

THE VOICE OF THE WORKING WOMAN

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Vote for National Front-Left Parties Alliance



May Day Greetings to Working Women

On May Day 1991, working women will once again pledge to fight for equal status, an objective which is still far from realisation. They will pledge to renew their struggle more vigorously adding to the total force of working women in the united class struggle of the working class for their rights.

We greet women all over the country who launched various struggles during the last year for equal remuneration, for creche and child-care, for promotion, for better wages, for social justice. We are very proud of our sisters in the Anganwadis, who came in thousands to Delhi to demand better treatment from the Chandrasekhar Govt but were point blank denied higher wages commensurate with their work. What did Rajiv Gandhi say when he was the Prime Minister? If women want better wages, there would be a cut in their employment. The characters change, but the political colour and policies remains the same.

We are proud to send our greetings to the Air hostesses in Indian Airlines and Air India, who are continuing their fight consistently against the discriminatory treatment of their managements regarding age and medical examination.

Women workers in plantations, beedi, construction, etc are struggling for their demands under their unions to get equal wages for the same value of work.

Women who work in offices, hospitals, and other places have to face sexual harassment. Do they get justice? Even the Supreme Court can change the judgement given by the lower courts, denying justice to women against whom atrocities are committed every day.

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Appeal to Women

In a few weeks from now we, as citizens of this country, will be called upon to exercise our democratic right to elect a government of our choice. As women's organisations working in different parts of the country among diverse sections of women, we have been struggling to translate the constitutional guarantees of equality into a living reality for the large masses of women. We see the electoral process also as part of this wider struggle. It is with this perspective that we put before you certain critical issues that now face us and the nation as a whole.

The struggle to free India from the British Raj was built on many dreams—*freedom*—from hunger, fear, exploitation, and *equal rights and responsibilities*—*for all our people*. Our heritage included the visions of many—of building a new society based on human equality, dignity, justice and love—Buddha, Mahavir, Meera, Kabir, Lalla, Nanak, Basava, Akkamma, Jyotiba, Birsā, Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi. There were many more we do not remember—because those who were powerful destroyed the memory of their struggles. They came from ordinary people like you and us.

Fortyone years ago we took on that challenge—that we shall create the new India—“to ensure to all citizens *Justice*—economic, social and political”—whatever class, caste, community, religion or sex they came from.

But where do we stand today? Inequality, poverty, unemployment have increased. Forty years of ‘development’ has enriched some, but made far more of the people poor. It is women who carry the greater burden of poverty, hunger, overwork for less returns, and rising prices of all the goods they need to rear their families. That is why the proportion of women in the population continues to decline. Social oppression and violence have also increased in diverse ways—from the killing of the female foetus, to increasing dowry deaths, rape, gang

rape and murders.

Who is responsible? Laws for the protection of women are constantly violated even by the agencies of the State. Existing rights are being snatched away—Muslim Women's right to maintenance, restrictions on maternity benefits on the recommendation of the Pay Commission,—are only a few recent examples.

These increasing attacks on women's rights are part of the process of persistent undermining of democratic institutions and the rights of the people. There are many recent examples—arbitrary dismissal of democratically elected state governments or bypassing state governments while talking about ‘power to the people.’

Another growing danger is the increasing criminalisation of politics which adversely affects people's participation in the general democratic process, particularly the participation of women. Violence forces or frightens many to discard their political rights. Violence against women is particularly aimed to frighten whole families and communities to stay away from casting their votes.

There are some who tell us stability is the greatest need of the hour. We had stability for nearly forty years, but those years also bred the corruption, the inequality, the violence and hatred.

There are some who say that India is only for the Hindus. There are some who say that Punjab belongs only to the Sikhs, or Kashmir only to the Muslims. All of them use our faith to incite us to kill, destroy, and humiliate the faith, beliefs and places of worship of other communities. All of them want complete control over our minds and behaviour. Particularly they want control over women. Religion is being mixed with politics, resulting in the worst type of communal violence and the killing of men, women, even infants, that the country has ever witnessed.

Many will tell you that you can't stop all this, so why vote at all? If you listen to them, you will not only lose your only right, but you will be handing the country over to people who do not share, have never shared—your dreams of a new society.

It is true that all struggles for social justice face resistance which takes violent forms, but if we give up the struggle, where does that take us? It would be irresponsible if you allow your feeling of powerlessness to make you lose hope, and surrender your right to choose. Assert your right, but think hard of all that is at stake. Choose wisely and cast your vote in defence of democracy, secularism, social justice and women's rights.

YWCA of India; National Federation of Indian Women; Joint Women's Programme; All India Democratic Women's Association; Mahila Dakshata Samiti; All India Coordination Committee of Working Women; Centre for Women's Development studies.

(from page 2)

On this day, we will have to renew our pledge to unite and fight against all the injustices meted out to us under the present bourgeois landlord set up of the Government. Unless this framework is changed completely, working women and women in general will have to continue the fight, in a more determined way, to achieve our objective—the socialist system.

On the occasion of May Day 1991, CITU and the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women send their warm and revolutionary greetings to all our sisters world over and in South Africa, Latin America and Asia fighting for equal status and equality. Let us take a pledge to carry forward our class battles with more vigour on May Day.

Appeal To Women For The Elections : Vote For Those Parties Which Stand For Secularism, Democracy And Protection of Your Rights

Vimal Ranadive

Parliamentary elections are to be held in May 1991. Many important issues have emerged in the last few years affecting our lives. Women must express their opinion and exercise their vote in a responsible manner.

Election manifestos of political parties have listed what they intend to do for women if they come to power. It would have been better if they had also mentioned the promises they did not fulfill in the past. As per the reports in the press, the longest programme for women is given in the Congress (I) manifesto and the shortest in the BJP manifesto.

The Indira Gandhi Yojana, Perspective Plan for Women, Equal Remuneration and Development Corporation, jobs for all within 100 days, smokeless Chullah programme and many other promises have been given in Congress (I) mani-

festo. For rural women hope is held out for pattas in women's name or joint ownership of land.

Price Rise Affects Women Most

Sometimes one wonders what these bourgeois parties take women for? Have they got no conscience? Do they not think that we can see the gap between their words and deeds? Women may be illiterate, but they know that the prices are increasing daily during the last so many years. Governments have come and gone within a short time but prices it seems are going to rise for ever. Have the dowry deaths decreased? Have the number of molestations and rapes on Harijan and other women come down? Have the culprits been convicted? The working women has the right to ask that even after the

passing of the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976 (14 years ago during Indira Gandhi's regime) why do they still get unequal wages for the same type of work. Indira Mahila Yojana was declared with so much pomp and show. How many women were employed? Yes, a perspective plan for women was published by the Congress (I) Govt amidst much fanfare and propagated. Has any progress been made? Getting some jobs for women, opening of some centres of development, formation of some dowry cells have not even made a dent on the problem.

Now take the issue of price rise, which affects women most. They have to manage the house within whatever wages the family receives. The prices have skyrocketed. Recent rise in the price of milk, kerosene oil, cooking oil has caused immense hardship.

The prices of sugar, vegetables, rice, wheat and all the essential commodities have gone beyond the reach of the common people. All the manifestoes had to admit that the prices have gone up, and would be brought down as early as possible—some even claiming within a period of 3 months. Can we believe Pranab Mukherjee when he tells the press that "the Govt will roll back the prices of essential commodities to the level of July 1990, within 100 days of coming to power"...Nobody would be fooled by such propaganda from the Congress party. The first question the women ask in the bastis, colonies, in villages is measures to bring down high prices. Children cannot be given milk, nor sufficient rice or wheat. Price rise has become one of the central issues for the electorate, particularly the mass of those who are being pushed into pauperisation by the economic policies of successive governments.

The Deep Economic Crisis in the Country

Women, a majority of whom are illiterate and are not fully aware about the causes of the deep economic crisis, may not understand its link with high prices. The International Mone-

rary Fund and the World Bank from whom the Governments took huge loans, under strict conditions, impose policies which are not in the interest of the common people. While giving the loans to our country, the subsidy for our food items are asked to be stopped. Welfare benefits available to workers are curtailed. Our women should try to understand the seriousness of the situation from the increase in debts to foreign countries which go beyond Rs. 1,25,000 crores. Over and above this, our internal debt has risen to Rs. 2,40,000 crores. When our country has already been mortgaged to IMF and World Bank, the Chandrasekhar Govt was negotiating a second instalment of the IMF loan, when his govt fell. Under this pressure the Govt has turned to privatisation of basic industries instead of nationalisation. Borrowing from IMF means we are not allowed to have our own industries developed. Introduction of new technology means no more recruitment of the people in jobs. Unemployment figures will continue to rise with many more factories closing down. The unprecedented price increase of essential commodities is one of the factors of the deep economic crisis. Unless alternate policies of self-reliance, more employment, opening of the factories, land distribution and unemployment benefits are adopted by the new government, our people are bound to suffer. Working women will be the first victims of this attack.

Chandrasekhar Govt Promised Employment

Can one believe, Shri Chandrasekhar, the caretaker PM, when he promises 10 million jobs for the unemployed, drinking water in every village, eradication of illiteracy and giving 'Jan Swaraj'? Even members of his party do not believe him and are joining other parties. His minority Govt with 58 members was supported by Congress. One of its top most leaders Devilal has become the laughing stock due to his statements issued at different times on these issues. Janata Dal (S) never gave any importance to women's issues except for education

of women.

The CPM manifesto has rightly pointed out in its manifesto (Point No. 11) that strict measures are to be taken to curb the high prices. No increase in indirect taxes be made which affects common people, state trading in food grains and public distribution system to cover 14 essential commodities. It has also said that firm steps be taken against black marketing and hoarding. If the National Front and Left Parties Govt come to power, the CPM will fight for the implementation of these policies. The issue of price rise is the highest priority.

The Question of Unemployment

The question of unemployment has become very important for all, including women. More than 3.5 crores of the urban people are unemployed. More than 2,00,000 factories are closed. Lakhs of people are starving and are in search of jobs. Working women become the first victims since they have to be paid maternity leave, provided with creche facilities by the employers or the governments. They will be the first to be retrenched when new technology is introduced in the offices or in industry. It is a well known fact that very few women are now employed in jute and textile. As per the figures the number of women job seekers in 1988 were 57 lakhs on the register of employment exchanges among whom many were graduates and engineers. 6 lakh women in Anganwadi are paid only Rs. 250-300 and Rs. 110/-. They are insulted at every step as 'honourary workers' and 'social workers' and they have no right to make any demand. The govt treats them as bonded labourers. They are dismissed at any moment on any plea.

Thousands of women are working in small scale industries like electronics, garment, making 'thailas' and getting not more than Rs. 5-10 daily or even less, on temporary basis. These illiterate or semi-literate women are working for a pittance just to make both ends meet. The poor condition of the family urge

them to take up some work which will pay. Such women are in search of jobs which are not available easily. Moreover, the middlemen and contractors cut into their small earnings for giving this paltry sum for taxing and time consuming work.

The number of women in the organised sector is not more than 12% almost all women are now in the unorganised sector. What does it mean for them? It means no legislation of any kind, long hours of work, no security of jobs and health hazards. The condition of women working in the free trade export zones has been brought out very well even by the ILO and bourgeois press where the majority of women have asked for security and better payment. Denial of the right to form a union is the condition on which they are employed.

Under such conditions, the promises of "creating 10 million jobs or one job in every family" under the Indira Gandhi Yojana cannot be believed. The experience of congress rule has been quite contrar. The Right to work as a fundamental right is a basic demand of the working class today and it should be enshrined in the Constitution. Shri V P Singh and National Front Govt has accepted this principle. The AICCW, CITU, had specially taken up this issue and held conferences in states.

Unless urgent plans are made for guaranteeing employment in both rural and urban areas, and proper facilities for registration and recruitment through employment exchanges is done, no employment is possible. The ordinance stopping new recruitment has to be withdrawn. If the Govt changes its economic policies based on taking foreign loans and accepts self-reliance as its motto, some way can be found out of the crisis. In the absence of this, unemployment benefits should be paid as they are paid in other capitalist countries.

No Implementation of Legislations

Working women have launched struggles

for jobs, implementation of the legislation, for creche, against installation of machinery and so on. But unfortunately, no drastic change is noted in this. Acceptance of implementation of legislation by the successive Govts is a hoax. No legislation concerning women is implemented seriously. In many offices where women constitute a major force, no creche exists. In plantation industry, beedi and garment, no govt has ever compelled the employer to provide a creche. The Labour ministry or Welfare Ministry are not taking these problems seriously. This is the attitude of the Congress which ruled the country for decades after independence. The enforcement machinery is just there in name, it does not work anywhere. This point has been discussed in many conferences where both the govt and the employers made promises which they had no intention of honouring.

Molestation of Women and Sati Issue

Any Govt of the country would resign or be dismissed on the question of burning of Roop Kanwar, by making her 'goddess' and 'sati' in Rajasthan. The Congress and BJP should feel ashamed to keep such a Minister as Kalvi who supported Sati. Women would feel ashamed when Mrs Vijaya Raje Scindia speaks about the moral rights of a woman who would become sati along with her husband. The number of killings of female foetus is the highest in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. There is no end to the heaping of insults on poor, unprotected women and girls who are daily murdered or molested by anti-socials. Things have come to such a pass that even a 40 day old girl is molested, raped and killed. A young girl of a particular caste cannot love a boy or marry him because of his lower caste status and is killed by her father. One cannot believe such things, but unfortunately they are happening all the time. The AIDWA and other organisations have approached the Supreme Court in the case of a minor girl in Orissa who was

raped and murdered in 1988. The Supreme Court acquitted the culprit. If the Supreme Court becomes gender biased, what of an ordinary man or Govt?

Harijan women are made a special target of landlord's goondas if they demand wage increase. Such degradation is given strength by making a woman a weapon in a class struggle, as a sex symbol in ads, etc. The example of Air hostesses is there for everybody to note. The latest figures of molestations and rapes published by the Govt speak the truth. But who cares except the women's organisations and the left parties? Has the manifestos of the Congress (I), Janata (S) or BJP said what remedies they will ensure? Many people in present day society feel that a woman's place is at home, to look after the kitchen and children. Even in socialist countries women have come forward to fight this bourgeois ideology coming from Western European and American sources.

Women should be looked after respectfully and given their proper place in society, independent of their family role, of the class or their caste. A representative Govt should protect women from any molestation by any person, even of a higher rank. But unfortunately, the published figures and the sentences given to the culprit tell a different story. Women and working women become victims of such sexual lust in offices, at work places, in hotels, etc. They should demand a guarantee and justice from the govt that they will be protected from such humiliation.

Tripura Atrocities—No Parallel

In Tripura we have the glaring instance of using tribal women by the Congress as a class weapon to continue in government. The gruesome killings, rapes etc during last 3-4 years continue unabated. The list of women raped and molested is already too long and continues to increase every day. Imagine that the wife of an employee is molested by Congress goons in front of her husband, who is tied to a pillar.

The reason? Both of them belong to CPM or left parties. The Ujan Maidan rape cases by soldiers of Assam Rifles are well known. No judgement is delivered even after 2 years. The latest gruesome episode in booth capturing in the ADC elections has no parallel. The hands of a SFI polling agent at one station are cut after cutting his body to pieces and are taken to his mother? Can there be any parallel to such inhuman tortures by any person, except such horrors committed by the fascist rulers who did the same in Germany in 1939-40? Our women are asking the Congress(I) what they do when they are repeatedly demanding an inquiry? The stooge Govt of Rajiv Gandhi in Tripura could not listen to the voice of women and women's organisations. The common people all over India came out against such semi-fascist terror by the Tripura Govt and in support of the tribal people and against the atrocities on workers and middle class employees, including women. The question asked by women is: should people vote for such a party which openly allows and encourages atrocities on women, tribal people? Does the slogan of stability mean the continuation of such episodes?

Land distribution in West Bengal and Kerala includes peasant Women too

The history of land reform in India is known more for non-implementation than for the relief it brought to the rural poor. The distribution of surplus land to the landless in Bengal and Kerala is path breaking. It is a basic programme of CPI(M) and the Left Parties. The purchasing power of agricultural workers will be raised if they can cultivate the land. The Left Front Govt of W. Bengal and Kerala could distribute land to certain extent. W. Bengal accounts for only 3.6 per cent of the total cultivable land in the country. But one should also learn that the 20% of distributed vested land in the whole country is in W. Bengal. About 8.60 lakhs acres of land

concentrated in the hands of big landlords were vested and distributed among 18.01 lakh landless labourers. Women too were given pattas and land. Another important point is out of 18.01 lakh landless labourers, 9.70 lakh belong to SC and ST. Women are getting equal wages in agriculture. The important point to be noted here is that due to land distribution to rural women, they have now achieved a respectable place among the villagers. An independent source of income resulted in the promotion of dignity of agricultural women. It is known that there are a large number of women in the panchayat samitis. The number of women in Gram Panchayat is 5,705 out of 52,529. 470 out of 9,127 in Panchayat Samithi and 24 out of 658 in Zilla Parishad. These women are playing a commendable role in the villages. The W. Bengal Left Front has put up 21 women candidates for the current Assembly elections.

In Kerala also land was distributed, though on a smaller scale, to the agricultural labourers. 30% women were elected to the Zilla Parishads in Kerala, and they now have a say in every project in the villages. Rajiv Gandhi's slogan given in 1989 for 30% reservation to women was implemented in Kerala, but not by Congress ruled states. Is Congress serious about giving 30% reservation to women in Panchayat or employment? This is the reason why women have achieved a higher level of literacy than the all-India average and the public distribution system works well in every village.

Women and Communal Situation

It is unfortunate but true that women are very much prone, and sensitive to the communal happenings in the country. Their deep ignorance and illiteracy, keep them in dark and sometimes they fall easy victims to any religious propaganda. It is true about women in every religion, community, be it Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, etc. The political parties like BJP and Muslim League do take advantage

of such backwardness for political purposes.

The issue of Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid has become an important and crucial issue in the election. The way it is being propagated for last one or two years sharply points out the purpose of rousing the spirit of Hindu communalism, leading to the division of our country on a religious basis. National unity of all the religions, is in danger. Unfortunately, women become the first victims. The communal propaganda of BJP, VHP, RSS on this issue, their Rath yatra throughout the country, created terror among the minorities. When people are killed from the minority groups and houses and property destroyed, the majority community must feel a sense of shame. It is forgotten that all communities fought against British imperialists and got independence. They died at Jalianwala Bagh. The sacrifices made by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians together resulted in our achieving independence against British rule. But we forget their policy of divide and rule. It is a fact that the BJP leadership had to change its slogans from Ram to roti, due to their over enthusiasm on the issue of Ram temple at Ayodhya, and the damage it caused. The happenings in Punjab, Kashmir and other places are a serious concern to all our people. Do we wish to have a Hindu rashtra? Do we want to drive out all other communities under the name of religion? Every person has a right to stay in India and believe in any religion. The Congress(I) while speaking about secularism helped to start riots, allowed the Rath Yatra to pass by keeping silent about the riots and killings. The manifesto now at least says that the verdict of the Court regarding the Ayodhya dispute be accepted, if no settlement is reached. Any sane man or woman will not side with the BJP, VHP and such other parties who have made religion the main plank of their propaganda. These parties were against the Muslim personal law when the Bill came in Parliament. In Pakistan women were com-

pelled to wear Burkha and this was extended to Kashmir, at work place. In Punjab Satis were banned by extremists.

Punjab situation is worsening and Chandra Sekhar Govt allowed it to worsen by trying to meet the extremists to solve the problem. The daily killings of people continues and among whom many are CPI(M) men and women who have become martyrs. About 15-20 people are being killed on an average every day. This poison of communalism is spreading like wildfire in our country, supported and actively helped by imperialist countries and Pakistan. In Assam the ULFA is demanding a separate state.

Challenge is to be Faced

This is a big challenge for all of us and we have to face it, courageously, persuing the common people for secularism and for national unity. We may have to take more time with the women to convince them. The best examples are W. Bengal and Kerala where communal harmony is maintained. The experience of these states has to be brought before the people. In the united and class struggles of the working class against employers, communal feeling of different people have no role to play. There are examples when Muslim women were protected in Hindu houses till the riots were over. This is our national tradition and it has to be strengthened. Women will have to be convinced. The role of imperialist countries has to be exposed. The policy of divide and rule of British imperialism played against our people has to be noted. The idealism for social justice for deprived classes for women, for the great need for unity of our nation is to be created among the younger generation who must feel hatred for capitalist rule hand in glove with imperialism.

Stability for whom

The oft repeated slogan of Cong(I) is that only they will be able to provide stability. If stability means increase in prices, molestation

of women, atrocities on Harijans, division of our country on communal basis, we have been experiencing this 'stability' for the last 40 years. No Congress Govt could give any relief to the common people of our country in the name of stability. Our women should not be misguided by such propaganda.

During the long period of Congress rule, the position of women did not change considerably, though they have become politically conscious. The empty promises of 30% reservation and 100% atrocities will not work this time. The atrocities are on the increase. Employment of women in the organised sector is in danger, new employment getting scarce, there is no job security. All classes of women suffer due to the present ideology of the ruling parties towards women.

No Authoritarian Rule

Women would not like to vote for those parties who have introduced 'Emergency' in 1975 and created semi-fascist rule in W. Bengal in 1971-72 and in Tripura in 1989. Women would not like to vote for that authoritarian rule, who dismissed democratically elected Tamilnadu Govt. in a day and Governor of Bihar. The Tamilnadu Governor resigned in protest of this undemocratic act of a defector's govt playing the Cong(I) card.

The right to vote is an important right for every person and it has to be used consciously. Many will say what is the use of voting, they may not go. In such cases somebody might vote for them. We appeal to women, and working women in particular, you have to cast your vote considering the past experience of your own. Working women had fought class battles alongwith their brethren in offices, in factories. They know well who are their enemies and who protect their interests. In the manifesto of NF also it is promised and we hope it will keep its promises, the rights in parental property as well as review be made of all laws which discriminate against women and

those concerning marriages, divorce, maintenance, custody, adoption and inheritance. Larger representation shall be ensured for women in the legislatures and in govt jobs. Effort will be made to ensure 30% share for women in legislatures and in government jobs.

Ordinary women, housewives in our country have experience of their own. The corruption at every stage, price rise, sexual harassment and so on should make them decide on voting on principle. They also will find after consideration that the National Front and Left Parties are the only ones with a commitment.

Women Launch Struggles for Their Rights

It is a welcome feature that women from all classes are coming together to launch struggles for wages, against molestation and participating in the meetings against communalism and for national unity, in large numbers. Seven All India Women's organisations have appealed to women all over India to vote for these parties which stand for secularism, national unity and for the protection of women's rights.

The National Front Govt has tried to fulfil some of the demands of women. It has formed the National Commission on women and invited all the women's organisations for implementation. Its stand against communalism and for secularism and democracy is welcomed. It has set up representation to women including AIDWA in the Planning Commission. When a deputation of anganwadi women went to meet Shri V P Singh, the then PM, he showed a keen interest in increasing their wages. The Janata Dal MPs have come to address the anganwadi women on 4th March, at the Boat Club in support of their demands.

The most important thing is National Front has stuck to the secular ideas and programmes in case of the Ayodhya-Babri Masjid issue. The NF also has said that on the basis of Karpoori Thakur formula the backward classes shall be given justice. With these promises of National Front and Left Parties programme together, we will appeal to women that they should vote for this combination.

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AIIEA Women's Conventions

Varanasi

In pursuance of the decision of 14th General Conference of AIIEA held at Cuttack, a convention of the women employees working in different offices under Varanasi Division was held on January 16, 1991 in the Divisional Office premises. All the women employees numbering 33, attended the meeting which was presided over by Comrade Ram Pal Singh, President, VDIEA.

The discussion was initiated by Comrade Ramji Ram, Vice President, AIIEA, who explained the background of holding such a meeting and highlighted the necessity of active participation of women employees in the day to day functioning of the Association. He also briefed about the special session that was held for the women employees in the AIIEA Conference at Cuttack and the encouraging participation in the debates by the women delegates and observers.

The women comrades attending the meeting discussed in details various problems concerning them and assured the convention of their fullest cooperation in the organisational functioning in future.

For the purpose of election of Delegates to Divisional Conferences, it was decided that a separate constituency for the women employees would be constituted so that they would have adequate representation in the General Council of the Divisional Organisation. This would also enable them in joining effectively in the mainstream of the movement. The meeting elected Comrade (Smt.) B. Mohanambal as the Convenor.

Nasik

As decided in the Cuttack Conference of the AIIEA to organise women employees at all

levels under the banner of AIIEA, a beginning in the Western Zone has been made. Vima Karmachari Sanghatana, Nasik, on behalf of WZIEA, Bombay, successfully hosted a women's Convention at Nasik on January 26, 1991 which was meant for the women representatives of Divisions in the States of Maharashtra and Goa. The representatives from Nasik, Bombay, Pune, Satara, Nagpur, Amravati and Goa Divisions, numbering about 50 attended the Convention which was inaugurated and guided by Comrade A.S. Deo, General Secretary, WZIEA. Comrade Shridhar Deshpande, General Secretary, Vima Karmachari Sanghatana, Nasik welcomed the participants. Smt. Sumati Zinde of Nasik presided over the Convention. All the preparations for the Convention were made by the women members of Vima Karmachari Sanghatana.

A total of 16 representatives from the participating Divisions spoke in the Convention. It was observed from the speeches of the representatives that there was growing organisational awareness among the women members of AIIEA. It was suggested that the women members should devote certain time daily for union work, there should be women members in the Branch and Divisional Committees, regionwise meeting of women employees within the Division be held quarterly so as to make the organisation strong and live. The usual demands like extension in maternity leave period, separate toilet and rest room in every office, creche facilities, transfers on marriage and family difficulty grounds also figured in the speeches.

IEA, Bombay, IEU, Pune and Miss Rajani Lalwani of Nasik donated Rs. 250/-, Rs. 100/- and Rs. 501/- respectively for running the women's wing effectively.

LIC Working Women Demand Creche Facilities and Construction of Working Women Hostels

The 5th Convention of LIC Working Women organised by the Insurance Corporation Employee's Union, Coimbatore Division was held on Sunday the 10-3-1991 at Kongu Kalai Arangam, Erode. Ms B. Hymevathi (Coimbatore), Ms Rajeswari (Erode) Ms K. Vidya (Salem) Ms V Malathi (Dharmapuri) Ms B Shantha (Mettupalayam) and Ms R Kanthamani (Ooty) formed the presidium to conduct the proceedings. Prof. Nabisa Ummal MLA (Kerala) inaugurated the Convention. She called upon them to fight unitedly for the Rights of Women under the banner of AIIEA. Prof. R. Chandra (Trichy) who gave a special address on the occasion stressed that women should be promoted to prominent and decision making level in the leadership of the Trade Union. She expressed surprise that a premier Public Sector Undertaking like LIC is denying employment to women during pregnancy. She deplored the practice of destroying the female foetus by misusing sex determination test (Amnio centesis) the purpose of which was to eliminate the male foetus affected by hemophilia and other children likely to be born with serious handicaps. She wanted the women employees to take a leading role in the trade union movement. Nearly 250 women employees working in the LIC office situated in the five districts of Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Periyar, Bharampuri and Salem participated in the Convention.

The women's Convention adopted a resolution condemning the system of 'Sati' and 'Dowry' and called upon all democratic minded people to take cudgels against such obnoxious practices which are still prevalent in our country.

The second resolution wanted the Central

Govt to bring forward legislation to ban the misuse of the sex determination test which is popularly known as 'Amnio Centesis'.

Through another resolution the women's convention wanted the Govt to introduce women's special buses in all important towns and cities.

The fourth resolution wanted equal job opportunities for women and equal pay for equal work.

The women employees through another resolution called upon the LIC management for construction of women's Hostels in all cities and towns, creche facilities in the offices where there is a concentration of women employees, separate dining room and rest room facilities.

The sixth resolution demanded of the LIC management to enhance the maternity and to extend the maternity leave facilities in full of the abortion cases. The convention also deplored the practice of denying employment by LIC to women employees during the period of their pregnancy, as 'pregnancy' is not an ailment.

The work report submitted by Ms B Rajeswari on behalf of the women's sub-Sommittee was unanimously adopted after the summing up by Shri B. Govindarajan, Jt. Secretary, All India Insurance Employee's Association (AIIEA). The women employees were earlier welcomed by Shri G Madhavan, General Secretary, Insurance Corporation Employee's Union, Coimbatore Division and Shri S Krishnamurthi, Vice President of the Divisional Union proposed the vote thanks.

Memorandum By The Nurses of Steel Plants On Their Demands

March 11, 1991

The Chairman
Steel Authority of India Ltd.
Ispat Bhavan
Lodi Road
New Delhi-110 003

Sub : Grievances of Nursing Staff attached
with different steel plant hospitals.

Over 1300 nursing staff working hospitals under steel plants of Steel Authority of India have several outstanding grievances which are not attended to by the management for several years. They have been serving with devotion all these days but their legitimate grievances have been allowed to be accumulated which is causing discontent among the nursing staff.

We are therefore drawing your urgent attention to these grievances with the hope that you would look into the matter and take suitable steps so that they are ameliorated without any further delay.

a) The patient nurses ratio in all steel plant hospitals should be 3 : 1 as per the international norm. For this calculation actual number of beds in operation is to be taken into consideration.

b) The existing pay scales offered to the nursing staff do not commensurate with the professional qualification, skill and responsibility specified for nursing staff. Higher pay scale viz No. 7, No. 8, No. 9 should be introduced for different categories of nurses. The stipend for trainee nurses be, at least, equivalent to SOT.

c) Uniform allowance should be enhanced to Rs. 1500/- p. a.f

d) Washing allowance should be increased to Rs. 100/- p.m.

e) Nursing allowance (covering special diet charge, odd shift, 48 hrs weekly duty and risk) should be provided at Rs. 200/- p.m.

f) Nursing staff should be provided with quarters and transport facilities.

g) Nurses should be relieved of clerical and other miscellaneous work. Post of ward masters and clerical assistants should be created for each ward.

h) Nurses should not be burdened with the job of blood transfusion and collection of blood samples.

i) Nurses—should be allowed sufficient scope to acquire higher professional qualifications and two incremental benefits should be extended to them.

j) Nurses should be allowed to enjoy medical facilities for their relatives even after marriage.

k) All the wards should be properly manned with attendants and sweepers.

l) Better facilities existing in any hospital should be extended uniformly to all hospitals.

m) Training period should be counted in determining the seniority of nursing staff.

n) Recommendations of ILO and WHO for better service condition for nurses and for better therapeutic health care should be implemented for the greater benefit to the patients.

It may be mentioned here that we had in the past repeatedly brought these grievances to the notice of respective local managements without any results. As a last resort we are now bringing it to your notice.

We hope an expeditious action will be taken by you.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

Deepali Bose—Durgapur

Gouri Bhattacharjee—Durgapur

Gita Mukherjee—Burnpur Steel

Archana Sengupta—Burnpur Steel

Kalyani Das—Rourkela Steel

Urmila Wagh—Rourkela Steel.

Congratulations to the People of Kerala for Achieving 100 percent Literacy

Kerala Left Front Govt, the people and ordinary women in Kerala are to be congratulated wholeheartedly for achieving an unprecedented victory over the darkness of illiteracy through the literacy campaign. Can one believe that in such a small state, with a population of 290 lakhs, every single man or women is now literate? It is one of the wonders of the world and those parties vying with each other to come to power in the coming election should think about how this result was achieved and we should understand why only a left Front Govt was committed to this achievement.

There are 3 things here which resulted in such a grand success.

(1) The determined pursuance of the 'Aksharakeralam' (the literacy movement) by the dedicated cadres who have done the job so well and achieved excellent results. The state call has declared 93.16% as fully literate because it was much more than the target fixed for the year. The Kerala Saksharata Samithi (KSS) deserves hearty congratulations.

(2) The strong will power of the illiterate people to learn to read and write. Those of us who have tried to take adult education classes, voluntary or otherwise—know as to how difficult it is to mobilise adult men and women to attend the classes. We, the women's organisation know quite well the difficulties of women in sitting patiently to listen or try to write when they are bogged down by the children or household duties in Kerala. Women who desired to read and write were encouraged and supported.

(3) The determination of the Left Front Govt to pursue the objective. Without the cooperation or help of all the people required by the KSS, the results would have been different. Yes, it is also a fact, that other political parties, as reported in Times of India, like

Muslim League in Mallappuram Dist. have cooperated in implementing the plan. As per the report, in Malappuram, the muslim populated district in Kerala, would not have achieved this level of literacy without the help of Muslim League. It is a welcome thing to learn that an organisation such as Muslim League helps to bring women forward.

Out of a population of 2.90 lakhs, 28.50 lakhs were illiterate. The literary mission has decided to teach between the age of 6 to 60 group, which meant 22.8 lakhs. There was examination later for those who learnt to read and write. They must read a few lines, and write a few words to pass the examination.

Reading the instances given in the Times of India one feels proud and sometimes sad also. One Sarojini, a domestic servant was proud that she could read now and demand more wages! One woman said after she became literate she understood why her husband left her. One significant instance given here was that one of the fishermen who could not get time for attending the class though he named his vessels after the KSS. He used to ask his wife to go to attend classes while looking after all the children, a rare thing to happen in the present society. A husband working in the gulf was overjoyed to get a letter written by his wife in Kerala, after 10 years of marriage. Tears flowed from a woman who has staying in a Leprosy home, away from her husband. When she was interviewed, she said though I can not write because all my fingers have been lost, I can read now. One woman said 'I know how to vote. Now I can read the names also.' In fact, one has to be quite 'illiterate' to know the feelings of so many uneducated people. They are all now proud because they can read and write. All these people are from working class, agricultural workers, deprived of elementary

education. KSS was sponsored by the Left Front Govt and the Chairman was Com. E. K. Nayanar himself. All major political parties and organisations were involved. Women's organisations had a special role in this campaign, since they can approach muslim women and other sections too.

As per the reports, there were some hurdles. The 'class interest' of upper classes such as landlords, contractors etc and feudal attitudes of male members of the family hindered the work. The headmaster of a school was afraid, if the children were taught upto his level what would happen to him? There were bonded labourers near the Karnataka border who were afraid to come forward. One landlord had to be made a chairman of the committee without which he was not allowing his place to be used for holding class.

The help from the cultural squads wherever possible, the keen interest taken by the ordinary people, working class and peasantry for the campaign and the co-operation of all those interested parties and groups were the main reasons for such a successful results. Not only people in Kerala are proud but all those 'deprived' in our country will be proud and happy if they come to know about this wonder. Once again, we on behalf of AICWW and CITU send our hearty congratulations to Kerala people.

First women's convention in Jalpaiguri in LIC

On February 17, 1991, the women employees of LIC Working under Jalpaiguri Division held their very first convention under the Presidentship of Comrade Subhas Chandra

Mukherjee. It was attended by 37 out of 59 women members working in the different offices of the Division; one GIC employee attended as invitee. Comrades Samar Bhowmick and Shanti Bhattacharjee, President and General Secretary, EZIEA respectively were present in the convention.

Comrade Samar Bhowmick narrated in his inaugural speech, the sufferings in the days of private insurers and how the present improved conditions have come about through continuous struggles launched by AIEA. After the inaugural speech, Comrade Chhaya Chakraborty placed the report on behalf of the preparatory committee. As many as 12 delegates, taking part in the deliberation, dealt with the problems faced by the women workers as well as the common problems of the industry. Comrade Shanti Bhattacharjee also addressed the convention. Representations from fraternal trade unions like ABTA, ABPTA and Democratic Women's Association greeted the convention.

From the convention, a 5 point declaration was accepted unanimously.

(From page 10)

Every vote is costly. It is also found that women's vote is sometimes a decisive vote. The congress party came to power in 1984 on a massive vote women gave in favour of the party. Whatever it might be, the importance of women's voting for any party does reflect their strength. This time too we are sure, women will come out in large numbers to exercise their vote with a firm decision to cast votes for the party which protects national unity and women's rights. National Front and Left Parties, where CPI(M) is one of their main constituents, is the only alliance, which if voted to power, will try to solve our economic, and communal problems, try to fight for national unity and for democracy.

Appeal to units of Anganwadi Federation

(The following circular has been issued by the President of All India Federation of Anganwadi workers and Helpers on April 10, 1991.)

Dear Comrades,

On 4th March, 1991 after the rally a meeting of our Federation Executive Committee was held at CITU central Office.

The meeting reviewed the programme of the Boat Club rally sponsored by the Samyukta Sangarsh Samiti, in details. Many important points like organisational weakness (a few states not participating) as also some political points were discussed.

The meeting expressed satisfaction that inspite of several odds, the rally on the whole was impressive and created a good impact. National press also gave wide coverage along-with pictures of the rally and procession.

Expressing satisfaction over the stay and other arrangements made, the meeting discussed the ways and means to raise money for the expenses incurred which for the time being has been taken from CITU as loan.

As per the decision taken in the meeting of Sangarsh Samiti, stay arrangements for 20,000 delegates were made at a total cost of Rs 3 lakhs. Our Federation, wanted accommodation for 5, 500 delegates keeping in view the commitments made by our State Units for which we were required to pay Rs. 82,000 and another, share of Rs. 5000/- was required to be paid for meeting, poster, press conference etc expenses. Apart from this some Rs. 2000 was spent for taxi etc and other miscellaneous expenses. So in all we had to spend around Rs. 90,000 out of which around Rs. 20,000 was collected from the delegates who came for the rally. Thus, another amount of around Rs. 70,000 has to be raised and paid back to CITU.

The meeting, therefore, took a decision that our state unions should raise this fund at their earliest and send to the centre. It has been suggested to raise Rs. 1/- per member.

I would, therefore, request you to please collect the money and deposit to the centre as early as possible. Drafts or MOs may please be sent in the name of Centre of Indian Trade Unions with information to me.

AICCWW Issued the following statement in support of the struggle of Nurses

The All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) condemns the unworthy behaviour of a Fourth Class Employee in the Guru Nanak Eye Centre, of sexual harassment of a nurse in the hospital when she was alone.

It is reported in the press that the person charged is now under police custody and the Delhi Administration has assured the nurses that there would be two nurses in every ward.

The AICCWW supports the demands of the nurses and appeals to the Administration to take immediate action against the culprits so that such instances are not repeated in such institutions.

Record of Atrocities Under Stable Government of Congress(I)

Rapes

1985	6,356	(Source : Lok Sabha 25.2.1986)
1986	7,509	"
1987	7,638	"
1988	8,706	(Source : Rajya Sabha 29.8.1990)
1989	7,586	"

Dowry Deaths

1988	2,209	"
1989	4,006	"

Atrocities on Scheduled Castes

Atrocities specified are murder, grievous hurt, rape, arson and other offences.

1985	15,373
1986	15,403 (Source : Rajya Sabha 18.5.1990)
1987	13,529
1988	15,207
1989	14,366

Grant of Maternity Leave of 180 days in Punjab

There are many queries coming to our office with regard to the maternity leave in Punjab and whether they get 6 months maternity leave. We are publishing below the circular issued by the Punjab book on this issue, for our readers—Ed.

To

Commissioners of Divisions and
Registrar,

High Court of Punjab & Haryana,
District and Session Judges and
Deputy Commissioners in the State.

Subject : Grant of Maternity leave under Rule
8. 127 (a) of Punjab C. S. R. Volume
I, Part I-Clarification regarding.

Sir.

I am directed to refer to Govt. of Punjab. Department of Finance circular letter No. 2/3/1990-3FPII/7120, dated the 17th August, 1990, on the subject noted above, wherein it has been clarified in paragraph 3 that the intention behind rule 8.127 (a) of the Punjab C S R. Volume I, part I, is that a female Government employee is entitled to avail herself of maternity leave for any number of times so long as she does not have three living children at the time of submission of application for such leave.

2. A doubt has been expressed by certain quarters whether the above-mentioned letter, 17.8.1990, has superseded the decision contained in the Department of Finance letter No. 10/77/88/FPI/ 10304, dated 24.11.1988, to the effect that the maximum limit of maternity leave to the women employees shall be 150 days without the necessity of production of a medical certificate, because rule 8.127 (a) ibid provides that the period of maternity leave

AGENTS OF THE VOICE OF THE WORKING WOMEN— PLEASE NOTE

The CITU Secretariat has decided to bring out a special book on the 3rd Convention of working women in Calcutta held on 12-13th Feb 1991. It will contain the report by the Secretary placed before the 3rd convention, the reports from the states (many reports have already been received), the deliberations of the convention, credential committee report and the names of the new committee members from the states. The book will contain photographs taken at Calcutta.

Those who wish to have copies please place the orders to the Centre on the basis of which we will issue the print order. Please consult the committee and inform. The price will be conveyed later. Those who have not submitted reports should send them immediately along with the list of names on the AICCW.

Vimal Ranadive, Secretary

shall not ordinarily exceed three months.*

3. It is clarified that the decision contained in the above mentioned letter, dated 24.11.1988, still remains unaffected and the maximum limit of maternity leave to the women employees continues to be 180 days without the necessity of production of medical certificate.

4. The above clarification may be brought to the notice of all concerned for compliance.

Yours faithfully,
(Samjoti Sarup)
Deputy Secretary Finance (S)

New Way Forward

On the 7th April 1990 the Czechoslovak Union of Women was dissolved at an Extraordinary Congress. The Czechoslovak Union of Women (CSUW) was an umbrella for two republican organizations, the Czech Union of Women (CUW) and the Slovak Union of Women (which is now called the Democratic Union of Women of Slovakia—DUWS). Both organisations have become independent according to the decisions of their congresses held in March, 1990. The declaration of independence meant the end of the CSUW's membership of the WIDF.

However due to the rich international activities developed by the Czechoslovak Union of Women, both republican unions expressed their willingness to continue and develop external relations.

The Extraordinary Congress nominated a preparatory committee that is responsible for the establishment of an open coordinating body that will represent all women's groups and organisations including the CWU and DUWS on the federal level as well as on an international level, including all the rights and obligations to the WIDF.

Earlier this year former international representative in the CSUW, and now member of this preparatory committee, Eva Mickova gave her reactions to the rapid political developments in her country, her hopes and fears for the future :

"On the one hand I am happy about the developments in our country as far as the spirit of democratisation is concerned and as far as the people's spirit is concerned as the people have acted as they haven't done for a long time. But on the other hand, I'm a bit scared that our women are not being heard enough, even though they have had long experience in social and political activities. That makes me worried especially for the younger generations of

women.

"I feel a little sad when one sees that there are not enough women represented in the leading bodies of our country. There is only one woman in the federal government, now, although our women's organisation has recommended six women whom we thought to be able and capable enough to take posts as ministers. Also after the restructuring of our parliament we do not see enough women. In this process of rapid change the governmental bodies and parliament do not think that thoroughly about the issues of women."

We have had some discussions with some ministers of government and leading personalities, and it seems that some of our demands for women will be taken into consideration. For the time being our demands are as follows: the prolongation of maternity leave by two weeks; the extension of vacations for all people. (It has been a long standing problem for parents with young children during the summer holidays. They face serious problems trying to manage the time so that the family can be together). We have also demanded the shortening of the working week from the present 42½ hours to 40 hours a week for all people. We have supported the shortening of the military service for our young men from 24 months to 12 months and for students from 12 months to 6 months.

"Now there are other women's groups forming in Czechoslovakia for example the Political Party of Women. This is independent from our women's structures and from any other political structures, but we have found a common language and we think we could do a lot together especially in the coming period for the elections for the federal assembly, our parliament."

No Substantial Change In Women's Status In Society

After 100 years of the declining sex ratio, 1981 census results showed a slight improvement for the first time, at the national level. The 1991 results, however, shatter the rather optimistic conclusions drawn by the census authorities in 1981 that the upward tilt of three points indicated that India had turned away from the demographic slide in women's status.

The Committee on the Status of Women in India had viewed the declining sex ratio as a secular consequence of a composite process of women's declining status in Indian society. The marginalisation of women in the economy, in the family, the community and the political process, in the Committee's view, all contributed to women's growing poverty, hunger, and higher mortality in virtually all age groups. The Committee's hypothesis has since been substantiated by new research.

The problems have been repeatedly highlighted by the women's movement during the last 15 years, demanding major policy changes to prevent the increasing exploitation and marginalisation of women in the political economy. While the movement succeeded in forcing the Government to introduce some new laws to improve women's livelihood and physical security, the Government has failed to bring about any significant change in its macro policies for the country's economic, social and the rising trend of crimes of violence against women, are part of the same social process, which cannot be combated by a few token programmes for women.

We have identified other aspects of the process of social change, which indicate advancing subordination of women, with declining success or control over basic resources and power to lead their lives with dignity and basic

human rights.

We have struggled to make society aware of these multifaceted problems, as our concerns extend far beyond women's survival to the health, progress and values of the nation as a whole. Yet our demands and priorities have been viewed only as a sectional interest, ignoring the fact that women do not constitute a class, caste or community. Our demands for empowerment of women from the grassroots level upward through organisations, awareness of legal rights and responsibilities to participate in the national political process, have been met by only token gestures.

We did not receive the 1981 census results with any euphoria, since we found that the sex ratio continued to decline in several states, quite a few of them being new entrants to this national trend. Statewise variations are not yet out, but we would not be surprised if the declining process has now affected several other states as well. The phenomenon of violence has been spreading in myriad forms to new regions over the last few decades. The escalating figures of dowry deaths and other forms of killing women (including foeticide and infanticide, mass killings in communal and caste riots, and its new use as an instrument of political action) are now not confined to particular regions, but have penetrated areas with no previous history or tradition of such practices.

We can only reiterate our persistent plea and demand—empowerment of women at all levels to participate effectively in the political process to decide the future of this country. Protection and improvement of women's rights can not be made subservient to other policies, like population control. By what right has the Government restricted the right to maternity benefits among women employees? Who has given Government that right? Is the popu-

lation policy or the fourth Pay Commission above the Constitution?

Signatories to the statement are Vimla Ranadive (All India Coordination Committee of Working Women), Brinda Karat (All India Democratic Women's Association), Kumed Sharma (Centre for Women's Development Studies), Jyotsna Chatterjee (Joint Women's Programme), Pramila Dandavate (Mahila Dakshta Samiti), Pramila Loomba (National Federation of Indian Women) and Mary Khemchand (YWCA of India).

ACFTU establishes National Committee for Women Workers in China

On December 9, 1991, the 8th session of the 11th presidium of the ACFTU (All China Federation of Trade Unions) decided to establish at national level a committee for women workers.

In recent years, local trade union organizations at all levels throughout the country have strengthened or established working organs for women workers, increased the number of and strengthened the training of women cadres. These organs work hard to safeguard the special interests of women workers, conduct investigations into the problems of women workers, demand to solve and urge responsible departments concerned to formulate appropriate policies and measures.

Under the leadership of the ACFTU, the newly-established national committee for women workers will represent, voice and safeguard the legitimate rights and special interests of women workers. The committee is composed of the chairmen of committees for women workers of the trade union councils of various provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, the leaders of relevant national industrial trade unions and government departments and well-known personages, model women workers and women entrepreneurs.

There are 50 million women workers in the country, accounting for 37% of the total workforce in China.

On 1991 May Day

We Remember Marx

Marx on Labour Congress at Baltimore

The decision adopted at the Labour Congress at Baltimore was joyfully welcomed by Marx. In his letter to Kugelman dated October 9, 1866 Marx wrote :

"I was very pleased with the American Workers' Congress of at Baltimore (which was convened simultaneously with the Geneva Congress of the International working men's Association-A.L.). The slogan there was organisation for the struggle against capital, and curiously enough most of the demands which I drew up for Geneva were also put forward by the correct instinct of the workers

Two years later Marx again referred to this Congress, in his letter to Kugelman, dated December 12, 1868, he wrote :

"Joking aside, great progress was evident in the last Congress of the American "Labour Union" in that among other things it threatened working women with complete equality. While in this respect the English and still more the gallant French, are burdened with a spirit of narrow-mindedness. Anybody who knows anything of history knows that social changes are impossible without feminine ferment. Social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex (the ugly ones included).

This letter once again proves that Marx knew just what he wanted in all problem of social movements bearing in mind that limiting the rights of women workers in working class organisations means political self-limitation of the working class.

(Marx & Trade Unions)

Anxious about their jobs

What Microelectronics has brought to the Life and Work of Japanese Women.

Kiyoko Ozeki*

The recent developments in science and technology, microelectronics in particular, have brought about significant changes in the life and work of women.

The brilliant progress in microtechnology has certainly reduced the time spent operating precision apparatus or troublesome clerical work to an amazing extent, and has meant the dissemination of a massive amount of information to distant areas within a very short period of time. Work once dependent on human labour is now being done by microelectronic machines speedily and without difficulty. It is no exaggeration to say that there are no places of work in Japan without high technology equipment.

However this sort of progress in science and technology has not always liberated women from hard work or provided them with sufficient free time to make life worth living.

The reality of the life of working women in Japan clearly shows what scientific and technological development brings to working people in the capitalist world. In the capitalist society, microtechnology has been introduced interests of big business as a means of exploitation.

To cope with the sharpening contradictions of the world capitalist economy, and to get over the difficulties in competing on the international market, Japanese monopoly capital has set its fundamental strategy towards the 21st century to make 'a shift in the international collaboration-orientated economic structure.'

The "structural changes" in Japanese industry are promoted in line with rationalization through microelectronization, revision of the Labour Standards Law and other labour laws on the hand and an increase in unstabilized labour on the other.

Take the example of the data service industry. The Japanese government and financial circles have placed special importance on the growth of the data service industry and provided enormous financial aid for its development. General purpose computers in use numbered more than 140,000 in 1986, and probably much more today. Data service workers related to computers numbered some 153,000 in 1984. They are mostly programmers, systems engineers and key punchers. Key punchers are mostly women and account for half the entire women workers in this field (which totals 51,300). The majority of the workers, who are an essential labour force in the data service industry, are working as temporary workers dispatched from temporary workers employment agencies to client companies. The workers are on the payroll of these agencies but they work at client companies where and when they are needed. A striking feature of this pattern of employment is that an overwhelming majority of them are young workers. Almost half of them are between 22 and 25 years of age. Their wages are Y 120,000 per month which are paid in the following way. Users who buy computers ask the makers to formulate programmes for their own needs and pay, let's say Y 600,000. The makers ask their subcontracting firms or temporary workers employment agencies to programme the required information. As commission is charged at each stage, only Y 150,000 or so is paid to

(Cont'd on page 22)

* Kiyoko Ozeki is the Vice General Secretary of the WIDF affiliated organization FUDANREN

Discrimination of Working Women in Japan

The number of working women in Japan has increased and reached 16,150,000, representing 36% of the total. However, under the attacks of the LDP Government and monopolies, their situation is characterized by the following problems :

Following the changes made to the Labour Standards Law in 1985, the regulation concerning hours, late night work, holiday work, employment in hazardous services were eased considerably. In 1988, with the introduction of flexible work schedule, the working women saw their working conditions deteriorate rapidly. For the health workers who cannot avoid late-night work, because of an absolute shortage of nurses, the regulation set by the state on the number of night shifts (not exceed 8 and a team of at least 2 people) was lifted. 60% of them say they 'always feel tired', deaths due to over work and sudden deaths are increasing, and miscarriages and abnormal deliveries are getting more and more frequent. The rate of 'abnormal delivery' amounts to 70% of the total number of deliveries.

In addition, after the introduction of new technology, work with computers and VDI operations are on increase in every industry, causing more and more new occupational diseases : eyesight troubles, troubles in shoulder, neck and arm, mental stress other mental troubles etc.

The progress of the struggle of working women demanding equality between men and women resulted in 1985 in the enactment of the 'equal employment opportunity law' and the ratification of all forms government of the UN convention on the elimination of all forms discrimination against women, but sexual discrimination still remains one of the major problems of Japanese working women. Big companies have adopted a personal management system upon the ability of

each worker : working women are classified in 'courses' with different wage and status, according to their readiness to accept transfers to offices abroad or in distant areas of Japan, those who accept those transfers getting higher wages and better positions. As it is difficult for the most of women workers to accept transfer, they are always victims of discriminatory measures for wage, promotion and other working conditions.

(From page 21)

the actual workers. They work 7 to 8 hours a day, frequently doing overtime. About 15 per cent of women in systems engineering or programming work more than 60 hours overtime monthly. When they refuse unreasonable orders that are not explained beforehand by the temporary employment agencies, they can be fired and denied future jobs, and so they have to do as they are told.

To improve these circumstances, the Temporary Workers' Law was enforced in 1986. This requires that agencies describe the required work in writing. However in most cases jobs are provided through verbal promises. A government survey revealed that 65 per cent of temporary workers feel "anxious about their jobs"

These facts show up the enterprises' doctrine of exploiting young people, who are quick to learn new techniques and are efficient, cheap for a short period. To recover the gigantic amount of money invested in new equipment in a situation of rapid technological development, a quick rotation of machinery without idling time is necessary. The result is very frequently long hours of strenuous and jam-packed work deep into the night. And now we are seeing instance after instance of an adversely revised Labour Standards Law, for instance the introduction of flexible working time systems and the deregulation of daily working hours.

Role of women MPs

Reservations have become the hallmark of the 1991 general elections. With the V P Singh led Janata Dal promising 27 per cent reservations to the backward classes no political party can afford to overlook the Mandal Report.

Although almost all manifestos of political parties have mentioned welfare schemes for women and children, the question of maximum representation and reservations to women has almost been swept aside by the Mandal wave. Women, it seems, are destined to remain backward among the backwards.

The statistics of electoral results present a dismal scene as far as women's representation in Parliament is concerned, although there have been outstanding parliamentarians like Vijaya-lakshmi Pandit and Indira Gandhi. In 1952 there were only 14 women parliamentarians; thereafter, there were 27 in 1957, 35 in 1962, 31 in 1967, 21 in 1971, 19 in 1977, 28 in 1980, 42 (a landmark) in 1984 and then again the dip—only 27 in 1989 out of the 198 that had contested elections.

The 1991 Census reveals that this year women voters outnumber men and whether this will have any influence on the number of women candidates fielded by various political parties is yet to be seen. Those who clear the race at the hustings will no doubt come to light in the next month or so.

So, far, it is the Congress party which has fielded maximum number of women candidates—53 in 1989—and can proudly claim to have given the nation its first woman Prime Minister. Yet this has failed to have an impact on seat distribution to women candidates. In its recently brought out manifesto, too, the Congress has offered 30 per cent reservations but only at the level of panchayati raj and such other statutory bodies, not in the candidates to be fielded.

In 1989 the Janata Dal had announced 30

per cent seat allotment to women candidates but only five women were given tickets. The explanation offered by a senior party member was—lack of women candidates willing to contest. This year, too, V P Singh in reply to a question posed to him in this regard, at the release function of the 1991 manifesto, said that they would “maximise seat allotment to women depending on their absorption in the party.” A party which has successfully mobilised the dalits and other backwards throughout the length and breadth of the country should not find it difficult to encourage the already aware and socially and politically active women to join hands with them.

Go to into more details of the 1989 elections the party-wise tally of total number of candidates and the number of women contestants was: Congress: 510-56; JD: 244-5; BJP: 226-10; CPM: 69-3; CPI: 42-2. Surprisingly, BSP—basically a party of Scheduled Castes and the backwards stands second to Congress in fielding women candidates. It had 13 women contestants. The Progressive Left parties, on the other hand, lagged far behind. This year, however, the Left Front has announced its decision to field 21 women candidates.

The State of Rajasthan has contributed five women parliamentarians, so far, although it is ridden with fundamentalism and cannot claim to have a high literary rate. But it must be borne in mind that the women elected were not commoners but were related either to a royal family or a powerful leader. If the five women who made it to the parliament, one was a former maharani (Gayatri Devi) and one a Thukrain (widow of Mohanlal Sukhadia).

Not all women parliamentarians have played an important role in raising women's issues. On the contrary, India's first minister incharge of women's problem, Margaret Alva did not protest against the Muslim Women's Bill of

Demand Publications of Marx be continued

Dr. Christian Von Hammerstein Ministerial Director Independent Commission for Investigation into the Capital of Political Parties in GDR
Mauerstrasse 34-38
O-1086 BERLIN
(Federal Republic of Germany)

Dr. Richard Weizsaecker President of FRG Villa Hammerschmidt Adenauerallee W-5501 BONN 1 (Federal Republic of Germany)

Dear Sir,

We have come to know that the Government of Germany has stopped the the publication of the Collected Works of Marx and Engels, which was undertaken by the MEGA Foundation. Further, the Independent Commission for Investigation into the Capital of Political Parties of GDR under the German Interior Ministry has also confiscated the property of the MEGA Foundation.

The works of Marx and Engels are the richest contributions to the scientific and philosophical understanding of the laws governing the social development of the world. They serve as invaluable guidelines to the teachers, students, research scholars and social workers of philosophy, history, science, economics, politics and sociology throughout the world irrespective of any political position.

In our opinion, the task undertaken by the MEGA Foundation in publication of the Collected Works of Marx and Engels would have immensely contributed to the development and progress of mankind in all countries of the world irrespective of the social system. The stoppage of the publication and the confiscation of the MEGA Foundation's property and capi-

tal will greatly hamper this process and is therefore absolutely unjustified. Any law or judicial decision justifying such action cannot be accepted by the progressive and democratic forces of the world.

We therefore demand that the property and capital of the MEGA Foundation be returned to it and the publication of the works of Marx and Engels be allowed unhindered.

Thanking you,

Yours Sincerely,
(P K Ganguly)
Secretary

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1986 although she has been closely associated with the women's movement. Vijayaraje Scindia is a vocal supporter of the custom of 'sati'.

The role and place of women in political parties has more often than not been insignificant. In Janata Dal, in 1986, women led by Parmila Dandavate had strongly protested against the Rajasthan JD Chief Kalyan Singh Kalvi's open support to the custom of sati. But even their threats to resign could not get Kalvi out of the party. He went on to become an MP and subsequently a minister in the Chander Shekhar Cabinet.

As compared to the above examples, representatives of Left parties like Geeta Mukherjee and Shusheela Gopalan, have played a significant role not only in protesting against the non-implementation of anti-dowry laws but also in the amendments made to laws on rape and dowry.

An interesting point that strikes one is that out of the 198 women candidates who contested election in 1989, eightytwo contested as Independents. This refutes the point made by many politicians that the number of women candidates who seek election is low.