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THE WORKING CLASS

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20th March, 2004 - Anti Imperialism Day



DELHI JOINS WORLDWIDE CHORUS
HANDS OFF IRAQ

EPF INTEREST RATE: CITU APPREHENDS FURTHER REDUCTION TO ONLY 8 PER CENT

Citing media reports that the interest rate on Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) may not be continued at the present rate of 9.5 per cent from April 2004, the CITU had raked up certain procedural issues in a letter addressed to the Ministry of Labour. The letter has also voiced apprehension that the interest rate reduction could as well be to 8 per cent from the present 9.5 per cent as the Govt has clandestinely decided to restrict the PF interest rate to the administered rate of interest for the small savings, notified by the Govt of India.

The letter says: "It is a time honoured practice for the CBT to meet and make its recommendation to the Government of India on the rate of interest at which the members of the EPF should get the credit in their accounts on monthly running balances from April 1, every year. This exercise must, in normal course, be completed before 31st March every year. We learn that as on date no meeting of the CBT itself has been convened for this purpose". Incidentally, it may be recalled

that the CITU and the AITUC have been denied representation in the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the EPF, reconstituted in March last year. The CITU pointed out that even for the last two years viz. 2002-03 and 2003-04, there had been no official notification issued by the Government of India on the rate of interest on EPF, which leaves a question mark hanging on even the interest at 9.5 per cent credited by the EPF Organisation to the accounts of the EPF members during these years, as it lacks statutory backing.

The CITU letter cites that "there is a proposal to restrict the rate of interest on EPF to the administered rate of interest notified by the Government of India for the small savings, SDS, GPF, PPF etc. from April 1, 2004. As this rate as obtaining from April 1, 2003, notified in the budget of 2003-04, is only 8 per cent - there being no change announced in the interim budget for 2004-05 - it is gathered that the members of the EPF would get their accounts credited with interest at this rate only from April 1, 2004. This could result in a reduction of 1.5 per cent from what has been obtaining during the last two years, bringing down the interest to 8 per cent".

In such circumstances, the CITU has argued that report suggesting that the interest rate reduction would only be to the extent of 0.5 per cent, i.e., discontinuance of 0.5 per cent golden jubilee bonus declared last year, was a case of deliberate disinformation. And by keeping even the truncated CBT in dark and allowing the matter to linger on without a proper decision, CITU accused that over 3.2 crore subscribers of the EPF Scheme are taken for a ride.

Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, had urged the Labour Secretary to clarify immediately the position in respect of the interest rate on EPF as applicable from April 1, 2004.

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THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

APRIL 2004

YOU SAID IT by Laxman



Stop making good old promises like giving food, water, removing poverty etc, now start promising TV, cellphone, computers, movie houses etc. Remember India is shining and everyone is feeling good!

Courtesy: The Times of India

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EDITORIAL

EXPOSE THE CHEATS AND ENSURE THEIR DEFEAT

The country is going to the polls to elect the 14th Lok Sabha in April and May. In this background the working class movement of the country has to decide its task.

BJP came to occupy the seat of governance at the centre by cheating the people and using the divisive route. They had been able to carry on for five years playing the same balls of trickery and communal ploy together. And now, in the face of forthcoming election, resorted to the same route of cheating the people through lie campaign on the one hand and rousing communal passion on the other to manage themselves back to political power.

The last five years' BJP led governance witnessed all round degeneration and perverse distortion of the social, political and cultural values, accompanied by disaster on the economic front thereby exposing the BJP-led combine as enemy of the nation and enemy of the people. Rising joblessness and unemployment, aggravation of poverty, widespread sickness and closure of industries and unending streams of corruption in contracts and purchases and even bigger privatisation-scams are the only reckonable highlights of the BJP led misrule.

And in the social and political front, the BJP bandwagon, in a calculated manner, resorted to nasty tricks, putting human lives at stake, to create grounds for communal riots, to bring about a different divisive polarization among the electorates. The Gujarat riot including its antecedent, the Godhra carnage happened to be the handiwork of the RSS outfits, just to retain BJP in political power in Gujarat and help them to occupy governments in other states.

The cheating continues and now in the run up of election, the BJP bandwagon, along with their state-funded lie-campaign, has been acting overtime to rouse the communal frenzy as the election dates are coming nearer. The Sangh parivar outfits like VHP, Bajrang Dal etc are raising communal slogans, demonstrating arrogance over their so called hindutva plank, while the leaders of its political outfit BJP are posing the role of moderator with a crooked ploy to confuse and cheat the people and garner votes. The same trick also is being played on economic policy issues where the RSS outfits Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and BMS are spitting venom in public against the economic policy of liberalization while staying away from any concrete action against those policies.

The working class and the toiling people must not allow themselves to be cheated again by the BJP led combine. They must teach this worst enemy-regime of theirs a lesson by decisively defeating the NDA combine in the forthcoming election.

To assert the right to strike

MASSIVE COUNTRYWIDE STRIKE on 24th FEB. 2004

The call for General strike of 24th February 2004 given by the major Central Trade Unions and Industrial Federations has been magnificently responded to by the working class all over the country braving all prohibitory orders. The strike call was given to assert the right to strike in the face of the prohibitory orders by the Supreme Court and also to protest against the disastrous economic policies of the central government resulting in deepening poverty, growing unemployment, reckless privatisation and closures etc. The massive response to the strike action by the working class thoroughly exposed the ugly face of multi-multi crore lie-campaign by the NDA Govt regarding the so called "feel good factor".

The INTUC leadership, despite committing for a favourable decision in support of the general strike, backed out subsequently. The BMS leadership stayed away from the General Strike despite their declared opposition to the judicial ban on right to strike as well as to the economic policies of the Govt. But, at grass root level many of their affiliates and followers joined the strike action in a big way. Thus the ninth countrywide General strike by the working class against the policies of liberalization, privatization and globalisation and attack on labour rights has

reflected much broader unity at the grass root level.

Around four to five crore workers took part in the countrywide general strike braving police-action, lathicharge and arrests in many places. As per reports received so far, in Jahangirpuri industrial area at Delhi, police lathicharged on the striking employees and arrested about 100 workers. In Haryana, lathicharge and arrests have taken place in Zind, Rohtak, Karnal and Panchkula. At Rourkela steel town in Orissa, around 500 were arrested. Pondicherry reported arrest of 136 striking workers. In Assam around thousand workers were arrested in different part of the state.

The General Strike has drawn solidarity support by various organizations within the country and abroad. The World Federation of Trade Unions and CGT, France have sent message expressing solidarity to the strike action. The All India Kisan Sabha, DYFI, All India Agricultural Workers' Union and All India Democratic Women's Association have also conveyed their support. The Students' Federation of India has also decided to go for countrywide strike on the same day.

HEROIC STRIKE BY GOVT EMPLOYEES

The Govt employees against whom the ban on strike was directly thrust upon gave a befitting reply to such vindictive

arrogance of the State-machinery by staging the biggest ever strike action countrywide in all the state govt offices and establishments in most of the states in the country barring a few. We must note, for the govt employee, this general strike is not merely a bold assertion of their rights to strike but also a brave defiance of the unjust prohibition thrust upon them by the authority that be. It is the pioneering initiative by the Govt employees that played the most crucial role in ultimately materializing the countrywide general strike by the entire working class on such a crucial issue.

Not less than 80 lakh state govt employees, and employees of state-PSUs, Zilla Parishad and panchayats and govt teachers throughout the country joined the strike action defying the judicial orders. Barring one or two states, almost everywhere strike was near total.

In the central govt sector, overwhelming majority of employees in the telecom, postal departments, AG office, Income tax and audit offices joined the strike in a big way throughout the country braving threats and prohibition. More than eighty per cent of the defence sector employees working in ordinance factories and depots under Army, Navy and Airforce and the MES offices all over the country have joined the strike action at the

call of All India Defence Employees Federation.

STRIKE ACROSS THE SECTORS

The general strike has drawn participation of workers from all sectors. The entire financial sector covering the banks and the insurance companies witnessed almost total strike throughout the country. Of the six-lakh coal-mining workers in nine companies, more than 70 per cent workers joined the strike action. In the non-coal mining belt as well, spreading over Jharkhand, Orissa and chhattisgarh strike was near total. The public sector workers throughout the country also joined the strike action in a big way. The city of Bangalore and Hyderabad, the centres of concentration of public sector units in the country witnessed massive strike in all the PSUs there. In Port & Dock, despite opposition by some of the major unions, strike was massive at Kolkata, Haldia, Cochin, Gujarat, Paradip, Tutikorin and JNPT(Mumbai) and it was partial in other ports. In steel, strike was total in Durgapur, Burnpur, 60% workers joined strike in Salem steel and in other places it was partial. Electricity workers joined the strike enmasse in the states of Haryana, Punjab, Kerala, West Bengal, Jammu& Kashmir, and some others, while in UP, Rajasthan, Himachal, Rajasthan etc, they staged a walk-out and held massive dharna which has drawn participation of workers of other affiliations as well.

In the plantation sector throughout the country, both in tea and rubber plantation,

massive strike has taken place. The Unorganised sector workers in brick-kilns, head-load, beedi, and mandi-workers took part in strike in a big way. The construction workers, both from the organized and unorganised sector responded to the strike call magnificently. The construction workers in all the hydel-projects under construction in the state of Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal and Jammu were on complete strike. Anganwadi workers throughout the country also participated in the strike in a big way. The Oil sector workers took part in the strike and in the installations in Tripura, Assam, West Bengal, and in the southern states strike was total whereas strike was partial in other areas. In many states the flights have been rescheduled owing to impact of strike

STRIKE SITUATION STATEWISE

The General strike of 24TH February got converted into a complete BANDH in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. Also a Bandh like situation has emerged in Assam, Haryana, Orissa and Jharkhand and certain districts of Karnataka owing to massive participation by workers cutting across their affiliations and massive support from people from other walks of life.

Tamilnadu: Industrial workers, Central Govt. Employees, Financial sector Employees and unorganised sector workers in Tamilnadu responded magnificently to the All India General Strike. Strike was complete in all major industrial

establishments in and around Chennai including Ashok Leyland, Ennore Foundries, WIMCO, MRF, Enfield India, AILSTOM, Hindustan Motors car plant etc. Workers from Madras Export Promotion Zone (MEPZ) and in the Electronic Industrial Estate in Tiruvanmiyur and Industrial estate in Ambathur participated in the strike. Industrial workers from Textile, Engineering and other sectors from different parts of the state including Tiruppur Hosiery workers participated in the strike. Strike in Public sector units like BHEL, Neyveli Lignite, Salem Steel was partial. Unorganised sector workers from Construction, Auto Rickshaw, Beedi, Handloom, Cashew etc participated in the strike in large numbers. Striking workers took part in court-arrest demonstrations in different parts of the state.

Karnataka: Workers in all PSUs were in complete strike. In other industries as well workers across the affiliations joined the strike in a big way. Auto-rickshaw workers were in complete strike. More than 50% of public transport were off the road. Virtual bandh like situation was there in Gulbarga, Gangavati, Kushtagi, Tavaragere etc.

Maharashtra : The industrial centers of Navi-Mumbai/Thane, Nasik, Pune, Sholapur, Ichhalkaranji, Nagpur etc reported massive response to strike call both from organized and unorganised sector workers. Private transport, auto-rickshaws etc were off the road in most of the cities in the state. In Mumbai, besides the total

strike by state govt employees and in banks and insurance, response to strike by the central govt employees and workers in other private sector industries was quite good. In port and dock, it was partial.

Delhi: The industrial areas at Okhla, Tughlakabad, Patparganj, Jahangirpuri, Mangolpuri, Wazirpur, Kirtinagar, Mayapuri, Samaypur Badli etc reported good response to strike action by the industrial workers. Processions by thousands of striking workers was taken out in Okhla, Jahangirpuri, Mangolpuri and Patparganj. At Jahangirpuri, the striking workers faced lathicharge and arrests by police. Delhi University Teachers Association and University and College Employees Union supported the strike and in JNU, the students were on strike in solidarity.

Uttar Pradesh: Besides massive strike action by the employees of banks, insurance, govt employees, good response to strike by industrial workers was reported from Kanpur, Varanasi, Saharanpur, Bullandsahar, Sonbhadra, Jhansi and other industrial centers. In Ghaziabad and adjoining areas, in Sahibabad industrial area, strike was near total. Massive demonstration and rally was held by the striking workers at Noida.

Haryana: Complete strike by the Haryana Roadways workers gave the strike a virtual image of statewide Bandh. Govt employees strike was total. Around 60000 workers in 350 brick-kilns in the state were in

complete strike. The industrial areas of Sonapat, Panipat, Panchkula, Faridabad and Gurgaon reported good response to strike call by the industrial workers. Massive road-block was organized by the striking workers at Panipat. The Anganwadi workers were in complete statewide strike. In all the 90 blocks in Haryana, joint demonstration by the Govt employees and industrial workers and workers of the unorganised sector were being held. All the four universities were closed as the teachers, employees and students were on strike.

Rajasthan: The industrial workers in all the industrial centers of Jaipur, Kota, Ganganagar, Jhunjhunu, Bikaner, Sikar, Udaypur, Jodhpur, Chittorgarh, Rawatbhata etc joined the strike in a big way. Strike in Khetri Copper Complex and J K Tyre at Kankroli, Kamani Engineering at Jaipur was near total. Strike was total in all the three agricultural farms under central govt at Sardargarh. Govt employees staged day-long dharna. Unorganised sector workers in loading-unloading in the mandis also joined the strike paralyzing the transactions in the Mandi. Processions and demonstration were organized throughout the state.

Orissa: It was a bandh like situation in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Sundargarh in few other districts owing to overwhelming response of the workers, employees including the transport workers being on strike. In particular, the mining

belt witnessed a total bandh. NALCO witnessed a total strike. **Assam:** Besides complete strike in banks, insurance, BSNL and other govt offices, the refineries, paper mills, private motor transport and small scale industries reported total strike. In tea plantation strike was around 60%. In different parts of the state, police arrested around thousand workers and leaders from the rallies organized jointly by AITUC, CITU, UTUC-LS and AICCTU. In the district towns of Digboi, Tinsukia and some areas of lower Assam the strike got converted into a bandh as the public transport got paralysed and shops remained closed. The N F Railway Headquarters at Maligaon wore a deserted look owing to 90 per cent employees staying away from work. Railway service was also paralysed by striking pickteers.

Punjab: the industrial centers of Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Mandigobindgarh, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar etc reported massive response to strike action by the industrial workers and the textile workers in particular. Amritsar witnessed virtual bandh. FCI Palledars were on total strike. Punjab Roadways workers staged massive demonstration observing strike for two hours. Workers of the unorganised sector, particularly from brick-kiln responded to the strike call in a big way.

Gujarat: Response to strike call among the Govt employees was quite good. Textile workers and transport workers from all affiliations joined the strike. Rallies and dharnas were

organized at Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat and many other places by the striking workers along with the other mass organizations of kisan, students, youth and women.

Andhra Pradesh: Hundred per cent strike was reported by the Govt employees, both the state and central and cooperative sector, banks and insurance. This time participation in the strike by the State-Govt Secretariat employees, employees of the Panchayats and Telengana NGOs bears special significance. Public sector workers also joined the strike in a big way. Strike among the Anganwadi workers and gram sevaks and also among the employees of municipality, panchayats and various industrial centers was also near total. Public transport service throughout the state was severely affected as around 60% Road Transport workers joined the strike. Response by

the unorganised sector was also magnificent.

Jharkhand: Strike was near total in the collieries and the industrial units of Ranchi, Dhanbad, Tatanagar. Unorganised sector workers from beedi, quarry also joined the strike in a big way. Public transport services were affected in many areas in the state creating impact of virtual bandh. In TISCO and Bokaro steel plant, strike was partial. Massive rally and demonstration was held at Dhanbad and Ranchi.

Madhya Pradesh: In colliery belt strike was more than 70%. The industrial centers of Gwalior, Indore, Jabalpur, Guna, the areas adjoining Bhopal reported good strike.

Chhattisgarh: Response of the state govt employees to strike call was good. Employees of central services also joined the strike in substantial numbers. In Collieries, strike was to the tune

of 60%.

Himachal Pradesh: In the hydel projects under construction, strike was total. All the anganwadi projects were closed throughout the state as the workers joined the strike enmasse. In industrial units, workers across the affiliation joined strike.

Bihar: Besides almost total strike by the state govt employees throughout the state including the offices in districts, subdivisions and panchayat levels, and also in the banks, insurance and central govt offices, the industrial workers joined the strike in a big way. Unorganised sector workers also joined the strike and organized demonstration along with peasants at various places throughout the state including the state capital. In refinery at Barouni, strike was partial.

Reports of good response to strike call was also received from Uttaranchal.

HANDS OFF AMERICA - FROM IRAQ

20th March, 2004 has witnessed massive protests, demonstrations all over the country against the invasion and continued occupation of Iraq by George W Bush-Tony Blair and company.

It was the first anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Democratic and peace loving people the world over have registered their strongest opposition even before the attack against Iraq. On this day, they have demanded immediate withdrawal of the occupation forces, but the arrogant, power-headly super powers have scant regards for the world opinion and they are continuing the crime by force.

In Delhi, the Left parties and trade unions and other democratic mass organizations staged a demonstration, before the USIS. A resolution was passed demanding immediate end of occupation in Iraq and installation of a national government there. A street drama was enacted by Sahamat. In Kolkata there was a massive procession and demonstration organized by Left and democratic parties and trade unions

All over the country there have been several demonstrations and protests organized by the Left parties and trade unions and other mass organizations. CITU took a leading role in organizing these protest actions. There have been massive protests all over the world on that day, California to Madrid via London even facing the dirty campaign of being termed as "unpatriotic".

In India the ruling parties were conspicuously silent. But people will continue to raise their voice and mobilize resistance against the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

NDA AND THE RURAL POOR

Tapan Sen

Come election and the NDA bandwagon has jumped on an aggressive lie-campaign in the media, both print and electronic, spending several hundreds of crore from national exchequer to cheat the people. Some of those lies are analysed hereunder.

CROCODILE TEARS FOR THE RURAL POOR !

The Finance Minister announced in his pre-election interim budget speech the grand plan of constituting "Agricultural Infrastructure Fund" of Rs 50000 crore. What has not been mentioned that the existing Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) stands discontinued. And for the just announced agriculture Infrastructure Fund, not even a single paisa has been allotted in the interim budget. It's all pre-election announcement. And what do they think about the people? stupids?

And what does the fact sheet say on NDA's performance in the field of rural development expenditure, which includes all employment generation programmes, special areas programmes, village industry, irrigation and flood control etc etc ? It was a story of consistently robbing the rural economy and depriving the rural folk of their due share of GDP. The rural development expenditure has fallen from 14.5% of GDP during 1985-90 to 8% in early 1990s and further to 6% of GDP on the average in the years following 1998 and in some years it has fallen below 5 per cent. This means, in real terms " a reduction in rural development expenditure of about Rs 30000 crores annually on the average compared to pre-reform years" which in turn "means a drop in incomes in agriculture to the tune of between Rs 20000 crores to Rs 1,50,000 crores-a massive contraction indeed. (Utsa Patnaik)

As a corollary to above situation, the gross capital formation in agriculture as percentage of GDP is consistently falling to reach merely 1.3% in 2001-02, notwithstanding all liberalization measures and all concessions to big landlords. Annual growth rate in agricultural employment also has also gone down from 1.51% during 1983-93 to an absolute

decline of -0.34% during 1993-2000 and the same trend continues in the current years as well. The agricultural workers representing the overwhelming majority of rural working population, get hardly 100 days work in a year and are still considered employed in the official employment statistics.

The NDA bosses have claimed through advertisements that the minimum support price (MSP) has increased from 15% to 56% during their regime. But that advertisement most unscrupulously concealed that such increase is more than offset by slow-down of procurement and also by phenomenal rise in the cost of each and every agricultural input. The fertilizer price has increased by more than 50%. Diesel has become costlier by more than 100% and kerosene prices more than trebled. The cost of irrigation and other agri-inputs also have risen by around 100 per cent during last five years. For the middle and marginal farmers, representing the majority of the farmer- populace, the incidence of such cost is much more heavier owing to high rent for such agri-input services charged by the big-landlord lobby. Much more is being robbed from them than what they are supposed to get through such so called increase in MSP.

During last five years of NDA rule, the rural poor were robbed and sucked. And now, come elections, it's a time for tall announcement with no substance !

FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY POOR !

The Prime Minister boastfully announced the increased coverage of Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) for 50 lakh more rural poor in addition to existing 150 lakh. They are supposed to get limited amount of rice at Rs 2 a kg and wheat at Rs 3 a kg.

The allocation for the scheme is only Rs 2000 crore. Does it make any sense when around 350 million people are living below poverty line ?

And again, what does the fact-sheet say about the real situation on the ground under NDA-misrule. It is again a story of intensification of

hunger in its entirety. The per-capita absorption of food grains has sharply fallen from 174.2 kg per year in 1997-98 to mere 151.06 kg in the pre-drought year in 2000-01 with a marginal increase to 156.55 kg in post-drought 2002-03. The situation will look more grim if we look into the minimum calories-intake by rural people. More than 66.6 per cent of the rural population go extremely undernourished in terms of calories intake (below 2289 calories as compared with the bare minimum nutrition norm of 2400 calories) as per NSS data, 1999-2000. As per the Report of Food & Agricultural Organisation (FAO) on Food Security, 2000, the absolute number of hungry people in India has increased from 19.40 crore in 1995-97 to 21.45 crore in 1999-2001. And the latest NSS data (57th round June 2002) shows that one in every 200 households in rural India and one in every thousand households in the cities goes chronically hungry. As per an estimate, at least 16000 farmers committed suicide during last five years. (Devinder Sharma, February 2004). In 2002 itself, 2580 people committed suicide in Andhra Pradesh only consuming insecticide (The Hindu, 6-01-2003), and in Karnataka 276 committed suicide during April-September 2003 owing indebtedness, loss of crops and hunger. What a novel situation for 'feeling good' !

And even most of this meager allocation for AAY will not reach the targeted population. Such is the state of rural-society management in most of the states in the country. The Public Distribution System and the Fair-price shops are the agencies through which the AAY is being implemented. How do those agencies work or to put more appropriately, how are they made to work by the Govt aiming at dismantling the entire public distribution system ?

A Study by National Institute of Rural Development(NIRD) revealed that 20 to 25 per cent of the rice allotted to below poverty line (BPL) cardholders in Tamilnadu, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and 50 per cent of the rice allotted to above poverty line (APL) card holders is being diverted elsewhere at Fair-price-Shop(FPS) level itself. According to the study, 50 per cent of wheat allotted to BPL people has been diverted in Madhya Pradesh. In Maharashtra the diversion

is found to be more than 50 per cent (Business Line, 04-02-2003).

The Govt of the day is loudly claiming that Rs 27000 crore is spent as food-subsidy. But what is the real story ? Parliamentary Standing Committee Chairman for food and civil supplies, Devendra Yadav, who as Food Minister introduced targeted PDS in 1997, said, " Sixty five per cent of the Rs 27000 crore food subsidy goes to bureaucrats' salary, establishment costs, storage, traders and exporters. The remaining 35 per cent goes by way of diversions and pilferage." (Times of India, 31-12-2003) According to a survey of below-poverty-line (BPL) families and PDS shops in east Delhi by 'Parivartan', an NGO, over 70 per cent of the subsidised food grains do not reach the desperately poor. The Parivartan had surveyed 160 families in Welcome colony near Seelampur in east Delhi. The survey report reveals, "not a single family has got full amount of ration. Only 23 per cent got something, that too lesser than the prescribed amount and at a higher price." (Times of India, 31-12-2003)

The fate of the AAY allocation is any body's guess. The Rice at Rs 3 a kg and wheat at Rs 2 a kg, or in that matter the major part of the allocations under targeted PDS for BPL families have become a bonanza not for the targeted poor but for the unscrupulous traders who are pushing the subsidized foodgrains to open market selling grains Rs 10 a kg and even to the foreign market at Rs 5 a kg. The diversion of the BPL foodgrains from the fair-price shops to traders and mortgaging of the BPL cards with the trading community are common phenomenon in most of the states. Definitely the traders, and FPS owners will feel good and welcome the NDA announcements, not the mass of the people whom such announcement was meant for.

These are announcements to fish votes and not for acting upon !

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THE VOICE OF THE WORKING WOMAN

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Lessons of the February 24 Strike

Sukomal Sen

Nobody can doubt the magnificent success of the February 24 nationwide strike in defence of the right to strike. This was the ninth nationwide general strike organised since the beginning of the vigorous implementation of the IMF-World Bank dictated neo-liberal globalisation policies in 1991. Unlike previous occasions, the nationwide strike this time was of a different kind. True, the issue of the right to strike arose out of neo-liberal economic onslaught on the employees and teachers of Tamil Nadu and the resistance they put up by their united strike in July 2003. But the issue ultimately assumed a different character with the savage victimisation of the striking employees and teachers by the Jayalalitha government and the subsequent ruling of the Supreme Court declaring strike by government employees as "illegal, immoral, and unethical" while simultaneously castigating the strikes by other sections of the workers. This aroused the anger and protest not only from the government employees and other sections of the working class, but from a cross section of democratic minded people and intelligentsia of the country, including the legal luminaries. The imperative of fighting this autocratic assault by the entire bourgeoisie state on the democratic right of the working class through united resistance was stressed through national

level, state level conventions and innumerable seminars and writings.

ROLE OF JUDICIARY

For last couple of years, Indian judiciary has been opening up its fangs against the rising struggle of the working classes to resist neo-liberal economic offensives. The Kerala High Court's ruling against bandh and the Supreme Court's approval subsequently, the Kolkata High Court's sudden ruling banning processions during the day time, the Supreme Court's reversal of its earlier judgment on Contract Labour - all these constitute a systematic attempt by one very important organ of the bourgeoisie state to bind the working class hand and foot in order to incapacitate their power of resistance.

In fact, globally, when the intensity of economic offensive of imperialist globalisation is fast sharpening, world capitalism is also bent upon rendering the working-class resistance powerless by banning or severely curbing their trade union activities. Spain, South Korea, Mexico, some Latin American countries (not to speak of Pakistan or some Middle East countries where traditional democratic rights and workers' right to strike are severely curtailed by the nature of their state structure) are witnessing this dictatorial offensive on the trade union rights. Of late, in

Galicia, Spain, a court sentenced a number of workers to 14 years rigorous imprisonment along with a huge amount of fine for the "crime" of picketing during a strike in June 2002. Spanish workers led by CIG are waging struggles to undo this judicial autocracy. It is in this global context, the onslaught of the judiciary on the working class resistance in India is, in all likelihood, set to intensify if not checkmated in time by the combined might of the working class with the support of the democratic minded intelligentsia and other sections of the people.

CRISIS OF CAPITALISM & DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE

Imperialist globalisation itself is a veritably undemocratic phenomenon. The entire process of globalisation is dictated by the needs of the imperialist-capitalist interests in the current phase of world capitalism, which is undergoing prolonged and deep-rooted structural crisis. The globalisation process is a bid to tide over this unprecedented crisis at the cost of common people in general, the working class in particular.

Obviously, the mechanism for implementation of this globalisation cannot be evolved democratically. When offensive is directed against the common people, the question of democratically deciding the devices of that offensive is unreal and ridiculous too.

IMF-World Bank-WTO are unelected bodies, run by select bureaucrats who are committed to faithfully serve the vested interests of world capitalism - particularly of the imperialist countries. So imperialist globalisation is not only undemocratic, but highly oppressive and dictatorial too. In the process, the sovereign nation-states while faithfully implementing these dictates in the national and international corporate interests, substantially lose their economic and ultimately political sovereignty.

In India, the spree of privatisation, closures, downsizing, disinvestment, retrograde change of labour laws and deterioration in workers' service conditions - all these are being arbitrarily decided and implemented by the executive in the interests of the big bourgeoisie and the multinational capital. Even the elected parliament is totally bypassed, or bulldozed to ditto these anti-worker, anti-people policies with the help of a subservient parliamentary majority.

It is a very peculiar situation developing in the present phase of world capitalism i.e. imperialist-globalisation. Today's working class movement is faced with the autocracy of the bourgeoisie state in all aspects of life of the toiling people and the democratic minded people as such. The present phase of capitalism is fast losing all bourgeoisie democratic norms which it espoused in its earlier phase. The BJP-led NDA

government by its very class nature and BJP's religious fundamentalist and outmoded outlook has turned out to be totally autocratic in forcing its anti-people, anti-democratic and reactionary economic and social policies on the people. The trade union movement is hard hit, not only by its economic offensive and anti-working class attitude, but by its divisive casteist and communal policies also. As a result, the trade union movement of the country cannot remain just confined to economic demands of wages and other economic issues relating to the workers' economic interest only.

TAKING UP DEMOCRATIC ISSUES

Long back in 1902 in his celebrated work "What is to be Done", Lenin sharply criticised the trade union movement in Russia at that time, particularly the trade union policy of the Mensheviks. Later in 1905, in his Two Tactics of Social Democracy, Lenin argued that the working class should move beyond the confines of its economic interests of wages and fight against the Tsarist autocracy and act as the leading force in the democratic struggle against Tsarism.

Lenin taught the working class the need for acquiring political consciousness (which has to be brought from outside by the Communist Party) and the need to rise above sheer economism. All these teachings of Lenin are well-known. But even then it needs reiteration considering the growingly autocratic attitude of the bourgeoisie state

(including judiciary) and growing attacks on the working class, its trade union movement and democratic aspirations of the people.

In the backdrop of the traumatic events of July-August 2003, when the entire state and its organs came down heavily upon the working class struggle, Lenin's teachings assume more relevance to the trade union movement. That is why the mighty unity leading to the nationwide strike of February 24 in defence of right to strike, signifies its historical importance. This latest episode of trade union resistance unleashed by the government employees' and the major part of country's trade union movement has marked a much needed and much desired change in the quality of the Indian trade union movement.

TRADE UNION UNITY

The nationwide strike on February 24 was a united working class action - but not an action of all-in-unity. In the trade union movement 'all-in-unity' is a strategic slogan with the purpose of uniting the entire working class. But in practice, the slogan can be materialised through different phases of struggles.

It is true that capitalist offensive of any form is directed against the entire working class without discrimination. It is more so in the current phase of imperialist globalisation. Moreover, the question of 'all-in-unity', if looked only from the angle of only top-level unity of different trade unions as the primary condition to ensure the grass-root level

unity of the entire working class, then one's attempt is most likely to flounder, especially in the concrete situation of the Indian trade union movement and political scenario.

In India the division of the trade union movement took place on ideological plane even before independence, and more particularly after attainment of independence. Emergence of a right-wing and reformist current at different phases/turning points within the trade union movement may be considered as one of the major reasons. Such right wing reformist ideological standing was designed for penetration of the capitalist ideology among the working class - not to fight it out resolutely. In the present phase of imperialist globalisation, when the offensive of the capitalist exploitation is being virulently intensified, practical experiences show that true to their birth marks, these right wing reformist trends led to occasional murmuring and protests against governments' anti-working class measures by some trade unions while they keep away from any action of resolute resistance. Of course, in some cases in industry-wise struggles, where the national economic policy of the state is not challenged, they do participate, but they take care to see that the over all interests or policies of the ruling classes are not targeted.

In India's trade union movement, therefore, historically a right-wing current of reformism persists and continues to do so even in this

phase of sharpening capitalist offensive on the working class. The reformists remain aloof from any trade union struggle that is designed to challenge the basic economic policy of the ruling classes.

Moreover, this reformist ideology tends to affect the centrist trade unions and on occasions any Left trade union also. In fact, in the struggle against imperialist globalisation, world wide there are two trends visible - one reformist and compromising and the other of resolute opposition and resistance. In India, the reformist ideology work in making the trade union movement sharply divided, preventing all-in-unified and determined resistance by the working class as a whole. These reformists, by their very class and ideological nature, subordinate the working class interests to capitalist interests. It is in this concrete situation, attempts should be made to penetrate into the ranks of the reformists and draw them into the struggle. And this is possible because despite the anti-struggle role of the reformist leadership, the ordinary workers affiliated to them are as much affected by the globalisation offensive as the other sections of the working class.

Immediately after the Jayalalitha government's savage attack on the striking employees and teachers, the AISGEF in cooperation with the Confederation of Central Government Employees took initiative for organising resistance in the form of a nationwide strike. It ultimately

announced on November 20, 2003, the date of strike as February 11, 2004 and also appealed to the central trade unions to decide on countrywide strike action in line with the declaration adopted by the National Trade Union Convention of 27th September 2003.

In this background, the CITU and other Left trade unions, which were from the very beginning pressing for a nationwide strike, in the process of their continuous effort to unite the other central trade unions for a countrywide strike action met together along with INTUC on January 5, 2004 and a joint decision could be taken for a countrywide general strike, but the agreed date was announced to be February 24, 2004.

But, INTUC kept away from the strike at the last moment. Despite this, a big section of their ranks - a section of the ranks of even the BMS and some others - participated in the strike and the unprecedented success of the strike is there for all to see. Thus the unity of the working class was ultimately built from the below and it succeeded to a great extent.

This is a big lesson in the desired task of building trade union unity in the country. Trade Union unity is achievable by struggle only and through generating urge for struggle at the grass root level and not merely by negotiations.

SOME EXPERIENCES IN STATE EMPLOYEES FRONT

These tactics of trade union unity were quite successful when applied in the front of state

employees. That the slogan of defending the right to strike in defiance of the most harmful judicial prohibition and the building of unity from below was correct is confirmed by the fact of unexpected success of the strike in Jammu & Kashmir (Kashmir valley in particular), Gujarat, UP, AP and to some extent in Karnataka. Given the situation of dangerous communal polarisation in Gujarat, or the historically persisting division of the state employees movement in AP, the huge success of the strike in these states was beyond expectation. It is clear that the slogan of defending the right to strike in the context of Supreme Court's ruling clicked and caught the imagination of the employees and workers.

So, this time the tactics of trade union unity and the correctness of the slogan worked in achieving success. More so, the importance of the success is notable because it was achieved overcoming all sorts of confusion and doubts raised in the aftermath of dissolution of parliament and the impending Lok Sabha elections.

OTHER VITAL LESSONS

Apart from the lessons of tactics of trade union unity and the correctness of the slogan and the appropriate timing of raising the slogan and unleashing the struggle, there are other vital lessons also to be taken from the strike.

Firstly, the barbaric victimisation in Tamil Nadu followed by the atrocious Supreme Court ruling initially created a highly demoralising situation and fear psychosis, particularly among the government employees. But the decision of the strike and its massive campaign and ultimately successful observance of the strike - turned the negative situation into a positive one.

Secondly, a massive and successful strike is possible on a purely democratic issue, without depending on economic issues like wages if the slogan is given at an appropriate moment, and the campaign is properly conducted, propagated and unity built.

Thirdly, the reliance on the masses is another important lesson - that fighting trade unions, if they can deeply

penetrate into the ranks and the issues are properly explained, then the masses of the workers can be moved for a big action on simply a democratic issue also as was February 24, 2004. Finally, working class movement while fighting against economic offensive, should also try to come out of sheer economism, deal with the popular issues of the democratic masses, unite with them, in the process get themselves politically educated, unleash united democratic struggles to defend democracy, trade union and political rights and get involved in the struggles for other national and international issues. This is of paramount importance in this phase of imperialist globalisation, imperialist aggression and all the aggressive and autocratic measures accompanying it.

The February 24, 2004 nationwide strike contains valuable lessons for the progressive and radical trade union movement of the country which aims at politically conscious working-class activities of the class as a whole.

COM AJIT CHOWDHURY PASSES AWAY

We are shocked to learn about the sudden demise of com Ajit Chowdhury, secretariat member of West Bengal state CITU and all India working committee member of CITU on 22nd February night at his 71 years of age. Com Chowdhury was one of the veteran organisers of the trade union movement in West Bengal. He started working in trade union movement as a worker of Jessop factory as back as 1949 and played a frontline role in organising the trade union movement in the entire Dumdum area of the North 24 parganas district. He was general secretary of North 24 Parganas District Committee of CITU. He was also the secretariat member of north 24 parganas dist committee of CPI(M). He was one of the popular leaders of the engineering workers and led many struggles under the banner of engineering workers federation. During his five decades long trade union life, he faced imprisonment and police atrocities while leading the struggles. CITU secretariat offers respectful homage to the memory of the departed leader and conveys condolence to his bereaved family members and comrades.

ECONOMY DERAILED ...

SHINING EXPORTS ? STATISTICAL JUGGLERY

The Central Statistical Organisation has already set the trend of reducing the base, say, in 2002-03 to jack up GDP growth in 2003-04. The same technique has now been applied to trade. Because the Mini-Exim policy needed spectacular export growth, the December 2002 export figures were slashed by \$2 billion and consequently the December 2003 exhibited fabulous export growth of 42% on a month on month basis. Questions

were arised about the shining figure, since infrastructure pressures that should have been associated with such fantastic export growth were not evident.... Beyond damned lies and statistics, April 2003-January 2004 cumulative export growth of 12.83 per cent is more realistic. This confirms exports slowing down in 2003-04 compared to 2002-03 since the first ten months of 2002-03 produced 17.16 per cent (export growth)....

(Editorial, THE financial Express, 04-03-2004)

PSUs ARE THE HIGHEST TAX-PAYERS

Public sector corporations accounted for 8 out of 10 top corporate tax- payers for the last nine months of the current fiscal....

State Bank of India stood first with a tax payment of Rs 1234 crores with an increase of 18.54%, followed by Indian Oil Corporation with a payment of Rs 1133 crore making an increase of 55.6%. LIC with a tax payment of Rs 909 crore registered an increase of 5.61% over the same period last year. Other prominent tax payers are : Hindustan

Petroleum Rs 623 crore(62%), Bharat Petroleum Rs 479 crore(91%), Bank of Baroda Rs 423 crore(120%), Nabard Rs 325 crore(7.26%), Bank of India Rs 320 crore(68%). TISCO (Rs 530 crore) and Hindustan Lever are the only two private companies that figure among the top ten corporate tax-payers from Mumbai.

(Economic Times, 02-03-2004)

Yet the NDA Govt is desperate to sell the PSUs by any means and at any cost !

YET, SELL THE PSUs OUT....!

Riding the 'so called' success of recent over-subscription in selling of shares of blue-chip PSUs in the market, disinvestments minister Arun Shouri has hinted that the government can raise as much

as Rs 1,50,000 crore every year for five years from the market by way of such sale of shares.

(From The Financial Express, 12-03-2004)

Yes they will put the entire country on sale !

84 LAKH NEW JOBS ! 12% JOBS LOST IN INSURANCE SECTOR ALONE

Almost 11.66 per cent of over 67,600 employees (around 7882) of the four nationalized general insurance companies have gone through VRS. United India has seen over 12% of 18009 employees (2171) leaving through VRS. In New India Assurance, the VRS toll is 2150 (11.23%). For National Insurance, it is 11.4% and rest in the

Oriental Insurance. Besides causing a huge outgo of funds amounting to around Rs 1000 crore, the VRS may result in outflow of skill and business-experience as well, as expressed by some senior official of the nationalised Insurance sector.

(Source: Economic Times, Financial Express, 02-03-2004)

DOWN THE DISASTER LANE !

RURAL ELECTRIFICATION ?

The 55th round of National Survey Organisation (NSSO- June-July 2000) reported that around 51 per cent of rural households, corresponding to 70-80 million families, burn kerosene in lanterns for light. Although 87 per cent of villages have been declared (?) electrified, barely 43 per cent of the rural households actually have power

connections, leaving the un-electrified homes and poor dependent on kerosene....

And though the kerosene is largely poor man's lighting fuel, the distribution process is beset with problems of poor transparency, 'rent-seeking' and diversion to more profitable use... said Ibrahim H Rehman of Tata Energy Research Institute

(Business Line, 12-03-2004)

DISMAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES !

India's health indicators are among the worst in the world. For instance, according to the latest National Family Health survey (1998-99), half of all Indian children are undernourished and half of all adult women suffer from anaemia....

The condition of health services is no less dismal. As a ratio of GDP, public expenditure on health in India is among the lowest in the world - about one per cent. In fact, the health system is almost totally privatised. To illustrate, only 15 per cent of total health expenditure in India is public expenditure; the rest is private... By contrast, the ratio of public expenditure to total health expenditure is 40 per cent in east Asia, 50 per cent in Latin America, 75 per cent in Europe, and as high as 85 per cent in Britain. In large parts of India, there are

no public health facilities worth the name, except for female sterilisation and polio immunisation.... If anything, the neglect of health services in public policy has intensified in the "liberalisation" period. Public expenditure on health declined steadily since early Nineties, as a share of GDP... As the recent budget indicates, the spotlight today is on expensive, high-tech facilities such as modern hospitals, and also on "vertical" programmes sponsored by foreign agencies, such as the pulse-polio programme. Basic health services, for their part, have been grossly neglected, to the extent that the coverage of routine immunisation has shrunk in recent years, according to the Reproductive and Child Health surveys....

(Jean Dreze, The Hindu, 12-03-2004)

EMPLOYMENT DEGENERATION.... !

....Only a month back, in November, 7.5 million people had applied for a mere 38,000 vacancies of "gangman" in the Indian Railways. Thousands of those applicants were post-graduates and MBAs.

The number of applicants had, in fact, exceeded the total population of Switzerland, was twice the population of Ireland, and a third more than the populations of Norway, Finland and New Zealand. The numbers say it all. After 56 died in the riots that followed, and 38,000 eventually got

employment, more than 7.45 million of those who applied are still jobless.

Notwithstanding the exuberance over the "unprecedented" growth of the software industry, the fact remains that India's famed IT industry has only created 0.5 million jobs. In the name of software exports, the IT industry continues to milk the state exchequer by way of tax exemptions and "incentives for improving efficiency," a sophisticated term for the much-abused subsidy.

(Business Line, 31-12-2003)

COMRADE PARAMESHWAR SINGH IS NO MORE

Comrade Parameshwar Singh, the veteran trade union leader and working committee member of CITU died on 2nd March 2004 at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi after prolonged illness. He was 88.

Comrade Parameshwar Singh is one of those who played crucial role in establishing and developing the CITU central office as the important centre of the trade union movement in the country since its inception. He was also closely associated with the Reception Committee of the foundation conference of CITU. He had been in the trade union movement since last more than five decades. He was born in Sherghati in Gaya district of Bihar and started his working life as a worker of the-then foreign-owned Petroleum company, Caltex at Calcutta in the late thirties and subsequently became an activist of the Petroleum Workers Union. In that process he got actively associated with the work of Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress (BPTUC). He took early retirement from service in 1969. After formation of CITU in 1970, he joined the CITU centre as a whole-timer and shouldered tremendous responsibility in organizing the central office at its formative stage. He was subsequently elected in the all India working committee of CITU and remained in that position till death. He had also been a member of Communist Party of India(Marxist) since last more than thirty years. Despite failing health, he remained actively associated with the work of CITU centre till the last days of his life.

The CITU secretariat while expressing grave shock over the demise of Com Singh, conveyed heartfelt condolence to his bereaved family members. M K Pandhe and Chittabrata Majumdar, President and General Secretary of CITU, both of whom were out of Delhi at the time of death have conveyed their heartfelt condolence from Korba and Kolkata respectively. Prakash Karat, Polit Bureau Member of CPI(M), E Balanandan, Vice President, CITU, Kanai Banerjee, K Hemalata, Tapan Sen, Secretaries of CITU, Ranjit Basu, Treasurer CITU, Sunit Chopra, Secretary, All India Agricultural

Workers Union, Pramila Pandhe, All India Democratic Womens' Association, P M S Grewal, Secretary, Delhi State CPI(M), and many others paid homage of respect to the departed leader before his last journey.

CONDOLENCE MEETING

A condolence meeting was held at BTR Bhawan, CITU Central Office Auditorium in memory of Comrade Parameshwar Singh, on 9th March. Presiding over the condolence meeting, M K Pandhe, President CITU, recalled the great contribution made by Comrade Parameshwar Singh in building the CITU Centre and its functioning. He recalled Parameshwarda's tireless service in building a strong centre. His total commitment and dedication to the movement was evident in his work and the way he lived. He attended all the CITU all India Conferences, except the recently held Eleventh Conference at Chennai which he missed due to ill health. This last winter, even with his deteriorating health condition he attended the office for a few hours daily, as long as he could.

Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU, recalled that Parameshwar Singh did every kind of work at the Centre. Comrades who worked with him all really loved and respected him, because of the love and respect he gave them.. It is notable that an ordinary worker from a poor family was able to rise so high in the CITU. We must remember this and try to emulate him, and bring in more workers like him into the CITU.

Kanai Banerjee, Secretary, CITU, said that Parameshwar-da was a father figure in CITU, who will be remembered and missed for a long time. He said that Com. Parameshwar Singh was a member of the CPI(M) who had a ceaseless quest for knowledge and a keen interest in political developments, which he discussed avidly.

Ashok Vashisht, member of the Editorial board of CITU Mazdoor, recalled his association with Com Parmeshwar Singh and related many episodes about his life and younger days.

The CITU has lost an invaluable comrade. We dip our flag in homage to his memory.

SHOURI'S ASSURANCE !

Come election, each and every minister of the NDA clan has been showering assurances and promises to different constituencies of electorates. Some are assuring people to generate more employment, some are distributing fake enrolment forms and identity cards for imaginary social security benefits for the unorganised sector workers, some on free-electricity and remunerative price to farmers, some on lucrative contracts etc. Of all such pre-election promises, only Shouri's one appears to be more genuine.

Riding on the so called success of the sell-off exercise of the shares of the blue chip PSUs like ONGC, GAIL etc, which might fetch around Rs 14500 crore for the govt, Shouri, the BJP minister in charge of selling national assets through whatever route available, minced no words in giving a clear message— give me votes and I will sell-off whatever remains of national assets faster. He could not suppress his glee in setting his target of PSU-sell-off more than 10 times higher next year. "Speaking at the valedictory session of the Young Indians Summit at New Delhi on 11th March, Arun Shouri has hinted that government can raise as much as Rs 1,50,000 crore every year for five years from the market." (The Financial Express, 12-03-2004).

Shouri's track record as a BJP minister has earned him such dubious 'genuinity' of a desperate salesman serving the buyers. Each and every public sector unit privatized so far through strategic sale, has ultimately turned out to be a free-gift to the private buyer, sometimes with cash-bonus, following the post-privatisation settlements

and "post-closing adjustment". Having been obstructed in selling off coal companies, Nalco, HPCL, BPCL etc owing to workers and peoples' resistance or the Supreme Court judgment as the case may be, Shouri has chosen the share-sale route to achieve the budgetary target.

But even in the midst of euphoria of so called success of the market sale of shares of selected blue-chip PSUs, being created by media and the capitalist lobby for obvious reasons, it can no way be concealed that the sale of shares in block of the highly profitable and natural-resource-rich PSUs like ONGC, GAIL etc have turned out to be an utterly under-priced sale, resulting in huge loss to national exchequer. The arithmetic of deciding the offer-price-band for sale of shares of those PSUs clearly reveals a deliberate ploy to keep the price lower and a marked departure from the standard norm being followed by the Standard Companies in the same sector both within and abroad, in the matter of pricing of shares for sale-in-block. And there has been manipulation, falsity and forgery at every step right from projecting a bearish stock-market through bear-cartel operation to the false projection on the extent of "over-subscription" through multiple counting of the same offers, as exposed by some national dailies on 12th March. And this demonstrates, rather certifies the consistency of Shouri's dubious resolve to sell-out PSUs with huge national asset and vast reserve of natural resources by any means and at any cost.

Any body can now guess the pace at which the entire nation would be placed on sale, if the Shouri's clan comes back to power.

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ELECTION TIME IS RUDY TIME FOR VAJPAYEE & CO.

Dipankar Mukherjee

It was New Year eve as well as election-eve for the Aviation Minister Rajib Pratap Rudy and he chose Airport Authority of India Ltd, a profit making PSU under his ministry, for footing his hotel bill at Goa. When caught, he paid it from his personal account.

It is election eve and the Vajpayee govt made a rush to the market to sell Govt. shares of six PSUs, including two Navratnas —ONGC & GAIL, so that budgetary deficit can be made up before 31.3.2004. Why this deficit? As the government had to give pre-electoral sops of Rs 12,000 crores to those who 'shine' in NDA rule - corporates, MNCs, share market operator etc. for cheaper air travel, cheaper foreign liquor, less import duty, tax concessions, etc, etc. Deficit because government had to spend before election, hundreds of crores on pre-election campaign through government departments, to make people 'feel good'.

If Rudy had the spectre of post election scenario—"Kal Ho Na Ho" and hence to enjoy at the cost of a PSU before election, so has the Vajpayee government despite all bravado, a dismal prospect of come back. So give parting electoral gift to the rich, enjoy electoral extravaganza, all at the expense of 106 crore of people who hold the shares of PSUs through President of India. Government of the day is only the Trustee of the shares on behalf of the people. But the caretaker government is flouting the trust to cover up its financial profligacy. In case of Rudy, it is an individual minister milching a much maligned PSU, while Vajpayee Government has institutionalized global loot of pride of India —its navratnas, through either strategic sale or sale of shares in block in the market. Rudy, when caught, could pay from his pocket, but who will give back the Indian people their irreplaceable assets like GAIL and ONGC?

It may be recalled when NDA Government came to power, it sold 25% Government shares of GAIL in November 1999 at a grossly under-priced value of Rs 70 per share. There was a furore inside the

Parliament and outside that the share was priced 3 to 4 times less than the actual value which meant a loss of not less than Rs 1500 crore to the exchequer. Incidentally most of the 25% shares were acquired by M/s British Gas and Enron, global competitors of GAIL. Now, when 10% of Government's share in ONGC & GAIL is being rushed for distress sale, the loss would be in the tune of not less than Rs. 5000 to 6000 crore. The following details would make it abundantly clear, how this huge amount of public money is being compromised in this deal to please the Foreign Investors(Fis) and Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) who are keen to acquire the control, in graduation, of these irreplaceable asset-bases and natural resources of India, with minimum investment in a highly manipulated share market.

ONGC

Shares offered for sale - 142.5 million (10% of total holding)

Offer Price/Share - Rs.680-750

Earning per share (in 2002-2003) - Rs. 74

Price Earning Ratio - 9.2 to 10.1

Expected earning from disinvestment- Rs.9690 crore to Rs. 10,875 crore

Govt's share after disinvestment - 74%

GAIL

Shares offered for sale - 84.6 million (10% total holding)

Offer price/Share - Rs.185

Earning per share (in 2002-2003) - Rs.19.38

Price Earning Ratio - Rs.9.5

Expected earning from disinvestment - Rs.1565 crore

Govt. Share after disinvestment - 57%

(25% were earlier disinvested in November 99)

In international market, the price-earning ratio (i.e. offered share price divided by earning per share) of similar oil/gas based companies like ONGC & GAIL, would not be less than 15 to 20. That means, the standard norm for sale of shares in block is fixing the offer price at a level of 15 to 20 times the earning per share as generally being followed

by the global oil majors like BP, Exxon-Mobil, Royal Dutch Petroleum etc. In case of ONGC and GAIL, it was fixed at around 9 to 10 times of the earning per share, that too calculated in a highly manipulative share market. Moreover in case of PSUs the equity base is comparatively larger than the similarly placed private companies, and thus the price-earning ratio should be comparatively higher and the fixing of offer prices should be based on an even higher multiple than usual 15-20 times. But in the election-eve off-loading ceremony, the Shouri and Co decided to grossly under-price the share at a multiple of 9/10 of the earning per share and made a bonanza to the foreign investors in the midst of stage-managed self-congratulatory noise created through media and the capitalist lobby regarding the so called high-pitch response in market.. Even if the actual share value of ONGC and GAIL is computed at the minimum price earning ratio of 15, the country has already lost about Rs.5000 to 6000 crores in recent sale of shares thus giving rise to another sordid disinvestments scam, perpetrated by the present government.

Whether in disinvestments through strategic sale

or through market-sale of shares, the government has always refused to value the assets on the basis of replacement value and has gone for valuation of assets through either Discounted cash flow method or through share valuation as per manipulated market which in turn has, in every case of disinvestment, led to gross under valuation, and therefore to the biggest ever scam in post-independent India in the name of disinvestments/privatization . It has always gone for a distress sale to makeup its budgetary deficit and in the process has gifted thousands of crores of public money to domestic and foreign investors. Vajpayee & Co. should not be allowed to get away with another 5 to 6 thousand crore worth scam, just before election, at the cost of India's pride and MNC's envy viz ONGC & GAIL, to meet NDA's electoral expense. Election Commission as well as Hon'ble President should stall this sale notwithstanding the hullabaloo created by Shourie's drummer boys in the corporate and media, so that in future no government can treat election time as looting- time for misusing and liquidating public assets, built by common mans' money.

SHOURI AND THE MANIPULATORS

Arun Shouri, the disinvestments minister, in an interview to Suveen K Sinha of the weekly news-magazine, Outlook, commented that 'Markets are non-existent' and 'a few manipulators controls the market'. The interview goes further as under:

"Question: Who was the part of bear-cartel (the manipulators) ?

Shouri : How can I reveal. I have told them not to reveal...

Question: Why don't you take them to task ?

Shouri: What purpose will it serve ? Take them to court ? The court takes 15 years....

Question: You mean some of the advisors to the issues (share-sale of PSUs) were part of the bear cartel ?

Shouri: I am not saying anything more(sighs)....

Question: Tell us the name, we will publish it.

Shouri: You can find it on your own....

Question: Why not punish them ?

Shouri: Punishing will lead to collapse of the market..... " (*Outlook, March 22, 2004*)

Shouri knew the market manipulators but refused to disclose their names and take punitive action against those offenders. Because the manipulators and the sales-minister's party were in league in selling off the highly valued shares at a low price within minutes and share the gains (the exchequer's loss) themselves.

Vast Areas of Darkness in 'Shining' India

K Hemalata

If India is shining for the select few in the capital city of Delhi, it is quite dark for millions of women here and other cities. The findings of a study on the conditions of women workers in the informal sector- the home based workers and the self employed- in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata revealed horrifying exploitation of large sections of home-based women workers in various occupations. In each and every case, the workplace is worker's own and the employers or the middlemen have no expense to provide the work-place. And in every case the workers get a pittance, on a piece-rate for backbreaking long-hours of work. And their earnings in all the cases do not even constitute .01% of the price the materials they produce fetch in the market. This horrifying revelation of exploitation in the major metropolis of so called "shining India" was made public in a Seminar cum workshop held on in March 2004 at New Delhi.

Along with the presentation made on the Study-paper, some homebased workers from Delhi were also invited in the Seminar to present their direct experience of work.

Sumitra, who prepares small stones for use in embroidery in fancy garments, said that the supply of the material by the middleman is not regular. She is paid only Rs. 15 for making 1,200 ornamental stones. With the help of her children, she manages to complete doing 1,200 stones, working for around 10 hours in a day. She complained that even these meagre wages are not paid regularly.

Usha, who does patch cutting, works for 6 hours a day. The cloth and the design are supplied to her by a person in the same locality. She manages to cut around 20- 25 pieces in a day with the help of her daughter and earns Rs. 20 -25 per day, i.e. Re. 1/- per piece. She feels she should get at least Rs. 4-5 per piece. The work is not regular and there is lot of competition, so she cannot demand a wage rise. The fingers are affected due to continuously working with scissors. Rekha stitches ornamental designs on garments.

She gets Rs. 5 per piece, which she completes in a day. She knows that the same pieces are sold at a high price in the market, and that she is exploited, but feels helpless as she gets no other work. Besides, she said that there is so much competition due to unemployment that she cannot ask for higher wages.

Kamini makes elastic for use in garments. She is paid Rs. 0. 20 ps for making one dozen elastics. She makes around 30 dozens and earns between Rs. 6 and Rs. 8 per day.

Geeta removes the thin film from aluminium foil envelopes. The envelopes are soaked in water for one hour and then the film is removed. She gets Rs. 10 for removing the film from 1,000 envelopes. If her daughter helps, she can complete 1,000 envelopes in one day. Otherwise it takes two days. But even this work is not available now. Her husband is a drunkard. He has TB.

Champa makes 'elements' for soldering irons. She cuts the nickel sheets into small pieces, folds small tungsten steel pieces and keeps them inside. She gets Rs. 15 for making 100 such 'elements'. She is able to complete 100 pieces in a day with the help of her children aged 6, 9, 12, and 17. She injures her hands and fingers while cutting the tin. She is the only earning member in the family. The payment is made once in a week or fortnight, while the 'elements' are collected by the middle man every day.

Some of the women present were involved in toffee wrapping and price tag making. The toffees and the papers are provided by a middle man. The women are paid Rs. 3 for wrapping one kilo of toffees. It takes around 10 days to wrap 5 kg of toffees and the women earn Rs. 15 in 10 days ! Paper price tags are also supplied by weight. Threads have to be attached to the tags. Rs. 12 are paid for attaching threads to 1 kg of tags. Suman takes around 2 days to complete 1 kg, if she works the whole day without any help. Her husband used to do embroidery work whenever he got work. He used to earn Rs. 70 to 80 a day

when he got work. But now a days he does not get any work. She does not like to involve her children in this work as she wants them to concentrate on their studies.

Rekha makes and packs bindis. She gets plain bindis and has to stick tiny beads on these to make them attractive. This creates a lot of strain on her eyes. She can make 1 box of 144 packets of bindis in 5 days. She gets Rs. 20 per box, which enables her to earn an average of Rs 4 per day.

Varsha is involved in another stage of making 'elements'. She adds wire to the elements. She is paid Rs. 8 per 100 elements and earns around Rs. 20- 25 per day. Her husband has severe burn injuries and cannot work. Her daughter Rekha, who suffers from asthma makes bindis. Both her husband and daughter need treatment, which she is not able to afford.

Kalavati is old, probably above 60. She also makes

paper price tags. She is paid Rs. 11 per kg. She can make around 1 kg of tags in 2-3 days. She gets severe backache as a result of working in a sitting position for long hours.

All the women were unanimous that their conditions were better 5 years ago, compared to the present. For example, one woman said that 10 years back, when she came to Delhi, she used to pay Rs. 300 as house rent. Her husband used to earn Rs. 50 per day. Now he gets Rs. 100 per day but the work is not regular. But the rent for the same house has gone up to Rs. 1,000. Earlier, they used to get cheap ration through the PDS. Now nothing is available in the ration shops.

All the women were very angry that the Government was allowing free sale of liquor, to fill its coffers. But it is not bothered about how the poor women suffer because of their husband's drinking habits.

FEEL GOOD ! REALLY ?

As per 2001 Census figures

- ▶ Of 177.5 million rural houses, over half or 88 million had walls of grass, thatch, bamboo, mud or unfired brick and 125 million rural houses, or 70 per cent, had mud floors. What about your much advertised 'Gramin Abas Yojana' Mr Prime Minister ?
- ▶ 56 per cent of the 138 million rural households have no access to electricity and kept their abodes lit by kerosene, as and when available
- ▶ What about the much touted programme for carrying electricity to all villages ?
- ▶ Only 24 per cent of rural household got their water supply from taps, 43 per cent got water from hand-pumps and 22 per cent fetched water from wells
- ▶ 108 million of total 138 million rural households did not have toilets.
- ▶ In rural India there were 1.98 million places of worship but only 0.98 million factories and workshops, 0.34 million hospitals and dispensaries and 0.26 millions schools and colleges...

Well, these are all figures from the 2001 census records. But what is the reality. As against the claim of 89 per cent rural households having access to water, the ground reality is that there is just one hand pump or standpipe for every 250 people and a water source within 1.6 km of a habitation. But even under this punishing norm, do people get quality water all the year round? Here is what the World Bank has to say: "...many drinking water supply facilities in rural India are defunct due to poor maintenance and not sustainable." And here's what experts tell us: there is poison and all kinds of pollutants in that water that large number of rural Indians drink and use, causing diseases, deformities and deaths....(*My News, Rediff.Com*, 26-12-2003)

REPORTS & EVENTS

HARYANA

BRICK-KILN WORKERS IN STRIKE STRUGGLE

Brick-kiln workers in Haryana have been in statewide struggle demanding higher wages. District level strikes are being organized throughout the state. Already in four districts, viz., Hissar, Fatehabad and Bhiwani, the Brick-kiln workers had to come forward for settlement with CITU affiliated Laljhanda Bhatta Mazdoor Union in the face of indefinite strike action by the workers enmasse. After three days strike in Hissar, five days strike in Fatehabad and four days strike in Bhiwani braving atrocities by police and employers' henchmen, settlements were arrived at in those districts which

have led to wage rise of around 7 per cent with separate provision of increase in Dearness allowance. In Jind district, the Brick kiln workers have gone on indefinite strike since 9th March and in other districts as well, strike preparation is going on.

In the preparatory stage itself, the brick-kiln workers and the CITU leadership in the state had to confront police atrocities. Pravat Singh and Satvir Singh, President and General Secretary of State CITU along with four others have been implicated in false case by the police. Indiscriminate raids by Police and the armed gangsters deployed by the brick-kiln owners

in the residences of the workers took place to terrorise the workers. But nothing can deter the workers from the strike action.

Laljhanda Bhatta Mazdoor Union, Haryana (CITU) have been preparing for last three months for this struggle. The district level conferences of the union held in ten districts of the state have drawn the plan for the statewide strike action. The Union also organized numerous demonstration in all the districts of the state in support of the countrywide general strike of 24TH February. Around 45000 brick-kiln workers took part in the general strike and organized militant demonstration.

CHATTISGARH STATE CONFERENCE OF CITU

The State Conference of CITU was held at Gevra coallier township, Korba on 29th February -2nd March 2004. The conference venue was named as (B T Ranadive Nagar, while the Conference dais was named after Sunil Basu Roy, recently departed leader of the coal workers movement.

On 29th February, M K Pandhe, President CITU inaugurated the conference. In his inaugural speech, Pandhe explained in details the ruinous impact of the policies of LPG on the common

people and rising discontent among the masses. The working class movement must take initiative to organise the toiling people in militant struggle against the imperialist-dictated policies as well as against the anti-people NDA regime and for the same CITU must take front line role, Pandhe asserted. Pandhe also stressed upon the urgent need for strengthening the CITU organizationally throughout the State in order to be able to effectively discharge the responsibility fallen on it.

After the inaugural session a huge procession of workers and delegates moved through the coal township to converge in a mass meeting at Durga Chawk. The mass rally was presided over by S Sudevan, President, Chattisgarh State CITU and was addressed by M K Pandhe, President CITU, Ardhendu Dakshi, Secretary CITU and Haradhan Roy, General Secretary, All India Coal Workers' Federation.

Delegate session of the conference started on the second day on 1st March which was attended by 115

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delegates from different parts and industries of the State. The proceeding was conducted by a presidium headed by S Sudevan. M K Nandy General Secretary of state CITU placed the report of activities and organization in the conference. 34 delegates including six women delegates took part in deliberations on general secretary's report and put forward

many suggestions for improving the organization and pace of activities.

The Conference was also addressed by Ardhendu Dakshi, Secretary CITU, Usha Paragnil of state AIDWA, N K Kashyap, President, State Kisan Sabha, Badal Saroj, General Secretary of M P State CITU besides the leaders of other fraternal

organization. Conference also passed resolutions against the disastrous policies of LPG, against communalism and casteism, in defence of right to strike and various other subjects. The conference elected a 29 member state Committee with Ajit Lal as President, M K Nandy as General Secretary.

20TH CONFERENCE OF FMRAI

The 20th Conference of Federation of Medical and Sales Representatives' Associations of India was held on 9-12 February 2004 at Hyderabad. The Conference was held at Nanduri Prasada Rao Nagar (APSRTC Complex) Hyderabad.

The Conference was attended by 784 delegates from all over the country. In his inaugural address to the conference, Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary, CITU dealt in detail the issues arising out of the neoliberal imperialist globalisation and its severe impact on the working class and the people and the dangers to economic sovereignty and the society as a whole emanating from the same. While pointing to the mounting unrest among the people and rising pitch of countrywide struggles against those policies in the background of intensification of the anti-globalisation movement worldwide, Majumdar stressed upon the urgent need to further

broad-base the unity of the working class and the toiling people from all walks of life and heighten the pitch of struggle. He also emphasized the immediate task before the working class movement of exposing the anti-people, anti-national BJP-led NDA regime and ensure their rout in the forthcoming election. E Balanandan, Vice President CITU also addressed the inaugural session and dealt on the crucial role that is being played by FMRAI in the trade union movement and stressed upon the urgent need of strengthening the same. The inaugural session was also addressed by Dr P M Bhargava, Chairman of the Reception Committee, K L Mahendra, President, World Federation of Trade Unions and leadership of other fraternal organizations.

The delegate session was conducted by a presidium consisting of J S Majumdar, R S Bajpai, K Ramesh and A K Ghosh. D P Dubey, General

Secretary placed the Report before the conference on the issues confronted and activities during the period since the 19th Conference. Two other documents on agenda on movements and agenda on organization were placed before the conference by Amitava Guha and R Viswanathan respectively.

36 delegates took part in deliberation on General Secretary's report, 22 delegates deliberated on agenda on movement and organization and 14 delegates participated in the discussion on sectional movements. Deliberation contained mature analysis of the situation and concrete suggestions on strengthening the organization, besides outlining the pressing tasks before the entire movement.

On 12th, DP Dubey replied to the points raised in the deliberation and summing up speech was delivered by J S Majumdar. The Conference elected a 20 member Secretariat,

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48 member working committee and a 221 member general council with R Viswanathan as President, D P Dubey as General Secretary

and S R Roy as Treasurer. The open session of the conference in the form of a huge mass rally was held on 11th February

afternoon at Indira Park which was addressed by B V Raghavulu, Secretary, AP State CPI(M), J S Majumdar and DP Dubey besides others.

STRONG DEMONSTRATION AT CHANDIGARH

On 11th March 2004, a huge demonstration of around ten thousand workers from the cycle industry and brick-kilns in the state took place before the office of the Labour Commissioner, Punjab at Chandigarh. The demonstration was organized by the Punjab State CITU to protest against desperate violation of Factories Act and other labour laws by the owners of Cycle industries of Ludhiana and non-enforcement of basic labour related statutes in respect of the brick-kiln workers in the state of Punjab. The demonstration was joined by the workers enmasse from Hero Cycle Ltd, Highway Cycle Industries Ltd, Ralson India Ltd, Wassn

Engineering Corporation, K W Engg Works, Avon Cycle Ltd, Rockman Cycle Ltd,—all from Ludhiana. Brick-kiln workers in thousands from all over the state also joined the demonstration.

The demonstration was addressed by Balwant Singh, President of Punjab State CITU, Raghunath Singh, Vice President CITU, Vijay Mishra, Working President, Punjab State CITU, Sukhvinder Singh, Punjab Kisan Sabha besides others. Speakers pointed out to the gross violation of labour laws by the cycle industry owners in the form of 12 hours working without proper overtime payment, no safety arrangement and non-supply of minimum safety

appliance, absence of statutory social security benefits or violation thereof etc. They also mentioned about the threat of closure and lock-out frequently being given by the owners to the unions demanding implementation of labour laws. The conditions of the workers in the brick-kiln are even more precarious where the kiln-owners, taking advantage of the crisis and recession have been denying almost everything to the workers. The demonstration demanded upon the govt to take immediate action against the law-breaker employers and arrange for strict implementation of labour laws. From the demonstration, a memorandum was submitted to the Labour Commissioner, Punjab.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY OBSERVED AT CITU CENTRE

The CITU Centre organised a meeting in the auditorium in BTR Bhawan, the CITU headquarters in Delhi, on the occasion of the International Women's Day on 8th March 2004. Ranjana Nirula, member, General Council of CITU, presided over

the meeting and observed that this was the first time that such a meeting was being organised at the CITU Centre.

Speaking on the occasion, M K Pandhe, President of CITU, said that International Women's Day is not an occasion to be observed by

women only. Both women and men need to fight for women's emancipation. He suggested that seminars or bigger meetings be organised on the occasion from next time onwards. Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary of CITU, said that CITU has been

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paying attention to the question of organising women and promoting them to leadership positions. These efforts need to be intensified in the coming days and awareness on this has to be created among the men also. Hemalata, Secretary, CITU

gave a short historic outline of the International Women's Day and said that it is necessary for both men and women to fight shoulder to shoulder to end the exploitative capitalist society; women can achieve their due place in society

only when exploitation of man by man was ended. She also emphasised the need to overthrow the anti worker, anti women NDA Government, in the ensuing elections to the Lok Sabha. WR Varada Rajan, Secretary, CITU gave the vote of thanks.

TEXTILE WORKERS' STRUGGLE AT PANIPAT

Panipat is known as the Textile-town of Haryana. Around 50000 workers work in around 600 spinning mills at Panipat-Samalka area. In none of the factories, even statutory minimum wages are paid to the highly skilled workers whose usual working hours in 12 hours a day without any overtime payment. Overwhelming majority of the workers are contract workers supplied to the mill owners by labour contractors. An unholy alliance of mill-owners, contractors and the state administration has been jointly promoting absolute lawlessness in the textile sector here. Workers are made to work for 12 hours, minimum wages are not paid, employment registers are not being maintained, and no social security benefit like PF, ESI is available to the workers. If any worker dies of accident while at work, the mill-owner immediately denies the responsibility as the victim worker is not in the roll of the factory. Deployment of workers on contract in textile industry is prohibited at Haryana through govt-notification. But that is only on paper.

The 24th February 2004, the day of countrywide General Strike in defence of Right to strike marked the beginning of a militant phase of united struggle of textile workers at Panipat at the initiative of CITU. Major section of the workers started continuous strike from 24th February 2004 demanding implementation of labour laws as mentioned above. In the first week of March, the tempo of strike reached such a peak that District Administration had to intervene and during 3rd-5th March, the mill-owners of around 200 spinning units had to come forward and enter into agreement regarding maintenance of Employment Register, payment of Minimum Wages etc. In other units the agreement is yet to be arrived at and in the units where agreements were arrived at, the employers started bungling on their implementation and payment of regular wages to workers. On 14th March a huge ten thousand strong rally of textile workers was held at the Circus ground. The rally was addressed by Tapan Sen, Secretary CITU,

Satvir Singh, General Secretary of Haryana State CITU, senior CITU leaders S N Solanki, Surendra Malik, Santokh Singh, Santosh from Anganwari Union, Jagpal of Sarb Karmachari Sangh Anand Jawhara, Secretary of Panipat District CITU, Rajib from Bhawan Nirman Kamgarh Union, besides leaders of the fraternal organizations like DYFI, Kisan Sabha etc.

On 15th March, a massive demonstration of several thousand workers was held before the office of the Deputy Commissioner in charge of district administration and memorandum was submitted demanding administrative intervention for implementation of labour laws and the agreements in the textile units at Panipat.

In the rally of 14th March, it was also announced to hold a massive demonstration before the office of the Labour Commissioner of Haryana at Chandigarh. It was also decided to go for multiple-day strike action in all the textile units at Panipat in April, if no improvement in the situation takes place.

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

State	Sr. Centre		Month		State	Sr. Centre		Month	
	No.		Dec.' 03	Jan.' 04		No.		Dec.' 03	Jan.' 04
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	475	475	Maharashtra	38	Mumbai	589	593
	2	Guntur	502	503		39	Nagpur	506	509
	3	Hyderabad	497	499		40	Nasik	545	543
	4	Visakhapatnam	488	493		41	Pune	566	568
	5	Warangal	511	512		42	Solapur	517	528
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	426	427	Orissa	43	Barbil	440	442
	7	Guwahati	505	501		44	Rourkela	443	442
	8	Labac-Silchar	398	396	Punjab	45	Amritsar	436	438
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	439	439		46	Ludhiana	447	449
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	442	432	Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	492	492
Bihar	11	Monghyr	485	485		48	Jaipur	457	459
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	447	446	Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	535	539
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	491	494		50	Coimbatore	501	504
	14	Bhavnagar	504	506		51	Coonoor	497	498
	15	Rajkot	451	453		52	Madurai	492	486
	16	Surat	477	478		53	Salem	486	480
	17	Vadodra	467	468		54	Tiruchirapally	576	548
Haryana	18	Faridabad	504	510	Uttar Pradesh	55	Agra	464	469
	19	Yamunanagar	466	463		56	Ghaziabad	494	500
J & K	20	Srinagar	589	595		57	Kanpur	476	480
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	466	466		58	Saharanpur	459	462
	22	Jharia	404	402		59	Varanasi	513	516
	23	Kodarma	409	411	West Bengal	60	Asansol	484	484
	24	Noamundi	442	451		61	Darjeeling	430	426
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	456	456		62	Durgapur	571	573
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	485	485		63	Haldia	595	600
	27	Belgaum	544	554		64	Howrah	565	573
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	503	510		65	Jalpaiguri	429	436
	29	Mercara	486	482		66	Kolkata	547	552
Kerala	30	Alwaye	499	504		67	Raniganj	443	441
	31	Mundakayam	494	492	Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	538	543
	32	Quilon	530	529	Delhi	69	Delhi	576	579
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	572	578	Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	549	549
Madhya Pradesh	34	Balaghat	452	451					
	35	Bhopal	531	534					
	36	Indore	513	517					
	37	Jabalpur	498	492					
								ALL-INDIA	502
									504

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State	Centre	December 2003	January 2004
Andhra Pradesh	1 Kethgudem	495	
Himachal Pradesh	2 Himachal Pradesh	473	
Rajasthan	3 Bhilwara	491	
Madhya Pradesh	4 Chhindwara	455	
Tripura	5 Tripura	448	
Goa	6 Goa	603	

Unorganised Workers' Social Security Scheme

Why is it a fraud?

Because

- it is designed to cover only 25 lakh people in 50 districts in the country and not 37 crore unorganized workers as claimed by the govt.
- it is a pilot scheme for five years, to be jointly reviewed thereafter by Ministries of Finance and Labour and not full-fledged scheme for unorganized sector workers through a legislation.
- it is a scheme without any fund, against the claim that it is fully funded.
- Scheme is to be funded by the unorganized workers, identified employer and notionally by the govt, eg Rs 1800/month earner on minimum wage would contribute Rs 50 per month, if employer is identified and Rs 100 per month if employer is unidentified while the govt would contribute Rs 19/month.
- 70% of employer in unorganized sector, is unidentified, hence the worker in the age group of 18-35 would have to contribute Rs 100/- and those above 35 years of age to contribute Rs 200/- pm
- pension of Rs 500 would be available to only those who contribute fully and regularly for 30 years. How many unorganized sector worker specially in rural sector are gainfully employed for more than 100 to 120 days in a year?
- most of the unorganized sector workers would not be able to sustain this self aided scheme even in the present format, limited to only 25 lakhs.
- scheme has not been notified yet, state govts are not involved, but forms are being distributed from party offices of BJP and other NDA allies. Some private persons like 'facilitators' or 'filers' will collect money from workers. Obviously the money will be defalcated.
- EPFO does not have the infrastructure to serve even the present 32 million PF contributors. PF dues of PSU workers are about Rs. 1000 crores, leaving aside private sector where thousand crores of rupees of PF dues are yet to recovered from employers. How would it then ensure payment upto 370 million worker from 70% unidentified and 30% identified migrant labours with changing employers.

It is an ill-thought, electorally planned unalloyed fraud on the poor and destitute working population of the country. It is more than corruption actually a case of fraud.

B T R CENTENARY

B T RANADIVE ON "UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE WORKING CLASS"

.....In this connection, it must be stated that the TU movement on the whole has neglected the question of rising unemployment and left the unemployed to their fate. An organised campaign and fight was neither waged for those who are thrown out of jobs by closure of factories nor was any consideration given to the new entrants into the labour market. Much less was any consideration given to the grim unemployment situation in the rural areas where lack of jobs is leading to wide spread destitution and misery in spite of all Government claims to have lifted millions above the poverty lines.

The failure to link TUs with the demand for relief and other demands of the unemployed has been a major weakness of our TU movement alienating large sections of new entrants to the labour market from the organised movement of the working class. If continued, this policy would have incalculable consequences doing the biggest harm to the working class unity and solidarity.

The employers and the Government have already started pitting the unemployed against the employed, pointing to the latter as a privileged section. With the slogan of jobs for the sons of the soil, they incite the unemployed youths in one State against workers from other States.

Rousing of provincial chauvinism and creating an illusion that by depriving workers from other States of their jobs, the unemployment problem can be solved, is part of the bourgeois tactics and strategy to avoid a joint class action of workers. In the absence of trade union intervention, organisations like Shiv Sena in Bombay and similar Senas in other parts succeed in rousing local chauvinistic sentiments against workers from other States shattering both class unity and the concept of Indian unity. It is another form of divisive force attacking the unity of the working class movement and unity of the country and it gets a chance because the TU movement does not intervene in time to unite the employed and the unemployed in the common fight against the effects of the capitalist path....

It is high time that the organised TU movement undertook to organise the unemployed. The TUs should take initiative to organise joint conventions of the employed and the unemployed to focus attention on the problem and pressurise the authorities to grant immediate relief. They should unitedly move to pressurise the Government to embark upon policies to check the growth of unemployment. The TUs should come out with a document outlining the schemes of relief for the industrial and the rural unemployed and championing basic changes in the Government's economic policies and measures to check unemployment in the rural areas. The anti poverty programme, the rural employment guarantee schemes and other devices do not even touch the fringe of the problem and are diversionary measures to make people believe that something big is being done in the rural areas. It is noted by many committees that the major part of the funds for these schemes goes into the coffers of corrupt administrators or Congress leaders and ministers and only a very small part reaches those for whom it was meant.

The TUs therefore have to take the question of unemployment and prepare a charter of demands, the immediate aim being to secure adequate unemployment relief for those unemployed. At the same time, the united movement of the unemployed and the employed workers must demand that the right to work should be embodied in the Constitution as a fundamental right and the Government must accept responsibility to provide job or relief for every citizen who is prepared to work. The right to work is in fact the basis of all democratic rights and without this right many democratic rights become just formal democratic rights. It will be worthwhile considering whether the united TU movement and the unemployed together can organise a hunger march from the various State capitals of India to the country's capital proclaiming the demands of the unemployed, the unity of the employed and unemployed workers and demanding the right to work as a basic fundamental right to be embodied in the Constitution.

(*Working Class*, Vol 15, No 11, July 1986)