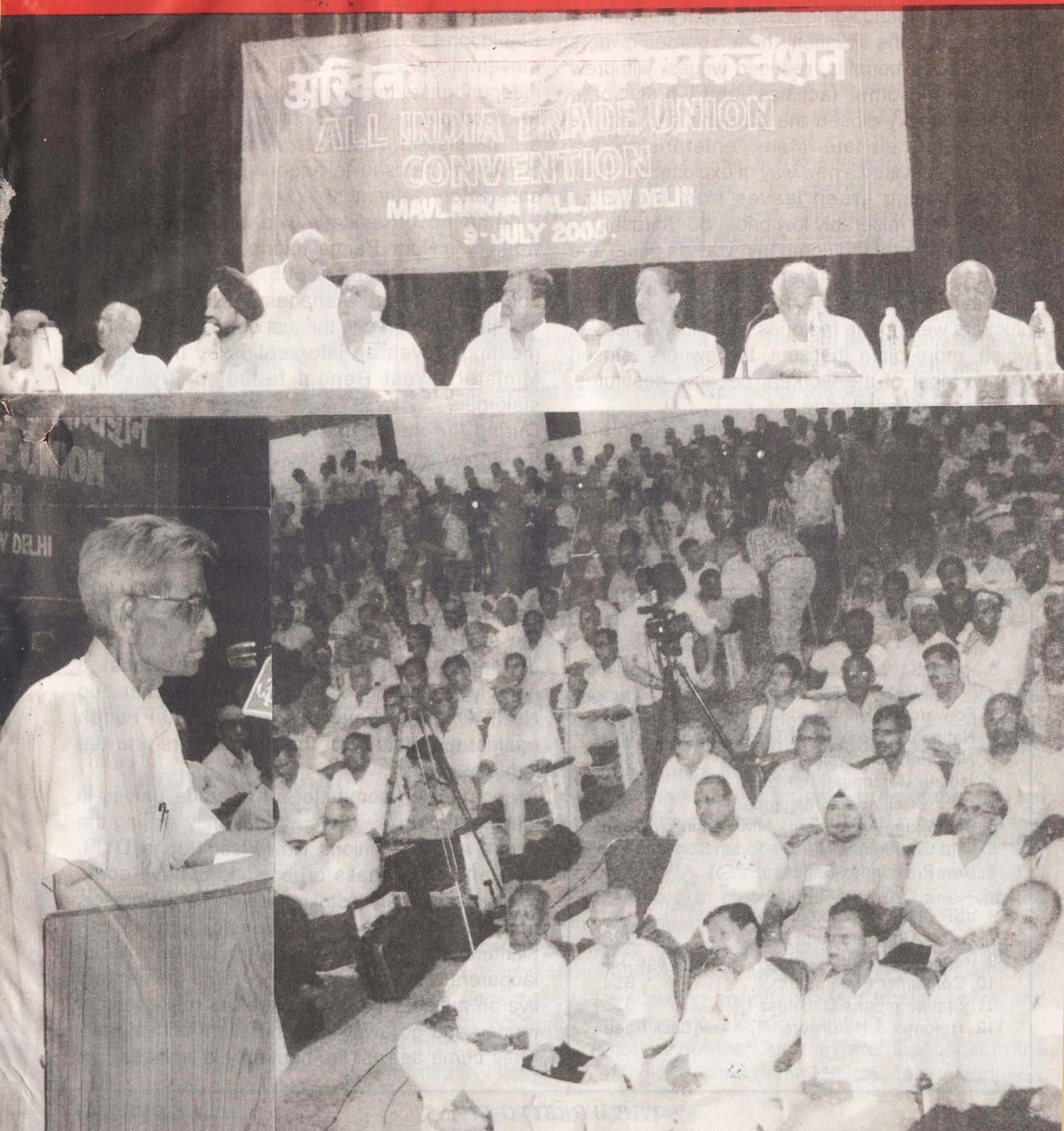
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THE WORKING CLASS

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West Bengal

GLORIOUS STRUGGLE BY TEA GARDEN WORKERS

Tea garden owners in the country are enjoying a windfall profit for the last 3-4 years. Prior to this phase there was a brief period when there was a depressed market condition and the industry had faced some crisis. At that time, taking advantage of the situation, the tea garden owners had curtailed benefits, reduced wages, withdrew medical and other facilities, and worst, some planters simply closed the gardens and left the workers to their fate. Many "enterprising" tea producers devised a new way of exploitation. They started buying green leaves from individual pluckers at a miserably low price. So "hardship to workers and profit to company" was as usual, the mantra to the tea garden management. Such exploitation has no limit. Regulalry the individual pluckers went to the factories with plucked leaves which, more often than not, the owners refused to buy. Most of the workers became destitutes, many committed suicide.

The workers waited patiently. When the market condition improved the unions submitted their demands exactly two years back The employers refused to respond. Series of meetings took place in an environment when profits were soaring as international and domestic price of tea was increasing rapidly. The workers' demands are precisely a new wage revision, which is due for more than two years and implementation of many of the unimplemented provisions of the last wage agreement. The workers demand that the Plantation Labour Act must be fully honoured by the employers. Even after nearly 60 years of independence demands like clean drinking water or a semblance of medical assistance or facility are persistent demands by tea workers. The employers refused to negotiate and agree to a satisfactory settlement.

Finding no other way 3 lakh tea plantation workers in North Bengal had to go for continuous strike from 11th July 2005. The strike is still continuing, as the management has shown no inclination to agree to the just demands. Tripartite meetings, even an intervention by the Labour Minister, West Bengal failed to break the stalemate.

During the slump period the behaviour of the garden owners towards the workers created such a miserable situation for the tea plantation workers. The owners went away with their accumulated profits.

The people of West Bengal, particularly of North Bengal have seen all these crookery and deprivation. They have come out in support of the striking workers. On 19th July people of 4 districts, where the tea gardens are located namely Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar and North Dinajpur have observed a total bandh against the attitude of the tea planters and tea industry owners.

A coordination committee of all trade unions is leading the strike. There is total unity among the central and local unions. Now Kisan Sabha, DYFI, SFI, and other mass organisations have come forward in support of striking tea workers. People's unity has taken a new dimension against the planters who come here, use the tribals, migrant labourers with starvation wage, force the workers live an animals life but themselves make tons of money and go away with the slight fall of profit. Their crime against the humanity is limitless.

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THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

AUGUST 2005

COUNTERPOINT



The two leaders are meeting in the bunker to discuss the threat posed by terrorism!

Courtesy: The Asian Age

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EDITORIAL

PATRIOTISM NOT IN DOUBT, BUT...

Our Prime Minister (PM), on board the aircraft from New Delhi to Frankfurt, en route to Washington spoke of the patriotic credentials of the Congress Party and its commitment to non-aligned movement. He said that it would be a mistake to think that any Prime Minister of the (Congress) party would sell India cheap and asserted: "India is not for sale".

But, the moment is for a serious introspection for the PM is it not strange that the PM of a country had to assert that he would not sell his country cheap?

In the present day world, the country has to maintain cordial relations with other countries of the globe. The interests of the country's economy and trade also demand that. But, when it comes to the USA, one has to keep in view the role it has been playing as the head of the imperialist camp.

The concern the leaders of the Left Parties expressed to the PM was in the backdrop of a framework agreement his Defence Minister had concluded during his recent visit. The Left parties only reminded him of his government commitment: 'The UPA government will pursue an independent foreign policy. This policy will seek to promote multi-polarity in world relations and oppose all attempts at unilateralism'. The PM has noted: 'India had to reckon with the U.S. as the most important power with influence and strength ...'. But, can India, once a leader of the non-aligned movement, ignore the hegemonistic ambitions and aggressive militarist interventions by the U.S. taking advantage of the unipolarity of the present global situation? Can the PM ignore the growing challenge to George Bush's foreign and domestic policies even inside the U.S. itself? Don't we, as a country need to steer clear of India being perceived as a strategic ally in the U.S. designs in the international arena?

While India has been mobilising support worldwide for its candidature for the enlarged Security Council of the United Nations, the U.S. administration has opposed India's claim and also the move to democratise the UN system itself. Dose this not call for at least some expression of resentment from the PM?

While the PM statement 'India is not for sale' is welcome, can we gloss over the plethora of concessions being doled out in the name of allowing inflow of FDI, financial sector reforms et al, which primarily benefits the MNCs of the USA. Economic policy measures aimed at appeasement of U.S. interests cannot go hand in hand with the claim of 'not selling the country cheap'.

It is necessary in India's interests to keep a safe distance from the U.S. administration. Any search for areas of convergence with it will only undermine India pursuing an independent foreign policy and finding synergies with other developing countries.

These concerns are not only of the Left; they are uppermost in the minds of the people of India. Will the Prime Minister care to address?

FORWARD TO COUNTRYWIDE GENERAL STRIKE ON SEP.29!

A largely attended national convention of Trade Unions held at the Mavlankar Auditorium in New Delhi on July 9, 2005 chalked out action programme, culminating in a countrywide general strike on September 29, 2005. The convention unanimously adopted a declaration (reproduced hereunder) containing a 16-point charter of demands. The Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions, comprising seven Central Trade Union Organisations viz. AITUC, AICCTU, CITU, HMS, TUCC, UTUC and UTUC-LS and all India Federations/Associations of employees and workers in Bank, Insurance, Railways, Central and State Govt. offices/departments, Telecom, Postal, Defence, Petroleum, Civil Aviation and other sectors had called the national convention. Over 1600 delegates representing the constituents of the sponsoring Committee and scores of independent unions attended the convention, and the Mavlankar Auditorium and the adjoining lawns were overflowing, reflecting the enthusiastic response to the call for immediate action.

The proceedings of the national convention were steered by a presidium comprising M.K.Pandhe (CITU), Amarjeet Kaur (AITUC) A.D. Nagpal (HMS), N.N. Thomas (AICCTU), Nripen Chatterjee (TUCC) Rajesh Kumar Raju (UTUC) Shambhu Nath Nayak (UTUC-LS) and others.

M.K.Pandhe, while placing the draft declaration and the action programme, pointed out that the UPA government at the centre had not taken any worthwhile measures to implement the pro-people commitments in the National Common Minimum Programme; instead it has been moving fast in the direction of expediting the anti-people reforms measures. The working class cannot countenance such a callous attitude of the government. Moreover, the hard earned rights of the workers are increasingly targeted for attacks. Hence the imminent need for the workers to take to the streets and stage massivie protest actions including strike.

Endorsing the declaration and the call for strike, Chittabrata Majumdar, general secretary, CITU, emphasized the need to take the campaign on the issues and demands to the people in both rural and urban India. He ridiculed the spurious plea of 'resource crunch' by the government and pointed to over Rs. 1 lakh crore of tax arrears mostly by high-end taxpayers and corporate sector and an equal amount owed by the same lobby to the nationalised banks, which are termed as non-performing assets. He cited lack of political will as the source of inaction to recover these outstandings and step up the tax-GDP ratio.
Gurudas Dasgupta (AITUC), Unraomal Purohit (HMS), Swapan Mukherjee (AICCTU), Shayam Charan Gaur (TUCC), Aboni Roy (UTUC), Krishna Chakroboty (UTUC-LS), J.P. Chaube (AIRF), C. H. Venkatachalam (Banks), S.K. Vyas (central government employees' confederation), Sukomal Sen (State government employees federation) K. Venugopal (Insurance), Dada Samant (TU JAC, Mumbai), Chandran Pillai (Postal) V.A.N. namboodri (Telecom), C. Kumar (Defence) Michel Fernades (JAC, Bangalore) D.P.,Dubey (FMRAI), Upadhyaya (GIC), Uniyal (Oil) and Santhanam (Airport authority) addressed the convention and pledged full support to the action programme.

Several organisations, whose leaders attended the convention, gave in writing to the presidium their unstinted support to the call for action.

The national convention has sounded the bugle. The working people of the country are on to a countrywide strike on September 29, to express their total resentment with the disastrous pursuit of anti-labour economic policies of liberalisation and privatisation.

NATIONAL CONVENTION OF TRADE UNIONS - DECLARATION

This National Convention of Trade Unions held in New Delhi on July 9, 2005, massively participated by the representatives of the constituents of the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions, while taking stock of the present challenges that confront the working people of India, adopts this DECLARATION.

The working people of India had welcomed the outcome of the general elections 2004, which resulted in the ouster of the National Democratic Alliance government, whose track record in office had been disastrous for all sections of the Indian society including the working people, except the vastly affluent few.

The United Progressive Alliance government assumed office at the centre in May 2004, in the backdrop of the utter failure of the BJP led NDA Government to tackle the basic problems of the country during its nearly six years rule; its total inability to contain recession, push up rate of investment, promote employment, ensure poverty alleviation, step up higher growth and economic development benefiting the common people; its inability even to provide food security to the hungry millions. It had instead given the multinationals substantial access to domestic savings, bringing about massive casualisation of work force and weakened the ability of the state to effectively intervene in the economy in favour of the vast majority of people who are close to destitution.

The trade union movement in the country denounced the Supreme Court pronouncement against the right to strike and demanded that the central government take appropriate steps to negate the pernicious impact of the said judgement of the Supreme Court.

During the past several years, the central trade unions and independent unions and federations in the country, had unitedly been on the move, launching campaigns and sustained struggles throughout the country and in different sectors, against these policies.

In this backdrop, the working people expected the UPA government to set out to act without any delay and carry out the tasks of giving immediate relief to the distressed working masses of the country. They also looked forward to the UPA government embarking on an exercise to bring about a pro-people shift in the economic policies.

The UPA government adopted a National Common Minimum Programme, which despite its manifest pro-reform stance did contain commitments to implement certain pro-people measures. But, the track record of the UPA government, in the last fourteen months in office, has rather been disappointing.

Though the UPA Government had, committed firmly 'that labour-management relations in our country must be marked by consultations, cooperation and consensus, not confrontation' and to actively pursue 'tripartite consultations with trade unions and industry on all proposals concerning them', several unilateral and arbitrary moves, which are of serious concern to the working people, had been initiated without any consultation whatsoever with the trade unions.

The apex tripartite forum in the country viz. the India Labour Conference had not been convened ever since the UPA government assumed office.

The promise that the UPA administration will enact a comprehensive legislation to guarantee minimum wage and to extend social protection to the vast multitude of agricultural labourers, had remained a dead letter.

Though the government had been indulging in patronising phrase mongering on ensuring the welfare and well being of workers in the unorganised sector, it has failed to respond to the unanimous demand of all the Central Trade Unions to legislate the Unorganised Sector Workers Bill, duly incorporating the suggested improvements.

The government had been harping on reversing the phenomenon of jobless growth and that the proposed Employment Guarantee legislation would be the "vehicle for providing income security to the poorest sections of society". But the fact remains that the Bill introduced and pending with the

Standing Committee of Parliament is a much diluted version of the draft of the National Advisory Council and just a mockery of the NCMP commitment even.

Despite the professed commitment to 'a strong and effective public sector' and that 'the profit-making companies will not be privatised', the government has already started the process of privatisation of profit-making PSUs through disinvestment moves. It has virtually redefined the very concept of public sector from 'wholly owned' to '51 per cent holding' by the government. The attempt by the Finance Minister to justify such moves as necessary for mobilising resources for social sector expenditure and for rehabilitation of sick PSUs is reprehensible. It indicates a mindset to abdicate the government responsibility for raising resources, through budgetary and taxation measures, to finance schemes aimed at welfare of the people.

Ever since the UPA government assumed office, it has imposed burdens on the common people by increasing the prices of petroleum products on four occasions. Repeated pleas to reduce the excise duty on oil, drop the additional road cess of 50 paise and take similar other measures in order to avert the increased burden on the people went unheeded.

Recently, the Labour Ministry in a press a release indicated "readiness to raise exemption limit for establishments seeking government permission for retrenchment/lay off from employing 100 employees to 300 employees under the ID Act". Such a move will bring more than 90 per cent of the establishments under the 'hire and fire regime'. This is resurrecting the much-resented recommendation from the discredited report of the Second National Commission on Labour! Here again, the NCMP commitment to 'reject automatic hire and fire regime' and to exclude "the Industrial Dispute Act from the labour laws that will be re-examined and procedures harmonised and streamlined" is merrily reneged!

In the name of dismantling 'Inspector Raj', the government has virtually abandoned its responsibility to enforce various labour legislations and the employers have been allowed to trample every rule and law severely hurting the interests of the workers. Proliferation of contracting, sub contracting and outsourcing has reached such dimensions that the threat of totally obliterating permanency and security of jobs looms large before the working people. The ban on recruitment in government jobs continues for years with no end and downsizing of work force ha s become the 'mantra' of the 21st century India! All these are leading to deterioration in the quality of employment.

There has been an alarming increase in the atrocities against women throughout the country. The Supreme Court had, as far back as August 1997, made recommendations and issued guidelines for a legislation to protect women workers from sexual harassment at work places. This is yet to receive the attention of the government.

The government is yet to initiate any tangible move to ensure the right to strike undoing the Supreme Court verdict.

Even long after expiry of the period of operation of the Fifth Pay Commission, the government is stubbornly refusing to constitute the Sixth Pay Commission, overturning the specific recommendation of the Fifth Pay Commission.

The present provisions in the Bonus Act, with the income ceilings for eligibility and calculation of Bonus, have virtually turned out an overwhelming majority of workers, almost the entire organised sector, outside the purview of the Bonus Act. Yet, the government is in no mood to amend the legislation.

The government resorted to an ordinance to legislate setting up a Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority to establish regulate and develop pension funds under the New Pension System, which is outright privatising of pension funds and diverting the contributions to the speculative stock markets. Furthermore, the UPA Finance Minister has announced in the budget 2005-06 opening of the 'pension sector' for FDI, along with retail trade and mining sectors!

The government proceeded to reduce the interest rate on Employees Provident Fund by resorting to decision by majority in the Central Board of Trustees. Though the Prime Minister subsequently intervened to restore the rate to 9.5. per cent, that assurance is also given a short shrift by dipping into the Special Reserve Fund earmarked for settlement of Provident Fund dues of defaulting employers

of closed establishments. The government is perpetuating the interest rate reduction down to 8 per cent on Special Deposit Scheme (SDS), GPF, CMPF, PPF, Small Savings etc.

The Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 is the only defined benefit pension scheme for non-governmental employees and workers. The Ministry of Labour has initiated moves aimed at reducing the benefit package under the Scheme, against the aspirations of the workers for improved benefits.

The government is wide opening the doors of for the aggressive influx of foreign investors, who are keen on taking over all sectors of the economy. Civil aviation, telecommunication, insurance, banking et al have been the targeted. The united voice of opposition to the arbitrary pronouncements on mega merger of public sector banks by the entire work force in the industry is sought to be brushed aside. Even the production units in defence sector are slated for privatisation through the corporatisation route. The glib talk of making every effort to modernise and restructure sick public sector companies and revive sick industry has remained an empty word.

The government has no hesitation in handing over the public utilities and services, including drinking water, to private and foreign hands for the plunder of profit. The Public Distribution System in the country today leaves much to be desired. But, the government in the name of 'targeting subsidies' is further weakening this only measure aimed to reach some succour to the impoverished and destitute families in both the urban and rural areas.

The review of the Electricity Act, 2003 is an unkept promise and the government has arbitrarily announced a National Electricity Policy in February 2005. The prescriptions for 'unbundling' of the State Electricity Boards, eliminate subsidies - including cross subsidy - and leading to deprivation of energy to rural areas remain intact with just a revised deadline.

Rural India, with intensification of poverty, misery, debt burden, starvation deaths and suicides is a picture of totals distress, crying for justice. The urgent need to implement meaningful land reform measures is not on the agenda of government. On the contrary, contract farming and corporatisation of agriculture are being pursued vigorously. The promised public investment for agriculture and irrigation are yet to materialise and institutional credit is unavailable to the vast majority of poor and middle peasants.

While the government is ever ready to counter every genuine demand of the working people and other masses with a spurious plea of lack of resources, there is no political will to crack the whip on tax defaults, black money, corporate debt default to banks and other financial institutions. There is a shocking revelation that a sum of Rs. 45000 crore of Non Performing Assets (read loan defaults) had been written off by the banking sector in recent years!

The working people and toiling masses of the country cannot countenance this all-round drift towards disaster.

We demand of the Government of India to immediately effect a directional change in its economic policies and take actions on the following urgent demands:

1. Enact comprehensive legislation on service conditions and social security for unorganised sector workers and agricultural workers with adequate government funding and effective monitoring system.
2. Suitably amend/change the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill to ensure employment guarantee for the rural and urban unemployed within a time frame in line with commitment made in NCMP.
3. Halt moves towards downsizing of work force and lift ban on recruitment; stop contractorisation.
4. Strengthen inspection and enforcement machinery to ensure strict implementation of all labour laws including statutory minimum wages in all sectors including SEZs and EPZs; no pro-employer changes in labour laws in the name of flexibility.
5. Enact legislation to prevent sexual harassment of women at work place and ensure full protection to women against atrocities.
6. Stop privatisation and disinvestment of profit making/ strategic sector PSUs including nationalised banks, telecom, airports, FCI etc; no privatisation of public services and utilities; stop merger of

banks; no corporatisation of defence production units.
7. Take urgent measures for revival of sick/loss making but potentially viable PSUs. Initiate steps for revival/rehabilitation of sick and closed industries and SSI units.
8. Rescind measures raising FDI cap in telecom sector and permitting FDI in defence sector; drop proposed raising of cap on FDI in banking and insurance sectors; halt step to allow FDI in coal, retail and pension sectors; withdraw amendment bills on Banking Regulation and Reserve Bank of India Acts.
9. Review Electricity Act, 2003 and the National Electricity Policy (announced on February 3, 2005); repeal provisions against cross-subsidisation and on unbundling and privatisation of SEBs; eliminate rural-urban divide; ensure supply to rural areas, agricultural sector and urban weaker sections.
10. Undertake immediate legislative measures to ensure right to strike for all workers and employees including in Govt. services.
11. Constitute Sixth Pay Commission for the Govt. employees.
12. Remove ceilings on eligibility and calculation in Payment of Bonus Act.
13. Raise interest rates on EPF, GPF, CMPF, PPF and small savings instruments by raising the administered rate of interest; scrap New Pension System and the PFRDA Bill; restore the pre-2004 pension scheme for the new entrants in Govt. services.
14. Carry out land reforms and step up public investment for irrigation facilities.
15. Strengthen public distribution system and check price-rise of essential commodities.
16. Take stringent measures for recovering NPAs and unpaid tax arrears from the defaulters in the corporate and big business lobby.

To press for immediate realisation of these demands, this all India Convention of central trade unions and independent federations/unions, calls upon the workers, irrespective of affiliations, to unitedly carry out the countrywide action programme as under:

Action Programme

20th July to 20th August 2005: State level and district level and sectoral conventions
27th August to 7th September 2005: Demonstrations/rallies and dharnas in all workplaces, industrial centres culminating in Stae/District level rallies
15th September 2005: Observance of NATIONAL MOBILISATION DAY and serving of Strike notice
29th September 2005: Countrywide General Strike

Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions

(Central Trade Union Organisations viz. AITUC, AICCTU, CITU, HMS, TUCC, UTUC and UTUC-LS and all India Federations/Associations of employees and workers in Bank, Insurance, Railways, Central and State Govt. offices/departments, Telecom, Postal, Defence, Petroleum, Civil Aviation and other sectors)

COM. BIPLAB DASGUPTA

We record with deep regret the sudden demise of Com. Biplab Dasgupta at Kolkata on July 18, 2005. He was unwell for quite some time and hospitalised at Kolkata.

Com. Dasgupta was a leading figure in the democratic movement of the country and in West Bengal in particular. As an office bearer of the All India Kisan Sabha, he played a prominent role in the advancement of the common struggle; he had authored a number of books and contributed several articles on topical issues. His writings had served to highlight the agrarian crisis, penury of the peasantry and the rural distress in the country. His has been an invaluable contribution to the debate of the World Trade Organisation related issues.

He was also a member of the central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay homage to the memory of Com. Biplab Dasgupta and convey our deep condolences to all the aggrieved comrades and to his wife Com. Arati and his son.

NEW PENSION SYSTEM - A MISLEADING TWIST

Yet another deliberate twist being given to this debate is the government claim that this move and the New Pension System will cater to the needs of the informal (unorganised) sector workers, who do not have any social security plan that addresses their need for protection during old age,

India does not have a universal public social security plan. What we have is at best occupational earnings related pension schemes only for the civil servants and workers covered under the Employees' Provident Fund Act and certain other statutes.

Even a cursory glance of the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Bill, which is only aimed at putting in place a regulatory mechanism for the New Pension System, will reveal that this is not intended for the benefit of the workers in the informal (unorganised) sector. There is a provision in the Bill for making available the New Pension System, on a voluntary basis, to all persons including self employed professionals and others in the unorganised sector. But, it has amply been made clear that there will be no contribution from the government for them.

The major problem in extending social security benefits to the unorganised sector arise from the fact that they lack formal and steady employment throughout the year, the migratory nature of the workers and the low wages they receive, which makes it impossible for them to earmark even a small portion of today's earnings as contributions for receiving a social security benefit during their old age.

The world over it has been accepted that social security should be a multi-pillar arrangement of which the first pillar should be a benefit defined, tax financed social assistance scheme catering to the absolutely poor and destitute, which in Indian conditions comprise the workers of the unorganised or informal sector. The government is not lifting the little finger even for putting in place this first pillar of social security, despite tall talk of 'social safety net' and giving a 'human face' to the reforms process.

The cruel fact is that the government is insisting that even the informal (unorganised) sector workers should 'buy' their own social security and that the government will not extend any funding. We, therefore, reject with contempt the claim that the New Pension System will address the concerns of the unorganised sector workers. We shall, however, continue to press the government for initiating measures to usher in a really beneficial social security scheme to cater to the needs of the unorganised sector workers. In this connection we need to pursue with the UPA government to sincerely implement the commitment in the national Common Minimum Programme that, " The UPA government is firmly committed to ensure the welfare and well-being of all workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector who constitute 93% of our workforce. Social security, health insurance and other schemes for such workers like weavers, handloom workers, fishermen and fisherwomen, toddy tappers, leather workers, plantation labour, beedi workers, etc will be expanded".

COM. P. VASUDEVAN NAIR

We record with deep grief the passing away of Com. P. Vasudevan Nair, at New Delhi on July 15, 2005. He was ailing for some time and was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Science. Com. PCV, as he was popularly known, was a veteran leader of the communist and democratic movement in the country and a former Chief Minister of Kerala. At the time of death he was a member of the Lok Sabha and leader of the Parliamentary Group of the Communist Party of India. Com. PCV was a consistent champion of the interests of the working people. The CITU and 'The Working Class' pay respectful homage to the memory of Com. P. Vasudevan Nair.

ISOLATE COMMUNAL FORCES! FIGHT ECONOMIC POLICIES!

Chittabrata Majumdar

The 14 months of UPA governance has witnessed pursuit of the neo-liberal policy framework as a continuity of the NDA Government's economic policies and demonstrated its failure to initiate pro-people measures as outlined in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP). As a matter of fact, in a few cases it has been a straightforward violation of NCMP.

The content of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill introduced in Parliament has been so diluted that it made a mockery of the NCMP commitments. Till now the government has not taken any step to bring the promised legislation for the unorganised sector workers, including a meaningful social security scheme for them, in spite of repeated demands from the trade unions. The government only re-circulated the earlier draft bill by NDA government, which was rejected by the trade unions, without taking into consideration the unanimous suggestions made by the trade unions.

Serious labour-management confrontation is occurring in many areas of the country, because of violation of existing labour laws by the employers in connivance with the law-enforcing authorities. Trade unions, especially CITU unions, are not being registered for years in states like Punjab, U.P., M.P., Haryana, Rajasthan, etc. The UPA government, instead of being proactive, is totally passive. PF and ESI laws are mostly violated in unorganised sector and government instead of monitoring the same is talking of ending "inspector raj", which only means, "free corporate and contractor raj". In this background, the Labour Ministry is understood to have been moving with the idea of amending the Industrial Disputes Act to increase the threshold limit of employment from existing 100 to 300 for the establishments, where 'hire & fire' regime will be allowed.

On major issues like contemplated merger of banks, FDI in Banks, telecom, civil aviation, retail sector, etc. government is taking policy decisions without any discussion with trade unions, without any consensus despite their opposition.

Right to Strike is not being legislated thus giving a free hand to judiciary to curtail or even impose a ban on right to strike by the workers in different parts of the country. Sector wise tripartite industrial committees have not been formed so far, in spite of continuous pursuit by the trade unions.

On the whole, commitments in the NCMP regarding labour have merely remained on paper, because of indifference of the UPA government. The UPA government started its tenure on wrong footing on public sector. One of its first decisions was to privatise Delhi and Mumbai Airports of Airport Authority of India (AAI) through joint venture route.

The major aberration comes in the case of disinvestments in profit making PSUs; the NCMP does not mention the word "disinvestments" to fill the government coffer at all. Finance Ministry, taking advantage of the clause "(PSUs) to be encouraged to enter the capital market to raise resources", goaded the NTPC to go for 5% IPO in the market and riding piggy back on the same, disinvested 5% govt shares. The government delinked disinvestments from the budget but has made a policy decision to disinvest 49% government equity in all profit making PSUs through executive decision, starting with the navaratnas. After NTPC, government has removed the smoke screen of IPO and already decided to disinvest 10% shares of BHEL, 10 to 20% shares in NALCO, Power Grid Corporation, Shipping Corporation, etc. These decisions are being taken up in spite of the reservation of concerned PSUs or their nodal ministries, as was evident in the case of NALCO. Such creeping privatisation is a serious violation of the NCMP and an act of sabotage of the national interests, which must be fought tooth and nail by the working

class.
The revival of sick PSUs is being totally neglected. Till now Board of Reconstruction for Public Sector Enterprises (BRPSE), formed for the purpose of revival, has dealt with the revival plan of only two PSUs.

Employment generation is being redefined as reckless recourse to 'contracting', 'sub-contracting' and 'outsourcing' and merrily resorted to in PSUs also.
The record, therefore, of the government is utterly dismal and unless the government is given a jolt, it will continue to refuse to have a re-look on their approach to public sector.

In the infrastructure sector, the NCMP mandated the government to review Electricity Act, 2003. It took about a year for the government to start such a review through a structural mechanism, after the employees threatened a strike from 31st May 2005. Though the government assured that there would no unbundling of Electricity Boards and cross subsidy would be maintained, based on which the strike was withdrawn, the government went back on its word as the Prime Minister expressed contrary views on the issue in the conference of State Power Secretaries.

The budget session has witnessed the effort of the UPA government to get the disastrous Patent Amendment Bill, which has been a carbon copy of the NDA's proposed legislation, passed as it is. The determined resistance by the Left MPs in Parliament ultimately compelled the UPA government to incorporate most of the amendments proposed by the Left, which have moderated, at least to some extent, the pernicious impact of the original bill.

Similarly, strong intervention by the Left MPs, in the case of the Special Economic Zones Bill, compelled the government to drop the retrograde provisions enabling grant of exemptions, both by the State and Central Governments, to the SEZ establishments from the obligations under labour laws.
The government resorted to a series of offensives by way of privatising of pension funds, perpetuating the interest rate reduction down to 8 per cent by the previous NDA regime on GPF, PPF, CMPF, Small Savings etc., effecting adverse changes in the benefit package under the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 and unilaterally deciding to launch the 2001 series of Consumer Price Index.
We should launch an intensive campaign on these issues of immediate concern to the working class.
The socio-political atmosphere in the country is still marked by the aggressive onslaughts by the communal forces, which have still not reconciled to they being ousted from power at the centre in the elections 2004. Despite apparent internal disarray in the 'sangh parivar', they constantly try to exploit every conceivable opportunity to spread the communal venom and incite orgy and violence targeting the unity of the people. Hence, we should not lose sight of the immense potential of the hindutva forces to revive their agenda and damage the secular fabric of the Indian society. We have to continue our vigilance over the overt and covert moves of the communal forces; we must constantly struggle to isolate these forces and preserve people's unity; we must checkmate the attempts of the rabid communal forces to stage an early come back to power.
The UPA government has been exhibiting a lukewarm attitude on implementation of the pro-people measures contained in the NCMP and also seeks to pursue the disastrous policies of economic reforms, which had during the earlier NDA regime derailed the entire economy. This situation calls for building up a powerful popular resistance to reverse the anti-people economic policies and force a directional change.

In carrying forward these twin tasks, we have to increase manifold our independent initiatives, along with steps to be taken to implement the joint action programme chalked out by the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Unions. In this connection, we have to take all efforts to develop joint movements with all other trade unions. We have to launch extensive campaign based on the 16-point demands, jointly and independently, carrying it on in a sustained manner up to September 2005 and ensure successful implementation of the countrywide strike on September 29!

COAL: WAGE AGREEMENT ACHIEVED THROUGH STRUGGLE

M K Pandhe

After a long drawn united struggle, the coal workers succeeded in forcing the Government of India to accept most of the major economic demands of the six-lakh coal workers. This agreement was concluded ahead of a weeklong strike from July 18 to 24 planned by the five federations of coal workers affiliated to CITU, INTUC, AITUC, HMS and BMS.

Initially, the ministry and bureaucracy planned to tackle the strike situation by threatening to dissolve the Joint Bipartite Committee for Coal Industry (JBCCI) and by invoking ESMA. But as the preparatory campaign of the strike picked up, Dasari Narayan Rao, Minister of State for Coal, realised that it would aggravate the situation, causing serious disturbance in coal supply, since after third day of the strike, the thermal power plants in the country would come to a grinding halt. Import of coal was also thought of but the high cost of imported coal in the international market ruled out that possibility. The Port & Dock workers also declared that they would refuse to unload imported coal in the event the government moves to break the strike of coal workers. In this backdrop, final negotiation commenced on 9th July 2005, at the residence of the Minister and talks continued throughout the night. The strike was averted as an understanding was reached on all the points raised by the trade unions. The drafting committee met on 14th July 2005 and the final agreement was signed by the JBCCI on 15TH July in the presence of the Minister. The total payment including the arrears works out to be Rs 7500 crore.

The National Coal Wage Agreement, the NCWA-VII, effective from 1st July 2001 has become a pace setter for the entire public sector workers' movement. Besides achieving the highest level of minimum wages, this wage agreement has secured full neutralisation in respect of DA, within a five-year settlement, nullifying the directive of the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) prescribing a benchmark of ten-year duration. The splendid display of unity and determination for struggle by six lakh coal workers has culminated in this success. The same spirit of united struggle was witnessed in the fight against privatisation move of the coalmines during the past years. This path breaking achievement by the coal workers has many a lesson for the entire public sector trade union movement.

STRIKE PREPARATION

The strike was slated to take place on the eve of monsoon session of Parliament, which could have caused difficulty and embarrassment for the UPA government. Hence the Prime Minister, who is also in charge of the Coal portfolio, directed the Coal Ministry to settle the issues and avert the strike, before his departure to USA on July 16.

The National Coal Wage Agreement-VI expired on June 30, 2001 and the new wage agreement was supposed to come into effect from 1st July 2001. The coal workers movement had to plan and prepare for united strike action a number of times during the last four years on the issue of wage revision. The massive campaign and preparatory movements for long-drawn strike action throughout the coal industry witnessed a spontaneous participation of the mass of coal workers. The workers at the grass root level raised the slogan of an indefinite strike, if their demands were not met.

The NDA regime delayed the constitution of JBCCI for over two years. Only a strike threat by the coal workers compelled the NDA government to constitute the JBCCI and also to grant interim relief of 15% of basic pay from January 1, 2004. Under the UPA regime also, the coal management persisted with their dilatory and negative tactics. In September 2004, coal workers called for another nationwide strike. On the eve of strike, the Coal India management commenced negotiations and agreed to raise the Minimum Basic Wage of the coal workers from Rs 3300 to Rs 5500 and the rate of annual increment to 2.5% —3% of basic pay. Most importantly, it

was agreed that the settlement would be applicable to all coal workers including those working in ECL and BCCL, which the government was refusing on the ground that these loss-making companies were before the BIFR.

FULL NEUTRALISATION

The previous Coal Wage Agreement provided that the workers drawing basic wage above Rs 6500 would receive only 75% DA neutralisation, thereby depriving the major chunk of the coal workers. CITU opposed this and declared the new wage agreement would not be signed without full neutralisation. Ultimately, all the trade unions had to raise this demand, due to pressure from the ranks.

The government appointed a 'Group of Ministers' headed by Pranab Mukherjee to discuss the wage negotiations issues under dispute. The trade unions jointly informed the GoM of their firm stand on full neutralisation. The DPE had issued a directive to all the public sector undertakings that 100 per cent DA neutralisation (above the wage level of RS 6500) would be allowed only if the period of wage agreement is 10 years. But confronted with the weeklong strike call, the government threw overboard the directive of DPE and accepted full DA neutralisation, even for a five-year settlement. Thus, Coal is the only industry, which could achieve Full neutralisation DA even for a five-year wage settlement, frustrating the restrictive anti-worker directive of the government and the DPE.

CITU congratulated the coal workers for the remarkable achievement, which has been possible owing to the unity and determination to fight, demonstrated magnificently by six lakh coal workers.

There are other policy issues concerning the coal industry over which also the coal workers must carry on a sustained struggle. These relate to formulation of a national coal policy, assigning the status of infrastructure Industry to it, stopping the practice of outsourcing (out of 325 million tonnes of coal produced in the country today, 175 million tonnes are outsourced), extending JBCCI wages to the entire industry including workers in the private sector, curb illegal mining, root out corruption and theft of coal, improving the safety conditions in coal mines etc. CITU will continue its efforts to highlight these issues and mobilse the coal workers for further struggles

Major features of Coal Agreement

- Period of settlement 5 years (not 10 years as prevalent in other PSUs
- Full DA neutralisation.
- Minimum Basic wage was raised to Rs 5500 as on 1-07-2001 from existing Rs 3300/- (highest in all PSUs as on that date)
- Rate of increment ranged from 2.5% to 3% of basic pay, minimum Rs 139 and maximum Rs 300.
- On account of 10% quarterly bonus, which is also treated as basic pay, increase in consequential benefits of Rs 99.62 at the minimum level.
- Guaranteed benefit: 15% of basic pay as on 30-06-2001 plus Rs 300/- or Rs 1185.39, whichever is higher.
- Underground Allowance: up to Rs 9000 basic pay-10%,. above Rs 9000/- basic-12.5%. At minimum level, UG Allowance increased by more than Rs 200/- per month.
- Increase in other allowances: Washing allowance from Rs 50 to Rs 60 per month; Transport Subsidy-from Rs 5/- to Rs 7 per day; Additional Transport subsidy from Rs 7 to Rs 10; Conveyance Reimbursement from Rs 10 to Rs 15 per day....etc.
- First class rail travel for Leave Travel Concessions (LTC/LLTC) to almost all workers (from Rs 5850 basic)
- The workers who have not been provided standard quarters will receive Rs 100 per month as HRA, while no rent will be charged for the standard house provided to the workers.
- 30 units of electricity free of charge, free supply of coal or reimbursement of cost of 14.5 kg of LPG.
- Rs 40,000 under Life Cover Scheme over and above gratuity. In case of permanent/ total disablement Rs. 30,000 over and above payment under Workmen's Compensation Act.
- The existing provisions relating to employment of dependents will continue till a new scheme is jointly framed.
- Trainees, deployed in regular production jobs, will be paid category-1 wages.

93RD CONFERENCE OF ILO

Tapan Sen

The 93rd Conference of the International Labour Organisation was held on May 31 - June 16, 2005 at Geneva.

The Conference was held in such a backdrop of deepening crisis of the World Capitalist system that the President of the Conference Alsalim, who is also the Labour Minister of Jordan, had to open his address to the conference saying "Globalisation and Liberalisation have become great challenges that the international community must confront in order to minimise their negative repercussions ... this situation is making it increasingly difficult for our organisation (the ILO) to carry out its mission."

The Director General of ILO, Juan Somavia, while presenting his report before the conference, stated "... clearly the world in facing a global job crisis, in quantity and quality.... Many Govts. enterprises and workers are asking themselves, `where is this unbridled global competition taking us?"

Director General further had to observe, "The global job crisis is the most pressing political issue of our time ... Surprisingly the interconnection between growth, investment and jobs is missing from today's political agenda". While dealing on the policies of globalization in this backdrop, the Director General of ILO had to admit in his address, "Prevailing policies have failed us in too many places. We need to have the honesty and courage to review the policies that brought us here. There is a growing sense that the Global economy has evolved in an ethical vacuum with policies, which, many feel, are organized too much around market values and too little around human values. As per estimate of the Swiss Bank UBS, even in the G-7 economies as a whole, the share of profits in national income has never been so higher but labour's share of the cake has never been so lower..... The warning light is blinking on today's global economy..... Questions about the direction of globalisation continue to grow and are asked by protestors on the streets and anxious workers on the job, by struggling families in their communities and by worried citizens in the voting booth as we have seen in so many places.....simply put, we must repair the disconnect between economic growth and job creation, rebalance priorities, revalue work and target the right investment policies'. While quoting Late Pope John Paul-II, Somavia said that "the economic system in which we live must not upset the fundamental order of the priority of work over capital, of the common good over private interest." Even, the Guest speaker in the conference, Abdelaziz Bouteflica, President of Algeria, had stated based on his Algerian experience of globalisation, " Unemployment is a major problem..... This is a major challenge, which we face now at a time when human values are gradually being squeezed out of the labour market. Hence we must not allow ourselves to be swept aside by post modernist mercantilism. We should always, everywhere, remember and fight for the idea that capital is the product of human labour and that it is therefore up to the democratic states to take whatever measures necessary to ensure that profit motive does run counter to the legitimate aspiration of men and women to a decent work paid too for all."

But regarding the way out of this vicious phenomenon of increasing poverty and unemployment for the billions along with galloping profit for the handfuls, the Director General of ILO remained meticulously evasive in his report. DG prescribed joint tripartite exercise by the employers, Govt. and the workers to be the only way out. DG remained deliberately silent about the waves of strike struggles by the working class that were witnessed even in the advanced industrialized countries since the last conference of ILO held in June 2004, against the onslaught on their rights by the Govts and employers combine. DG refused to note that the united struggle by the working class against the neoliberal policies can only make meaningful tripartism a reality.

Perhaps, it has become fashionable for the modern elites in the society to speak eloquently on the negative impacts of the neoliberal policy-

packages on the mass of the people, while unscrupulously pleading for reconciling with the same policies and their mentor-class. Can hypocrisy go further ?

The DG's idea about finding a solution to the crisis through tripartism (?) has been appropriately retorted by various workers' representatives in the conference. Notable is what is spoken by Com. Gonzalez, the workers' representatives from Cuba. He said, "the desire of Director General to achieve decent work for all is laudable, but it will not be possible without changing the rules of today's world order". More forthright was the workers' representative from Venezuela, Com. Jesus Asdrubal Diaz when he stated, "The struggle continues, you do not beg for your demands to be met, you fight and only the people can save the people."

During the conference, the employers' organisations and many of the governments literally mocked at the prescription of the Director General on so called tripartism. The Convention on the working conditions of the workers of Fishing Sector, the text of which has been finalised by the tripartite committee appointed by the conference itself, was voted out by the Governments and the employers. The Conference passed the new Convention on occupational health and safety; but owing to consistent resistance by the governments and employers, its content has drastically been diluted. In the discussion on "Youth employment and Decent work", the governments of the developed countries and the employers group as a whole stubbornly resisted any critical reference to the policies of globalisation. But, due to intervention by Tapan Sen (CITU, India) from the workers' side, the conclusion finally drawn recorded that policies of globalisation require to be reformed for greater employment generation and decent work. Still the conclusion remain weak in terminolgy, leaving room for misinterpretation.

The committee on Application of standards, besides scrutinising various complaints of violation of ratified conventions in different countries, also held a general discussion on "hours of work" on the basis of a paper circulated by ILO titled " Hours of work, from fixed to flexible?" The ILO document on the plea of fast changing practices in different countries pleaded for flexible working hours within over all limit to be prescribed. The trade union representatives in the committee voiced a strong opposition to the idea of empowering the employers on this count.

The ILO conference also held a special discussion on "Forced labour" on the basis of a paper circulated in the conference titled " A Global Alliance against forced labour". The ILO document revealed that even in the developed industrialised countries, there have been various forms of forced labour, not to speak of the developing countries. In the discussions held in the conference, the trade union representatives from various countries pointed out the close linkage with the fast informalisation of the production relations being promoted by the neoliberal policies and the emergence of modern forced labour in the workplaces world wide. Sankar Saha (UTUC-LS) while speaking in the session on behalf of Indian Workers' delegation, pointed out, that "no amount of humanitarian appeal and social dialogue can put an end to this most uncivilized instrument of pursuing profit, unless the process of informalising formal production relations through contractorisation and casualisation etc. is stalled through all embracing legal and prohibitive framework and its strict implementation. The fashion of so called deregulation and flexibility of labour market cannot go together with the idea of putting an end of forced labour." Md Amin, Labour Minister, Govt of West Bengal also addressed this session on behalf of the Govt delegation from India and stressed upon the urgent steps to be taken to bring about an end to the phenomenon of forced labour with the joint initiative of all the social partners. John Pierre Page also addressed the session on forced labour on behalf of WFTU.

The ILO conference was attended by a six member delegation from trade unions. Md Amin, Labour Minister of West Bengal also attended as Govt. delegate. BMS representatives boycotted the conference in protest against Govt.'s arbitrary decision in selecting workers' delegate. N. Adwiantaya from INTUC was elected in the governing body of ILO along with I P Anand from employers Group as Deputy member.

UNILATERAL MOVE TO LAUNCH NEW PRICE INDEX SERIES

W. R. Varada Rajan

The Labour Bureau of Shimla is entrusted with the task of compiling and publishing the Consumer Price Index for industrial workers. Presently the Index is published with the base year 1982=100. The Regional Computer Centre (RCC) of Labour Bureau, based at Chandigarh, carries out the work of tabulation of the prices for compiling the index. This index is being used mostly for calculation of the Dearness Allowance for the workers in the organised sector, where the payment of D.A is linked to cost of living index. The 1982 series has also a linking factor to the 1960 series. With this linking factor the 1982 index figures can be converted to the 1960 index figures and used for calculation of dearness allowance, where such payment is based on 1960 series.

The Labour Bureau has now embarked on launching a new series of price index with the base year 2001=100. The new series is ready for launch. The Minister of Labour decided that before the launch of the new series, a tripartite index users' meeting be convened. Accordingly a tripartite meeting was held in May this year at Shimla.

A note on the methodology for compilation of price index on base 2001=100 was placed for discussion at the tripartite meeting. The Technical Advisory Committee on Statistics of Prices and Cost of Living (TAC) has, reportedly, approved this discussion note.

ARBITRARY MOVES

This exercise for updating the base year was actually initiated during 1987, with the aim of launching a new series with 1991-92 as base year. The International Labour Organisation has recommended updating the base year for price index compilation every five years. In any case, the Family Income and Expenditure Surveys need to be conducted at intervals of not more than 10 years. The TAC remitted the scheme proposed by the Labour Bureau in 1987 for updating the series to be examined by a Working Group constituted for the purpose. This resulted in an inordinate administrative delay, because of which the actual work could be started only in 1997. Based on the recommendations of the Working Group, issues like coverage of workers, selection of centres, reference period, fixation of sample size etc. were decided by the TAC. The TAC entrusted the fieldwork for conducting the income and expenditure survey to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). The survey was conducted in 78 centres between September 1999 and August 2000. TAC considered the data collected by the NSSO and tabulated by the RCC in August 2001. The Labour Bureau since then started compiling the new series of index using the prices pertaining to the calendar year 2001. Labour Bureau claims that with this entire backdrop, the index with new base (2001=100) is ready for release.

Labour Bureau is the only institution under the Ministry of Labour, which has consistently been kept outside the ambit of any tripartite consultation and dialogue process. The TAC has been exercising arbitrary powers in deciding all matters connected with the methodology and compilation of consumer price index.

The updating of the series of consumer price index is supposed to be based on latest consumption pattern of working class population. There are, no doubt, changes in the consumption pattern of working class families. But, the family income and expenditure survey, which is expected to mirror the change in consumption pattern, has been conducted in an arbitrary manner. After this survey, the Labour Bureau decides on a 'fixed basket' (of consumption) and collects price data only in respect of articles/items of consumption contained in the 'fixed basket'. These items of consumption are divided into six consumption groups like food, fuel, housing, clothing, etc. and further sub-divided into sub-groups. Each group/ sub-group is accorded a weightage in deciding the 'fixed (consumption) basket'. The price data is collected in different centres spread all over the country. Each centre is accorded specified weightage, related to the size of working population, for the purpose of arriving at an all

India average. The Labour Bureau and the TAC claim that the new series has addressed all the deficiencies noted in connection with the present 1982 series.

The working people and the trade union movement have been expressing apprehensions over the procedure followed by Labour Bureau in compilation of price index. The common perception is that the index figures released by the Labour Bureau fail to correctly reflect the inflation or price rise at the ground level.

In 1977, the Government of India constituted an Index Review Committee, known as Rath committee. It considered the Labour Bureau proposal for launch of a new series with 1971 as base year. Rath Committee report recommended, inter alia, constitution of a tripartite standing advisory committee at the all India level, as also at the state level.

The Government of India chose not to implement the recommendations of the Rath Committee. It also abandoned the then move to release a new series with base year 1971. Later, the government went in for the 1982 series and appointed yet another committee (Seal Committee) and got the 1982 series cleared for release. While the Rath Committee had representation from the trade unions, the Seal Committee comprised merely experts and officials. The government, however, accepted the Seal Committee report, though several of its recommendations remained unimplemented.

UNANIMOUS OPPOSITON

When the Labour Bureau took up the exercise of conducting a family income and expenditure survey in 1998-99, with a view to launch the new series, the central trade unions protested against lack of prior consultations. The AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS, and INTUC jointly addressed a letter to the then Labour Minister (M P Veerendra Kumar) urging: "There is a need to review several maladies which have occurred in the collection of price data and compilation of index without properly correcting the 1981-82 series, the introduction of the new series is likely to depress the index. It will also affect the conversion factor of the new series with the old series."

The Government of India paid no heed to the plea of the major central trade unions and proceeded with its unilateral move.

It is in this backdrop that all the representatives of the central trade unions, during the tripartite meeting in May 2005, opposed the release of the 2001 series of price index. (See box for the text of a joint letter handed over to the secretary, Labour & Employment, at the meeting).

INADEQUACIES GALORE

During the meeting, the trade unions pointed out some of the glaring inadequacies and deficiencies noticed in the compilation of the proposed 2001. They are:

- The new series covers only following six sectors: Factories, Mines, Plantations, Port & Dock, Public Motor Undertakings, Electricity Generation and distribution and Railways. Several sources analyzing the economic growth in the present times in our country point out that the share of services sector in the GEDP has gone up significantly while the share of mining and manufacture had declined. In this context, limiting the present exercise to only these six sectors needs to be closely examined. (There may be an argument that as a separate series of price index is published for the Urban Non-Manual Employees (popularly known as middle class index), the question of factoring in the services sector is not advisable. But, the fact remains that in several service sector wage agreements, like banks, insurance, etc, the union have chosen to follow only the working class index).
- The list of selected centres for conducting the survey, as also for compiling price-data, include 9 new centres and drop 6 centres under the 1982 series. This has been done without any consultations with either workers' side or employers' side.
- The data presented reveal an increase of 11 per cent in the workforce in the 78 centres covered. The weightage assigned to each center in compilation of all India average is also based on the data collected of the working population at these centres. These data have been collected from the returns filed by establishments of the six selected sectors, under the various legislations applicable to them. This data requires careful scrutiny, as it is widely reported that there is huge default by establishments in filing of returns and incidence of faulty returns is also widespread.

TEXT OF JOINT LETTER BY CENTRAL TRADE UNIONS

"We are in agreement with the objective, outlined by the Labour Bureau, of updating the existing series of the Consumer Price Index (1982=100) and to bring out a new series with a more recent base year.

"We, however, wish to point out that such a tripartite exercise involving representatives of employees, employers and State/Central Governments ought to have taken place at the starting point itself. In fact, the Central Trade Union organisations had, during 1998-99, urged successive Labour Ministers to hold discussions on the entire question of conducting the Family Income and Expenditure Survey to avoid any unilateral steps by the Labour Bureau. Unfortunately, there was no response. Naturally, we feel that the present tripartite meeting convened at the culminating point of release of the new Consumer Price Index, making it a fait accompli, is not in keeping with the ethos of tripartism.

"Moreover, the Central Trade Union Organisations have jointly represented to the Union Minister of Labour & Employment, immediately after the present UPA government assumed office at the center, requesting inter-alia, appointment of a review committee to go into the question of compilation of consumer price index.

"In this connection, we recall the recommendation of the committee on Consumer Price Index Numbers (Rath Committee) in its report of 1978 that at all India level a `Standing Committee consisting of representatives of trade unions and organizations of employers, the chairman of TAC and the Director, Labour Bureau should be constituted in the Ministry of Labour.' This was envisaged as a continuing forum for consultations on matters relating to the index. There was also a similar recommendation for constitution of state level tripartite standing committees for periodical scrutiny of the price data and examine other related issues.

"Besides, there have been occasions in the past, where certain deficiencies in the process of compilation of consumer price indices had been pointed out by several quarters.

"We are, therefore, of the firm view that all substantive issues connected with the updating of the consumer price index, such as selection of the base year, conduct of family income and expenditure surveys, methodology of index compilation, selection of centres, methods of sampling, agencies for carrying out the necessary surveys, process of price collection and compilation et al, should thoroughly be deliberated in a tripartite forum de novo.

"We urge the Ministry of Labour to initiate early tripartite consultations to address the concerns raised herein above for taking positive steps in this regard.

"In view of the above, we express our opposition to the release of the new series of Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (2001+100) as presented in this tripartite meeting".

■ There are wide variations in the centre weightages for arriving at the all India average between the 2001 series and 1982 series. The weightage has declined in respect of 42 centres and increased only in the case of 22 centres. The decline, for example, for Kolkata, is from 4.24 (182) to 1.51 (2001) and for Bangalore from 3.27 to 1.95, while the increase for Mumbai is from 7.87 to 9.57. These variations need to be scruitinised carefully. These are only illustrative and not exhaustive.

■ The work relating to consumer price index has three stages: (1) the preliminary stage of evolving the methodology, conducting of family income-expenditure-survey, deciding the fixed basket (consumption), assigning weightage, selection of centres, etc. (2) the second stage of collection of price-data at selected centres, the status of price collection machinery and (3) the final stage of actual compilation and release of index by the Labour Bureau at Shimla and the Regional Computer Centre at Chandigarh. The existing processes at all these three stages require complete overhaul and drastic improvements. The whole process requires transparency, tripartite consultations and constant

monitoring.

■ The trade unions must be allowed representation in the Technical Advisory Committee, which is vested with all decision-making.

These are only a few of the faults pointed out by the trade unions.

DANGER AHEAD

At the Shimla meeting, the employers' and some government representatives also raised several objections. But, at the end all of them, however, agreed for the launch of the new series.

The Labour Secretary had to accept that it was a lapse that no tripartite meeting at the central level was convened at the initial stage of the work relating to compilation of the new series. He also assured to take up the issue of making the functioning of the Labour Bureau transparent and participatory. He also agreed to take up for consideration of according representation to both the employees and employers in the Technical Advisory Committee. But, he tried to go ahead with the launch of the new series under the plea that there was no compulsion for the employees' and employers' organisations to use the new series only for Dearness Allowance purposes and they can continue to use the 1982 or 1960 series.

The workers' side pointed out that once the 2001 series was launched, the 1982 series would be discontinues as was the case during the past and the linking factor alone would be used to convert the index figures into 1982 or 1960 series. If the index itself was defective, linking factor also would be defective and the workers would stand to lose. Hence, all the trade unions reiterated their opposition. The Labour Secretary concluded the meeting stating that tripartism is a three-legged race and if one leg is not willing to go along with the rest, there cannot be any movement.

It was evident during the meeting that the Finance Ministry was pushing for a go ahead for the launch of the new series. Dr. Tarun Das, Advisor, Finance Ministry, who was leading his team, also conveyed that a committee had been set up for working out the modalities of publishing a Producers' Price Index in lieu of the present Wholesale Price Index. The Labour Secretary rounded off the meeting conveying that he would brief the Labour Minister of the proceeding of the tripartite meeting.

Despite the unanimous opposition from the trade unions, the danger of the Government of India unilaterally deciding to launch the 2001 series of Consumer Price Index is very much a possibility. This must be resisted.

DUBIOUS, ANTI-WORKER ACTIVITIES CONDEMNED

Divya Yoga Mandir Trust (DYMT) is a huge business in the name of god and yoga; from a scratch it has grown into a sprawling complex worth hundreds of crores of rupees and is patronised by the rich and powerful. Some state governments too also going out of the way to pamper Baba Ramdev and the so-called trust. Some time ago, the trust started producing so-called Ayurvedic drugs in a number of pharmacies, employing 400 workers, most of whom are women. These drugs are being sold at exorbitant prices, but the workers are not paid even the minimum wage. There is no record of their employment and therefore no system of provident fund or any other statutory benefit.

The workers, united under the CITU's banner, went in on an agitation and a tripartite agreement was signed in the office of the DLC, Haridwar, on May 21 this year. The agreement enjoined upon the trust to pay statutory minimum wage to the workers and reinstate all dismissed workers. But on May 22 the trust refused to take the workers back; on the contrary, it implicated many workers in false police cases. The workers are still continuing their agitation for implementation of the May 21 agreement. The CITU has demanded that the Uttaranchal government must enforce the agreement and not allow the administration to be used by the trust against the workers and their families. The CITU has also demanded that the government of Uttaranchal should institute an enquiry into the methods of production and quality of medicines. For, it has been reported that human skull, horns of endangered species of animals or body parts of slain animals are being used illegally to make these 'Ayurvedic' medicines. The issue warrants a CBI enquiry into the affairs of the trust so that the truth is brought out and those found guilty are brought to book.

Andhra Pradesh:

LESSONS FROM VSP CONTRACT WORKERS' STRUGGLE

Ch Narsinga Rao

On the night of June 16, 2005, the till then gloomy looking Rehabilitation Colony of contract workers became a center of festivity. The workers and their families were jubilantly celebrating the successful culmination of a fortnight long strike struggle of contract workers employed in the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP); a struggle which was waged against all odds - in the present times of globalisation.

In Visakhapatnam Steel Plant around 8200 contract workers went on strike from June 2 in support of their demands. After a protracted and bitter struggle, the management of the steel plant was forced to come to an agreement with the workers on June 16. It agreed that workers would be paid an interim relief of Rs 300 per month and bonus of 8.33 per cent for the year 2004-05. It was further agreed that a committee, with majority of representatives from the trade union, would be constituted to consider other demands of the workers in order to conclude a final settlement. The INTUC leadership played its anti-worker role, to scuttle the settlement and to destabilise the strike. But, the workers saw through their game, ignored their false alarms and participated in the struggle with redoubled vigour and commitment.

All the contract workers, despite being categorised into 'production sector' and 'service sector' displayed exemplary unity. As the contract workers were spread over the entire plant in all the departments, it was difficult to mobilize them to participate in a struggle. Many remained out of the purview of the trade union movement, making it all the more difficult still to bring them into direct action. Over the last three years a number of activities were undertaken to cement the unity of the workers. Seven years back, a major breakthrough was achieved by the CITU, which clinched a demand that even if the contractors changed, the contract workers shall not lose their jobs. The workers unitedly opposed the move to remove some of them on the pretext of physical fitness, by conducting medical check-ups, and stopped it.

UNITY AND SOLIDARITY

Barring the INTUC, all the other unions of permanent workers supported the struggle. The permanent workers extended total support to the cause of the contract workers by wearing badges. They held a scooter rally and participated in the meetings of the contract workers. They also tried to dissuade a few of the contract workers found attending to duty and convinced them to join the strike. In order not to inconvenience the permanent workers, the contract workers, working in the canteens and hospitals were exempted from the strike.

During the last three years, the contract workers have been demanding wages on par with other steel plants and resorted to a number of agitational programmes. The steel plant has been making steady profits, which was Rs 2006 crore during the last financial year. The slogans of the contract workers' union that 'wages shall be paid at par with other steel plants' and 'workers be paid wages by the steel plant management itself as in other steel plants' caught the imagination of the workers. The recommendation of the Petitions Committee of the Parliament, made in the year 2003, that pay structure of workers shall remain the same in all steel plants was never cared for by most managements. The VSP management never observed the principle of equal pay for equal work. For the same work a permanent unskilled worker was paid Rs 14,000, including an incentive of Rs 4000, (which is the proud outcome of their united struggle), while a contract worker was paid only Rs 2386. Those who lent support and guidance to the strike included M K Pandhe, Chittabrata Mazumdar, and B V Raghavulu, who wrote letters to state chief minister and VSP managing director. Ardhendu Dakshi, Jibon Roy, P K Das, M Baburao (MP), S Veeraiah and all political leaders, excepting those of

Congress and INTUC, rallied to extend solidarity, strengthening the resolve of the contract workers. Steel Plant Contract Labour Union (CITU) made serious efforts to build unity among all the trade unions. As a result, the CITU and HMS served a combined strike notice to the management, whereas the AITUC gave a separate strike notice. Discussions were held with the management on a number of occasions. The INTUC and other unions were repeatedly requested to join the struggle. Both the INTUC and the TNTUC (B Pydiraju group) not only joined hands with the management but they also tried all dirty tricks to scuttle the strike. They went to the extent of challenging that 'even if one rupee raise could be secured by this strike, they would tonsure their heads'. Nothing of this could distract the workers from their struggle.

UNTENABLE STAND

For a long time, the steel plant management took up the untenable position that the wages of contract workers is the concern of the contractors alone and the steel plant management has no role to play in the issue. This position is clearly against the provisions of the Section 25(v)(b) of the Indian Contract Labour Act, which provides that the payment of wages and bonus of the contract worker is mainly the responsibility of the Principal Management. The steel plant management took up another position that if the state labour department issues any GO on minimum wages for contract workers, they would implement that. The state labour department on the other hand took up the position that they cannot issue GOs for each industry. However, the state labour commissioner, in a letter dt.11-03-2005 suggested that wages could be negotiated by a process of 'collective bargaining'. The plea of the CITU to honour at least this advice of the labour commissioner fell on the deaf ears of the management.

When the strike was on, the plant management made an offer of forming a committee to go into the issue and enhance wages later after its deliberations. The unions refused this dilly-dallying tactical offer and continued the strike. The management tried its best to foil the strike. It encouraged 'black legs' by issuing passes to 500 outsiders. The servile trade unions were given all sorts of encouragement. On the other hand, it attempted to cancel the passes of about 150 CITU workers. Newspapers were pressurised not to highlight the news of the valiant strike of contract workers. Some willing newspapers were fed with false news about the response to the strike. All these conspiracies could not deter the workers from their determination to clinch their just demands from the unwilling hands of the management.

LESSONS OF THE STRUGGLE

- Better wages and other benefits for the contract workers employed in public sector and heavy industries can be secured if they stand united.
- If the workers own the demands and when a strike action is initiated by militant trade union like CITU, other unions as well as non-unionised members would also join the struggle, sooner or later.
- In general, contract workers fear that their employment is not secure. This struggle demonstrated that if the workers stand united, no force on earth could affect their employment security.
- No management will accede to a demand, however just the demand may be. Only a struggle will make the management see reason.
- The permanent workers, by their total and direct support to the struggle, proved that they are the real comrades-in-arms to the contract workers.
- This struggle has exposed the true colours of the bourgeoisie unions like INTUC. It is one thing to shed crocodile tears about the plight of unorganised workers and another thing to carry on a relentless fight for their rights. The CITU by its fight proved that it is the real leader in fighting against management with all its strength.
- When workers go on a strike, managements aggressively push lot of untenable arguments. Workers can succeed only by exposing such false arguments and by not falling a prey to their dirty tricks.

REPORTS & EVENTS

KERALA PARALYSED BY GENERAL STRIKE

The 24-hour general strike called by the Kerala State Sponsoring Committee of the Trade Unions on July 5, 2005 was a big success with its observance in all the 14 districts of the state. The strike was unprecedented in which workers participated in a massive scale even though the INTUC officially declared not to participate in the strike. Thousands of processions were conducted throughout the state.

The general strike comes in the wake of several agitations of the working class led by CITU against the retrograde policies of the UDF regime, both during Antony's tenure and now Oomen Chandy's. The CITU had submitted two separate charters of demands, one relating to workers and employees and another on farmers, to the chief minister Chandy on June 30, 2004. Even within the last two months, CITU independently and other trade unions, including INTUC, BMS and STU (pro-IUML) unitedly launched several struggles for the cause of workers belonging to different sectors.

While calling for the general strike, the sponsoring committee of trade unions, which comprises of nine trade unions - CITU, AITUC, UTUC, UTUC(LS), HMS, INLC, KTUC(J), NLO, TUCA - released a chargesheet against the UDF government. A big campaign was organised in the form of vehicle jathas, united general body meetings of workers, gate meetings etc in the run up to the strike. The chargesheet was widely publicised through pamphlets, posters etc.

The main demands raised before the government were:

1. Stop privatisation of public sector undertakings
2. Protect the traditional sector industries and unorganised sector workers
3. Sanction special package schemes to the poor and marginal farmers who are in distress due to the deteriorating situation of agrarian sector
4. Withdraw the contributory pension scheme proposed by the UPA government
5. Removal of the ban on recruitment in the government sector
6. No downsizing of the workforce
7. Evolve necessary schemes to solve the acute unemployment problem in the state.
8. Withdraw the anti-people, anti-working class policies of the government; Save Kerala and safeguard the working class.

In addition to the above demands, the sponsoring committee raised the demand for the withdrawal of the hike in prices of petrol and diesel saying this will hit the ordinary people.

The functioning of the normal life of the state was totally paralysed due to the strike. The state government employees, public sector workers and teachers also participated in the general strike in solidarity. In most of the central public sector undertakings, participation in the strike was significant with Cochin Port and Shipyard reporting hundred per cent participation. Almost all private sector industrial units were closed due to the participation of the entire workers having different affiliations. The strike was total in traditional industries and unorganised sector.

The sponsoring committee strongly supported the militant struggle of the students in Kerala against the commercialisation of education by the UDF government. Repression on protesting students and youth has become the norm under the UDF government, which was once again evident in the brutal attack on July 4.

(Report from P K Gurudasan)

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THE VOICE OF THE WORKING WOMAN

Monthly journal of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women
Single Copy Rs. 5
Annual Subscription Rs. 40

REPORTS & EVENTS

ANDHRA PRADESH

APSRTC WORKERS' UNITED STRIKE ACTION

About 1, 17,000 employees of Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) went on indefinite strike from 4th July 2005 under the leadership of Joint Action Committee of APSRTC Unions comprising CITU and AITUC unions and one independent union. The main demands of the workers were, inter alia, reduction of Motor Vehicle Tax and tax on HSD oil, reimbursement of the RS 1350 crore loss incurred by the APSRTC owing to policy of the Govt, recruitment of regular employees in all cadres, and payment of interim relief to all workers etc. INTUC and BMS unions did not formally join the strike initially, but owing to response of the mass of the followings of their unions to the call for strike action, the INTUC union ultimately had to support the strike action.

The Strike received overwhelming response from the mass of the workers. Meantime, in response to a Public Interest Litigation, the AP High Court directed to end the strike while instructing the Govt to discuss the demands of the workers with the trade unions.

In the face of the High Court's order, the JAC decided to postpone the strike on 6th July evening for three weeks in view of the meeting convened by the Ministers' subcommittee with JAC on the demands.

SRINAGAR: BIG RALLY BY WORKERS

On July 9, more than 25,000 employees and workers held a historic rally at Sher-e-Kashmir Park, Srinagar, to protest against the massive casualisation of jobs in government departments. They also voiced opposition to the new pension scheme and regularisation of contract workers and other temporary workers like Rehbar-e-Taleem teachers, Anganwadi workers and helpers, casual labour and adhoc employees. Revival of public sector units in the state and release of 3 per cent DA were among the other demands raised.

This was for the first time in the history of employees' movement in Kashmir that such a huge rally had taken place. The call for the rally was given by the Employees Joint Action Committee (EJAC), a broader platform of almost all the organisations of employees in Kashmir like the JKCCTU, GEC, WEC, EAF, JKTF, MEU etc.

The employees and workers thronged the state capital from all the districts since early morning. They came by buses, matadors and other vehicles, carrying banners, and shouting slogans against privatisation and casualisation and for regularisation and people's unity.

Teachers Forum chairman Abdul Qayum, JKCCTU president Mohd Maqbool, Fayaz Shabnam (EWC), Khurshid Kutty (EAF) and Gulzar Bandy (GEC),, among others, addressed the rally. The speakers lashed on the present economic policies of the centre and state governments, and explain their disastrous results for employees and workers.

They demanded stop to privatisation and casualisation, withdrawal of pension scheme, regularisation of workers and employees, and immediate wage increase for all temporary workers.

They also served a notice on the state government to respond to these demands within a month or face an intense struggle.

REPORTS & EVENTS

KANPUR: DUNCUN FERTILIZERS TO REOPEN

The employees of Duncun Fertilizers will go to their factory not for picketing etc. but to resume their normal duty as the workers of that factory. The end of their present phase of struggle will come on July 8, 2005. Arvind Kumar, the Secretary IEL Employees Union (CITU), announced this here. He was addressing the large gathering of workers and employees of the factory on June 22, at the gate. Shyambabu Mishra, the Working President of the Union presided. Previously the leaders of the Union and the representatives of the Management signed an agreement. The Management has agreed to pay Rs 30 crore towards the arrears of the workers. The worker will get additional gratuity equal to the wage of thirty days in lieu of working six days in a week. There will be no cut in the dearness allowance, other service benefits of the worker. Similarly, there will be no reduction in the age limit for retirement of the workers. The management has also agreed that there will not effect any change in the service conditions and other matters related to the employment of the workers without the consent of the union. The memorandum of understanding was read out by Arvind kumar in the gathering. The workers welcomed it. It may recall that the management closed the above factory almost three years back. The workers were on the path of struggle since then. They under the leadership of IEL Employees Union (CITU) waged relentless struggle against it and faced all the difficulties with courage and determination. CITU whole-heartedly congratulates the workers and their Union at this success.

Chhattisgarh:

HEALTH WORKERS PROTEST AGAINST INJUSTICE

In Raipur on 11th July 2005 hundreds of health workers organized a protest dharna before the District Collector against winding up of village health scheme from 1st March 2005. Those workers have not been paid honorarium from February 2004 to March, 2005. They came out with facts and figures that cases of Malaria and seasonal diseases as well as incidence of other avoidable health problems have increased after the scheme was abruptly stopped. Death cases have sharply rose in recent months.

Chhattisgarh Health Workers Union demanded that this health scheme must be continued as the villagers' level of consciousness and poverty prevents them from getting access to proper medical attention. Such schemes and visit by health workers go a long way to contain the occurrence of such diseases.

They demanded that anti-malaria/ public health schemes to be reintroduced. Also they demanded arrear honorarium to be paid and the employees be taken into regular cadre.

They submitted a memorandum to the Health and Family Welfare Minister of Chhattigarh.

ANGANWADI WORKERS & HELPERS STAGE DHARNA

On 11th July 2005 hundreds of anganwadi workers and helpers staged a day-long dharna before the office of the District Collector, Raipur to press for their 6-point charter of demands highlighting the issues like (1) restructuring ICDS into Integrated Child & Women Development/ Welfare Scheme and bring it under Human Resource Development Ministry, (2) Introduction of PF,

Dearness Allowance and Social Security Benefits, (3) Wages should be, at least, equal to class III and Class IV employees, with proper scale and increments, (4) pension after retirement, (5) setting up of complaint cell against sexual harassment at work place as per the Supreme Court directive and, (6) end corruption at the administrative level.

After the dharna the demonstrators submitted a memorandum to the district collector addressed to the Prime Minister of India.

The programme has created enthusiasm among the Anganwadi workers in Chhattisgarh.

ALL INDIA F.C.I. MAZDOOR FEDERATION

The second conference of the All India FCI Mazdoor Federation was held at Chandigarh on July 10 - 11, 2005. W.R. Varada Rajan, Secretary, CITU, inaugurated. Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU addressed the conference. Asim Bala placed a report highlighting the problems faced by the workers, mostly arising from the moves of the Government of India aimed at weakening the Public Distribution System in the country and undermining the role of the FCI. The conference adopted the constitution of the Federation and elected a working committee, with H.P. Singh of INTUC as President, Raghunath Singh as Working President and Asim Bala as General Secretary. Despite rains, an impressive rally was held before the Regional Office of the FCI at Chandigarh. The Conference has called for holding to close a number of FCI depots and resort to downsizing of work force, as per prescriptions of the McKenzie report and the crying need in the country to strengthen the PDS, the All India FCI Mazdoor Federation has decided to intensify its activities throughout the country and hold a massive dharna before Parliament in New Delhi on August 17, 2005, on the following demands:

** SCRAP McKenzie REPORT ON FCI * ABSORB ALL CONTRACT WORKERS*
** EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN PDS*
** ROOT OUT CORRUPTION IN FCI*
** NO INCREASE IN PDS FOODGRAIN PRICES*

GENERAL SECRETARY'S VISIT TO TAMILNADU

Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, visited Tamil Nadu on 17th and 18 th July. Arriving in Madurai with a rousing reception by the Madurai urban district committee of CITU, he inaugurated the new building of the district CITU. Built at a cost of around Rs.14 Lakhs, contributed by workers, the new building was named after Com. Vazhavandan, leader of the textile workers. The meeting hall was named after Com. Poochi, a leader of the early TU movement in Madurai.

Chittabrata Majumdar congratulated the Madurai workers and also explained the present situation in the country. Reaching Chennai on 18th morning, the General Secretary first addressed a press conference, explaining the background to Sep. 29 strike; he addressed the Chennai Port Workers, in a gate meeting; addressed a well attended meeting in the Kerala Samajam Hall, organised by the North and South Chennai district committees. He called upon the Chennai workers to conduct powerful campaigns on the demands of the General Strike. He pointed out that the demands included demands of all sections of people and this message should be taken to all sections of people and organise the strike in a systematic manner.

T.K.Rengarajan, Vice President, A.Soundararajan, Secretary, CITU and other leaders of the State CITU also addressed the meeting.

(Report from A.K.Padmnabhan)

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

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Apr.' 05	May' 05
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	500	498
	2	Guntur	506	506
	3	Hyderabad	519	530
	4	Visakhapatnam	514	518
	5	Warangal	534	554
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	451	448
	7	Guwahati	523	531
	8	Labac-Silchar	407	414
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	445	442
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	431	432
Bihar	11	Monghyr	501	494
Chhattisg	12	Bhillai	469	470
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	509	510
	14	Bhavnagar	531	529
	15	Rajkot	491	490
	16	Surat	491	497
	17	Vadodra	486	492
Haryana	18	Faridabad	545	541
	19	Yamunanagar	518	514
J & K	20	Srinagar	641	621
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	497	501
	22	Jharia	431	433
	23	Kodarma	456	461
	24	Noamundi	477	478
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	484	487
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	521	527
	27	Belgaum	571	579
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	531	538
	29	Mercara	492	495
Kerala	30	Alwaye	538	539
	31	Mundakayam	508	511
	32	Quilon	536	538
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	586	597
Madhya Pradesh	34	Balaghat	454	459
	35	Bhopal	552	554
	36	Indore	535	533
	37	Jabalpur	528	528
Maharastra	38	Mumbai	619	589
	39	Nagpur	542	543
	40	Nasik	570	563
	41	Pune	591	574
	42	Solapur	526	531
Orissa	43	Barbil	471	476
	44	Rourkela	464	468
Punjab	45	Amritsar	490	483
	46	Ludhiana	507	497
Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	540	536
	48	Jaipur	485	484
Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	564	565
	50	Coimbatore	506	499
	51	Coonoor	502	507
	52	Madurai	506	514
	53	Salem	482	481
	54	Tiruchirapally	562	569
Uttar Pradesh	55	Agra	502	509
	56	Ghaziabad	547	543
	57	Kanpur	505	505
	58	Saharanpur	499	499
	59	Varanasi	556	559
West Bengal	60	Asansol	506	503
	61	Darjeeling	425	429
	62	Durgapur	593	588
	63	Haldia	618	617
	64	Howrah	611	607
	65	Jalpaiguri	437	439
	66	Kolkata	578	572
	67	Raniganj	466	467
Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	603	600
Delhi	69	Delhi	643	640
Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	566	563
ALL-INDIA			**529**	**527**

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State		Centre	April 2005	May 2005
Andhra Pradesh	1	Kethgudem	526	528
Himachal Pradesh	2	Himachal Pradesh	505	502
Rajasthan	3	Bhilwara	522	518
Madhya Pradesh	4	Chhindwara	467	467
Tripura	5	Tripura	469	468
Goa	6	Goa	625	631

BALCO: STERLITE MEANS DARKNESS

Things are becoming murkier and murkier with Sterlite. Profit making, efficient, strategically important Bharat Aluminium Company popularly known as BALCO situated in Korba hills in Chhattisgarh, was handed over to M/s Sterlite by Arun Shourie and company during the Vajpayee regime. The BALCO plant, its own captive power plant, huge Bauxite mines in Chhattisgarh and Orissa, a big beautiful self contained township alongwith property of Bidhanbag plant (West Bengal) was handed over for only Rs 550 crores while the actual price could be ten times of that. The workers, people of Korba and the surrounding villages and people of Chhattisgarh in general did not allow this transfer to go unchallenged. From 2nd March 2001 workers went for continuous strike for 67 days. But all these valiant efforts failed as NDA government supported M/s Sterlite; later on Ajit Jogi Ministry of Chhattisgarh also supported them. INTUC leadership at the center also supported the sell out of BALCO. Despite this failure, the BALCO Bachao movement will be written in red letters in the history of trade union movement in India.

CITU opposed the privatization of BALCO. The opposition was based on principles as well as on economic and strategic considerations. Besides, M/s Sterlite has a very dubious record of history. The post-privatisation records show that they flouted many provisions of share purchase agreement, such as illegal VRS (or CRS?), off loading jobs to contractors and so on. The UPA Government, particularly the Prime Minister has been informed about these developments many times with a request that remaining 49% shares should not be transferred to M/s Sterlite and, on the contrary the government should re-nationalise BALCO. We do not know what will finally happen because M/s Sterlite has supporters in UPA Government also as one of the very important cabinet ministers was a director on the Board of Vedanta International, the London based holding company of M/s Sterlite own by the same Anil Agarwal. The Minister, of course, resigned from Vedanta Board immediately before t he took oath as Minister in Govt. of India.

Front page banner headlines in all the newspapers from Raipur declare that M/s Sterlite has illegally usurped 1016 acres of government land meant for forest cover and has set up some new plants there. The Forest Minister of Chhattisgarh ordered an enquiry in the matter and the district collector, on inquiry has confirmed that indeed this plot of 1016 acres of forestland has been an encroachment into govt land without the knowledge of the government. The Revenue Minister has given a statement in the Chhattisgarh Assembly confirming this illegal activity. This land, adjacent to BALCO township and factory, being a forestland the old public sector management had planted thousands of valuable timber producing trees. Like many other PSUs BALCO, under public sector had spent a lot of money for green cover, environment and social well being. The Sterlite management have cut down all those valuable trees and cleared the land for their new unit. This is also illegal as per the law of the land. Now it is only to be seen what steps the Chhattisgarh government takes against this illegal encroachment, against illegal felling of trees and other offences, or the Agarwals will be able to "manage" the things as they did during the NDA regime.

Sterlite management's treatment of their own employees was also shocking. They recruited 300 young men and women as trainees and after giving them training refused to take them as permanent employees. When they protested against this injustice, Police arrested 118 trainees including 8 girls. However, they were released on bail. So far only 25 of them have been absorbed. It is not without reason that CITU is opposing transfer of remaining 49% of the shares of BALCO to Sterlite. Govt. of India must reconsider the share purchase agreement and if possible should take over the company once again. BALCO makes very sophisticated quality Aluminium needed for making missiles and other military hardware. It is dangerous to keep this company in the hands of a management run by a group of people who are unscrupulous, corrupt and have scant regards for laws and propriety.

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REFORMERS and HARDLINERS

Neil Clark X

If you orientate your foreign policy towards the U.S., you will be a "reformer." If you run your country for the benefit of your people you will be called a hardliner.

IRAN's NEW president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is one. So are Belarus' Alexander Lukashenko and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. These men, we are repeatedly told by CNN, the Wall Street Journal and the London Financial Times, are "hardliners." But what exactly is a hardliner - and why are some world leaders hardliners and others not?

In a dictionary you will find hardline defined as "definite and unyielding." But if so, why is hardliner used so selectively to describe world leaders?

As Mr. Ahmadinejad celebrated his landslide victory, another election was taking place in Bulgaria. For the past four years Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha has presided over a privatisation programme that the Iron Lady herself would have drooled over. His neo-liberal agenda has left half of Bulgaria's eight million people surviving on less than two euros a day. Yet unlike Mr. Ahmadinejad, Mr. Lukashenko or Mr. Chavez, the Bulgarian Premier has not been labelled a hardliner - for his "definite and unyielding" policies - but instead is referred to as a reformer and a moderniser.

It is a similar story across eastern and central Europe. Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany, whose government is following the most aggressively neoliberal policies in the European Union, recently announced plans to privatise healthcare. Hungary has no more money for hospitals - but did find £7.7 million to buy air-to-air missiles from the U.S. and £34.5 million to "adapt" its armed forces to the demands of NATO and EU membership. To many, a policy of putting guns before health would be considered hardline. But not the Western media, who laud Mr. Gyurcsany as a "centrist reformer."

Look further and it is clear; if you run your country for the benefit of international capital and orientate your foreign policy towards the U.S., you will be a "reformer," "moderate" or "moderniser" - regardless of how extreme your polices are. The rule applies even if you served in an SS unit (like the neoconservatives' favourite Islamist, the late Bosnian leader Alija Izetbegovic) or, like the Shah of Iran, had one of the most feared secret police forces in the world.

If, on the other hand, you run your country for the benefit of your people and refuse to pay Danegeld to the most powerful empire the world has seen, you will be called a hardliner. Mr. Ahmadinejad is "hardline," not for the social and religious conservatism he shares with the non-"hardline" leaders of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but for his policy of empowering Iranian working class people and defending his country's right to develop nuclear power.

Mr. Lukashenko is "hardline," not for his authoritarianism, but because he wishes to maintain the last planned, socially owned economy in Europe: an alternative economic agenda that has seen his country climb from 68th to 49th in the U.N. human development index.

And Mr. Chavez is "hardline," not because he once led a failed military coup, but because he wishes to use his nation's vast oil wealth to benefit Venezuela and not U.S. oil corporations.

It is for standing up for the interests of their own people that these three men are labelled "hardliners." For those genuinely concerned with social justice, derailing the U.S. behemoth and creating a world in which people come before profits, the more "hardliners" - and the less "moderates" and "reformers" that are elected to power, the better.

(Neil Clark is a writer and broadcaster specialising in Eastern European and Middle Eastern affairs. Courtesy: 'The Hindu' Thursday, Jul 14, 2005

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