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THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

LET US SAY "NO" !

CHALO DELHI

9th MARCH

CENTRE OF INDIAN TRADE UNONS

General Council Meeting
Kozhikode (Calicut), Kerala,
20-22, April 2000

NOTICE

A meeting of the General Council of the CITU will be held at Tagore Centenary Hall, Kozhikode, Kerala from the 20th to 22rd April, 2000, to consider the following AGENDA:

1. Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting of the General Council held at Ghaziabad from the 27th to 30th May 1999
2. Presidential Address
3. Report of the General Secretary
4. Statement of Accounts for the year 1999.
5. Finalisation of the proposals for revision of affiliation fees for placing before the CITU conference
6. Holding of the 10th Conference of the CITU at Hyderabad on 27-31 December 2000
7. Resolutions
8. Any other matter with the permission of the Chair.

The meeting will commence at 10.AM on 20th April 2000. There will be no meeting of the Working Committee prior to the General Council meeting.

In view of the forthcoming elections in West Bengal, the meeting will be only for 3 days. Comrades will have to sit one extra hour every day to complete the agenda. The meeting will end at 8.00 PM on 22nd April. Hence comrades should not book their tickets by earlier trains.

General Council members will have to pay Rs 350/- each, towards boarding and lodging arrangements.

To and fro rail journey reservations may please be made by the General Council members at their respective destinations to avoid eleventh hour difficulties in reservation.

Members are requested to intimate their arrival plan to the Reception Committee at the following address:

Com.T P Ramakrishnan
Secretary, Reception Committee
CITU Dist Committee Office
YMCA Cross Road,
Kozhikode 673 001, Kerala
Phone: 0495-765507

A MASS RALLY will be held from 4 pm on 20th April 2000, culminating in a public meeting at Kozhikode Beach.

M K Pandhe
General Secretary

THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

MARCH 2000

9 MARCH 2000

DELHI CHALO !

MARCH
TO
PARLIAMENT !

NATIONAL
PLATFORM
of
MASS
ORGANISATIONS

EDITORIAL

NO MORE IT IS HIDDEN!

Whenever secular forces in the country point out the dangers of the HIDDEN AGENDA of the BJP, the friends of the saffron party in power at the Centre—particularly the neo-converts to the National Democratic Alliance camp—frown upon them.

The BJP itself tried to put on yet another cloak to hide it's secret designs further, through its Chennai declaration. "BJP has no agenda of its own, other than the programme of the NDA" is the loud assertion often heard from the Prime Minister downwards.

But, the recent events have unmasked the BJP's real agenda-much to the discomfiture of its allies.

Brushing aside the words of wisdom that came from the President, K R Narayanan, to ponder over whether "it is the Constitution that has failed us or we have failed the Constitution," the BJP Government has constituted the review committee. This is affirmed as an election promise by the NDA.

But, Ram Jethmalani, Law Minister, had gone on record that if some one would submit a memorandum on doing away with Article 370 (giving Jammu & Kashmir a special status), the review committee was bound to examine it.

K C Sudharshan, the high-profile RSS supremo, has said that even the parliamentary system could be a matter for review!

If these are not parts of the 'hidden agenda', what else will be?

The only State where the BJP is ruling on its own, Gujarat, has lifted the ban on Govt employees participating in the activities of the RSS. The Prime Minister justified it. The Home Minister visualised extending the 'privilege' to the Central Government employees. But Rajju Bhaiyya of the RSS made a *volte-face* to state his organisation did not demand removal of the ban. The murmurs in the NDA camp are sought to be silenced with this. But, the fact remains that it is the Home Ministry in Delhi that gave the clearance to the Gujarat Govt move.

It is for BJP allies to ask the BJP, "Is the Chennai Declaration of BJP not binding on their party in Gujarat?"

But they are sadly mistaken. The BJP's real agenda is in rigorous implementation in Gujarat as they need no crutches to hold on to power. The NDA smokescreen is needed where they have to depend on those allies.

In UP, where the centuries old *Babri Masjid* was pulled down in 1992, when BJP was in Govt in the State, vandalism, with Govt patronage, stalled the shooting of Deepa Mehta's film *Water* .

The 'Sangh Parivar' nominees in the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) had stopped printing of the two volumes of 'Towards Freedom' authored by eminent historians, and recalled the manuscripts. The HRD Minister M.M Joshi justified it.

The saffron agenda of **Hindutva** is no more hidden. The Octopus is out spreading its tentacles.

Those in the seats of power, sharing its spoils, along with the BJP, may continue their pretensions. The people cannot afford to ignore this alarming trend. The fight against communal designs assumes utmost priority!

SLC SESSION : ANOTHER FUTILE EXERCISE

The 36th Session of the Standing Labour Committee held in New Delhi on 9th February 2000 merely debated the issues without achieving any positive results for the working class.

The meeting highlighted the decline in tripartism in India as a result of ignoring the process of consultation with the trade unions by the Government of India on issues concerning labour. The last meeting of the Standing Labour Committee meeting held on 6th February 1999 had decided that the composition and the terms of the Second National Labour Commission should be finalised in consultation with the employers and workers organisation and then notified immediately. However, the Government of India finalised the terms of reference without calling any tripartite meeting; the entire terms of reference visualised changes in labour laws to suit globalisation and structural adjustment programme.

Despite commitment by the Government that "the Chairman of the Commission should be a person of high stature so as to achieve credibility and independence of the Commission", the Government of India appointed Ravindra Verma as Chairman. He was instrumental to bring in Parliament the notorious Industrial Relations Bill, which was resolutely opposed by the entire T.U. movement. Majority of the other members of the Commission were either RSS activists or belonged to pro-BJP lobby. The Secretary of the Commission was earlier a Secretary of the employers' organisation. It would, thus, be futile to expect from such a Commission any justice for the working class. Though most of the trade union speakers criticised the manner in which the Commission was constituted, these objections were not recorded in the conclusions of the Committee.

DECLINE OF TRIPARTISM

The Labour Secretary L. Mishra noted in his preliminary remarks that there were about 70 Tripartite Committees functioning under the Ministry of Labour. The number was brought down to 36. However, these committees do not meet regularly and their conclusions did not see any sign of implementation. As a result, genuine aspirations of the workers got delayed inordinately. Mishra in his speech further noted that the Agricultural Labour Bill is being considered since two decades without seeing the light of the day. Though it was recommended in the meeting that it should be brought out in the next budget session of Parliament, attempts are being made to water down the contents of the Bill due to the pressure of the landlord lobby in the country.

The Labour Secretary also pointed out the non-payment of statutory dues by Public Sector Undertakings which had reached a colossal figure of Rs.2000 Crore. The Government had only referred the matter to the Group of Ministers which is only delaying the settlement of the issue.

Though several Tripartite Committees made pious declarations that Indian Labour Laws should be implemented in Export Processing Zones, the conditions in these zones continue to deteriorate. To make matters worse, the Union Commerce Minister made a public declaration that Labour Laws would not be applicable in Export Processing Zones!

Labour Minister, who is the Chairman of several of the Tripartite Committees, could not find time to attend these meetings. Most of the employing Ministries of the Central Government either do not care to attend these meetings or send junior officers who could not speak authoritatively for the Ministry on various issues. The Union Ministers, who at times attend tripartite meetings, read out their speeches but have no time to listen to the views expressed by the participants.

CRITICISM BY TUs

The CITU was represented in the SLC meeting by M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary, Chittabrata Majumdar, Secretary as delegates and Surajbhan Bharadwaj as adviser.

All the T.U. representatives who spoke in the meeting criticised the dilatory tactics of the Government of India in removing the ceilings in the Payment of Bonus Act which resulted in exclusion of even the unskilled workers from the purview of the Act. They also strongly objected to the delay in settlement of wage negotiations in public sector due to the retrograde guidelines issued by the Department of Public Enterprises that the settlement should be made applicable for a period of 10 years. This has met stiff opposition by all the trade unions in PSUs.

The trade union representatives pointed out the phenomenon of growing sickness in industries and ever increasing unemployment, mad drive towards privatisation of public sector undertakings, reduction in custom duty resulting in flooding of

Indian market by foreign goods and closing down of Indian industries. They also objected to the growing penetration of MNCs in the Indian market. Satya Naraian Jatia, Union Labour Minister, while endorsing the Government of India's policies, had to admit,"we are noticing an upsurge in loss of mandays as a result of recourse to direct action by workers in Central Public Sector Undertakings as also elsewhere".

CITU FLAYS GOVT.

M.K. Pandhe, while speaking in the meeting, criticised the policy of the Union Labour Ministry of behaving like a silent spectator when big strikes were emerging in Port and Dock industry and U.P. State Electricity Board. He also noted the longdrawn struggles of J.K. and Rajasthan State Government employees. When para military forces were used against U.P. Electricity workers and Navy was deployed in Port and Dock strike, the Labour Ministry failed to do anything in the matter.

CITU representative demanded a time bound programme to accept all core ILO conventions by the Indian Government.

Regarding the sickness of industry, CITU demanded that the money lying with the big business houses, which they had borrowed from banks, should be recovered and used to revive the sick units both in public and private sectors.

CITU further criticised non-functioning of the tripartite machinery in Gujarat, Haryana, Sikkim, A&N Islands. Lakshadwip and several other States, which was visible from the reports submitted by the State Governments at the meeting.

CITU criticised the dilatory tactics adopted by the Government in non-implementation of the revival package for sick NTC mills adopted by the tripartite committee and accepted by the Cabinet.

Speakers from other Central Trade Unions, Keshubhai Thakkar (BMS), Subramaniyam (HMS), K.L. Mahendra (AITUC), Ashutosh Banerjee (UTUC-LS) criticised the policies of the Government. However, G. Sanjeeva Reddy (INTUC), while criticising the Government on some aspects, also appreciated some steps of the Government like disinvestment etc. He was critical of trade unions for organising strikes which according to him were outmoded weaponry. He did not take into account the participation of INTUC unions in the strikes in Port and Dock, U.P. Electricity Board and public sector. He advocated collaboration between employers and workers in "national interests". He also attacked some trade unions for appreciating the developments in China but not in India.

EMPLOYERS' IRE AGAINST WTO

Among the employers' representatives, I.P. Anand, a member of the ILO Governing body, characterised WTO as undemocratic, while some others criticised it for pressurising India for adopting pro-MNC policies. They noted that due to these policies, India's economic growth has mellowed down. However, Arvind Doshi from the Employers' group found some positive indications in the WTO Chief's recent statements. However, all of them wanted changes in labour laws to make them more flexible for the employers. Some of them even argued for lenient treatment for violation of labour laws.

The representatives of the State Governments while speaking confined to the steps taken by their Government in "improving the industrial relations". No representatives of the employing Ministries of the Central Govt. spoke despite the Chair inviting them to speak.

Demand of the trade unions to include their criticism about the constitution of National Labour Commission in the conclusions was not heeded. The objection raised by them to the recommendation to include the central trade unions who were not members of the Commission in the study groups/sub-committees, was also not incorporated in the conclusions. These points were raised by the CITU representative in the drafting committee and K L Mahendra in the concluding session but they were ruled out. Chittabrata Majumdar's proposals to include Disinvestment of Public Sector as agenda for the Indian Labour Conference was also not accepted by the Chairman.

The Standing Labour Committee unanimously rejected the Dave Committee Report which recommended investing of workers' PF and Pension funds in the share market operations. This use of hard earned moneys of workers for speculative activities is only an attempt to boost share market prices. Though the Labour Minister joined the workers in rejecting the Dave Committee Report, he did not take into account the fact that the NDA election manifesto has mentioned the same proposals some months ago.

The Labour Minister announced that the Indian Labour Conference will be held in the middle of April next. The agenda would include.

1. Sickness of Indian Industries
2. Generation of employment
3. Workers' participation in Management.

THE UP ELECTRICITY EMPLOYEES STRIKE

E. Balanandan

The 11-day strike by the employees and engineers of the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board which started on January 15, literally shook the government of UP, the central government and the whole of the pro-reform lobby in the country on the one side. On the other, it electrified the whole of the trade union movement, especially the electricity employees of the country, except those who are temporarily immunised from their labour instincts by their "union leaders". The pro-reform lobby was afraid that the strike would engulf the electricity workers throughout the country and paralyse power generation and distribution so that their plan of implementing the World Bank dictated reforms in the electricity sector would be jeopardised. Although, the workers could not succeed in forcing the Government to retract from the trifurcation proposal, they were able to wrest some checks and guarantees through the agreement entered into on January 25.

The electricity employees were agitating for a long time, against the plan to trifurcate the electricity sector which they properly understood as a prelude to privatisation. However, they came to an understanding with the Government that this reform would be implemented only after studying the situation in States where this has been implemented, like Orissa, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh. In their hurry to get a loan of Rs. 15,000 crore from the World Bank, for which the precondition was implementation of the reforms, the Government had ignored the promise given to the workers and sought to enforce the trifurcation by a notification. This had provoked the workers and the engineers to go for immediate strike.

BRUTAL REPRESSION

In their panic, the Government used all their powers to suppress the strike, but the strike was total. All the engineers and the workers numbering 82,000 joined the fray, including the BMS — the ruling party supported organisation. ESMA, MISA and NSA were invoked. Thousands of workers and engineers were arrested and military engineering personnel were deployed to man the power stations. The Government went to the extent of denying water and power to the workers' colonies. Thus, the Government virtually declared war on the employees.

UNPRECEDENTED SUPPORT

This unprecedented repression unleashed against the striking employees evoked enormous sympathy for the strike and strong protest against the Government. On January 17, the northern area electricity engineers met and decided to go for 'work to rule' in the States adjoining UP and organise demonstrations throughout the country on the 21st. The Central Trade Unions too, which met at Delhi on the same day, decided to send a delegation to Lucknow to sit in dharna together with the agitating employees and called upon the workers throughout the country to join in protest demonstration on the 21st. Accordingly myself and the other Central Trade Union leaders went to Lucknow and took part in the dharna. We had occasion to meet the senior Minister of the UP Government. During the talk, we requested that the *status quo ante* be restored and negotiations started, withdrawing all the penal actions taken against the employees. But the Minister vehemently insisted that without withdrawing the strike, he would not negotiate.

On the 20th of January, the National Platform of Mass Organisations met in New Delhi and declared wholehearted support for the electricity employees strike, and called upon the electricity employees' of the country to go for a day's strike in support of the striking workers on the 24th. This strike of electricity employees and engineers was an important landmark in the electricity workers' movement. Nearly five lakh workers took part. The increasing support of the people and the strike, really isolated the UP Government and forced it to negotiate with the striking employees' leaders.

WHY SEB IN THE RED?

The argument being made by the Government that the Electricity Board is loosing heavily and, therefore, it is not wise to continue with it. Though the Electricity Board is an independent entity, the fact was that on everything they had to go by the Government directives. For the power distributed in the State at the users end, the average cost per unit is Rs. 1.82 paise while the production cost per unit is Rs. 2.60 paise. Therefore, the State Electricity Board had to lose Rs.

2,600 crore per annum on this count.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India in his report stated that the UP State Government owes to the State Electricity Board Rs. 13,000 crore. Of which: a) Rs. 11,226 crore is unpaid agricultural subsidy, b) Rs. 1,674.12 crore are due from Government departments, and c) public lighting Rs. 251.99 crore. He noted that if this Rs. 13,000 crore were paid to the Electricity Board , the Board would have a marginal profit.

It can be seen from the above that the story of losses which is being tom-tomed, is the result of implementing the government directives. The central government has offered to the private operators, foreign and Indian, 16% return on investment with several guarantees, while they do not take care to ensure 3% return for the State Electricity Boards, though this is a legal liability. Here, we see the double-standard. For the private operators, a guaranteed 16% return is extended, while the Electricity Boards are denied even the legally stipulated 3% return.

PRIVATISATION, NO REMEDY

There may be a number of areas in the functioning of the State Electricity Boards, which need correction. But, the privatisation *ipso facto* will not bring efficiency to the system, but only pave the way for squeezing super-profit from this basic infrastructure facility.

The experience of privatisation of the power sector has resulted in delaying installed capacity as envisaged and the power rates charged by the private operators are also sky high. The experience of the 8th and 9th Plans shows that the Plan target could not be achieved. The notorious ENRON company supplies bulk power to the Maharashtra State Electricity Board for Rs. 4.96 per unit and the GMR Vasavi is to sell power at the rate of Rs. 4.10 in Tamilnadu. As per the World Bank expert study, the power rates in UP will go up from 200 to 600 percent for different categories of consumers. The average rate will go up from the existing Rs. 1.80 Rs. to 5.60.

In Orissa, after the introduction of the policy of privatisation, the existing rate which was 97 paise per unit, has been raised to 319 paise now.

In Haryana and Andhra Pradesh also, where the reform programme has been implemented , the rates have been hiked very much, and after the Assembly elections, these rates are going to be further hiked. Therefore, the policy of privatisation, as noted above, increases the power rate at least three to four times.

The argument advanced for privatisation of Electricity Boards is that they are making heavy losses. Why then the profit-making entities which have performed very well according to all standards-the NTPC, the Power Grid Corporation and the Nuclear Power Corporation-are also listed for privatisation? The objective of the Government of India is, under any plea whether profit or loss, is to privatise the whole of the public sector.

The vital power sector, if privatised as stated above, will only result in increasing the power cost sky high, which will increase the cost of our agricultural and industrial production and negative the competitiveness of these sectors. And this will pave the way for foreign multinationals to dominate the Indian market. This will again lead to deindustrialisation and domination of Indian economy as a whole by foreigners. So, the electricity employees were fighting against the privatisation policy to protect the national interests, as well as to protect their service conditions.

In the agreement, it was stated that all the service conditions of the employees would be protected including promotions and wage revision. In the newly formed corporations, workers will be given representation. There will be a review each year and in that, if the system is found to be not properly working, remedial measures will be taken including the restoration of the old system.

The trade union movement must explain to the people that the total privatisation policy of the Government of India is only to allow garnering of billions of crores worth of public property for a song by the big capitalists of the country and their foreign collaborators. In the case of UP alone, it is estimated that the wealth of the State Electricity Board comes to around one and a half lakh crore rupees which will finally be privatised as indicated above, for a song. This is the single agenda of the big bourgeoisie.

The UP experience also shows that engineers' and workers' unity at the national level is a pre-condition for fighting back this privatisation programme. They must unify the electricity workers and engineers.

The people of UP who, inspite of the inconvenience caused to them, stood with the strikers, deserve congratulations.

DAVE COMMITTEE REPORT:

INVESTMENT CENTRIC PRESCRIPTIONS

W R VARADA RAJAN

The Project OASIS (Old Age Social & Income Security) Expert Committee headed by S.A. Dave, former Chairman of Unit Trust of India, submitted its final report to the Government of India on 11th January, 2000.

The report was initially not made public. But, the Expert Committee's recommendations were selectively released to the media, which hailed them as "pension system reforms".

The CITU, on the basis of the Press reports, opposed the main thrust of the Dave Committee inspired 'reforms', which aimed at diverting the workers' hard earned savings, in provident fund and pension fund corpus, for investment in corporate bonds and share-market.

Subsequently, the Dave Committee reports were placed before the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), at a special meeting convened on the 8th February, 2000. As the CBT could not discuss the first report of the Dave Committee submitted on 1st February, 1999, both the first and final reports were together considered at the special meeting.

INVESTMENT ORIENTED

The very composition of the Committee reveals that its orientation is towards investment and not social security.

The Committee comprised, besides S.A. Dave, Chairman, Dharmendra Deo, Nalin Thakor and Atul Chaturvedi (all from Ministry of Social Justice), C.S. Rao (Ministry of Finance), Ajay Shah (IGIDR) and Gautam Bharadwaj (Invest India Economic Foundation - IIEF) as members.

Late R.S. Kaushik, Central Provident Fund Commissioner, EPF Organisation was a member of the Expert Committee and a party to its first report. After his death, the successor—CPFCs were not associated with the committee. But for this brief association of Kaushik, there was no representation of either the EPF Organisation or the Ministry of Labour.

The final report itself acknowledged that the Industrial Development Bank of India, ICICI Ltd., Unit Trust of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India, IFCI Ltd and the Stock Exchange Mumbai jointly funded the Project OASIS. IDBI and IGIDR hosted some of the Project OASIS committee meetings! Needless to mention, that the finance, investment and share market interests were the driving force behind the project. The Expert Committee drew its *inputs and ideas*' on pension system, design etc. from The World Bank, OECD, UNDP, University of Singapore, besides the Ministries of Communication and Social Justice Empowerment. The Ministry of Labour was not in the picture here too.

The Project OASIS had the benefit of feed back from experts in a set of three consultations in Goa, Mumbai and Delhi. The long list of experts invited for these consultation-meetings comprise mainly financial and investment wizards. No representative from any of the social partners-labour, employers and Government - was invited. All this make it abundantly clear that the social security of the elderly was only a facade - the real intent being the diversion of workers' savings to quench the thirst of corporate greed!

'SANS JURISDICTION'

The very appointment of Dave Committee by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is 'sans' jurisdictions.

If the "Project OASIS" and the "Expert Committee" were confined to study the National Social Assistance Programme, which comprised the National Old Age Pension Scheme as well, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment would have been well within its jurisdiction.

But, an exercise of far reaching implications covering the entire gamut of pension system in India, including the Employees' Provident and Pension Schemes, the Government Pension Schemes for Central and State Government Employees and the Public Provident Fund Scheme, should not have been launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, leaving out the Ministry of Labour as a by-stander.

The recommendations by the Expert Committee on the one and only pension scheme under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is:

"The Committee is of the opinion

that the National Old Age Pension Scheme plays an important role despite its limitations, and it should be continued".

This is, perhaps, on considerations of "political risk" involved, to borrow the language of the Expert Committee itself.

On all other segments of 'Pension system for India,' the Expert Committee had put forth recommendations contemplating drastic changes. It is, therefore, apparent that the Expert Committee had dealt mainly with the issues which are outside the ambit of the Ministry which constituted it. Hence the reports of the Expert Committee deserved to be rejected outright on the ground that they were 'without jurisdiction.'

UNSCIENTIFIC STUDY

The Expert Committee had concluded the existing pension schemes for Government employees, EPF subscribers and PPF members to be "unsustainable" and "expensive" schemes. But the blue print of a "new pension system" that the Committee has drawn up is not backed up by any scientific study.

The Expert Committee was worried over the demographic projections which suggest an alarming increase in the number of the aged in the country, in the next quarter of a century or so. Hence, it aimed at bailing the Government out, by proposing to withdraw whatever subsidy or contribution it is presently obliged to make. The Committee has made some untenable assumptions - like every worker saving Rs 3 to Rs 5 per day uninterruptedly for 35 long years - and prescribes they will be free from destitution, provided two conditions are fulfilled: (1) continuous, uninterrupted accumulations (of contributions) and (2) highest return through "sound fund management" (read stock market operations).

The Expert Committee did not commission any actuarial assessment. Nor it had made any reasonable appraisal of the cost/expense involved to operate the new pension system it had structured.

The Expert Committee had proposed the following structures, agencies and intermediaries to function its 'system.'

1) Indian Pensions Authority (IPA)
2. Depository
3. Points of Presence (agencies for collection of contributions)
4) Pension Fund Managers
5) Retirement Advisers
6) Annuity providers

CITU ON FIRST REPORT

The CITU had criticised the recommendations of the first report itself as "without jurisdiction, retrograde, anti-labour and private-sector friendly".

The CITU had called for outright rejection of the first report and termination of the Project OASIS itself.

This was because of the fact that the Project and the Expert Committee were under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, which had nothing to do with the EPF, Employees' Pension Scheme and the Public Provident Fund dealt with by the committee in the first report.

The first report recommendations, *inter-alia*, comprised:

* Limiting early withdrawals from Provident Fund only in the event of permanent disability or death;
* A punitive withdrawal tax at a flat rate of 10% on premature withdrawals;
* 10% tax on sums exceeding Rs.1 lakh, even on withdrawal after retirement;
* Investment of PF and Pension Funds upto 20% in corporate debt (private sector bonds) and domestic equity (share-market);
* Withdrawal of Government contribution of 1.16% to the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995;
* Rename the Public Provident Fund as Individual Retirement Account and initiation of a new Public Pension Scheme earmarking 10% of PPF contribution with a minimum of Rs.500 to this new scheme;
* Unbundling the functions of EPF Organisation by handing over pension payment functions to private, public and foreign annuity providers; and
* setting up of a National Senior Citizen's Fund, under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

The Expert Committee, in its first report, proposed that it would forcus its further research and recommendations on "non-contributory Government pensions (Central and State Governments), railways, armed forces as well as post and telegraph". This again meant further transgressions into the jurisdiction of the HRD, Railways, Defence and Communications Ministries as also that of State Governments.

Unfortunately the Union Labour Ministry failed to act on the demand of the CITU and allowed the Expert Committee to continue its journey on 'trespassed territories.'

As none of the above will be maintained through any contribution or subsidy from either the Government or the employers, the individuals who will have the accounts in the pension system will have to fund all the expenses for maintaining the above structures/agencies. The enormity of the cost involved, especially when all these structures/agencies, except perhaps the IPA, will solely be driven by profit motive, can be imagined.

But the Committee simplistically concluded that it was possible to confine the total expenditure to 0.25% of pension assets per year! This is not supported by any fact or figures. The only estimate, the Committee has made, is that it would cost Rs 80000 for a post office to be hooked into the pension system that the committee envisaged. For this alone, an initial outlay of Rs 1224 crore would be needed to hook the 1,53,000 post offices into the system to serve as points of presence! How such a huge expenditure can be met at the very initial stage is not answered in the report.

Nor had the Expert Committee gone into the question why the Public Provident Fund scheme, or even the various schemes of the Unit Trust of India, which was one time headed by Dave himself, could not achieve any worthwhile coverage of the huge unorganised sector workers.

The Expert Committee has also recommended setting up of an independent Board of Trustees for the new PPF and a Board of Trustees, (appointed by the Ministry of Social Justice), for administering the National Senior Citizen's Fund, to cater to social security related education and research. Needless to mention, the expenses of these Trusts also will have to be met from out of the contributions and not shared by the Government!

The promise of OASIS (Old Age Social and Income Security) through such an unscientific study can only be an 'utopian dream' and the least practicable!

TAMPERING WITH THE EXISTING SCHEMES

The Expert Committee had transgressed its limits in proposing measures to tamper with the existing schemes and the beneficial provisions thereunder. To cite a few:

a) Curtail all premature withdrawals from the EPF

b) Divert the EPF beneficiaries to the individual retirement account system advocated by the Expert Committee

c) Exempted establishment should 'cease' to manage the PF and switch over their employees to the individual account system

d) Increase the EPS contribution from the existing

THE WORLD BANK INSPIRATION

The "Acknowledgments' section of the Project OASIS Committee Report (Final Report), clearly indicates that the whole project is World Bank driven and inspired. The World Bank had been an `omnipresent' force, whether it be `inputs and ideas' or `sponsored research' or `consultations. That the source of funding and financial support had been some premier financial institutions and the Stock Exchange, Mumbai, clearly establishes that the Expert Committee was addressing the concerns of these institutions and not those of the lay workers, deprived of any social security cover.

The trade unions were kept completely out of picture. Ministry of Social Justice fancied that it could keep 'labour', a social partner, outside and render 'justice' to workers everywhere! Nor any of the employers' organisations were associated with the committee, even though the committee had made recommendations on provident funds of the exempted establishments, administered by the employers themselves! Even the State Governments, which carry a much bigger burden on their frail financial resources to take care of the 'destitute elderly,' were not involved at any point of the whole Project OASIS.

The main thrust of the Expert Committee recommendations are:

a) relieving the Government, of even its present minimal responsibility for making any provision for social security for its citizens.

b) the problems of the 'destitute elderly' to be addressed through thrift and self help only.

c) diverting a part of workers' savings for investment in corporate bonds/domestic and international equity;

d) restructure the existing pension schemes as personally funded (by workers) and privately managed, with the workers bearing the entire cost and expenditure of administrating the schemes.

It needs no emphasis that such a scheme of things, derived its inspiration from the World Bank theories of free market economy.

8.33% to 10%

e) Withdraw the Government contribution of 1.16%

f) Liberalise all investment guidelines, to divert the funds to corporate bonds and equity market (domestic/international)

g) Outsource the functions of the EPF Organisation

h) Freeze the existing Public Provident Fund Scheme

i) Introduce a new PPF, delinked from small savings instruments and with provision for withdrawal only at the age of 60

j) Make the Government Pension Schemes fully funded out of contributions made by employees only

k) A mockery of a provision for premature withdrawal which stipulates that only 33% of accumulations over and above Rs 2 lakh can be permitted to be withdrawn; such withdrawals also limited to 3 occasions in the entire period of accumulation

i) A 10% punitive tax on premature withdrawals, even after such stringent unrealistic provisions

m) Tax exemption on PF contributions to be limited to Rs 60,000/- per annum only, in respect of all schemes.

All these are, to say the least, totally unacceptable to workers and the trade unions.

REJECTED OUTRIGHT

In this background, the Dave Committee report met stiff opposition from the employees' representatives in the CBT.

The Labour Minister, Satya Narain Jatia, had extended an invitation to the Chairman of the Expert Committee, S A Dave, to make a presentation on his reports. However, he did not attend the meeting but in his place three other members of the committee were deputed. Satya Narain Jatia himself expressed unhappiness over "the fact that there was no representation from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment at an appropriate level."

Members of the Central Board of Trustees, representing the Central and State governments, employers and employees were unanimously of the opinion that the proposals in the Dave Committee report would seriously jeopardise the safety and the future savings of the workers as well as the whole concept of social security and social insurance. The Central Board of Trustees unanimously rejected the report to the entire extent to which it impacted or impinged upon the working of the Employees Provident Fund and Employees Pension Schemes.

The very next day, the Standing Labour Committee, the second highest tripartite body under the Ministry of Labour, also unanimously rejected the Dave Committee recommendations outright.

But the question still remains, what the investor friendly Finance Minister will do when the Dave Committee report will go before the Union Cabinet? Trade union movement must exercise utmost vigilance and mount pressure on the National Democratic Alliance Government to consign the Dave Committee reports to the dust bin.

The trade union movement must also demand that:

The Government must take steps to initiate tripartite dialogue in the existing fora in respect of the EPF, EPS, Government Pension Scheme, etc, to make them more beneficial and viable.

The Government must also bring up the subject of providing a social security net to the unorganised workers in the Indian Labour Conference. Such a social security net can only be provided through increased contributions by the Government and the employers and not on the basis of withdrawal of existing contribution/subsidy.

FORM IV

(See Rule 8)

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SAIL-RESTRUCTURING OR DEMOLITION ?

Ardhendu Dakshi

Govt of India meeting on 15th February, 2000 has cleared the so called "bail out package" for public sector Steel Authority of India Ltd(SAIL),. as " SAIL Restructuring Plan". The whole exercise is being trumpeted as a great help to SAIL and people are made to believe that Govt has granted relief of nearly Rs 8500 crore to SAIL.

It is a case of deliberate distortion of facts. In the name of bail out, what has been decided is mostly a blue print to dismantle and finally demolish public sector SAIL. Along with some marginal financial sops, extremely short term in nature and impact, SAIL has been asked to sell out all the three units in special/alloy steel making, all the captive power plants, one oxygen plant and a fertiliser plant besides slashing down the workforce by at least 40% (about 60000) or so.

WAIVING Rs 5073 CRORE LOAN

This is not a "loan" at all in real sense. The Steel Development Fund was set up in 1979 with the participation of SAIL and TISCO with the drawing right of each to the extent of its contribution. The fund was generated by payment of a stipulated amount per tonne of steel sold. SDF was operated by Joint Plant Committee(JPC) constituted by the representatives of SAIL and TISCO, besides from Iron & Steel Controller's office. JPC was also assigned to decide on pricing of steel. Hence, in reality, SDF was a mutual arrangement by SAIL and TISCO, built up by apportioning a part of their earnings to fund for development/modernisation, as and when needed, through soft loan from that fund. That fund was never part of the consolidated fund of Govt of India.

Along with the decision of Govt of India to decontrol steel-pricing, the SDF was abolished in 1994. At that time itself, the SDF money should have gone back to respective parties including SAIL. But the Steel Ministry and the Govt of India did not allow that. Since last more than three years, the SAIL management has been asking the Govt to regularise their loan account in erstwhile SDF. And now the Union Cabinet, in a most deceptive manner, is posing itself saviour by conceding the same.

So, tall talk of waiving of loans is totally misleading. The money did not belong to Govt and question of waiving did not arise.

Besides above, Govt agreed to give guarantee for raising loan for funding VRS and repayment of a very small part of SAIL'S outstanding loan and writing off a part of loans advanced to IISCO earlier and shown as SAIL'S liability. All taken together, the so called financial sops would bring not a single paisa addition to cash starved SAIL and have its bearing only in the form of reduced loss to the tune of Rs 600 crore or so, in the current fiscal.

SELL-OUT OF SAIL PLANTS

The Govt is compelling the SAIL to sell out its special steel plants, namely Alloy Steel Plant, Salem Steel and Bhadrawati Steel Ltd. which according to them, is not its core business. This is a pet American theory to justify down sizing the industries in the developing countries and the American consultancy outfit, M/s Mckinsey has recommended the same. This means complete withdrawal of public sector from the field of special steel making. Given the domestic industrial situation and investment prospects, the decision of the Govt to hive-off special steel making from SAIL would inevitably pave the way for handing over the entire special steel segment to foreign companies. Already a number of MNCs like Krupp, Nippon, Demarg etc. are waiting in the wings following the global tender for sale of Salem Steel. These three plants in special steel making, together produce about half a million tonne of extremely critical and sophisticated variety of special/alloy steel used in defence, oil, railways, aeronautical, atomic energy, automobile and many other industries. During Kargil conflict, these plants came to country's rescue when armaments and hardware ran out of stock. A Rs 60 crore investment could make the ASP profitable, and the invested amount would come back within two years. Almost the same is the case for the other two plants. But much more money may be made available for VRS, not at all for productive investment. This is the policy of the MNC friendly swadeshi brand Govt.

Production of 400 varieties of special steel and 14 types of stainless steel is not construed "core job" of public sector SAIL! This is not comprehensible to any one, having little concern for the country's steel economy. The same is true of IISCO producing mild steel.

POWER PLANTS ETC.

As per Cabinet decision (read c/o Mckinsey decision), the captive power plants in Durgapur(120 mws), Rourkela(120 mws), and Bokaro(180 mws) have to be divested so also the oxygen plant of Bhilai and fertiliser plant of Rourkela. Again, the plea is the same, not being core business of SAIL.

Oxygen plant produces the most essential ingredient of steel making and divesting the same in Bhilai would affect the Bhilai Steel Plant severely and make it dependent on outside supplier. Uninterrupted power supply is an indispensable necessity in continuous and integrated steel making process. Any disruption or irregularity in power supply would have severe bearing on the quality of products and safety of the plants. On the basis of the experience in the past, these captive power plants of SAIL were built up in the seventies to make the steel plants self-contained. Subsequently, steel making units in private sector, also had their own dedicated power plant. Hiving -off power plants from steel making unit is nothing but cutting off its essential limbs and the Govt. doing is just that.

This hiving off is termed as a rescue from financial hardship. In effect, the financial condition would only worsen. At present power generated in the captive power plants costs SAIL hardly Re 1 per unit. If SAIL plants were to buy power from private suppliers, cost would multiply to at least Rs 3 to 4 per unit. The steel plants would be extremely vulnerable to external blackmail by private power suppliers in the backgrond of State Electricity Boards being privatised.

This is not all. The final part of the Mckinsey report says that after hiving off of the smaller and special steel units and the power plants, the remaining part of the SAIL consisting of four steel plants would be bifurcated into two separate companies, one with Bhilai and Durgapur and another with Rourkela and Bokaro. And then both the companies should be privatised. The Mckinsey Report also recommended gradual hiving off other infrastructures developed by SAIL over years, like its countrywide stockyard network, mines, township, hospitals etc.

It is difficult to get buyer for the giant monolith SAIL, even outside the country. Hence SAIL should be cut into pieces for easy saleability. To create ground for a total sell out, SAIL must be put to more difficulty with depressed bottomline, accumulated losses, cash-crunch etc. So the policy engineering from the Govt by patronising dumping from CIS countries and South Africa, withdrawal of floor price mechanism, meek capitulation to anti dumping duty, thrust upon by USA and European Union on Indian Steel, and obliging the US Consultant Company by accepting their suicidal propositions in toto.

Despite all odds, SAIL still supplies more than fifty percent of the country's steel requirement and is a symbol of national self reliance. In the name of restructuring, it is being demolished by the Govt., not to benefit the industry, but to benefit those in power and the MNCs.

The treachery against national self reliance, putting up the country's economy on sale must be defeated. Steel workers and the working class, the toiling people would not allow the auctioneers in New Delhi to have a cake-walk.

TOTAL STRIKE IN SALEM STEEL

The steel workers all over the country, irrespective of affiliations reacted sharply to the disastrous and deceptive decision of the Govt of India on so called restructuring of public sector Steel Authority of India Ltd(SAIL), through countrywide massive demonstration in most of the steel centres, offices and mines and a **total strike in Salem Steel Plant**.

In Salem Steel Plant, all the eight unions affiliated to CITU, INTUC, ADMK and PMK and independents called for one day strike on 16th February, which has been responded to by 100% workers. The unions had served notice for indefinite strike from 4th March, 2000 if the retrograde decision was not reversed.

The workers in Alloy Steels Plant, Durgapur, IISCO, Burnpur , and in the head-quarters of Central Marketing Organisation (CMO/SAIL) have demonstrated in a massive way. The report of similar demonstrations in Bokaro, Rourkela , Bhilai, and the iron ore mines of SAIL have been received. The workers of Durgapur Steel and Alloy Steel again held day-long dharna at the gate of Alloy Steels Plant on 18th February, preceded by demonstration at the DSP gate on 17th. Steel workers unions are planning to chalk out next course of action to resist the Govt design.

The CITU condemned in strongest terms the deceptive and nefarious move of the Government, demanded a true and effective revival scheme with due protection from dumping onslaught. It appealed to the entire trade union movement in general, and those in steel industry in particular, to launch countrywide massive movement to save SAIL.

*(We publish hereunder excerpts from the address to the nation by **K.R. Narayanan, President of India**, on the eve of Republic Day, January 25, 2000. These contain useful points to ponder over. But the moot question remains: have those in the corridors of power in the capital city of the country, any time to pause and do some introspection on their deeds or misdeeds? - Editor)*

THE PRESIDENT SPEAKS OUT

"On the eve of the Golden Jubilee of our Republic, I have the privilege to extend to all Indians living in India or abroad, my heartiest greetings and felicitations.

"Fifty years into our life in the Republic, we find that Justice - social, economic and political - remains an unrealised dream for millions of our fellow citizens. The benefits of our economic growth are yet to reach them. We have one of the world's largest reservoirs of technical personnel, but also the world's largest number of illiterates; the world's largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition. Our giant factories rise from out of squalor; our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor. Not surprisingly, there is sullen resentment among the masses against their condition erupting often in violent forms in several parts of the country. Tragically, the growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest tier of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence.

"Dalits and tribals are the worst affected by all this. In parts of rural India forms of sadism seem to be earmarked for dalit women. From the time of Draupadi, our womenfolk had been subjected to public disrobing and humiliation as a means of vendetta - individual, social or political. For dalit women it has become a common experience in rural areas, but what is astounding is that it has been extended as one of the methods of ragging in our elite colleges and universities.

"To open a newspaper or to hear the news over television now requires nerves of steel. Violence in society has bared a hundred fangs as the advertisement-driven consumerism is unleashing frustrations and tensions in our society. The unabashed, vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption by the *noveau-riche* has left the underclass seething in frustration. One half of our society guzzles aerated beverges, while the other has to make do with palmfuls of muddied water. Our three-way fast-lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation must provide safe pedestrian crossings for the unempowered India also, so that it too can move towards 'Equality of Status and Opportunity. "Beware of the fury of the patient man" says the old adage. One could say "Beware of the fury of the patient and long-suffering people."

"Water is a basic need and a fundamental right of the people. Yet to-day millions of our people are struggling to get adequate clean drinking water.

"It is to-day an accepted fact that literacy and education is at the root of human as well as economic development. Why is it that as a nation we do not feel the desperate urgency of making our people literate? I hope that vested interests have not been fearful of awakening the masses through education. On the contrary, we should have faith in the people. We should organise a mass movement for literacy.

"Be it the way cars and buses are driven in our city roads, the way garbage and, particularly, middle class plastic garbage, is strewn around, the way public servants treat the public, or the public handles public utilities, the manner in which we squander or pollute precious reserves like water, the way owners of vehicles allow toxic gases to be spewed into the air that we breathe, the way we allow children to be exploited, the disabled to be passed by, speaks of a stony-hearted society, not a compassionate one that produced the Buddha, Mahavira, Nanak, Kabir and Gandhi.

"Fifty years after our Constitution, the plain truth is that the female half of Indian population continues to be regarded as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is more than 170 years since Raja Rammohan

Roy caused *sati* to be abolished. But the infamous practice still manages to raise its head and, what is worse, even gets explained away as 'suicide' or as saintly sacrifice! What one finds disconcerting is even the absence of political rhetoric on these social ills.

"Commenting on the male-female disparity in India, Gandhiji wrote in 1931: "You cannot have one set of weights and measures for the one and a different one for the other. Yet we have never heard of a husband mounting the funeral pyre of his deceased wife." Unless the status of women in Indian society changes, the 'Equality' spoken of in our Preamble will remain hollow. It is against this attitude of society and the habit of discrimination prevalent in society that the demand for constitutional reservation for women in the Legislatures and Parliament has become a compelling necessity.

"We have to ponder over the condition of not only women in our society, but of the dalits, the tribals and other weaker sections. Untouchability has been abolished by law but shades of it remain in the ingrained attitudes nurtured by the caste system. Though the constitutional provision of reservation in educational institutions and public services flow from our Constitution, these provisions remain unfulfilled through bureaucratic and administrative deformation or by narrow interpretations of these special provisions. It seems, in the social realm, some kind of a counter revolution is taking place in India. It is forgotten that these benefits have been provided not in the way of charity, but as human rights and as social justice to a section of society who constitute a big chunk of our population, and who actually contribute to our agriculture, industry and services as landless labourers, factory and municipal workers. There are signs that our privileged classes are getting tired of the affirmative action provided by Constitutional provisions. On this Golden Jubilee, I would like to say that let us not get tired of what we have provided for our weaker sections, for otherwise as Dr. Ambedkar pointed out, the edifice of our democracy would be like a palace built on dung heap.

"The world watches us with a combination of admiration and concern: admiration at what we have achieved despite real odds, and concern over the fact that, even with great investments of money and energy, we remain far from our goal. Indians do well, they say; India does not. We must examine the import of that observation and try to rectify the situation.

"The end of the cold war has not ended all conflicts, it has only changed its character. Even as we want equality amongst ourselves, so do we want equality among the nations of the world. This does not and cannot mean that all countries have the same of everything. But it does mean that no nation or continent can seek overlordship over others claiming political, economic, technological or strategic superiority.

"We are privileged, as Indians, to have played a leading role in the decolonising of the mighty continents of Asia and Africa. We are the initiators of the concept of non-alignment in a world when it was bitterly divided by Cold War, and whether the great powers now recognise or not, the role of non-alignment in ending the Cold War, the fact of its contribution remains for all to see. And we are also co-authors, with the People's Republic of China, of the Five Principles of peaceful co-existence which provide the world a code of conduct in international relations. The principles like the respect for the territorial integrity and independence of nations, non-interference in their internal matters and mutual benefit and equality are precious concepts which cannot become redundant in a world of globalisation.

"We are privileged also to be playing a role to see that in the new millennium all the nations of the world, enjoy the same political status and have a level playing field, economically and technologically. This will be our endeavour in all the world bodies of which we are proud to be members or associated with — the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement and the new formations such as the WTO and important regional groupings like ASEAN, SAARC, the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

"May all of us cross the golden milestone and march along the vision of the founding fathers of our Republic."

NFL TO GO TO 'STRATEGIC BUYER'

Swadesh Dev Roye

The BJP-led Government at the Centre has decided to sell 51% equity of the sustained profit making public sector National Fertilisers Ltd (NFL) to a 'strategic buyer.' This is yet another step of the Government shamelessly favouring the private sector at the cost of public sector.

According to Govt. press release: " Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment (CCD) gave approval today (15.02.2000) for disinvestment of 51% equity of Government of India in National Fertiliser Limited to a strategic buyer along with transfer of management control." The CCD also has given approval for appointment of global advisor through a global process to work out the other modalities of the disinvestment, so that "the task would be completed by 31.12.2000."

Fertiliser as one of key agricultural inputs has been playing a pivotal role in augmenting the food production and ensuring the essentially necessary food security in the country. The fertiliser PSUs including NFL have contributed immensely in attaining self-sufficiency in fertilisers. Thus it is idiotic to term the fertiliser sector as non-core. It amounts to betrayal of the country to forget the PL-480 days and give red-carpet welcome to the private sector to dominate the fertiliser industry and play with the food security of the country.

ADVANTAGES OF NFL

Undoubtedly the private operators have targeted the NFL due to the inherent commercial advantages of the public sector fertiliser giant.

NFL has four urea producing units at Panipat, (Haryana) Bhatinda, Nangal (Punjab) and Vijaipur (M.P), with a total installed capacity of 2.81 million tonnes of urea per annum. It is the largest urea producing public sector undertaking with a share of 13.0% of the total installed capacity in the country.

Excepting the Vijaipur Expansion, all the plants of NFL have almost been fully depreciated. This is tremendously advantageous costing factor. The Disinvestment Commission, which has recommended privsatisation of NFL, at the same time observed that "NFL is competitive even compared to gas based fuel plants. In the event of decontrol, the company would not face any major threats, from imports..." This proves that this disinvestment decision is not based on financial considerations.

NFL has got excellent location based advantage. The plants of NFL are located in the States of Punjab, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, which together constitute half of the urea market in the country. From agronomy point of view, land under food-grain (mainly wheat and paddy) cultivation consumes large doses of urea. The three States where NFL plants are operating have got the largest contribution in the country's food-grain production. Moreover, " a third of NFL's markets are not exposed to the vagaries of the Indian monsoon."

WORLD BANK CONCEPT

The concept of 'strategic disinvestment' has originated from the World Bank. It is revealed from a 'research report' of the Bank that: "If potential buyers cannot otherwise raise the funds, the enterprise can be sold in tranches (passing management control immediately to private, allowing them time to raise the funds to buy out rest of the share gradually). ... with freedom to hire and fire, which is an importrant factor in successful management contracts"

The recommendations of the Disinvestment Commission, (DC) have been formulated in the light of the above prescription of the World Bank. The 'strategic sale of share' as defined by the DC; "implies sale of a substantial block of Government holdings to a single party which will acquire substantial equity holding of up to 50% ..." *(report of the DC vol. - I. page - 38)*. Elaborating the concept further the DC noted: "At that time (strategic sale) there will also be an agreement with such strategic partner that at a later date, within a stipulated period ...Government will disinvest its balance holding "*(ibid Vol.-IV. page - 6)*

Thus, the Government decision is a copy of the World Bank strategy. It is moving towards full privatisation of NFL as per recommendation of the DC: "After the inductioin of a strategic buyer and completion of on-going modernisation programmes, Government could eventually disinvest its balance holding in NFL."

These moves call for ensuring and sharpening the broad based countrywide movement to stop the destruction of the public sector and assault of the anti-national 'second generation economic reform' of the BJP-led government.

MAGNIFICENT PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE

At the call of Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions (CPSTU), public sector workers all over the country observed one day strike on 2nd February against the policy of privatisation and closure, non-payment of salaries to workers of sick PSUs, early conclusion of pending wage agreements, and the anti-worker policies of the Govt of India. Around 15 lakh public sector workers participated in the strike.

The strike was massive throughout the country. Although BMS and INTUC leadership did not sponsor the strike, many industry level unions affiliated to them served notices and joined the strike.

In West Bengal and Kerala and Tripura, strike was reported to be almost total in all the PSUs.

In Tamil Nadu, workers of all the major public sector units like Neyveli Lignite Corpn, Salem Steel, Hindustan Teleprinters, Hindustan Photo-films, Madras Fertilisers, Balmer Lawrie, Richardson Cruddas, Andrew Yule Bharat Heavy Electricals and installations of Indian Oil, Bharat Electronics joined the strike en masse.

In Andhra Pradesh, strike was reported to be total in IDPL, BEL, HSCL, Vizag Steel Plant and Singareni Colliery. In Hindustan Shipyard and Bharat Heavy Plates & vessels, BHEL (R&D), ECIL and other PSUs in the state, etc strike was to the tune of 55-60%. In BHEL, Ramchandrapuram, HAL, HMT Bearings and Midhani, workers staged day long dharna.

In Karnataka having the highest concentration of public sector units in the country, the workers joined the strike, en masse. In ECIL, HAL, BEML, ITI, BHEL and many others the strike was to the tune of 100%. A notable fact is that around 40% of PSU officers and supervisors also joined.

In Delhi and adjoining area strikes in BEL, CEL, ETTDC, IBP, corporate centre of Powergrid Corporation and Bharat Petroleum was almost complete while the striking workers in BHEL corporate centre staged day long dharna. At the main gate of CEL at Sahibabad, the workers of the private sector units staged day long dharna and demonstration in solidarity.

Going by industry, all the regions of and Corporate office of Powergrid Corporation reported almost total strike. In the plants of BHEL at Hardwar, Trichy, Ranjipet and Jhansi more than 80% workers participated in strike. In BHEL, Bhopal 40% workers joined strike and around 200 workers were arrested by police. In Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) the strike in all the plants in Ghaziabad, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Machilipatnam, Pune, Taloja and Kotdwara were total and joined by all the trade unions and supervisors also joined the strike in a big way. In coal industry, as per report received so far, the colliery workers Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal joined the strike in overwhelming majority.

In Steel industry strike was reported total in Vizag steel and Salem steel, 75% in Durgapur and Alloy Steel Plant and 80% in IISCO, Burnpur and 80% in the central marketing organisation of SAIL. In other pants, strike was reported partial. In Bhilai workers picketed at the factory gate. In all the iron-ore mines in th eastern region, workers joined the strike en masse. In the oil sector including ONGC, in all the areas of crude production, refinery and marketing, strike was massive in Haryana, Delhi, Assam and West Bengal and Tripura. In Jute, Textile and Pharmaceuticals industries also participation in the strike was massive.

One notable feature is that apart from INTUC and BMS unions at the enterprise level several trade unions affiliated to DMK, AIADMK, Labour Progressive Front (LPF) have joined the countrywide strike action.

The CPSTU congratulated the PSU workers and called upon them to prepare for next phase of long drawn indefinite countrywide action against anti-national policies of the govt.

COM. N.J. IYER

Com. N.J. Iyer, the President of National Federation of Postal Employees and one of the most respected leaders of Central Government employees' movement in the country expired on 13th February, 2000 at Nagpur due to cardiac arrest. He was 74.

Passing away of Com. N. Jayarama Iyer brings to end the life of a great leader of P & T Movement in India, a life of incessant struggles.

Iyer was the General Secretary of the All India RMS & MMS Employees Union Class III for 22 years. He was the President of the National Federation of Postal Employees since 1986. For two decades Iyer was Treasurer of Confederation of Central Government Employees & Workers too. He took voluntary retirement 1977. Even after returning to Nagpur, he spent his time helping the serving and retired Central Government employees.

The CITU and 'The Working Class' condole the death of Com. N.J. Iyer and pay homage to his memory.

FORWARD TO 9TH MARCH

MEETING OF HINDI-REGION STATE LEADERS

The meeting of the representatives of the State committees of Hindi region States was held at CITU centre on 8th February to discuss on the preparations for the **"March to Parliament"** programme on 9th March. S B Bharadwaj, Mohanlal from Delhi, Satbir Singh from Haryana, Daulat Ram from UP, Chandrasekhar and Raghunath Singh from Punjab, Rakesh Singha from Himachal Pradesh and Ravindra Shukla from Rajasthan attended the meeting from the States. Comrades from MP could not reach in time due to dislocation of train service.

Kanai Bannerjee, Secretary, CITU presided over the meeting. E Balanandan and M K Pandhe, President and General Secretary of CITU, explained the fast developing situation for an all out united struggle against the anti-people anti-national policies of the BJP Govt at the Centre. They stressed upon the urgent need for detailed organisation preparation for making the Parliament March programme of 9th March, the biggest ever mobilisation.

The comrades from the States reported about the steps already taken in that direction. The State committees have already met and decided to ensure that the programme is discussed with agenda by every union-committee and campaign initiated amongst the workers. It was also decided to hold State level conventions of NPMO and also district level conventions, besides gate-meetings, street corner meetings, processions etc. in all the industrial centres. Efforts will be made to reach the broadest section of workers through such campaign to enthuse them to participate in the Delhi-rally.

DELHI CAMPAIGN

State Committee met on 14th February. PK Ganguly and WR Varada Rajan, both Secretaries, CITU attended from the centre. On 16th, the General meeting of the President and General Secretaries of all affiliated unions in the State along with the State committee members was held. The meeting constituted the reception committee and various subcommittees for the camp to be established behind Red Fort for the participants from all over the country. The meeting also decided details of the campaign programmes, viz., gatemeetings, street-corner meetings, meetings in workers' colonies in all the industrial locations of Delhi, Ghaziabad, Faridabad and Noida. From the campaign already taken up, possibility is emerging that from many industrial centres, workers *enmasse* would strike work on 9th March and join the rally in procession.

H P STATE CONVENTION

The State committee met on 6th February at Shimla. Tapan Sen attended the meeting from centre. Detailed schedule of district committee meetings and district level conventions and rally was finalised and quota of participation was given district wise. The State level convention of NPMO was held on 26th February in Shimla which was attended by the leaders of various trade unions and organisations of students, youth, women, peasants etc. from all the districts of HP.

RAJASTHAN CONVENTION

Jaipur, 13th February, the State level convention of National Platform of Mass Organisations was held at Kumarswami Hall. Around 400 leading participants from all the districts and the mass organisations of students, youth, women, peasants, agricultural workers, besides various trade unions, attended the convention. The State convention decided to hold similar district level meetings, conventions, rallies in all the districts. Ravindra Shukla, General Secretary of CITU, presented the resolution to make the 9th March rally before Parliament successful by massive participation from Rajasthan State which was accepted by all. Tapan Sen, Secretary CITU and SK Vyas, General Secretary Confederation of Central Govt Employees addressed the convention.

KANPUR CONVENTION

Kanpur, 20th February, 2000. The district convention of National Platform of Mass Organisation was held at Ramashraye Memorial Hall which was participated by representatives of various central trade unions, unions from textile, engineering, jute, fertilisers, chemical, Pepsico, IEL, Dunkan Brothers, Eletricity Boards, pharmaceuticals, insurance, banks and many other industries and establishments and also leaders of student, youth, women, and lawyers organisations. The convention was presided by a presidium consisting of Md Safi (CITU), AR Swarup(AITUC), R Tripathy(HMS), Ganesh Dikshit(HMKP)Ramesh Chander (AICCTU) and PD Yadav(TUCC). Tapan Sen Secretary, CITU, inaugurated the convention. Aravind Kumar, President, Kanpur district, CITU presented the resolution on Parliament-March and the campaign programme decided thereon in the district level, which was adopted unanimously. It was decided to hold factory level meetings and mass meetings in the important centres in the city to culminate in a central rally and procession throughout the city to be held on 3rd March. The convention also decided to observe Anti-Imperialist Week on, 12-18 March through demonstration, rally etc and by burning effigy of Bill Clinton to protest the visit of American President to India.

The State level convention of NPMO was held in Lucknow on 21-02-2000.

MADYA PRADESH

State Secretariat of CITU met on 6th February and has drawn a detailed campaign programme till 7th March, which includes gate meetings, area level meetings, processions in all the industrial locations, coal mines and commercial centres in the State. It was also decided to organise five *Jathhas* (cross district campaign procession) from different places in the State to cover important industrial centres and public sector units. On 16th February, day-long dharna was organised at Bhopal.

ASSAM CONVENTION

The State convention of NPMO, known as "Gana Mancha" in Assam was held on 22nd February at Guwahati. 444 representatives from 28 trade unions and mass organisations participated in the convention. The unions in Assam State Transport and Electricity Board, who were so long not associated with NPMO, also joined the convention this time. The convention was conducted by a presidium consisting of the leaders of CITU, AITUC, AICCTU, UTUC(LS) and Shrama Parishad which endorsed the Declaration of the All India Convention of NPMO and resolved to mobilise maximum in the Parliament March. The convention also decided to hold massive demonstration before Guwahati Railway Station on 26th February, besides other campaign programmes throughout the State.

MAHARASTRA

The call of the National Platform of Mass Organisations for countrywide actions against the globalisation and privatisation policies of the Vajpayee Government has evoked good response in different sections of working people in Maharashtra. The CITU organised three mass conventions during January.

The three conventions so far held were in Eknath Ranga BhavanHall at Aurangabad on 4th January, in Nasik on 5th and Pune on 7th January. P.K. Ganguly, Secretary, CITU, inaugurated all these conferences. He also addressed the 10th All India Conference of UBEL unit workers in Pune on 6th February. Monteiro and P.R. Krishnan also addressed these conventions.

The State CITU has decided to hold similar conventions at Nagpur, Solapur, Kolhapur, Raigad, Thane and other industrial centres of Maharashtra. The CITU is making all efforts to have participation by other central trade union centres and mass organisations in these programes. K.L. Bajaj, Udhav Bawalkar, D.L. Karad, Suman Sansgiri, Ajit Abhyankar, Sadashiv Bhat, VivekOn the basis of the reports so far received, more than 10,000 workers from Maharashtra will be taking part in the march to Parliament on 9th March.

The State CITU has also given a call for observance of demands day on 23.3.2000, throughout Maharashtra. On this day, all affiliated unions in the State will hold meetings and stage demonstrations. This will be followed by a 25000 strong workers' rally near the Vidhan Sabha in Mumbai on 23rd April.

PENSION CASE

The Supreme Court case on Pension Scheme was to be heard on 22nd February, 2000.But the Judges sitting in the Bench are now busy in the Constitution Bench; so they are not free to hear the Pension case.

Therefore, the date has been deferred to 4th April, 2000. So many postponements are causing hardship to workers and the air of uncertainty is lingering. Still, we hope that the case will be heard finally on 4.4.2000.

CAMPAIGNS AND STRUGGLES IN TAMILNADU

The new year has begun in Tamilnadu, with massive struggles and campaigns by various sections of working people in the State.

* National level strikes of this period by Medical Representatives, the Port and Dock Workers (in Chennai and Tuticorian), and public sector workers were all successful.

* In support of the U.P. Electricity Workers more than 20,000 workers including contract workers went on strike at the call of CITU, on 24.1.2000.

* At the call of CITU State Committee, massive dharnas and demonstrations were held all over the state on 24th January. The major issues involved were sickness, closures, loss of jobs, unemployment, privatisation and various demands of unorganised sector workers.

* The State Transport employees, at the initiative of CITU, conducted a joint struggle against the State Government's order which gave sweeping powers to bureaucrats for cancelling the driving licences in case of accidents. The united campaign, with the exception of DMK and AIADMK unions, was such a powerful movement, that forced the State Government to withdraw the order.

* Handloom Workers Federation (CITU) is conducting a campaign on 15 point charter of demands. Demonstrations and dharnas were organised in all the handloom centres on 9th February. A State level seminar on "Handloom industry to-day" was organised by the Federation at Madurai on 14th February.

* Headload workers Co-ordination Committee (CITU) is also conducting a signature campaign all over the State on a charter of demands.

* Regular and part-time workers in local bodies have called for an indefinite strike in April. This call was given in a Special Convention at Thanjavur, organised by the State level federation.

* Another notable sectoral mobilisation was that of workers in tailoring. More than 5000 workers, mostly women, held a powerful demonstration in front of the colectorate at Nagarkoil on 27th January. T.K. Rengarajan, J. Hemachandra, MLA, Malavilai Bhasi, Indira and others addressed the demonstration.

* CITU unions all over the State paid homage to the martyrs on 19th January. It was on this day in 1982, three agricultural workers were martyred in connection with the National general strike. The day is being observed to pay homage to all the martyrs, who laid down their lives for the cause of our class.

It is on this day, the CITU presents the 'Kisan Solidarity Fund' to the leaders of Kisan Sabha.

In a meeting at the Martyrs memorial at Thirumeignanam Village in Nagapattinam District, P.M. Kumar, Asst. General Secretary of State CITU, handed over an amount of Rs. 1,04,973 to the leaders of Kisan Sabha. CITU State Committee has been collecting the solidarity fund from 1983 and helping the peasant's movement in the State.

(Report from A.K. Padmanabhan)

TRIPURA : PLANTATION UNION CONFERENCE

The Seventh Conference of Tripura Tea Plantation Workers' Union was held at Durgawadi Tea Estate, six kilometres away from Agartala on 23rd and 24th January 2000. On 23rd, there was a procession of tea plantation Workers, in which more than 5000 workers participated. More than 350 delegates attended the conference. Lalaji Babu, General Secretary of AI Plantation Workers' Federation, inaugurated the delegates' session and also addressed the rally.

The delegates discussed the main problems faced by the tea plantation workers' of Tripura especially low wages (Rs.22.50 per day, now), inadequate medical facilities and the question of temporary workers. Two estates are run by our cooperatives where the facilities are better. Resolutions were passed demanding Rs.35 as minimum wage and against the attack of the extremists. In some estates, the extremist - forces did not allow our union to function. They did not allow even to collect money for the union. Anyhow, our unions are fighting it bravely. The conference decided to increase the membership from 8000 to 10000.

CHEVALLA: CITU FIGHTS POLICE BRUTALITY

A heinous incident has come to light in which the Andhra Pradesh police has exhibited their contempt for human rights, particularly of the poor and of women. Three innocent anganwadi helpers were falsely accused of theft, subjected to inhuman torture in the police station and when this failed to produce the stolen article, the police threw them out in the middle of the night.

The three anganwadi helpers - Parvatamma, Lakshmi and Anthamma, working in (the centres in Elvarti, Sankarpalli and Ramantapur villages) Chevella project in Rangareddy district came to the ICDS project office on 3rd February to collect their honorarium. After getting their honorarium, they reached the bus station at around 4.30 pm, to go back to their villages. As they were all illiterate, they boarded a wrong bus. When they found out that this bus does not go through their villages they got down and were going back to wait for thier bus. Meanwhile a woman in the bus lost her gold chain and complained to a constable that she suspected these women. The police caught hold of Parvatamma, who was behind the other two, took her to the police station, beat her and asked her who were with her. When she told the police about the other two, they went to the bus station and brought Lakshmi and Anthamma, who were waiting for Parvatamma, to the police station. It was around 5.30 pm by that time. From then, upto 11.00 clock in the night, the sub-inspector and three others together subjected the women to inhuman torture. They were beaten on their backs and legs with leather belts. They were stripped; a stout wooden pole used to pound flour was kept on their knees and two policemen stood on each end of the pole. Thy were kicked in the abdomen, their hands were twisted. Chilli powder was thrown on their wounds. After hours of torture when they failed to find the missing chain with the women, at around 11.30 at night, the police threw them out of the police station, dragging them by their hair. Meanwhile, their husbands came to know about this, came to the police station and took them to Sankarpalli.

The local CITU activists at Sankarpalli came to know about the incident on the morning of 4th February. They immediately held a dharna in front of the police station after mobilising the local anganwadi employees. Roja, General Secretary of the AP Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union, D G Narasimha Rao, State Committee member of CITU, Varalakshmi and Narmada, anganwadi union leaders of the Chevella project and Jangayya, CITU leader of Ranga Reddy district joined the dharna. When they got no response, they resorted to rasta roko at around 2.00 pm and stopped all traffic. The people travelling in the buses, the people belonging to the villages of the three anganwadi helpers and some sarpanches-in all about 5000 people - in all, who gathered were told about the incident and all of them spontaneously joined the dharna.

CITU leader at Hyderabad met the SP and lodged a complaint. The DSP rushed to the Chevella police station and held discussions with the union leaders. The sarpanch of Chevella also participated in the discussions. At first, the DSP promised to suspend the sub inspector. But, on the insistence of the union, he issued a written order suspending the SI immediately. The union demanded that Rs 1 lakh should be paid as compensation, and stern action should also be taken against the persons who assisted the sub inspector. After the DSP gave an assurance that he would report the matter to the higher authorities and would support fully the demands of the union, the helpers were taken to the hospital, where they were given first aid and then shifted to Osmania Hospital in Hyderabad at midnight.

The local newspapers widely reported the incident and the State Home Minister Devendra Goud (who represents Chevella assembly constituency) came to visit the victims at the hospital. The union leaders met him and put forward their demands:

1. A proper enquiry should be conducted immediately and the SI should be dismissed.
2. Stern action should be taken on

those who assisted the SI.

3. Exgratia of Rs 1 lakh should be paid to each victims.

4. Each of the 3 helpers should be given 3 months leave with wages.

The Home Minister agreed to institute a proper enquiry, (the SI was already suspended) pay Rs 25,000/- to each of the victims and to grant 2 months leave with pay. Two persons who assisted the SI were dismissed.The initiative taken by the union in the agitation was appreciated by the general public in the district. It has further enhanced the union's prestige among the employees.

CITU WIN IN CHITTIVALASA JUTE MILLS

CITU-affiliated CJM & G Workers Union registered a spectacular victory in the recognition elections held on 29.2.2000 in the Chittivalsa Jute Mills in Visakhapatnam. In the secret ballot, CITU union polled 58% of the total votes. Out of 4277 votes polled, CITU got 2514 while AITUC and INTUC got 1115 and 637 votes respectively. By giving such an emphatic verdict, the workers of CJ Mills rebuffed all the vicious campaigns made by both AITUC and INTUC against CITU. Both AITUC and INTUC went on maligning CITU that in case CITU wins, the factory would be locked out; that CITU would force strikes on workers etc. But the workers, who were completely fed up with the corrupt, pro-management INTUC and AITUC union leaders in CJ Mills, totally rejected them. Both AITUC and INTUC tried to get away from answering queries about their capitulation before the management with lame excuses and sought to attribute every thing to the crisis in the industry. But the workers were not prepared to be carried.

TU movement in CJ Mills has a history of militant struggles. The workers bravely fought against the brutal management in 1938 when the British resorted to firing against the workers. In 1979, when CITU was elected for the first time, a militant struggle was waged on the demand of Bengal pattern wage rise. All attempts to suppress the struggle through police repression were made. The wages along Bengal pattern came to be implemented in all other composite jute Mills of AP after this victorious struggle.

Subsequently, after the reformist leadership, the Bengal pattern of wages was given up. Now workers in AP get Rs 500/- less than those in West Bengal per month. In addition to this, increased workload and reduced compliment of staff were thrust upon the workers. When the INTUC union sought to thrust a thoroughly retrograde agreement on the workers in 1991 by signing it without the knowledge of workers, CITU took the lead and waged a struggle which ultimately led to the abrogation of that anti-worker agreement. This increased the popularity of the CITU union. But the management actively colluded with both AITUC and INTUC to prevent CITU from winning the elections in 1994 as well as in 1997. But this time, their tricks did not fructify. The workers were determined to teach them a lesson by awarding a handsome victory to CITU with a record majority of 1399 votes which is unparalleled in the history of CJ Mills.

(Report from Ch.Narasingha Rao)

INTUC: METAL WORKERS' CONVENTION

The Indian National Metal Workers' Federation (INTUC) will hold its 9th national convention at Nagpur, 10-12, March, 2000. A workshop on "Challenges of Changes: Tasks before the Metal Workers" is also organised on 10.3.2000. 500 unions representing workers in steel, engineering and metal trade industries will participate in the convention.

M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, in a message of greetings sent to the federation, said:

"We hope that the convention will evolve strategies to combat the disastrous effects of liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation drives by the BJP-led Central Government.

"The recent decision by the Cabinet to dismantle SAIL has thrown a serious challenge before the metal workers in general and steel workers in particular in our country. What we have achieved in IISCO in building a joint movement to save it now has to be extended to all over SAIL. This is an imperative need demanding our united action urgently.

"CITU believes that there is an urgent need to unite the entire working class in India to stop these disastrous policies.

"We hope that your national convention will address all these questions and explore possibilities of all the central trade unions and federations joining hand together in the interest of working class."

REAL FACE OF PEPSICO

PEPSI company has a bottling plant in Jainpur, near Kanpur, U.P. It was an old plant acquired by PEPSICO in 1996. They retrenched 50 workers and taken a batch of another 50 workers and is operating normally. The plant has 101 permanent and 300 contractor workers (A good ratio at that, and an example of maintaining "Labour Standards", indeed).

The workers are entitled to a new wage agreement from 1st January, 2000. But suddenly the management refused to negotiate and unilaterally extended the current wage agreement by 3 more years. The workers were naturally resentful.

To start up a trouble the management suddenly called 16 workers to work on a sunday on 30.1.2000. 6 workers turned up, 10 did not who had other preoccupations.

Then the management sprang into action. The 10 workers were suspended 1st February for going on "illegal strike"!

On 3rd February the factory gate was locked out and permanent workers were ordered to sign a "good behavior" bond before being allowed to go in and join work.

The workers refused. That infurriated the management. 14 Executive Committee members of the union were suspended and 22 employees were chargesheeted on 5.2.2000, and of coure, 'No work No Pay' was declared after denying the workers to join work! (An American concept of fair labour standards!). The matter went to the Labour Department and the DLC recommended clearly that the employees be taken back to work immediately. PEPSICO management has so far ignored the advice, on the contrary, they are addressing the employees and their families seperately reminding them how glorious it is to work in PEPSICO and how they have been mislead by a group of union leaders with "vested interest". The workers stood firm on their ground. There will be no"BOND" of subjugation, come what may.

(Finally the agreement has been signed and the derogatory conditions withdrawn)

INSURANCE EMPLOYEES CONFERENCE

The 3rd General Conference of Central Zone Insurance Employees' Association was held at Indore from 9th to 12th January, 2000. The venue of the conference was named after Com. Saroj Choudhari while the dias was named after Com.Balaji Tokekar. Dipankar Mukherjee, M.P., inaugurated the conference. N.M. Sundaram, General Secretary, AIIEA and P.K. Ganguly, Secretary, CITU, attended the conference as Special Guests.

A mammoth and colourful procession was taken out from the LICDivisional Office, Indore at 12 A.M. on 9.1.2000. Large number of workers representing different trade unions of Indore participated in the procession, apart from hundreds of insurance employees.

The conference felicitated Bhagwan Swarup Sharma, General Secretary, NZIEA and Joint Secretary of AIIEA and G.P. Chandolkar, Vice President, CZIEA, on their retirement from the services of LIC. The conference also felicitated Harish Singh of Ujjain for the publication of his book "This is India", a unique satire.

The conference adopted an amendment to the constitution of CZIEA ensuring compulsory representation of women comrades in the Working Committee. The conference unanimously elected a 41 member working committee with S.R. Urdhwareshe, B. Sanyal and B.K. Thakur as President, General Secretary and Treasurer respectively. A colourful cultural function was held in the evening on 10th January, 2000, in which besides the delegates and observers, the children and family members of the insurance employees participated.

SICA: REPEAL MOVE DENOUNCED

The Govt of India move to repeal the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act, 1985 (SICA), has been reported in the Press. Although the concerned Act has many shortcomings and loopholes as reflected in its lacklustre operation, the outright repeal of the Act without any concrete alternative mechanism for revival of sick industrial units would mean complete abdication of Govt's responsibility with regard to industrial sickness. It would also give a free hand to the employers and mill-owners to play merrily with the instrument of industrial sickness at the cost of the workers, the industry and the country's economy.

The already high level of industrial sickness is destined to aggravate further in the coming days in view of impending withdrawal of all restrictions on import and other pro-MNC policy initiatives, and several lakhs of workers would be the worst victims. What is required at this moment is to strengthen and re-tune the Act by removing its deficiencies, with a clear cut revival orientation blocking the possibility of closure and fixing the responsibility for rendering the companies sick. In such a background, any move to just repeal the Act, without any alternate mechanism for revival, will tantamount to deliberately paving the way for making closures and liquidation a *fait-accompli*. It will be relieving the mill-owners, promoters and the Govt from all their obligations and implementing the exit policy through back-door.

In a statement on 18.2.2000, the CITU denounced such an approach and demanded the Govt not to take any precipitate action in this regard. It urged that the matter must be discussed with the Central trade unions threadbare to decide on concrete changes in the SICA and measures for revival of the sick industrial units. The trade union movement must keep vigil and oppose the move unitedly.

DUNLOP: CHHABARIA'S GAME EXPOSED

Manu Chhabaria is notorious for his nefarious games to acquire enterprises, suck them white and leave them to lurch. The story repeated with Dunlop, the premiere tyre factory that is also a producer of aircraft tyres in India. He took it over it through questionable means, made as much money as possible and then closed it down about 2 years back without informing anybody and fled to Dubai.

He did not return or open the factory when Kargil conflict enhanced the demand for aircraft tyres, but suddenly desired to open it and called the unions for discussion early this year.

7th February, 2000 was the date fixed and "minutes" were drawn, (not an agreement), enumerating the steps and time table to solve all outstanding issues including back wages. But when the record notes were sent to CITU union, it was found that CITU's points were omitted; so they refused to sign.

Then Chhabaria's game started. He let the hell loose on CITU union by declaring that because of CITU union's intrasigene the factory could not be opened on 7.2.2000. Local Press went for the blood of CITU, trains were stopped, bandhs were called and people were instigated by opponents of CITU.

But CITU stood firm. At that time Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister, intervened and charged the management why the minutes were not properly drawn. The management was defenceless and had to comply-then CITU signed the 'minutes'. 11th March is the new date for opening Dunlop plant at Sahaganj, Hooghly. So far so good.

But everybody suspects that

Chhabaria is again upto some game.

As suspected by many, this initiative has been prompted by his fear that BIFR may, in the hearing on 15th March, take Dunlop away from Chhabaria and find a new promoter to run it. Chhabaria wants to forestall it because huge properties owned by Dunlop all over the country can still get him a lot of money which he wants to pocket.

In Ambattur, near Chennai, the Dunlop factory has been opened. But according to information available till now, there is no work assigned for the workers there. They are also being instigated that only because of CITU in Calcutta, the management is helpless.

UB EMPLOYEES TO FIGHT JOB LOSSES

"Any permanent job loss, may it be in the form of retrenchement or removal shall be fought with unitedly and militantly" was the main theme and message in the 10th Annual Conference of UB Engineering Ltd, Unit of Engineering Labour Union (ELU) held at Pune on 6th & 7th February, 2000.

UB Engg Unit represents site staff such as Engineers, Supervisors, Storekeepers, etc, spread all over India The management has started downsizing the company staff at various levels since last two months. The Site Staff, who has not been touched so far,is likely to be covered under this downsize drive.

The conference was inaugurated by K L Bajaj, General Secretary of CITU, Maharashtra. P K Ganguly, Secretary, CITU, Vivek Monteiro and P R Krishnan addressed. The conference was attended by 54 delegates from sites all over India. A new committee was elected with Ajit Abhyankar as President, and Sadashiv Bhat as General Secretary.

MP: RETRENCHEMENT MOVE CONDEMNED

The Madhya Pradesh Government has decided to terminate the services of all the daily rated employees who have joined after 1988. This cruel step is being taken in the name of reducing government expenditure. The CITU in a statement on 4.2.2000 condemned the move. It said: "It is strange but has become fashionable that both BJP and Congress have made the poorest section of the people their target to push through their `Reforms` programme. Their hypocrisy is unlimited when they both pledge to create jobs, sometimes in crores, but actually are throwing people out of jobs wherever they are in power. The MP Govt has also eliminated 2and 1/2 lakh jobs in government establishments. They are out to `kill` jobs fast and the poor employees are to bear the brunt of it.

The CITU demanded immediate reinstatement and confirmation of these employees.

(It is reported that MP State Administrative Tribunal has ordered re-instatement of all the employees after accepting their petition).

EMPLOYEES' PENSION SCHEME

On the basis of the Second valuation of the Employees' Pension Fund as on 31.3.1998, the Government of India has announced the grant of additional relief. A 5.5% additional relief on the original pension will be granted with effect from 1.4.1998. This will be available to all pensioners as on 31.3.1998. As a result pensioners as on 15.11.1996, will get 9.5% of their original pension (including the 4% relief granted subsequent to first valuation). Pensioners, who have been sanctioned pension from 16.11.1996 to 31.3.1998, will get 5.5% relief on the original pension. The EPF Organisation has taken up the third valuation as on 31.3.1999.

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

Sr. No	Centre	Oct 99	Nov 99	Dec 99
1	Gudur	457	447	430
2	Guntur	424	425	422
3	Hyderabad	401	403	404
4	Visakhapatnam	420	425	428
5	Warangal	431	434	436
6	D D Tinsukia	402	402	395
7	Guwahati	451	450	443
8	Labac-Silchar	386	390	386
9	Mariani Jorhat	433	433	433
10	Rangapara-Tezpur	440	440	431
11	Jamshedpur	415	418	409
12	Jharia	380	377	370
13	Kodarma	397	401	380
14	Monghyr Jamalpur	433	441	431
15	Noamundi	387	396	396
16	Ranchi-Hatia	429	430	425
17	Ahmedabad	437	435	435
18	Bhavnagar	466	465	456
19	Rajkot	415	416	412
20	Surat	445	442	436
21	Vadodra	417	415	404
22	Faridabad	448	444	432
23	Yamunanagar	402	410	400
24	Srinagar	467	477	476
25	Bangalore	413	418	416
26	Belgaum	460	468	463
27	Hubli-Dharwar	436	437	428
28	Mercara	450	452	452
29	Alwaye	427	429	429
30	Mundakayam	450	454	454
31	Quilon	433	443	445
32	Thiruvananthapuram	466	471	482
33	Balaghat	394	392	386
34	Bhilai	392	390	386
35	Bhopal	455	452	445
36	Indore	434	432	428
37	Jabalpur	453	449	440
38	Mumbai	472	468	468
39	Nagpur	447	442	435
40	Nasik	435	440	439
41	Pune	475	471	459
42	Solapur	460	459	455
43	Barbil	398	410	404
44	Rourkela	405	412	407

Sr. No.	Centre	Oct 99	Nov 99	Dec 99
45	Amritsar	388	383	376
46	Ludhiana	386	391	382
47	Ajmer	423	426	419
48	Jaipur	395	393	390
49	Chennai	459	453	452
50	Coimbatore	424	429	426
51	Coonoor	422	436	433
52	Madurai	443	441	436
53	Salem	435	438	430
54	Tiruchirapally	469	493	480
55	Agra	409	407	401
56	Ghaziabad	451	447	439
57	Kanpur	440	439	427
58	Saharanpur	391	396	392
59	Varanasi	486	484	474
60	Asansol	416	424	413
61	Calcutta	468	472	447
62	Darjeeling	396	397	391
63	Durgapur	475	479	464
64	Haldia	490	493	484
65	Howrah	525	516	488
66	Jalpaiguri	423	415	406
67	Raniganj	388	389	379
68	Chandigarh	456	454	450
69	Delhi	498	496	488
70	Pondicherry	477	486	477
	All India	437	438	431

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

1	Kothagudem	444	444	431
2	Himachal Pradesh	416	420	413
3	Bhilwara	427	430	431
4	Chhindwara	428	429	423
5	Tripura	417	435	416
6	Goa	489	494	496

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

(Writing in the Times of India (2.2.2000), PRAFUL BIDWAI, graphically presents the decision of the Government of India to privatise Indian Airlines as devaluing its worth. Here is a slightly abridged version of his article - Editor)

A DIFFERENT HIJACKING

The Government's precipitate decision to put 51 per cent of the equity of Indian Airlines Ltd. (IA) on sale, while handing over a decisive 26 per cent to a 'strategic' partner, defies market logic. It is anti-competitive and against the national interest. It amounts to hijacking a precious public asset worth thousands of crores, and transferring it to private interests for a fraction of that sum. Twenty six per cent of IA's present Rs.105 crore equity amounts to a miserable Rs.27 crore. Even if this is multiplied many times over, it will not add up to a fair price. The move is economically, politically and strategically disastrous.

IA is not an inefficient, market-unfriendly or chronically loss-making enterprise. Nor is it poorly managed by domestic or international standards. If anything, its efficiency has improved in recent years, precisely when private airlines have closed down (including such hyped-up 'success stories' as East-West, Modiluft and Damania) or sustained losses. For the last two years, IA has rallied back into the black side of the balance-sheet with annual operating profits exceeding Rs.200 crore. For five years, it has managed to defend its 60-65 per cent market share despite severe handicaps. There is, of course, a case for further improving IA's efficiency by giving it functional autonomy and above all, by letting it acquire desperately needed new aircraft. But that is a far cry from privatisation unrelated to management quality or efficiency.

FLEET MODERNISATION

The Government might have been forgiven had it abided by the bargain it made with IA, and infused equity of Rs.325 crore into it, as recommended by the Vijay Kelkar committee more than three years ago. However, it merely sat on the report after repeatedly declaring that it had accepted it. It thus prevented IA from expanding its capital base and acquiring 75 new aircraft to replace and modernise its aging 56-strong fleet. This is despite the Kelkar committee's warning that absent modernisation, IA's market share could drop to a very low 32 per cent in the current year. Timely equity infusion would have permitted IA to borrow and totally invest Rs.920 crore into fleet modernisation by now.

This infusion was not meant to be a subsidy or charitable grant, but represented the Government's obligation to make up the losses its own policies had inflicted on IA through the grounding of its entire Airbus-320 fleet for nine months in 1990, through unjustifiable differential pricing of fuel, and the forced merger of Vayudoot. The Government would get a handsome return of 48 per cent on its capital, as IA's projected net worth would rise from Rs.25 crore five years ago to Rs.2,183 crore, its post-tax profit spurting to Rs.330 crore from a Rs.110 crore loss.

STRATEGIC MISNOMER

If proof was needed of the Government's anti-IA prejudice, nothing furnished it as starkly as the recent decision to lower aviation fuel prices (when other oil prices are sharply raised) for small aircraft, which IA's prime competitor is about to buy.

Even more questionable is the Government's plan to hand over not just 26 per cent of IA's equity - the largest chunk to be held by any one shareholder - but also effective managerial control to the so-called 'strategic partner' - a misnomer for someone who is taking over IA. Nothing has established that such 'partnership' is necessary, or that IA's management cannot be improved. The Government has not even tried to create the minimum conditions for such improvement. Besides, the record of domestic airlines, or the private corporate sector as a whole, does not prove they are superior to public enterprises. There is a higher incidence of sickness and non-performing assets in the former than in the much-maligned public sector. It makes no economic sense to equate efficiency with private equity.

LET IT COMPETE

Above all, IA is a public asset which, if properly revalued today, would be worth Rs. 15-20,000 crore. It would be folly to squander this. It won't do to trivialise IA's contribution in the name of market efficiency, when IA embodies this better than its competitors. Don't kill IA; let it compete.

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MARCH 8

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day, 8th March is an occasion observed by women's organisations around the world. This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday. When women on all continents, often divided by national boundaries and by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, come together to celebrate their DAY, they can look back to a tradition that represents at least nine decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

International Women's Day is the story of women as makers of history, it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men. During the French Revolution in the 18th century, Parisian women calling for "Liberty, equality, fraternity", marched upon Versailles to demand women's voting rights. The idea of an International Women's Day first arose at the turn of the twentieth century. Following is a brief chronology of the most important events:

1909: In accordance with a declaration by the Socialist Party of America, the first National Women's Day was observed across the United States on 28th February. Women continued to celebrate it on the last Sunday of that month through 1913.

1910: The **Socialist International**, meeting in Copenhagen, established a Women's Day, international in character, to honour the movement for women's rights and to assist in achieving universal voting rights for women. The proposal was greeted with unanimous approval by the conference of over 100 women from 17 countries, which included the first three women elected to the Finnish Parliament.

1911: As a result of the decision taken at Copenhagen the previous year, International Women's Day was marked for the first time (19th March) in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, where more than one million women and men attended rallies. In addition to the right to vote and to hold public office, they demanded the right to work, to vocational training and for an end to discrimination on the job.

Less than a week later, on 25th March, the tragic triangle fire in New York City took the lives of more than 140 working girls, most of them immigrants. This event had a significant impact on labour legislation in the United States, and the working conditions leading up to the disaster were invoked during subsequent observances on International Women's Day.

1913-1914: As a part of the peace movement building up on the eve of World War I, Russian women observed their first International Women's Day on the last Sunday in February 1913. Elsewhere in Europe, on or around 8 March of the following year, women held rallies either to protest the war or to express solidarity with their sisters who have suffered as a result of the war.

1917: With 2 million Russian soldiers dead in the war, Russian women again chose the last Sunday in February to strike for "Bread and Peace". The rest is history. Four days later, the Czar was forced to abdicate and the provisional Government granted women the right to vote. That historic Sunday fell on 23 February on the Julian calendar then in use in Russia, but on 8 March on the Gregorian Calendar in use elsewhere.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. The growing International women's movement has helped make the commemoration a rallying point for coordinated efforts to demand women's rights and participation in the political and economic process. Increasingly International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to celebrate the courage and determination of the women who have carried forward the women's movement. It is a time to reiterate the commitment and solidarity of women, the world over, to fight caste, class, ethnic and gender oppression, and to continue the struggle for women's rights, democracy, equality and social justice.

CITU exhorts the women in India, particularly the working women, to enthusiatically join the worldwide struggle.

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