Iraq. War and terror are not solutions to social, economic and political problems. There have to be other, non-violent means of dealing with these issues.

We are about to witness terror unleashed on an unimaginable scale on the Iraq people. These technologically sophisticated bombs and other mass killing devices have no place on this planet. They represent a form of insanity and a clear indication that the United States military industrial complex is out of control by the very dictates of its own logic.

SIGTUR unions across the south marched and protested against this new wave of insane terror. The Korean movement has sent its leaders to Iraq to face this terrifying onslaught.

While we seem powerless to stop this madness, we can, even in this darkest of times, still oppose this madness. In so doing we point to an alternative, to a socially just world order, based on respect and structures of full participation. The victims of this terror can and will play a role in this visionary project. All that we can say now is that we stand in solidarity with all victims, knowing that most will be from the working class. Wars have always been like this.

Finally, we are in solidarity with our brave Korean comrades. Lets keep working to build an alternative to this madness.

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

State	Sr. Centre No.	Month		State	Sr. Centre No.	Month	
		Dec.' 02	Jan.' 03			Dec.' 02	Jan.' 03
Andhra Pradesh	1 Gudur	467	462	Maharashtra	38 Mumbai	569	574
	2 Guntur	492	488		39 Nagpur	497	493
	3 Hyderabad	478	478		40 Nasik	521	524
	4 Visakhapatnam	479	476		41 Pune	537	540
	5 Warangal	507	512		42 Solapur	489	491
Assam	6 D.D.Tinsukia	402	396	Orissa	43 Barbil	433	427
	7 Guwahati	486	481		44 Rourkela	420	416
	8 Labac-Silchar	380	373	Punjab	45 Amritsar	418	419
	9 Mariani-Jorhat	421	416		46 Ludhiana	432	430
	10 Rangapara-Tezpur	424	405	Rajasthan	47 Ajmer	477	476
Bihar	11 Monghyr	447	437		48 Jaipur	449	448
Chhattisgarh	12 Bhilai	424	425	Tamil Nadu	49 Chennai	522	523
Gujarat	13 Ahmedabad	479	478		50 Coimbatore	487	485
	14 Bhavnagar	489	487		51 Coonoor	483	483
	15 Rajkot	456	453		52 Madurai	477	470
	16 Surat	488	487		53 Salem	472	467
	17 Vadodra	464	461		54 Tiruchirapally	573	564
Haryana	18 Faridabad	482	482	Uttar Pradesh	55 Agra	437	445
	19 Yamunanagar	446	447		56 Ghaziabad	478	479
J & K	20 Srinagar	555	554		57 Kanpur	456	453
Jharkhand	21 Jamshedpur	440	441		58 Saharanpur	439	440
	22 Jharia	386	379		59 Varanasi	489	484
	23 Kodarma	392	386	West Bengal	60 Asansol	460	455
	24 Noamundi	427	430		61 Darjeeling	405	410
	25 Ranchi-Hatia	437	431		62 Durgapur	554	552
Karnataka	26 Bangalore	460	463		63 Haldia	582	578
	27 Belgaum	523	522		64 Howrah	546	542
	28 Hubli-Dharwar	480	481		65 Jalpaiguri	416	404
	29 Mercara	463	459		66 Kolkata	530	527
Kerala	30 Alwaye	487	489		67 Raniganj	414	408
	31 Mundakayam	483	481	Chandigarh	68 Chandigarh	514	514
	32 Quilon	518	518	Delhi	69 Delhi	551	555
	33 Thiruvananthapuram	554	555	Pondicherry	70 Pondicherry	531	529
Madhya Pradesh	34 Balaghat	438	432				
	35 Bhopal	509	508				
	36 Indore	492	491				
	37 Jabalpur	471	466				
						ALL-INDIA	484 483

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State	Centre	December 2002	January 2003
Andhra Pradesh	1 Kethgudem	498	
Himachal Pradesh	2 Himachal Pradesh	451	
Rajasthan	3 Bhilwara	486	
Madhya Pradesh	4 Chhindwara	443	
Tripura	5 Tripura	438	
Goa	6 Goa	582	

South Asian Regional Conference of Women Trade Unionists

The South Asian Regional Conference of Women Trade Unionists was held in Kathmandu on 15-17 March 2003. The theme of the Conference was 'identifying common gender agendas for a better South Asia'. 31 Women Trade Unionists from Bangla Desh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka participated in the Conference. Delegates from Pakistan were not able to attend due to some personal problems. Besides, representatives from KAD - the Women Workers' Union in Denmark, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Union Network International (UNI- Apro), World Confederation of Labour (WCL), Committee for Asian Women (CAW), and National Confederation of Trade Unions (ZENROREN) from Japan, and Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) from South Korea participated in the Conference. Pong-sul AHN, Senior Specialist on Worker's Activities (ACTRAV), Jyoti Tuladhar, Senior Specialist on Gender and Women Workers' Issues, both from ILO- SAAT, and Leyla Tegmo-Reddy, Country Director of ILO, Nepal were also present in the Conference on all the three days. CITU, AITUC, INTUC and BMS and SEWA participated from India. Hemalata represented the CITU and the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (CITU). The Conference was organised by the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) with the support of KAD. The Conference started with the inaugural function in which around 1,000 workers both men and women from different sectors participated. Leyla Tegmo Reddy chaired the first session. Binda Pandey of GEFONT made a power point presentation of the agenda and programme of the Conference and expressed the hope that a common action plan and a mechanism would emerge from the Conference for sustained and coordinated activities on the problems of working women in South Asia. Jyoti Tuladhar from ILO informed that 'All Women are Working Women' was the theme that the ILO took up last year. She made a presentation on the ILO Conventions on

Working Women and Women Workers' Rights. The Conference broke down into two separate groups to discuss two issues - one on 'Working environment with specific emphasis on maternity protection and reproductive health' and the other on 'Empowering women leadership with specific emphasis on participation and representation'. The group discussions made it clear that the problems of working women and their participation in union activities etc were more or less the same in all the countries of South Asia, with marginal differences. After discussing the recommendations of both the groups, the Conference unanimously adopted a 'Declaration for a Better South Asia'. The Declaration identified five sectors as deserving high priority for action-informal sector workers including home based workers, agricultural workers, workers in the Export Processing Zones, migrant workers and workers in the garment and carpet industries. The Maternity Protection, Decent Work and Trade Union Rights were the three major concerns of working women in these sectors, which need immediate attention. Collection of data, wide campaigns and enhancing women's participation in trade unions were envisaged as the strategies to achieve these rights.

The Conference also called upon the Trade Unions to concentrate on organising women workers by mobilising the necessary resources, providing the training and education and ensuring gender sensitisation of the Trade Union leaders and cadres at different levels.

The Conference declared that increasing women's representation and participation in Trade Unions was important not only for women, not only for Unions but also for 'A Better South Asia'. It was decided to form a Task Force consisting of one representative from each of the Unions in South Asia invited to the Conference. GEFONT was asked to coordinate the activities of the Task Force in the first year, till the Task Force gets on its feet. The Conference unanimously adopted a Resolution against the US led war on Iraq.



2ND WORLD CONFERENCE OF OIL, GAS & REFINERY TRADE UNIONS

(Report on page 10-13)