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ON WORKING WOMEN



Policy Documents of CITU

A CITU Publication

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A CITU Publication

FOREWORD

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AK Padmanabhan
President

FOREWORD

The All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) was formed by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions in 1979, in a special national convention of working women, at the time of the 4th All India Conference of CITU in Chennai. Since its inception in 1970, CITU had been underlining the importance of organising working women, bringing them into the mainstream trade union movement and promoting them to decision making bodies of the trade unions. It has been repeatedly pointing out the weaknesses of the trade union movement in this regard and emphasising the responsibility of the trade unions in addressing the problems specific to working women.

This task of organising women workers has become more important in the present circumstances when the attacks on the workers, particularly women workers have grown manifold under neo liberal globalisation. CITU believes that the trade union movement cannot achieve its full potential to resist these attacks when a big contingent of the working class, the working women, remains outside its purview.

In the context of the 40th anniversary celebrations of the foundation of CITU and the connected tasks, CITU has taken the decision to publish a volume consisting of some of its documents that elucidate its perspective in paying special attention to organising working women.

CITU Secretariat is sure that the documents in this volume will be of great use to our organisers and cadres, both women and men, in fulfilling the tasks ahead. It also believes that they will be of interest to those involved in studying the approach of the trade union movement in the country towards gender issues.

AK Padmanabhan
President

ON WORKING WOMEN

(The resolution adopted by the foundation conference of CITU held on 28 - 30 May 1970, at Kolkata)

The All India Trade Union Conference notes with grave concern the large scale retrenchment of working women in textile, jute and other industries. In the last 13 years, thousands of women have been thrown out of employment under various pretexts, depriving them of their only source of livelihood. Many women workers have been thrown out from pharmaceutical concerns after their marriage.

In the present economic crisis women workers are the first victims of retrenchment. The number of women workers in textiles in Bombay came down from 35,000 in 1947 to 4,000 in 1969. The same can be said about the jute industry, which was one of the major industries employing thousands of women. While retrenching the women workers the management put forward excuses, such as, they are incapable to cope up with the new industry, or after marriage they are not regular in their work, etc. that have no basis. The real reason for throwing them out is to evade the provisions of the Maternity Benefit Act.

Capitalism in India is exploiting women workers most severely by denying them equivalent wages as are paid to male workers. Yet many women workers have to work hard after completing their domestic responsibilities. This has adversely affected the health of women workers and in the absence of any adequate medical facilities, their misery and privations have become still worse.

This Conference also takes note of the fact that more than 40 percent of women workers are employed as casual workers in cashew, coir, beedi and lac, agriculture, building and road construction. The work being seasonal, these women

are employed on daily wages which are extremely low varying from Rs. 2 to Rs. 4. Though they are the major working force in some of these industries, the working conditions are beyond description. Since many of these concerns are not governed by the Factories Act, there is no strict working hours, no maternity benefit or provision of crèche or Provident Fund Scheme.

In Tea Gardens in the North and South, women workers comprising 75 percent of total workers, get wages only from Re. 1.84 to Rs. 2 having differentiation between men and women workers, the type of work being the same. This gross inequality is continuing for years together. This inequality in the wages is seen generally in every concern, in mines, bidi, tobacco, lac or in agricultural work or construction work.

Even those women workers who are covered by the Factory Act are many times deprived of their maternity benefit due to their ignorance and many factories are not providing crèches for the children, and even if they are provided, then the number of nurses and ayahs are not sufficient, with the result the children are totally neglected.

The Conference, while taking note of the increasing participation of women workers in trade union struggles, calls upon the unions to pay more attention to the organisation of women workers so that they should be able to play a bigger role in the T.U. movement.

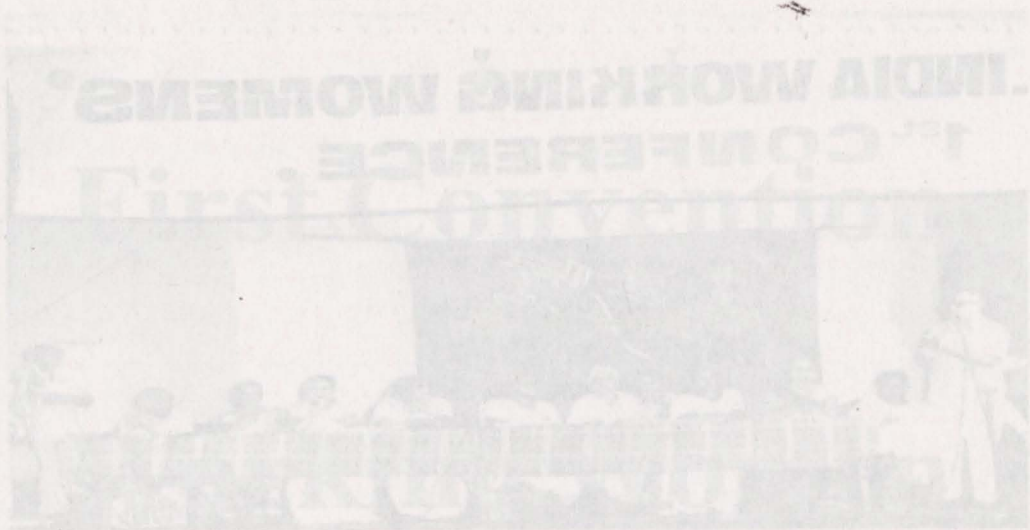
This Conference fully supports the following demands of the women workers:

1. Equal wage for equal work

2. Extension of the application of the Maternity Benefit Act to cover all working women and modification in the Act by providing additional leave facilities with full payment and more punishment for violation of the Act

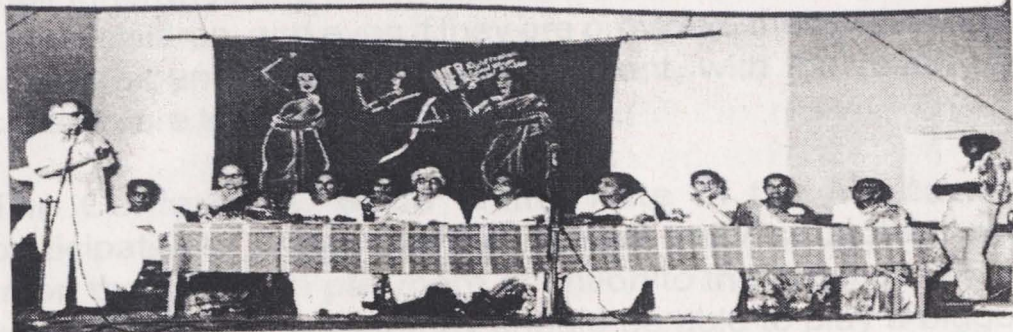
3. Retrenchment of women workers should be stopped forthwith
4. Better crèche arrangement, provision for rest rooms, lavatories, etc. for women workers
5. Adequate housing facilities
6. Provision for proper medical facilities for women workers.

Report of the



.INDIA WORKING WOMENS'

1st CONFERENCE .



and in the T.L. movement

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**FOREWORD BY
B T RANADIVE**

Report of the First Convention of Working Women

FOREWORD BY B T RANADIVE

The CITU at its Ernakulam Session in 1973 drew attention to the question of working women. At its Bombay Session in 1975 it decided to call a conference of working women to consider the disabilities from which they suffered. The Emergency intervened rendering impossible conduct of progressive trade union activities.

The CITU Working Committee meeting at Kota in June 1978 took a firm decision to convene a conference of working women in Madras. That conference was held in Madras on 9-10 April, 1979. All unions and all committees should see to it that its decisions are properly implemented.

The CITU had to take the decision to call a special conference because it was found that the grievances of working women were unattended: the government was indifferent : the employers were hostile; and even the trade unions were not very enthusiastic about their demands. In the many strikes that the working class fought, there were very few instances when special demands of the working women were given prominence.

It was also found that women, even in industries and occupations where they formed a sizeable section, were hardly represented in the leading bodies of the unions.

This state of affairs was partly due to the disabilities which women suffer from in a society like the Indian society. The inferior status assigned to women in both Hindu and Muslim communities is known to all. The discrimination doggedly pursues the working women and it is the elementary duty of the trade unions to fight against it. We cannot say that our

workers and some of our trade union leaders are free from this outlook.

It has been noted that the employers resort to retrenchment of women workers to avoid giving maternity benefit, and provision of other facilities prescribed by law. In many industries the number of women employees is decreasing. The axe of retrenchment falls first on the women workers.

The notorious Baveja Committee on coal industry has suggested retrenchment of 50,000 coal miners. The committee says, "A large number of those are female workers who cannot be sent underground. The redeployment in other projects in the vicinity is possible through a programme of training and "Replacement of female workers." This means women will be retrenched in large numbers. And the Janata Government's Energy Minister is intent on implementing this recommendation.

Under the Congress regime, women membership of trade unions went down. In 1961-62 it was 370,000; in 1968, it reached 421 thousands, by 1974, it had fallen to 262,000. Perhaps the indifference and neglect of trade unions has also contributed to this fall.

Regarding the question of equal wages for equal work also there is discrimination. The tea planters, the bidi employers find diverse means to cheat the women workers and the trade unions have not always shown the same zeal that they would have if men were affected. The plantation women, the bidi and coir women and the sweeper women have been the worst sufferers of this unequal treatment.

Nor are the conditions easy for women employees in private and government services. Apart from sharing the denial of crèches and other facilities with the women in factories, they are discriminated in matters of promotion and transfers under a male administration and are often the objects of lust of

superior officers. The employers besides retrench women or refuse them employment to avoid giving them maternity benefit.

The latest official survey dealing with the socio economic conditions of women workers in mines says, according to press reports, that no woman worker engaged in production process in any sampled mine was found to be skilled. While only 29 per cent of them were found to be unskilled workers, as many as 71 per cent of the workers were classified as unskilled. The proportion of women engaged in supervisory work was found to be negligible. No woman was found to be holding administrative, executive or managerial post in the mining. A large number of women continued to be temporary hands even after putting five years of service.

The study showed that prospects of women graduating from unskilled to semi-skilled and supervisory jobs were practically non existent. In none of the mines was there a regular channel for their promotion. The cost of providing extra welfare amenities like crèche, maternity benefits, toilets and other facilities to women workers was found to be very low- 0.20 to 1.80 per cent of the total wage bill. However, most of the employers were reluctant to incur even this small expenditure.

In a few occupations, wage rates of women workers for identical work were found to be significantly lower than those of their male counterparts, even after the promulgation of the Equal Remuneration Act.

The Charter of Demands prepared by the working women's convention in Madras should offer a rallying point for unifying working women from industries, services and occupations. It has been prepared after thorough discussion among the delegates, who exposed the neglect by the Government and uncovered the wholesale cheating practiced by the employers. It is a charter which should be popularised among all sections of working women and should be supported by all

organisations of women.

The Madras convention gave a call to observe 30th May as Working Women's Day. The day was a remarkable success with hundreds of women demonstrating in support of the charter. The Coordination Committee of Working Women, the CITU unions, women's organisations and other unions joined hands to make the day a big success. Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, U.P., Delhi organised big demonstrations to focus attention on the Charter of Demands. The participation of women organisations in observance of the day is an important development.

In all capitalist countries, there is discrimination against women. Women have to fight for equal pay for equal work in many of the advanced countries.

It is no wonder that India with one foot in the capitalist age and another in the preceding age should deny equal treatment to women at every stage. The trade union movement has to fight it as part of the working class struggle. Our leaders and cadres, besides, must see that the union leadership does not become a male preserve, that women are trained and quickly promoted to leading positions. The trade union movement cannot attain its full stature unless the women's contingent plays its role in organising and leading the unions. Thousands of women participate in strike struggles, face jail and repressions, go through privations along with men workers and employees. But they are far from occupying the position in the unions that is their due. The fight for working women's demands-for the demands of factory workers, teachers, employees, etc., should not be the exclusive concern of the trade unions. All women's organisations should lend their support and actively help the trade union movement in this struggle.

The CITU calls upon all affiliated trade unions to strengthen the working women's movement. Let our trade unions and

Coordination Committees get ready to organise in cooperation with other central trade unions and women's organisations a mighty all-India demonstration of working women in New Delhi.

WORKING WOMEN

B.T. Ranadive

9.6.79

(Report placed by Vinod Ranadive in the first Convention of Working Women held at Madras on 9-10 April 1979)

In thirty-one years of independence, the social and economic position of Indian women has not very much improved. The conditions of women are a yardstick to measure the progress and advancement of a society; if we judge our advancement from this angle, we are yet to cover a long way. According to the figures of 1971 Census, only 18.44 per cent of women population in India was literate and this single fact reveals in what miserable conditions the Indian women are still made to live.

The working women are the most advanced and vocal section of Indian women and their conditions have also not improved. Neglect and failures of the Government and most brutal attitude of the profit hungry employers have worsened the conditions of working women in independent India. "The employers are determined to use women workers as cheap labour, by utilising their inferior status in the society. Whenever their wages are brought at par with men, the women workers are thrown out of jobs. This has happened in mines, in textiles and jute industry" - this is how the conditions of Indian working women was summarised in a resolution adopted in the second Conference of CITU held in Cochin in 1923 and this position has further worsened now even after the enactment of Equal Remuneration Act.

After the World War II, large number of women from the middle class families came to work in various fields due to economic compulsions and today they form a sizable section of working

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION OF WORKING WOMEN

(Report placed by Vimal Ranadive in the first Convention of Working Women held at Madras on 9-10 April 1979)

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After the World War II, large number of women from the middle class families came to work in various fields due to economic compulsions and today they form a sizable section of working

women in India working as nurses, teachers, librarians and also in clerical and other positions in Government departments, banks, insurance, mercantile offices, railways, post and telegraph etc. They get equal wage and salary but in the matter of promotion and training for higher positions they are widely discriminated against and their difficulties and special problems are hardly looked into with the seriousness it deserves. The proportion of women employees in the Central Government is as low as 2.41 per cent of the total strength of employees. Out of 542 members in the Lok Sabha only 21 seats are occupied by women which is less than 4 per cent of the total strength of the House. Constitutional guarantees and legislations concerning working women are only on paper.

The Trade Unions in India have also not paid sufficient attention to the problems of working women. Due to special position of women and more particularly for household responsibilities, it is difficult for working women to devote sufficient time for trade union work and come in the forefront of leadership unless they are given the required encouragement and their problems are seriously looked into by the front ranking leadership of trade unions. The trade unions, therefore, should bear the responsibility for poor strength of working women in the unions and their most insignificant share in the Trade Union leadership. The influence of feudal society and male chauvinistic attitude are still playing their role in Indian Trade Union movement and these factors are to a great extent responsible for failures of Trade Union movement in paying proper attention to organise the working women and ease their problems.

The poor participation of working women in trade unions and trade union leadership is a basic weakness of Indian Trade Union movement and this helps the employers to garner more and more profits by carrying on ruthless exploitation of women workers backed by near-competent indifference of the Government. This basic weakness should be removed in

the interest of further expanding and strengthening Indian Trade Union movement and not just for helping the working women. A consistent class approach should be inculcated in the Trade Union movement in this regard and seriously pursued in all industries and vocations wherever there are women workers.

The working women in India have played a very significant role in various struggles on trade union and democratic demands. Experience has shown that they, in spite of their special position and household responsibilities, are capable of taking active part in trade union movements and democratic struggles. If proper encouragement is given to them, they take active part in trade union struggles, and once they join the struggle, they stick to the last, overcoming all difficulties in their way. The working women are a potential force wherever they are employed in sizable numbers and their active participation in trade union movement in the Plantations and Mines, in Bidi and Tobacco and Pharmaceutical industries, in Cotton Textile and Jute industries, in Garment Making and Electronic industry, in P&T, Government Departments and Mercantile Offices, in Nursing, Teaching and in various other professions and more particularly in the struggles of agricultural laborers, are well known facts. During the semi-fascist terror in West Bengal since 1970, the women played a very significant role in fighting against the terror in Durgapur, Asansol, Rani ganj, Calcutta, and 24 Parganas and other places, protecting the trade unions and the leadership.

The employment strength of working women in the organised sector was 21.88 lakhs in 1974 and as against that 262,000 working women were members of trade unions which submitted their annual returns to the Government for the same year 1974. There is a great possibility of utilising this potential force – the working women – for further strengthening and enlarging trade union movement and the trade unions in India must address themselves to this task in the interest of working class struggle with all seriousness.

CITU TAKES THE LEAD

This National Convention of Working Women now being held in Madras is being organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. This is a broad-based Convention and large number of representatives of working women from CITU and also unions not belonging to CITU from all over India are participating in it, which is a welcome feature.

From the Foundation Conference itself, held in Calcutta in May, 1970 CITU has taken initiative to organise the working women and highlight their problems and their demands. In a resolution adopted in the Foundation Conference, the CITU Unions were called upon "to pay more attention to the organisation of working women" so that "they should be able to play a bigger role in the trade union movement."

In the Second Conference of CITU, held in Cochin in April 1973, it was re-emphasized that "the trade unions had to pay special attention to the task of organising the working women on their special problems. It is not a question of passing some resolutions but of concretely undertaking this important task. The representations of working women on the union committees are either nominal or totally absent in spite of their large percentage in industries like Plantations, Beedi, Coir etc. The Unions must take immediate steps to organise them on their special problems so that they participate in the struggles on a large scale and their consciousness is roused, conscious efforts should be made by the unions to educate them politically, encourage and promote them by giving them more responsibility and opportunities at all levels."

Reviewing the problems of the working women and further reiterating the importance of their greater participation in trade union struggle, a decision was taken by the Third Conference of CITU held in Bombay in 1975, "to organise a seminar on the problems of working women during 1975 to highlight their

working and living conditions.” Unfortunately, this could not be done due to Emergency imposed in June, 1975. In the Working Committee meeting of the CITU, held in Kota in June, 1978, it was decided to hold the National Convention of Working Women at the time of the CITU session.

The problems of the Indian working women should be dealt with at the National level and, therefore, CITU wanted to make this national Convention of the working women as broad-based as possible. The National Federations and unions not belonging to CITU were, therefore, requested to send their working women representatives to this National Convention. CITU record its deep appreciation for participation of these organisations and for giving all help and assistance for making this national Convention a success.

ARREST THE DECLINING STRENGTH OF WORKING WOMEN

In the present social and economic situation of our country, the question of employment for women is assuming very great importance. When need-based minimum wage is a far cry and hardly in any industry in India the need-based minimum wage is paid, it is next to impossible to meet the needs of the family with the earnings of husbands only. Due to this economic compulsion large number of women are coming in the employment market every year.

The Planning Commission in India stated in the “Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83” that “the Census of 1971 grossly underestimated the number of women workers, because of its emphasis on counting “main” or primary workers. If this Census is believed, while the female population increased by 51 million during 1961-71, the female work force declined by 26 million—from 59.5 million to 33.6million. And the participation rate declined about 28 per cent to a mere 12.7 per cent. In view of the utter unacceptability of these figures,

the Planning Commission has developed adjusted estimates of the work force in 1971 showing that the female work force increased by 15.09 million during the decade 1961-71, and the participation rate remained roughly the same (about 28 per cent) as in 1961."

Whatever may be the actual strength of women workers, the fact remains that in the factories the strength of women workers has sharply declined during the last many years. In 1963, the factories in India which submitted returns to the Government, employed a total work force of 38,59,647, out of which the number of women workers were 4,00,364, constituting 10.37% of the total work force. But in 1972, out of a total work force of 44,68,824 in the factories (which submitted returns) the number of women workers came down to 3,90,269 and their percentage to total work force was 8.73, a decline of 1.64%. In Cotton Textile Mills, in Jute Mills and also in the Coal Mines, the strength of women workers has been willfully and drastically reduced.

Large number of women workers would have been further employed, had there been no modernization in departments of packing in pharmaceutical and also in the garment making industries. The largest number of women are employed in the plantation, coir, cashew, bidi and tobacco industries. In these industries also systematic attempts are being made to reduce the number of women workers either by increasing their work-load or by introducing the machines as in Coir Industry in Kerala. Reduction of the strength of women workers and compelling them to accept lower wage goes on simultaneously.

In a paper circulated by the Labour Ministry of the Government of India in the conference on the "Problems of Working Women" held in December 1978, in Delhi, it was stated that "there is no doubt that as most of the legal provisions relating to women involve some extra expenditure on the part of employer, there may be some reluctance for them to employ

women." This statement shows that the Government has all its sympathy for the employers who violate the provisions of the Labour Laws on working women and deny employment to them. This statement also shows that the Government is least concerned about the question of employment of women and the implementation of the legislations concerning working women.

With the application of modern machinery and techniques in the agricultural sector, large number of women workers have been thrown out of employment all over the country. The Minister of State for Education and Social Welfare Shrimathi Renuka Barkataki in her address to a Conference on the problems of women labour held in Delhi, referred to earlier, admitted that "experience and studies have revealed that employment of women in agriculture is substantially affected adversely by the introduction of certain new methods and techniques of cultivation. A case in point is the replacement of hand weeding (mostly done by women) by chemical weed-killers. To prevent such displacement, it would be necessary to examine every new method, technique or system for its impact on women's employment before it is introduced."

In the organised sector, large scale discrimination is practiced against the working women on the plea that working women cannot acquire skill for doing sophisticated work. Employment of women is evaded on this plea also. But there is no substance in this contention. The women workers are doing highly skilled and sophisticated jobs in Radio assembling, Electronic goods and equipments assembling, electric bulb manufacturing, in pharmaceutical industry and in handling of telephone, telex, tele-printers, punching machines etc.

The unemployment among the women in urban and rural sector has considerably increased. According to the figure of Employment Exchange 1.6 million women were unemployed on 31st March 1978, and a sizeable number of them are educated unemployed. From the latest available

figures, the number of secondary teachers unemployed in 1973 was 26,542; middle school teachers 25,366; the typist 59,958. There are a large number of nurses, midwives, clerks, telephone operators and others waiting for the call on the live register.

The people do not register their names with Employment Exchange as jobs are not usually available. In the rural sector the unemployment figure is very high. There is no Employment Exchange in the rural sector and no scope for registration of unemployed persons. Those who get jobs in the rural sector get it only for a part of the year.

Whenever the attacks come on employment the women become the first victims. Therefore, we should also demand that retrenchment of women workers be banned in all fields of activities wherever women are working.

From this National Convention of Working Women while we should take a serious note of the declining trend in the employment of women, we should also demand that all discriminations against working women should be stopped and more women should be recruited in various jobs as a matter of policy.

NO SECURITY OF JOBS

In various Conventions held in the States, working women demanded security of jobs for women. Most of the delegates complained that they are employed on temporary basis for years together, or they are compelled to take breaks in services after 3 to 6 months.

In pharmaceutical Industry, a large number of women are employed as casual employees, made to work extra hours without overtime allowance and then thrown out of employment after 15/20 days. It is surprising that in the department of P&T large number of women are employed as

“short Duty operators” and paid Rs. 1.50 an hour without any other benefits and kept for years together. In the textile and Jute industries in Mines and in the unorganised, small scale industries, women are kept on “Badli” or “casual” basis. Hundreds of these women daily come to the Mill gates, patiently wait for the call, and usually return without getting any work.

Therefore, the question of job security is closely connected with the employment for working women and it should be dealt with by the trade unions seriously.

The Directive Principle of the State Policy – embodied in the Constitution of India speak laudably of treating men and women equally and securing for them employment and livelihood. Even though these Directives of the Constitution were not justifiable, they have not been implemented in 30 years of Congress Rule. In the way of present Janata Party Government are formulating and implementing their economic policies – pursuing the same line of serving the interests of capitalists and landlords – we do not visualise that these Directives will ever be implemented.

From this National Convention of Working Women we should demand inclusion of the ‘Right to Work’ in the Constitution of India as a justifiable fundamental right and as long as jobs cannot be given to able-bodied persons, both men and women, should be paid unemployment relief in adequate measure.

A demand for reservation of jobs for women is raised by a number of organisations. But job reservation, in practice, is a demand for distribution of unemployment and not for solving unemployment. Unemployment can be ended by creating employment through rapid industrialisation of the country and through basic and radical land reform. Unemployment cannot be treated separately for men and women. It is an integrated question, an integrated problem and the Trade Unions will

have to treat the question of unemployment for both men and women on the same footing. The demand for reservation of jobs for women will only help to sidetrack the main issue of unemployment and the struggle against unemployment.

The problem of unemployment is the creation of capitalist society. In our country, in the name of socialism capitalism is being encouraged which breeds constant unemployment. Experience has shown that only in a socialist society, full employment can be ensured.

ALL WOMEN WORKERS SHOULD BE PAID MATERNITY BENEFIT

At present, the Maternity Benefit Act and the Employees State Insurance Act provide for maternity leave to women workers with cash benefit in factories, mines, plantations, and other industries as well as in offices and establishments. The Maternity Benefit Act applies to every establishment wherever more than 10 workers (with power) or 20 workers (without power) are employed.

The maximum period of maternity leave given is for 12 weeks with full pay. The women worker is entitled to get cash benefit of the maternity leave only if she has worked in the establishment for a period of at least 160 days in 12 months immediately preceding the date of delivery. The same provisions are applicable to working women of Mines and Plantation. A large section of women are covered by the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948. The cash amount under the Maternity Benefit Act is paid at the daily wage or one rupee per day whichever is higher. Under the ESI Act, the women workers get cash benefit at the daily rate for a period of 12 weeks – for six weeks before confinement and for six weeks immediately following it.

It is an established fact that large number of women workers are deprived of maternity benefit due to various dubious

methods adopted by the employers. Thousands of women, who are employed in small factories, do not come under the purview of the Maternity Benefit Act and as a result women workers of these units do not get the benefit. The factories employing less than 20 workers also do not come under the purview of the ESI Act, 1948 and the women workers of these units do not get maternity benefit.

Even those women workers who are covered by the Factory Act, are often deprived of their maternity benefit due to their ignorance and there is hardly any agency or machinery to put a check to such malpractices.

The women employed in Banks, Insurance, Mercantile offices, in Government Departments and Departmental undertakings are paid maternity benefit as per Act but are not given the full reimbursements for medical expenses for delivery and post delivery period.

The teachers and women employees of educational institutions are given three months maternity leave with full pay and usually no other facilities are given to them.

The amount of maternity benefit paid to the women workers is usually very low. This is precisely for the reason that wages of the women workers in our country, in most of the industries, are very low. For instance, in the plantations 40,672 women workers claimed maternity benefit in 1972, out of which 22,782 claims were accepted, and the average claim came to Rs.316 only. The total cash benefit paid to these plantations women workers on account of maternity benefit came down from rs.72.1 lakhs in 1972 to Rs.63.3 lakhs in 1975.

The employers adopt various unscrupulous means to evade payments of maternity benefit to the women workers. Under the Act a woman worker should work for 160 days to qualify for claiming maternity benefit. The employers in various cases terminate the employment of women workers before

completion of 160 days and thereby evade payment of maternity benefit even though the Act provides that the employment of women workers cannot be terminated during pregnancy.

In the organised industries unmarried women are preferred for employment. There are cases when married women were refused employment for detection of pregnancy at the time of medical examination prior to recruitment.

In the Working Women's Conference of Durgapur Industrial Complex held in February, 1979, a woman worker raised a very pertinent question as to whether payment of maternity benefit should be made if the child is born at home and not in the hospital. It was said that maternity benefit is denied in case the child is not born in the hospital and a certificate cannot be produced.

In various small units working women are forced to work even during advanced state of pregnancy and this not only tells upon the health of the mother but also of the Child.

Where the women workers are unorganised or less-organised, they cannot effectively fight against denial of payment of maternity benefit. A proper machinery should, therefore, be set up by the government to re-examine the claims for maternity benefit rejected by the employers and ensure payment in all cases of genuine claims and the Trade Union representatives should be associated with this machinery.

When all the provisions regarding payment of maternity benefits are deliberately flouted and ignored by the employers, the Government sit idle and encourage the employers by their gross-inaction. In our Constitution, 'Motherhood' is treated as 'sacred'. But from the conduct of the Government it is clear that they are least concerned about the Constitution of our country. From this National Convention of Working

Women we should strongly condemn the attitude and inactions of the Government and demand that officers responsible for supervising the implementation of the Maternity Benefit Act be also made accountable for their failures in restraining and punishing the dishonest employers who deny payment of maternity benefit to the women workers by various means. We should also demand amendment of the Maternity Benefit Act to punish severely the employers denying Maternity Benefit to women workers and this penal measure should include compulsory imprisonment and fine.

In the agricultural sector, women agricultural labours are compelled to work during pregnancy due to poverty. Giving birth to babies while working during the sowing and harvesting time are not rare incidents. There is no protection for the agricultural women workers during pregnancy and they are deprived of maternity benefit or any care. The hospital arrangements in the rural sector are practically non-existent and during child delivery agricultural working women have no means to lean on and are completely helpless.

In the Conference convened by the Union Labour Ministry in last December in Delhi on the Problems of Women Labour, it was suggested by the Government that all working women may be covered under the Maternity Benefit Scheme and the scheme shall be financed by imposing a levy on all employers whether they employ or not. At present the individual employers directly pay maternity benefit to the working women. If the Government really develop such a scheme to cover the working women of all industries and establishments including the unorganised sector and agricultural sector and of all vocations and callings, irrespective of the number of working women employed in a single unit, and take the responsibility to pay maternity benefit whether the employers pay the cess or not, then only such a scheme will work and if it is so devised it will be welcomed by the trade unions. Otherwise, this scheme will not work and it will only be a device to deceive the working women from payment of

maternity benefit. It should also be ensured that under this scheme eligible working women will be promptly paid the maternity benefit by the employers in the organised sector and thereafter the employers shall realise the money from the proposed maternity benefit scheme.

From the bitter experience that the working class have gained from the operation of Provident Fund Scheme and also the Employees State Insurance Scheme, it cannot be readily said that the maternity benefit scheme proposed by the Government shall work satisfactorily and fulfill its purpose. If, however Government moves seriously in the matter and devise proper and effective machinery under a social security scheme and ensure prompt payment of maternity benefit, we feel, the trade unions will not lag behind in extending their cooperation for its effective implementation. The representatives of Trade Unions should be directly involved in administering this scheme so as to ensure its effectiveness and fulfill its purpose.

During the discussions in the State conventions of working women, a number of delegates expressed that the maternity leave with full pay should be at least for four months, and it should be given according to their choice. The general trend in the discussion was that it should be given after the delivery of the child when the child care is mostly needed and the mother too requires rest. Pregnant women who are to stand continuously at a stretch for long hours in the usual discharge of their duties should be given some alternate jobs during the period of pregnancy.

The cash benefit paid under the Maternity Benefit Act is inadequate considering the fact that the prices of drugs and medicines have gone up. From this National Convention of Working Women, we should demand that all working women – in both rural and urban sector – irrespective of the number of women workers employed in a unit, should be paid maternity benefit on a compulsory basis including four months' leave

with fully pay and all delivery and post delivery medical expenses subject to a minimum of Rs.500/-.

The Government should directly pay maternity benefit to the women workers of the unorganised sector and also to those who are employed as teachers and nurses as employees in unrecognized schools, to nurses and aayas and those working women not serving directly under one employer.

We should also raise the demand from this Convention that the Maternity Benefit Act 1961 and the Employees State Insurance Act 1948, should be suitably amended to include this provision and ultimately the Government should remain legally responsible to pay maternity benefit to all working women.

CRECHE SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR BABIES OF WORKING WOMEN

A crèche is a basic necessity for the working women wherever they work. For want of crèche working women having small children suffer most oppressive agony and the children also suffer physically. The working women coming from depressed sections of the society including the agricultural sector rear their babies only by breast feeding and for want of suitable crèche in the work places they cannot timely feed the babies and this affects the babies' health. The women workers in the plantation, particularly the tea-leaves and coffee-seeds pickers-sometimes carry their children in a cloth tied round their necks. This becomes an additional burden to the heavy basket they carry on their back. The vast number of women workers employed by the contractors for earth cutting, road building, embankment and construction job have no facility of crèche despite the clauses provided in the Contract Labour Act. Sometimes women workers leave their children inside the rooms locking the doors from outside and also tie the children to trees with nobody to look after and these desperate acts invite very sad tragedies sometimes.

The crèche is also a burning demand of the working women coming from middle class families as there is no provision of a crèche in the offices or establishments. It is difficult for working women coming from low-income group of the middle class to employ somebody to look after the children if there is nobody in the family to look after them. The survey recently conducted by the Shramik Mahilla Samitee of Bombay on the working condition highlighted the demand for crèche with reliable arrangements as a major demand of the working women employed in the Railways, P&T, Government Departments, Mercantile Offices, Insurance, Banks and other establishments.

In the cities and towns all over India the working women demand for crèche, in one voice. In State Government and Central Government Offices, in P&T and Railway Offices – large number of women are employed but nowhere is crèche is provided by the Government. Crèches is not provided in any Bank, in LIC or in any Mercantile office. Large number of women are employed as teachers and nurses and for their children also no crèche is provided. In some cities, private crèches have recently been started but they are very expensive and beyond the reach of average working women. If the private employers are to be forced to provide crèche in offices, the Government should first provide it in all its offices, including the offices of its Departmental and Public Sector Undertakings.

The Factories Act, 1948 provides that in every factory where more than 20 women workers are employed, crèche should be provided for the children of the working women below the age of six years, a trained Nurse or 'Aaya' should be kept for the crèche and half a pint of milk should be provided for each children every day. Large number of factories do not implement this provision and those who implement it, they do it in such a manner that women workers cannot keep their children in the crèche with confidence.

Out of 15,468 factories all over India in 1972, crèche was

provided for in 834 factories. In 1976, the total number of factories went up to 19,471 whereas the number of factories which provided crèche was only 900. Out of 1,322 mines in 1976, 741 mines had no crèche.

In the industries where women workers constitute a majority like Tobacco, Beedi, Plantation and Cashew etc., the arrangement of crèche is just nominal or non-existent. The National Commission on Labour had pointed out this fact very sharply in their report and commented on the role of employers and enforcement machinery of the Government. But this was not taken seriously by the Government and no action was taken. The Union Labour Ministry in its paper circulated in the conference held in Delhi on 18th December, 1978 on the Problems of Women Labour admitted that information collected by them on crèche provided by the employer revealed that implementation of the Act in this regard "leaves a great deal to be desired", but they did not suggest any measure for strict enforcement of this provision. This attitude of the Government not only helps the employers to flout the provisions of the Act regarding crèche but also gives them direct encouragement to completely ignore this basic need of the women workers.

In the Contract Labour Rules, one of the conditions of the licence granted to a contractor is that "wherever 20 or more women are employed in an establishment, crèche will have to be set up." But implementation of this provision is deliberately ignored by the contractors. The women workers employed by the contractors can be seen at a number of places of construction; their small babies are found playing in the dust or crying for milk in temporary cradles of cloth tied to the trees. As yet, it is not known if any contractor has implemented this provision. But the Government departments are completely meek and silent about taking any measure for enforcement of this provision of contractors or resorting to cancellation of contract for non-fulfillment of this provision. The Labour Welfare Committee of 1969 recommended that

“the setting up of crèche near residential areas of workers is desirable as they will not only solve the problem of transport difficulties experienced by the working mothers, but will also be better utilised.” The committee recommended that “with a view to meeting the appropriate needs of the children of the employed women workers, the Municipalities, Local Bodies, State Governments should set up community crèches near the residential areas or central places in big cities and towns so that the working mothers are able to utilise this facility to the maximum extent possible. Crèches should also be provided in the labour colonies specially for the benefit of such workers whose place of duty is far away from their residences”. These recommendations never received the attention of the Government.

Without eliminating or minimising the direct responsibility of the employers to provide crèche in the work places, we want to say that setting up of crèche in working women’s residential areas and localities or at the stations will be very useful and it is the responsibility of the Government to provide such crèches. At present, the Municipalities and Local Bodies cannot undertake this responsibility as their financial resources are very meager. The Central Government and the State Governments should provide funds if the Municipalities and Local Bodies are to take up the responsibility.

From this National Convention, we should demand that crèche should be provided for all working women in both in rural and urban areas irrespective of the number of women employed in a single unit and the arrangement of the crèche should be such that women workers can keep their babies without any worry. The crèche should be provided with trained nurse or ‘aaya’, the room should be airy, lighted and well-ventilated, and the babies should be provided with free milk. We should also demand that working women should be given paid-time-off from their duties to feed their babies.

It cannot be said that Trade Unions have pursued this demand

with the seriousness it deserves and as a result an organised fight against the employers' hostilities and Government's indifference could not be effectively launched. From this Convention, we should appeal to all Trade Unions, irrespective of their affiliation, to take up the demand for the working women – in their work places as in the localities – in both rural and urban sectors and build a national campaign in the International Children year and make the Government concede this demand. We should also call upon the working women to take initiative in this movement and make it as broad-based as possible.

THE EQUAL REMUNERATION ACT SHOULD BE PROPERLY ENFORCED

The Equal Remuneration Act was passed in 1976. This enactment was made with great fan-fair when International Women's year was being observed and sought to create an impression as if equality was given to Indian working women by this piece of legislation. But in actual fact this has become a great joke to the working women in India as the employers have deliberately flouted the act backed by complete indifference of the Government.

The Equal Remuneration Act provides that no employer shall pay any woman worker employed by him in any establishment or employment, remuneration whether payable in kind, at rates less favourable than those at which remuneration is paid by him to the workers of the opposite sex, employed in the same establishment for performing the same work or work of the same nature. The Act also provides that women should not be discriminated against during recruitment. There is a provision in the Act for setting up of an Advisory Committee to suggest to the Government ways and means for increasing employment of women, for setting up of authorities for hearing complaints and appeals arising out of non-implementation of the provisions of the Act. But the Government has not so far taken any serious step to implement the provisions of this

Act and safeguard the interests of the women workers. The attention of the Government was drawn time and again by CITU and other trade union organisations of its failure to implement this Act, but all attempts have been ignored by the Government, even under the Janata Party's rule.

As soon as this Act came into force, the owners found out ways and means to flout its provisions and deprive the women workers from their legitimate wage. In the Plantations, task (workload) for women workers was increased contending that women workers should work more for more wage. In Beedi Industry, the owners usually pay very low wage to all workers and much lower wage is paid to the women workers compared to male workers. Besides, the employers in Beedi Industry in its usual course of operation reduce considerable wage of the women workers by rejecting sizable portion of the beedi wrapped by them on the plea that they are inferior: But, as matter of fact, the so-called rejected beedis are sold by the employers in the market at the same price other Beedies are sold. The difference in wage rate of women and male workers in Beedi Industry is about Rs.2 to 3 per thousand of beedi wrapped. New grades were also introduced in plantations for women workers and these grades were lower than the usual grades in force. In Cashew, Tobacco and various other industries, the jobs which are predominantly done by the women workers are paid very low wages, and the wage of those women workers was not suitably increased even after enforcement of this Act.

It is no doubt a fact that where women workers are organised in trade unions and the Trade Union movement is considerably strong, the discriminations against women workers are comparatively less in number. There are inspiring cases also where the Trade Unions have taken up this issue with all seriousness and have achieved equal wage for the working women.

It is, however, a weakness of the Indian Trade Union

movement that the issue of equal wage for the working women was not taken up seriously. The Trade Unions will have to overcome this weakness not only in the interest of the working women but also to broaden and strengthen the base of Trade Union movement.

In the note circulated by the Union Labour Ministry in a recent Conference held in Delhi it was stated that "Information relating to implementation of the Act, complaints received etc., which have been collected from the States, do not represent a very encouraging picture." But the Union Labour Ministry did not admit its own responsibility for this state of affairs and did not seriously suggest any measure to ensure its implementation. They only casually stated: "If the Act is to be implemented in its true spirit, it would be necessary not only for the Government to seek out cases of violation but also non-officials to bring such violations to the notice of the proper authority."

This attitude of the Government is actually helping the employers to flout the Act.

From this Convention, we should strongly condemn the role of the Government on implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act and demand that (a) the Act be amended to plug all its loop-holes with a view to ensure its full implementation, (b) include provisions for compulsory punishments for the employers who violate the Act, and (c) create an enforcement machinery involving the representatives of the Trade Unions. We also appeal to all Central Trade Unions to unitedly pursue these demands.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF WORKING WOMEN IN OFFICES AND ESTABLISHMENTS

A working woman is a worker at her work-place and at the same time she has household responsibilities. When a working woman is a mother of a small child, her responsibility is further increased. The Trade Unions should take note of

these facts in proper perspective and highlight their problems for solution.

Transport facility is an urgent requirement: Conveyance is a very acute problem in every city and industrial area. In big cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras, long time is taken in transit for the workers to reach their work-places after leaving home and also for returning home after the day's work. Very often it is found that passengers are hanging on the footboards of the vehicles in dangerous position. It is not possible for the working women to travel in this manner and, therefore, longer time is taken by them both for reaching their work-place and also for returning home.

The working women employed in schools, educational institutions, Offices, Banks, Insurance, Hospitals and Government Departments are worst suffers due to difficulties in transport. In some of the cities special facilities are given for these working women by providing special coaches in local trains and also by running special trams and buses during peak hours but their numbers are not sufficient. More carriages should be given in trains for working women and special buses and trams should be plied with greater frequency during the peak hours to ease the problems of the working women.

A large number of women are employed in Telephones under Central Government and most of them do duty in the night. In Bombay, the area in which their office is located is very solitary and it is dangerous for them to move in the early hours of the morning when it is still dark. But these women are not provided with any transport facility. The Parle Biscuit Company in Bombay employs large number of women in the second shift which ends at 10 P.M. On the 3rd September, 1978 a woman worker was attacked by goondas while coming to the factory at 6 in the morning. In protest the whole factory went on strike which continued for more than 3 months. Considering the seriousness of the problem and the increase

in the number of incidents of attacks on working women in the cities like Delhi, Bombay etc. the employers including the State Government and the Central Government should provide transport to them as a part of their service conditions.

The transport difficulty faced by them should be seriously looked into by trade unions and should be taken up with the employers to give them suitable relaxation in attendance.

The women having small children at home face greater problem for the unusual delay in transit. As long as suitable crèches are not provided, the mothers having small children should be given shorter duty hours for a period of two years after delivery for taking care of the baby.

Compulsory Arrangement for Rest Room, Toilets, Lunch Rooms: In most cases it was found that separate Rest Rooms, Toilets, Lunch Rooms and Bath Rooms are not provided for the working women in their offices, factories and work places, not even in Government departments. There are explicit provisions for these facilities in the Factories Act, the Mines Act and the Plantation Labour Act but they are hardly implemented. The implementing machineries are usually non-functioning. In some of the factories toilets are mere partitions, one side for the male workers and other side for the women workers, with hardly any privacy for the women workers. In offices of well established concerns like Banks, Insurance and Mercantile offices and offices of Public Sector undertakings separate lunch rooms and rest rooms are hardly provided. The arrangements in Railways and P& T are in no way better. The Central Government and State Governments pay least attentions to these needs of the women workers employed in their Departments. The Trade Unions will have to take up these issues with the employers and authorities and see that these needs are fulfilled and the enforcement machineries on these matters under the various Labour Laws function properly.

Hostels for Working Women: In urban areas unmarried working women very often need accommodation in hostels with adequate arrangement and protection. In some of the cities hostels are there but number is small and availability of seats is very limited. The working women in every big city are demanding for more hostels and accommodation on reasonable charges for a long time. It was reported that the Department of Social Welfare would introduce a scheme of 170 hostels with a total capacity of 11752 seats for working women. But the Government has not so far implemented it. The trade unions will have to put pressure on the Government for creating adequate number of hostels in every industrial city with adequate arrangement and on reasonable charges.

Problems of the Nurses: The difficulties faced by the nurses for their long hours of duty and very abnormal workload deserve special attention. Moreover they are to perform night duty very frequently. As a result they get very little time to look after their families. Due to mismanagement by the hospital authorities also they become targets of anger of the patients and public. The nurses should be given adequate service facilities including free transport and quarters and their duty hours should not exceed eight hours during the day time and their night duty should not be more than four hours. There is a demand from the nurses that performance of 8 hours duty in two phases creates problems for them and as such it should continue at a stretch with one hour break for lunch.

In some of the States the Government have allowed the employers to deploy women workers in shifts extending upto 10.00 P.M. This is against the interest of the women workers and should be stopped immediately.

PROTECTION AGAINST HEALTH HAZARDS

The women workers suffer from various health hazards in chemicals, paints and varnish, cotton and jute textile, mines, shellac, beedi and tobacco, fisheries and in various other

industries. The women working in prawn processing for exports in Calcutta and Visakhapatnam have to work, standing for 10-12 hours in the midst of ice, have no protection against the freezing of their feet and hands. After few years working, the fingers of these women workers become numb and useless for work. The coal loaders who are mostly women have no protection against the coal dust and easily fall victims of TB and lung diseases. The same thing can be said about the women workers in Tobacco Industry. The protective arrangements in these industries are either most inadequate or non-existent. The Government's enforcement machineries are usually dormant and inactive. Steps are, therefore, necessary to force the employers to take effective protective measures and ensure functioning of the Governments enforcement machineries. The women workers should also be protected from heavy physical labour imposed on them by vindictive employers.

WOMEN WORKING IN RURAL AREAS AND NIGHT SHIFTS NEED PROTECTION

Protection of working women from mis-handling and mistreatment by anti-social and lumpen elements and also insulting treatment meted out by the authorities concerned is also an important demand of the working women. The women who are to move from place to place, particularly in the rural areas, often face harassment by anti-social elements. As the position stands, these working women do not always get protection from the local people. Even Government do not provide protection to its women employees. Harassments of women teachers and nurses are not rare incidents. Women Telephone Operators returning late night after duty are also molested and insulted.

Therefore, it is the duty of the Government to give protection to the working women and their free movement is to be ensured in the course of their duties. The trade unions should also try to mobilise the opinion of the local people so that

miscreants are properly checked and restrained and the working women are ensured full freedom of movement.

If the trade unions pay proper attention to these problems, the working women will find more confidence in taking active part in trade union movement which will help to broaden the base of trade union movement and increase its strength.

RESTRICTION ON MARRIAGE OF UNMARRIED WOMEN WORKERS SHOULD GO

Instances have been mentioned earlier that various public and private companies as well as multi-national companies like 'Philips' penalise and dismiss women employees after marriage and this practice was also prevalent in public sector undertakings like the Air India International. There are a number of instances in all the states where the employers refuse to employ married women under some pretext or the other. The reasons are obvious. The employers can evade thus paying the maternity leave and provision of crèche. These facts came out in the discussion is the State conventions demanding immediate end to the insulting attitude towards the working women. Air India though under pressure, has agreed now to allow their women employees to marry, but will dismiss them on the birth of their first child or on their attaining the age of 35, whichever is earlier. In pharmaceutical companies, though women employees won the right to get married, companies still persist in refusing to employ married women.

We should demand immediate withdrawal of the penalisation wherever it exists and in whatever forms and call upon the trade unions to actively fight against this inhuman and illegal restriction.

PROMOTION AND TRAINING FACILITIES

The Indian working women should be given better promotion facilities and also be given training for higher positions and

for skilled jobs.

In almost every sector women workers and employees are victims of discrimination of one kind or another. In Government offices, while the wages may be almost the same, the number of women officers are very few and disproportionately low. The number of women officers do not even constitute 10 per cent of the total number of women employed in the State Government of Maharashtra. In granting of leave facilities and transfers, women have to face discrimination. In several pharmaceutical companies, the retiring age for a women is 55 while that of a man is 60 years.

Experience has shown that the working women in India are capable of doing sophisticated and skilled jobs and also work as administrators. If proper training is given, they will make further advancement. In assembling of radio and electronic equipments the women workers are employed in large numbers and they have given a good account of themselves in these jobs.

The women are kept in the same grade even after 30 years of service and this happens in the Railways and Government Departments. Women employees in State Government remain clerk even after 22-25 years service. In Bombay, out of 1300 women working in Maharashtra Government, only 0.01% are in the officers' rank. In the Banks, branches have been opened with exclusively women employees and these branches function as efficiently as others. In Insurance, Mercantile Offices, Railways, P&T and in Government Departments the women employees perform their duties efficiently. The efficiency of women employees in handling Telex, Teleprinter and punching Machines well recognised. The nurses do very skilled jobs and they perform their duties with responsibility. Therefore, there is no ground to restrict promotion of working women for higher and responsible posts and exclude them from training for more skilled assignments and trades.

While considering the question of training facilities for working women it is clear from the experience and also corroborated by the facts provided by the Government that women get less opportunities in all the technical schools, especially in skilled jobs,

On 31st March, 1978 there were 1,56,812 trainees all over India in all the Government sponsored training schools, Training Institutes and Vocational Training Centers and out of this figure the number of women trainees was only 5,834 or 3.7% of the total number of trainees. And out of these 5,834 trainees, 5,209 women were undergoing training in non-engineering trades like cutting and tailoring, embroidery, needle crafts, knitting, stenography etc. This shows the utter neglect towards giving them skilled training.

The trade unions should support the demand for better promotion and training facilities for working women as a matter of policy and seriously campaign for it to overcome all mental resistance of the employers and managements and also the male workers.

WORKING WOMEN OF UNORGANISED SECTOR SHOULD BE PROTECTED

In the urban unorganised sector, the working women are paid abnormally low wages, much below the subsistence level. It can better be called as "starvation wage". They also do not have fixed working hours. Usually, they are made to work 10 to 12 hours a day and even more. The women workers are treated in this manner in Coir, Cashew, Handloom, Silk, Garment making, Carpet, Beedi, Match manufacturing etc. where less than 10 workers work in an unit and which do not come under the purview of any Industrial Law. They are deprived of all permanent benefits.

In jobs like grinding of spices (masala), Dal, etc., and also in 'chikan' industry and tailoring jobs women workers are made

to work 14 to 16 hours a day. In stone-crushing, earth cutting, road-building and construction jobs, the women workers are paid lower wages than male workers and also made to work more than 8 hours a day. The contractors exploit the women workers most cruelly whenever they employ them. There is practically no certainty of securing employment in the unorganised sector, the women workers solely depend on the mercy of their employers. Driven by utter poverty and coerced by hunger, the women workers, in almost all fields of the unorganised sectors, are forced to do whatever the employers want and sometimes they are even compelled to satisfy the physical lust of their employers. These women workers, not being organised in the unions are taken advantage of by the employers.

The women workers from scheduled castes working as scavengers and sweepers get inhuman treatment from Municipalities and local bodies and their wage is abnormally low. Sometimes they are employed on part-time basis without any weekly rest. The Committee on the Status of Women in their study of seven villages of Punjab found that these women workers are most badly treated and on an average they get a monthly wage of Rs.80/- only.

The women domestic servants also face varied problems. They are to work for long hours and their wages are abnormally low. Most of them live in slums and work in two or three families labouring the whole day. A Bill restricting the working hours and improving their conditions was introduced in Parliament on 2nd December, 1977. Such bills generally remain unattended to for years together and this happened in this case also.

The women workers employed for processing prawns exported to foreign countries have no fixed working hours and most often they are to work 10 to 12 hours a day. In Waltair the women workers of prawn processing units are compelled to work 16 to 19 hours a day, during the seasons. The exporters

of prawns earn fabulous profits but they pay very poor wage to the workers.

The existing labour laws do not apply to the workmen of the unorganised sector. The trade unions should try to organise the women workers of the unorganised sector and at the same time demand legislative measure for 8 hours' work a day, fixation of minimum wage and regulation in employment to curb the whims and fancies of the employers. The working women of the unorganised sector do not get any permanent benefit. Neither they get any leave and medical benefit during the service period nor any gratuity or provident fund on retirement. The Government should introduce a scheme for inclusion of the workers of the unorganised sector, both men and women, for paying them unemployment doles for the days they remain out of work, medical benefit and retirement benefit after completion of certain age. A demand should be raised that these sections should come under statutory laws so that all the required benefits will be available for them.

EXISTING PROTECTION OF WOMEN WORKERS SHOULD NOT BE RELAXED

At present, the employers cannot ask the woken workers to work in the night shift or in underground jobs of the mines. But, it appears that the Union Labour Ministry is presently thinking of relaxation this ban and withdraw this protection. In the note circulated by the Union Labour Ministry in the Conference held in Delhi on 18th December, 1978, it was stated, referring to this ban, that "prima facie, therefore, these provisions would appear to be counter-productive to the intension of increasing the employment of women. However, on a closer examination, these provisions can be grouped into three broad categories, (a) those which are necessary but on which rethinking should be done due to changing circumstances i.e. prohibition of night work for women. Due to gradually changing circumstances the need for blanket protection may have altered, the earlier stringent safeguards can perhaps be modified so that while enjoying protection

women are not gradually forced out of employment or replaced by men.....” This is enough to show to which way the Government is thinking. This Convention of Working Women declares that we will not allow the Government to oblige the employers in this manner. We should demand that the existing ban on night shift work and underground work in mines for the women workers should remain unchanged and in no circumstances the women workers should be asked to do night shift work or any underground work in the mines. We should also call upon all the Central Trade Unions to jointly take up the issue and restrain the Government from giving any relaxation.

SPECIAL EMPHASIS SHOULD BE GIVEN ON THE PROBLEMS OF WOMEN WORKERS OF RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

About 87 per cent of women workers come from the agricultural sector and naturally more emphasis and attention should be given to their problems by organising them.

The women workers of the agricultural sector remain unemployed for more than half of the year and are paid very low wage, lower than their counterparts. With introduction of modern equipments and technique in agriculture, large number of women workers are displaced every year and this further increases poverty of the rural poor. Use of chemicals to destroy weeds, growing use of insecticides and deployment of large number of thrashing machines have greatly affected the employment of women workers in the agricultural sector. For a long time planting of paddy seedlings was the exclusive job of women workers. But during the last 2 decades – with increase in the number of landless labourers – male workers are also used for this planting job.

A large number of women were employed in family trades and crafts like making of earthen pottery, bell metal utensils, shell bracelets etc. With the advent of modern industries like plastic and stainless steel utensils and greater use of ceramic

pottery and change in habits and customs of the people, these cottage industries run on family basis, are gradually disappearing further increasing unemployment in the rural sector.

In rice growing areas, women-mostly from the families of landless labourers – were engaged in husking of paddy. But, now, this job has been almost entirely taken over by the rice mills and husking machines rendering hundreds of thousands of women workers idle.

These women workers displaced from jobs, cannot come to the cities for jobs. And, even if they come, they would not get any job. These women workers should be provided with jobs in rural areas and cottage and small scale industries should be set up to rehabilitate them after giving them training required for new job.

STOP ALL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WORKING WOMEN

We have already discussed about discrimination against working women. The working women are discriminated against in all spheres of activities – in selection for employment, wage, promotion, training and job opportunities. These discriminations are taken to such absurd limit and are so very wide-spread that even in the calculation of food intake it is suggested that the working women's requirement is less than male workers. The following recommendation made by the Nutrition Expert Group in 1968 will show how very amazing and deep rooted is this discrimination.

	Calories		Proteins	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Sedentary work:	2400	1900	55 gms	45 gms
Moderate work:	2800	2200		
Heavy work:	3900	3000		

Therefore the working women should demand in one voice- 'STOP ALL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE WORKING WOMEN'. The Central Trade Unions, irrespective of their leanings and affiliations should take up this matter as a demand of the Trade Union Movement and see that working women get equal treatment in all spheres – in employment, wages, promotions, training and new job opportunities.

PRESENT LEGISLATIONS CONCERNING WORKING WOMEN NEED DRASTIC REVISION

As already stated earlier, all the legislations concerning working women are totally inadequate to protect their rights and need basic changes for improvement. Actually, the present legislations, if implemented, may give some relief to the working women. The provisions of the Maternity Benefit Act and Equal Remuneration Act which are in favour of the working women, are ignored completely by the employers and are flouted with vengeance. The Central Government must enforce the existing laws and punish those who violate them. But the solution lies in bringing their modifications and framing new ones in favour of the working women. While ensuring strict implementation of the existing legislations, basic improvements in the legislations pertaining to the working women should be made by the Government – both at the Centre and in the States.

ORGANISE THE WORKING WOMEN TO STRENGTHEN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The membership of women workers in Trade Unions in India constitutes only a small part of the total membership. In 1974- the latest figures available from the Union Labour Ministry – membership of women workers in Trade Unions which submitted their returns to the Government was 2,62,154 only i.e. 6.2 per cent of the total Trade Union Membership in India. (Vide the figures given in the Table below). In 1974, the total strength of women workers in the organised sector in India

was 21.88 lakhs. In other words, only 11.98 per cent of the women workers were members of the Trade Unions which submitted returns to the Government. If the strength of the women workers in the unorganised sector is taken in to consideration, the participation of women workers in Trade Unions, according to membership, will be less than 5 per cent of its total strength. And if the number of women workers of agricultural sector is taken into account, the percentage of women's Trade Unions Membership to total strength of women workers in India, will be less than 1 per cent. This reveals a major weakness of the Indian Trade Union Movement and at the same time indicates the task the Indian Trade Union Movement will have to fulfill in this regard.

PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN WORKERS DURING 1961-1974

Membership of Unions Submitting Returns

Year	No. of Unions Submitting Returns	Men	Women	Total	% of Women to Total No.
1961-62	7,081	3,607,039	3,70,164	39,77,203	9.3
1962-63	7,251	3,334,755	3,46,987	36,81,742	9.4
1963-64	7,250	3,628,211	3,48,865	39,77,075	8.8
1966	7,244	4,078,146	3,13,501	43,91,647	7.11
1967	7,523	4,196,698	3,28,749	45,25,447	7.3
1968	8,851	4,699,944	4,21,067	51,21,011	8.2
1970	8,338	4,469,883	4,20,275	50,80,358	8.3
1971	8,909	5,044,902	3,86,380	54,31,282	7.1
1972	8,011	4,960,598	3,14,916	52,75,514	6.0
1973	7,442	5,026,896	2,53,251	52,80,147	4.8
1974	5,602	3,935,203	2,62,154	41,97,357	6.2

(Source: Figures circulated by the Union Labour Ministry)

The working women's membership in Trade Unions in 1970 was 4,20,475 – representing 8.3 per cent of the total membership of unions which submitted their returns and the

breakup of the figure was as follows:

Industry	Trade Union Membership of Women workers in 1970 Number
1. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing:	1,82,506
2. Mining and Quarrying	18,827
3. Manufacturing	1,42,561
4. Construction	2,019
5. Electricity, Gas, Water and Sanitary Services	11,173
6. Commerce	6,262
7. Transport and Communications (other than workshops)	5,243
8. Services	29,755
9. Activities not adequately described	9,075
Total	4,20,475 =====

Not only in case of Trade Union membership, the participation of women workers in Trade Union leadership is also very nominal. Recently, a survey was made of CITU unions in various states – which included both men and women workers – and it was found that in 580 unions, included in the survey, 18% were women workers and 80 women workers were office bearers and executive committee members, which is less than 1 per cent of the total number of office-bearers and executive committee members of these unions. Apparently this figure representing the percentage of women workers is not bad, but if all the CITU unions are included in the survey, the percentage of membership of women workers will be much lower. The CITU unions have more women workers as members in Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, West Bengal, Assam and Tamil Nadu than in other states. But the fact remains that the membership of women workers in CITU unions and their participation in union leadership is not at all satisfactory and serious efforts are necessary to increase the membership of workers and ensure their greater

participation in union leadership.

The position of membership of working women in unions affiliated to other Central Trade Unions and independent national federations will be more or less the same.

The membership of working women compared to their employment in offices and establishments among teachers and professors, in transport, communications, services and commerce etc. is poor. In transport the membership of working women was 1.2%, in communications 11.4% and services and commerce it was only 3.0% in the year 1970.

Among the teachers, the women teachers are somehow better organised. But, here also, their participation in the leadership is far from satisfactory. In State Government and Central Government departments, in P & T and Railways, large number of women are employed but their participation in union leadership is very limited. All unions, irrespective of their affiliation, and all Central Trade Unions and National Federations should give serious drive to organise the working women, wherever they are, and ensure their greater participation in trade union leadership.

The women constitute half of the society and working women are a vital force in class struggle. It is a failure of the Indian Trade Union movement that women workers have still not been properly organised in trade unions which are considered to be schools of class struggles. This weakness should be overcome by conscious and planned efforts with a view to broaden the base and increase the strength of Indian Trade Union movement.

We should also appeal to the Indian working women to take courage in organising themselves in trade unions and show greater initiative and imagination for educating themselves and removing their backwardness. The working women should overcome all their inhibitions and vigorously participate

in the trade union activities and be ready to assume positions of responsibility in their unions.

A GREAT NEED FOR WOMEN TRADE UNIONISTS

There is a great need for women trade unionists to work specially among working women. Women trade unionists can directly approach the working women and have an easy access, especially among backward sections of women workers. Secondly, they will be able to press for the specific demands of working women and prevail upon the leadership of the unions to press for their solution. At present, there are very few women trade unionists working in the industries. In some unions the position of secretary and president are held by women and some of them are also in the executive committee of the unions. As the participation of working women grows in the trade unions and they are included in the higher committees, their problems can be handled by the unions with greater alertness. The trade unions, therefore, have to give a serious thought to this point and increase the work among women for creating more women cadres in the trade unions.

Working Women in the forefront in the struggles: It is a well known fact that thousands of women workers in textiles, mines, plantations and other industries came forward to participate in the struggles launched during 1930-1940 period and also in the later period. They got themselves enrolled in thousands in trade unions in Bombay and Coimbatore during the historic general strikes lasting for months. They played most militant role in organising gate meetings, distributing handbills, picketing on the gates during the strikes. They gheraoed the managers and resisted the 'strikebreakers' at the mill gates. The women workers also got enrolled in trade unions in thousands in 1956-57 period, which perhaps showed their largest participation in trade unions being 11.8 per cent of the total membership.

During the last 10 years, too, women have proved their capacity to fight whenever the call was given by the unions. In coal mines in Asansol and Raniganj, they have successfully defeated the attempts of the goondas of the managements to break the strikes, by guarding the mines and protecting their leaders. Despite the drastic reduction in their employment strength in Jute, women workers always stand in the forefront of the struggles, demonstrations, general strike etc. In coir and plantations, a majority of women workers always take active part in all the struggles. Recently, the women workers in coir industry in Kerala state have launched a militant struggle against the mechanisation where husking machines have been brought in to retrench thousands of women. The women workers in Beedi industry in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal went on strike for bonus, equal remuneration and against low wages. Women employees in State Government departments in Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra etc. are always in the forefront of the struggles for realisation of Government Employees' demands. In Kerala, they have submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister and the Governor of Kerala on the specific demands of women employees signed by fourteen thousand women in the month of August in 1977 and also in 1978.

Has this militancy in the struggles, loyalty to the unions, solidarity with the total workers and employees been reflected in the membership of women in the unions? It has not.

It is said that a working woman "has to play a dual role", as a mother and a working woman. This particular outlook originates from the feudal set up of the society which prevents her from getting employment and securing economic independence. And, therefore, we have to fight against this.

WORKING WOMEN MUST COME FORWARD TO FIGHT FOR THEIR OWN DEMANDS

Working women and women as a whole, born and brought up in the feudal society themselves, sometimes feel

incompetent and incapable of shouldering the responsibility of the union work and this is partly responsible for the most unsatisfactory conditions prevailing in the working places. There are examples when honest efforts are made by the union leadership to bring them on the executive committees but they refuse saying that they have no time. There is also a tendency amongst the union leaders to exclude women members from the executive committees. Both these tendencies are wrong and must be corrected. The reluctance on the part of working women themselves to take up responsibilities is harmful for their own cause and also for the trade union movement.

SOCIALISM CAN ALONE SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF WORKING WOMEN

In 1971 Lok Sabha elections large sections of women voted for Shrimati Indira Gandhi with the expectation that a woman Prime Minister would do a lot to improve their conditions. But after the massive victory in the elections she followed the same old policies serving the capitalists and imposed more and more economic burdens on the common people. None of the problems of the women were solved or eased. Not only that, the woman Prime Minister imposed Emergency in the country suppressing democracy and taking away all the rights of the people. Freedom of the press and freedom of trade union functioning was suppressed and trade union movement was banned. During this period the Indian women immensely suffered like all other sections of the people. The working women should remember this experience and take active part in the struggle for democracy when the same old authoritarian forces are again trying to raise their heads.

The women should also realise that the present Janata Party's Government are following the same old economic policies of the Congress regime, serving the interests of capitalists and landlords and strengthening the hold of the monopolists. The recent Central Budget imposing enormous tax burden on the

common people, shows that this Government is least concerned about the well being of the people or to implement its own electoral pledges.

While evaluating their own experience the working women should realise that under capitalist-landlord society their basic problems will never be solved and their sufferings will never end. It is only under socialism that their problems can be solved and they would enjoy equal rights and have a free and happy life. And, therefore, they should organise themselves to fight against this capitalist-landlord rule and for establishment of socialism in our country.

ORGANISE A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON THE DEMANDS OF WOMEN WORKERS

The problems and difficulties of working women in India have been long neglected. The provisions in the Labour Legislations for protection of their rights are grossly inadequate and whatever provisions are there in favour of the working women, they are not properly implemented. The employers exploit the women workers and the Government encourages the employers by their unconcerned attitude and inaction. The time has now come to break the whole stalemate and organise a massive national campaign on the demands of the women workers.

The Government of India will not take any serious step to improve the conditions of working women. Whatever they say in seminars and conferences, are aimed at projecting a progressive image of the Government but, in reality, it does not mean anything for them. The problems and difficulties of the working women cannot be mitigated without organising a movement on a national scale.

From this Convention, therefore, we want to formulate the following demands for the working women as a "National Charter of Demands for Working Women in India" and would

appeal to all Central Trade Unions and all National Federations to support these demands and organise a national campaign on a united platform for realisation of the said demands of the working women.

NATIONAL CHARTER OF DEMANDS FOR WORKING WOMEN IN INDIA

1. Right to work and its inclusion in the Constitution of India as a fundamental right.
2. Eight hours work a day for all working women, including the unorganised and agricultural sector.
3. Equal wage and opportunity for working women on all spheres wherever they work and elimination of all sorts of discrimination that the working women are confronted with in regard to wage, promotion, training, treatment etc. Restriction on marriage of women workers wherever it exists, should go.
4. Ban retrenchment of working women in any form and maintain the existing strength of working women in all industries and establishments and further increase the number of working women as a matter of policy in all industries.
5. Maternity Leave with full pay for four months in all industries and establishments, irrespective of any size, including unorganised sector and agricultural sector, and payment of all medical expenses for the pre-delivery and post-delivery period with a minimum of Rs.500/-.
6. Modification and amendment of the existing labour laws – The Maternity Benefit Act, the Plantation Labour Act, The Factories act, The E.S.I. Act etc. concerning the working women with a view to give more benefits to working women and enforce strong punishments for employers who violate the provisions of these laws. Till such time as the existing laws are amended or modified, the existing provisions should be fully implemented and the Government both at the Centre and in the States should set up Vigilance Committees to keep a check on violation of the laws concerning the working

women.

7. Creches should be provided on compulsory basis for the children of working women in all work-places and localities of their choice in both rural and urban areas, and working women should be given time-off to feed their babies. Competent nurses and aayas should be kept to take proper care for the babies; mobile crèches should be provided for women workers in plantation and for women labourers in agriculture.

8. Rest rooms, bathrooms, toilets etc should be provided for all working women in all work-places.

9. Working women should be provided with quarters in all industries and establishments and also in rural areas.

10. Free Kindergarten schools should be provided for small children of the working women with a view to remove their difficulties.

11. The employers should be effectively restrained from deploying women workers in the night shifts in factories and mills or in any underground work in the mines.

12. The working women should be ensured security wherever they work in both rural and urban areas and a new law should be enacted giving direct responsibility to the Government to enforce it.

13. The working women should be protected from health hazards and special care should be taken for those who are employed in Bidi, Tobacco and Fisheries Industries, in Mica, Tannery, Coal, Chemicals, cement, Mines etc.

14. The working women should be given training free of cost for acquiring higher skills and promotion to higher post and they should be paid their full wage for the period of training.

15. Wherever there are working women, provision should be made to include at least one working woman on the executive committee of union and also in the Works Committee, on a compulsory basis.

16. A certain number of beds should be reserved for the working women in E.S.I, and other hospitals including in T.B. and Cancer hospitals.

17. In every Committee, appointed or set up by any

Government or any Semi-Government body, on any matter concerning social welfare or trade union problem, one seat/position should be reserved for women representative.

18. A new law should be enacted to ensure for the unorganised working women adequate minimum wage, maternity benefits, 8 hours work a day, annual leave with pay, medical expenses and retirement benefits.

19. The employers throwing working women out of employment for avoiding payment of equal wage or maternity benefit or imposing any restriction on marriage of unmarried working women, should be severely punished.

20. Hostels should be opened by the Government for the working women in both rural and urban areas, at subsidised rates.

Under the bourgeois rule the working women are exploited in the most cruel manner. In socialist countries, the women are better placed, much better than in advanced capitalist countries. The working women in socialist countries have the same rights as men in all respects and in all spheres and their rights are fully protected by the State. In India we will have to traverse a long way to reach that stage.

In socialist countries maternity leave and child care is the responsibility of the Government. There is a large net work of crèches and kindergartens all over the socialist countries. No working women sits at home because there is nobody to look after the baby. In North Viet Nam, China, Cuba and North Korea, too the working conditions of women are much better though they have been liberated lately. Women constitute more than half of Czechoslovakia's population, and working women constitute 46 per cent of the total working force. Czechoslovakia has a five-day working week. The cash benefit for maternity leave is 90 per cent of the net monthly income drawn by them.

There are hundreds of women's committees in East Germany, Soviet Union and other socialist countries to check the

implementation of the various laws concerning women. These Committees lay down the practical plans for women to raise their vocational standards and improve their working and living conditions. In East Germany, 49.5 per cent membership of all Trade Unions is of women.

In our own situation, in the situation facing the working women in India, we must endeavour to our utmost to improve their conditions and ease their problems and difficulties and this will be possible only through a massive united movement all over the country. And in this movement we invite all Central Trade Unions and National Federations and all organisations of the women to contribute their might to protect the rights of Indian working women and uphold their dignity.

WORK AMONG WORKING WOMEN

(From Bhubaneswar Document)

13.1 Despite repeated criticism in the CITU conferences and all India meetings, the working women's front is shown utter callousness on the part of our unions and various committees. Since 1979 when we held our 1st all India convention of working women, it has almost become a ritual to criticise our neglect in this regard and comrades put up with this without making serious improvements in our approach towards working women. Some state committees have not taken steps to form working women's sub-committees or state level coordination committees. Some of those who have formed have either not met or been meeting irregularly with poor attendance. Some state committees have not taken work among working women as agenda for discussion in the state committee meetings. A major reason is the lack of seriousness among our unions to develop work among working women.

13.2 Inclusion of working women on state committees is rarely seen in most of the state committees. One of the reasons for less attendance to the state level and all India meetings was mentioned as reluctance of the unions to pay their traveling expenses. Since we have decided not to form a separate organisation of working women they have no separate funds and unless unions finance their traveling their participation in such meeting is bound to be symbolic. Those who can raise funds on their own can afford to participate in these meetings. The state committees have to impress upon the union the unions to help the working women financially to enable them to attend the all India and state level meetings. Financial assistance to the functioning of the state coordination committee is also necessary. We must give special emphasis on promotion of women cadres so that they can discharge higher responsibility in the organisation.

13.3 We have not been able to form women's sub-committees at union level wherever sizable working women are working. In absence of local activities of unions on this front what is there to coordinate at the state level? Without formation of union level sub-committees merely holding a state level convention once in a while or on the occasion of state conference is not going to help in the long run. As a matter of fact, the state coordination committee of working women should coordinate the activities of working women's sub-committees formed by the unions.

13.4 At the initiative of some state level committees, activities among working women in Insurance, Banks and state govt. employee have made considerable headway but our own affiliated unions are lagging behind in this regard. Without development of activities among our own class the working women's movement cannot be developed properly. In unorganised sector where large number of women employees are working we have not been able to work effectively, with the result that their involvement in the TU movement is much less.

13.5 The only notable advance can be mentioned is about the work among anganwadi workers where we have been able to bring in the movement larger number of women employees. Although the independent functioning of the Anganwadi Federation requires gearing up, we have been able to take initiative in building a united movement of these employees. The CITU's initiative in other sectors of women's employment should be seen distinctly which alone will enable us to advance the movement.

13.6 Without educating the working women activists it would not be possible to make them work more effectively in the trade unions. A special syllabus has to be prepared to meet the requirement of training of working women.

13.7 It must be admitted that the T.U. movement in general has neglected the task of fighting against social oppression of women. In several cases we find that even in charter of Demands the special problems faced by working women are rarely mentioned. We have rarely taken up the cases of sexual harassment of women workers during our agitations. At times our leaders and activists become victims of male chauvinism while tendency is developing to look at problems of women somewhat contemptuously. Trade union movement must closely link itself with the women's liberation movement to enable larger involvement of women in the T.U. movement. We should also educate our workers to involve their womenfolk in the democratic womens movement.

13.8 We must keep in mind the criticism made by Com. B.T. Ranadive regarding our neglect of work among women during the 6th conference of CITU at Bombay, "...the major part of CITU committees either ignored the problems or made some cosmetic changes in their practices..... The problem of working women is a part of the struggle of the working class against the capitalist society and not just a question which concern women alone." He further pointed out, "What is the basis of this incorrect attitude? It is nothing but underestimation of women and their work."

Com. BTR's criticism is still valid today. Unless we correct our attitude in this regard, involvement of working women in larger numbers in our movement is bound to be symbolic and seriously obstruct the very advance of our movement.

CITU in their second conference at Emakulam in 1973 drew attention to the question of working women for the first time. In the CITU Conference held in Bombay in 1975 it decided to call a convention of working women to discuss their problems and their participation in trade unions. Due to the declaration of Emergency, all the activities in the trade unions were curtailed and the convention could not take place due to the restrictions on the trade unions. After the working committee

EXTRACTS FROM

**‘PROBLEMS OF WORKING WOMEN AND
THEIR PARTICIPATION IN TRADE UNIONS’**

**(Report placed in the Special Session on Working Women in
6th Conference of CITU)**

**Problems of Working Women and Their Participation
in Trade Unions**

It is a welcome feature of this conference of CITU that the special session of the Conference is dedicated to working women, their problems and their participation in the trade unions. The success of this particular issue depends upon the success of the total movement of the working class in changing its attitude and how much enthusiastically and seriously it takes up this issue, keeping in view the fact that unless the involvement of the major sections of women workers in the struggles of the working class is not ensured, the movement of the working class as a whole is bound to remain weak. Considering the great importance of this issue, the CITU has taken the decision of mobilising working women on their specific problems and their promotion on the higher committees of the unions and federations, while fighting against feudal tendencies in the trade union movement.

CITU takes lead

CITU in their second conference at Ernakulam in 1973 drew attention to the question of working women for the first time. In the CITU Conference held in Bombay in 1975 it decided to call a convention of working women to discuss their problems and their participation in trade unions. Due to the declaration of Emergency, all the activities in the trade unions were curtailed and the convention could not take place due to the restrictions on the trade unions. After the working committee

meeting held at Kota, Rajasthan in 1978, a firm decision to convene the conference in 1979 was taken and ultimately it was held in Madras, Tamilnadu in 1979.

....

Training Facilities for Women

Women are generally found to be employed in 'women preferred industries'. It is also accepted in the statement by the Government. They are employed in unskilled jobs, where not much education is required. They can work in electronics, garment, watch making, handicrafts and so on. Women would certainly like to work in skilled or engineering industries if they are given training.....

The Training Programme (of the Ministry of Labour) shows that the Labour Ministry would prefer women to be trained for 'hair and skin, dress making', 'garment knitting' and so on. This is a special skill no doubt which is meant to cater for only those women who belong to higher class.

What are the training facilities for women workers who are thrown out because they have no skill in the technical engineering departments or who have been retrenched on a large scale in jute textile and tobacco etc? Could not have these women been given training and continued in the same department? These vacancies and departments have been allotted to men now....

In this connection, the experience narrated by our women in Tamilnadu explains some important weaknesses of the schemes in training facilities.

As per the information there are total 50 polytechnics, out of which 43 are meant exclusively for men, out of 16 districts, only 5 have polytechnics for women. The study reveals the following features –

1. There are as many courses as 31 offered in men's polytechnics in mechanical engineering and electrical engineering available 'full time' in 28 institutes and 'part time' in 10 polytechnics.
2. Out of the 13 courses available in women's polytechnics, 10 are designed specifically for women, not available for men. These include costume designing, dress making, bakery and confectionary, cosmetology, etc. These courses prepared for women are relatively ill paid and of a subordinate nature. With regard to ITI in Tamilnadu, out of a total 35 ITI, only 3 are specifically for women. Only 3% of the total seating capacity for 35 ITI is available to the 3 women ITI. The remaining 32 are supposedly co educational. These ITI too predominantly train women for cutting, embroidery and needlework and stenography.

What are the reasons given for women not coming forward to take up the training? It is the 'heavy and rough nature of the job are not suitable for women'. This was the reply from the authorities. The fact is that these institutions are believed to be exclusively men's institutions. Even women too take these institutions as for men only. No woman is in fact allowed to apply for these courses.

.....

The Congress rulers and the Government including some of the women ministers want our women to be 'an image of 'Indian woman', not a modern type but a 'feudal housewife'. They want women to work in traditional industries, 'women preferred' jobs where the training given is in embroidery, garments, knitting, bakery and so on

....

The arguments forwarded by the management are in support of the policies of the Government. 'The provision of training facilities for women would mean a big investment for nothing'

one employer told. Another argument was 'women stick to their jobs only till they are married'. This shows once again the attitude of the employers and the Government towards women.

Unionisation of Working Women

Whatever it may be, the present position of the women workers, their rights, and the legislation concerning them is bad. The CITU was the first trade union, that taking note of it, gave a call from their 1979 convention to their unions to strengthen their participation in the unions, to promote them on the executive bodies. The CITU formed the All India Coordination Committee at the centre and in the states to fight against the continuing feudal tendencies among the leadership of CITU, to bypass the working women, their problems and their promotion on the committees. In the first Convention itself, it was stated that 'the trade union movement has to fight it (feudal tendencies) as part of the working class struggle. Our leaders and cadres besides must see that the union leadership does not become a male preserve, that women are trained and quickly promoted to leading positions'. It further said 'trade union movement cannot attain its full stature unless the women's contingent plays its role in organising and leading the unions...' The statement was based on the experience of the movement in trade unions and the significant role played by women workers in various struggles. The women in thousands participated in strikes, faced jails, repression, and went through all the privations along with men and other employees.

Unfortunately, the working class and their unions did not pay attention to their specific problems nor fought for their demands like retrenchment, provision of crèches etc. It was a correct step therefore by CITU, though belatedly no doubt, to note the weakness in the trade union movement and try to remove them.

At the time of the 1st Convention, our report quoted the figure of membership of women workers in the trade unions which submitted returns to the Government as 6.2% of the total trade union membership in India. In 1979, the total strength of women workers in the organised sector in India was 21.8 lakhs. This low percentage pointed out sharply the tasks that lay ahead.

CITU tried to review our own unions in this respect, and had a sample survey of 336 unions in Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Kerala registered in 1979. It was found that women membership of the unions made up just 8% of the total union membership... In the industries where women constitute the overwhelming majority of the work force, like plantation, coir, beedi, tobacco, the executive of the unions consisted mainly of male members, and in the conferences they made up hardly one to two percent of the delegates. In Durgapur steel plant, in 1979, out of the 900 women employees only 200 were enrolled as union members in a total membership of 15000. Two women were represented in the 220 council of the steel plant.

Trade Unions, The Schools of Class Struggle

The trade unions are the schools of class struggle. This is what Marx said. The strength of the membership of women in the unions under all Central trade unions is very poor. The membership of women in CITU as is mentioned earlier is not at all satisfactory. The union is her basic unit where she should get herself enrolled. Taking up their problems, bringing them in the union to fight for their demands and enrol their membership is a task before our coordination committees. The coordination committees do take up their problems, but to create the elementary consciousness of the union is hardly done as per the available reports. There are difficulties because of her double burden, at home and at the work place. It requires therefore a sustained effort on our part to bring her

in the union. Once she is an active member, then the interest continues to increase, any demand achieved due to their united efforts, she becomes part and parcel of the union. Her loyalty towards the union has no limit. A few examples given elsewhere show how much pride they have for their unions and how much sacrifice they are prepared to make for their unions. When a struggle is on, then they come out, attend meetings, keep watch day in and day out against the strike breakers in spite of the difficulties at home. Not literate but she knows who is the enemy - the employer, the anti socials, and the police. She comes to know the role of the bourgeois government. These schools of class struggle are very important to lead them to further class and political consciousness, the necessity to abolish the system which keeps them in bondage, and denies their rights. The AICCCWW and our state coordination committees have not thought much about the question of unionisation and participation of women workers in the unions.

Participation of Women Workers in Trade Union and The Role of CITU

In the foreword to the report of the 1st Convention of working women held in 1979 at Madras, the President CITU stated the following reasons for convening the special Convention. The CITU had to take the decision because it was found that the grievances of working women were unattended, the Government was indifferent, the employers were hostile, and even the trade unions were not very enthusiastic about their demands. It was also found that women, even in the industries and occupations where they formed a sizeable section were hardly represented in the leading bodies of the unions.

After 7 years we are not in a position to say today that the situation described above has changed considerably. Yes, changes are there to a certain extent. CITU unions have started paying some attention to the problems of working

women, conferences have been organised under CITU and other national federations, co-ordination committees and special wings under the unions have been formed in many places, the composition of the executive committees where women constitute the majority is changing a bit, women are being taken on the executive committees. Most significant point is that the leadership of the union is slowly changing their feudal outlook towards these problems. But it is also a fact that the centre, the leadership of the CITU has to remind repeatedly about this to the states and district committees of CITU. Complaints from the state co-ordination committees towards the CITU continue to come, and many times intervention had to be made.

Secondly, after the initial gains in the beginning of 1979, a stagnation period began during last 3-4 years and the committees formed earlier became non-functioning or inactive. In many states the conferences were held with a large number of working women from various sections, and committees were formed such as in Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi etc. In some important states like West Bengal, no information is available whether any committee exists or not, even after so many years.

The reports from our state co-ordination committees are received rarely about their functioning.

But continuous hammering from the centre, the intervention by the leadership time to time in several conventions and conferences in the states on the issue of working women did help the state coordination committees and the centre. But it was found a hard job, no doubt. The feudal tendencies of the CITU leadership in the states, and in general, take time to be corrected. They accept the deviations on paper or orally, but very rarely they are found to fight it consciously and help the working women to take up the problems, help and guide them politically.

....

Many CITU state committees in their reports have reported about the activities among working women. Despite a large number of women in the different industries under our influence and different problems taken up, we are not yet able to function the co-ordination committee ... Besides the difficulties of women workers due to their double role, the state committees in their reports said that 'feudal attitude of men in many cases are the obstacle' 'Non-availability of educated women cadres too, to work in trade unions poses a serious problems'. This is true to a certain context.

.....

Membership of Women Workers in Trade Unions

... If we take review of the last 6 years of our work on the question of unionisation of women workers in our trade unions as well as their promotion on the highest bodies, it appears, we have gained to a certain extent despite our committees not functioning well. Some more clarification is necessary to clinch this point.

...

Our progress on this direction is not as it should be considering the long period of more than 7 years after our decision. Most of the committees have criticised in their reports that they were not able to do much in the respect, feudal attitude persists and so on. It should also be admitted that without constant hammerings from the central and guidance from the leadership of the CITU, even these results would not have been there.

In the 5th Conference at Kanpur, in 1983 the President and the general secretary both criticised sharply the attitude of the CITU leadership. Com. BTR said these deviations (feudal) reflected a feudal outlook in the movement which sought to divorce the struggle of women workers from the main steam of class struggle. If conscious efforts are not made in this

direction, reactionary forces will snatch the opportunity to pit women against men, in order to divide and break the unity of the class and movement. He further said 'the slogan, workers of the world unite, was not meant to be a slogan only for men workers leaving behind the other half of the working class and perpetuating feudal tradition. CITU is against this and must struggle against this. CITU unions must realise that the trade union movement is not a preserve of men alone – and to divorce working class women's struggles from class struggle is a deviation – a feudal outlook'. He clarified that the retrenchment of women workers cannot be taken up by women's organisations alone. These are trade unions issues and it is essential to encourage the involvement of women workers in the trade union movement and ensure their promotion to responsible position. He advised women comrades in co-ordination committees to inspire the women to work through their unions. Com. P Ramamurti the general secretary of CITU also spoke on this issue.

....

The conferences held in plantation, coir, cashew, industries where women constitute a majority are attended in a large number by men; women are just a few or even only one while they are predominant in the industry. Here again the criticism was made by CITU as to why the CITU state leaders do not give proper representation to women. In some conferences some women delegates spoke frankly about not sending the delegation of women under the plea 'they have to look after the home and children'. In every conference, the AICCWWW and the CITU took these issues and pointed out the feudal outlook of the leadership.

....

The present economic crisis, invitation to multinationals and foreign capital, a vast sections of workers are thrown out, industries are being closed, and now computers are being introduced, women are first to be victimized. These lakhs of men and women now in the labour market, Central

Government has no other programme for them but self employment and part-time jobs. Therefore, some face saving formulas are being brought. In many articles in Indian Labour Journal the question and problems on working women are highlighted. In almost all these survey it is said 'women worker's special needs have to be taken care of by the trade union'. The article published in ILJ July 1984 states 'Today working women are increasingly questioning the whole of trade union world that has been organised independently of them. How is the trade union word to be recast in such a way that working women can find a new and rightful place in it for themselves, this is a challenges posed to the genius of the union leadership of coming years'. The way it is put here, it appears that trade union leaders are putting these views.

But from this, one dangerous conclusion has been put forward was of 'separate trade unions for women workers'. Labour Ministry circulated a report on the subject. (Social Economic conditions of women workers in manufacture of chemicals and chemical products). In this report it was said 'It is felt that unless and until women workers actively participate in trade unions it may not be possible for them to fight for and protect their interests. They must be made to realise the usefulness of trade unionism. They must also be encouraged to form trade unions exclusively for themselves, which, inter-alia can resolve their special problems very effectively'. CITU replied, that to accept this position means 'to take the women workers out of the mainstream of the movement, and it may divide the workers'..... The suggestion for separate cell, or unions for women is quite disruptive for the trade union movement and we have to fight against this separatist tendencies.

The Role of State level Coordination Committees of Working Women

The experience is the state committees of CITU do not even sit and discuss what is to be done to function the coordination

committee. They do not react to the problems of working women arising in their work places from time to time, to contact the women in struggle who are not under our influence or to find out ways and means on how to approach them. Large sections of women workers and employees are under the reformist leadership. As yet, we on our own are not able to bring various sections of women workers for united actions and it will not be possible unless all other trade unions agree on this issue.

While criticising the attitude of CITU, coordination committees in the states too must sit and discuss as to how we can mobilise the women workers under our influence.

Recently a number of strikes, demonstrations, meetings of working women in offices, colleges, nurses, doctors, air hostesses etc are being held and so many sections are coming out in struggles almost in all cities for various demands of their own. They come under their own federation or union. Sometimes we do intervene wherever opportunity occurs. Never before had such large sections of women employees joined their own struggles for their common and specific demands. We have to express solidarity and be in touch with them. After CITU has taken up the issue of women's wings, in industries etc, several federations in Kerala, West Bengal and even Bombay have formed their women's wings in the offices and establishments. At many places our coordination committees have contact with such wings which helps them and also us, if proper guidance is given. Because of the formation of these wings, the demands of crèche, toilet facilities, rest rooms, transport facilities etc are being raised in their meetings and conferences.

Therefore, while criticising the role of CITU for not paying attention to the cause of working women due to their feudal attitude, the co-ordination committees too should take this work seriously and try to solve the problem of functioning of the committees, cadres to work etc discussing with CITU

committees, so that the work among women workers and employees will not suffer.

Take Up the Struggles of Working Women

The Nairobi conference held in 1985 has brought out different aspects of inequality towards women in the capitalist world. The questions of their employment, equal remuneration, equal status etc were discussed. These issues have reflected the outlook of the Governments showing the basic difference of the two social systems, capitalism and socialism. Many times, the capitalist Governments were put on the defensive because the ILO Conventions were not ratified by capitalist countries with regard to women; maternity benefits are not available as a right in the USA, equal remuneration Act was passed in Britain in 1984 but unequal wages persist, in Japan women have to work in night shifts. ILO's report informs that the trend of part time work is more among women, despite their great contribution in employment. Sexual exploitation is utilised on a large scale by the employers as a class weapon.

Women in capitalist countries too are fighting against this deviation. In India the situation is not different from other capitalist countries with regard to working women. The report submitted here has tried to point out their bad working conditions, the non application of the legislations, their struggles and the role they are playing in today's economic and political situation. It has tried to point out their poor participation in the trade union activities, the age old feudal deviations in the trade union movement including CITU. This hampers the growth of the total movement of the working class. As the President of CITU has repeatedly told us, 'we should continue to knock at the door', and we are trying to knock it repeatedly. If there are complaints he had asked us to send them to the CITU centre. This struggle inside CITU should continue, if the women are to be brought in the mainstream of the struggles. Working women themselves must come forward to take up these issues in the unions.

With the serious attacks on the working women, the responsibility of the state committees of CITU and coordination committees have increased manifold. The important point to be noted is the increasing struggles of working women, middle class and women workers. The economic crisis and the reactionary policies pursued by the Government towards working women compel all of them to launch struggles. The state committees must pay attention to the special problems and difficulties of the working women, encourage them in the struggles, organise them and bring them into the forefront of the unions. Without this, the task of changing the present exploitative social order shall continue to be unreal and total emancipation of women will remain a far cry.

It is a failure of the Indian Trade Union Movement that women workers have still not been properly organised in Trade Unions, which are considered to be schools of class struggle. This weakness should be overcome by conscious and planned efforts with a view to broaden the base and increase the strength of Indian Trade Union Movement.

We should also appeal to the Indian working women to take courage in organising themselves in Trade Unions and show greater initiative and imagination for educating themselves and removing their backwardness. The working women should overcome all their inhibitions and vigorously participate in the trade union activities and be ready to assume positions of responsibility in their unions.

The same report also noted the fact that "the membership of women workers in CITU unions and their participation in union leadership is not at all satisfactory." It also emphasized: "serious efforts are necessary to increase the membership of women workers and ensure their participation in union leadership."

Com B. T. Ranadive, Founder President of CITU, in his foreword to the report, had succinctly pointed out as under

WORKING WOMEN, A CLASS PERSPECTIVE

(Commission Paper adopted by the 10th conference of CITU held at Hyderabad in January 2000)

The report of the National Convention of Working Women, organised by the CITU, at Madras (now Chennai) on 9-10, April 1979, noted:

“The women contribute half of the society and working women are a vital force in class struggle. It is a failure of the Indian Trade Union Movement that women workers have still not been properly organised in Trade Unions, which are considered to be schools of class struggle. This weakness should be overcome by conscious and planned efforts with a view to broaden the base and increase the strength of Indian Trade Union Movement.

“We should also appeal to the Indian working women to take courage in organising themselves in Trade Unions and show greater initiative and imagination for educating themselves and removing their backwardness. The working women should overcome all their inhibitions and vigorously participate in the trade union activities and be ready to assume positions of responsibility in their unions.”

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Com.B T Ranadive, Founder President of CITU, in his foreword to the report, had succinctly pointed out as under:

"It is no wonder that India with one foot in the capitalist age and another in preceding age should deny equal treatment to women at every stage. The trade union movement has to fight it as part of the working class struggle. Our leaders and cadres, besides, must see that the union leadership does not become a male preserve, that women are trained and quickly promoted to leading positions. The trade union movement cannot attain its full stature unless the women's contingent plays its role in organising and leading the unions. Thousands of women participate in strike struggles, face jail and repression, go through privations along with men workers and employees. But they are far from occupying the position in the unions that is their due."

Com.BTR narrated the events leading to the CITU convening the national convention of working women, starting from the Second Conference of CITU held at Ernakulam in 1973 drawing attention to the question of working women and laid the perspective before the CITU in the following words:

"The CITU had to take the decision to call a special conference because it was found that the grievances of working women were unattended; the Government was indifferent; the employers were hostile; and even the trade unions were not very enthusiastic about their demands. In many strikes that the working class fought, there were few instances when special demands of the working women were given prominence. "It was also found that women, even in industries and occupations where they formed a sizeable section were hardly represented in the leading bodies of the unions.

"This state of affairs was partly due to the disabilities which women suffer from, in a society like the Indian society. The inferior status assigned to women in both the Hindu and Muslim communities is known to all. The discrimination doggedly pursues the working women and it is the elementary duty of the trade union to fight against it. We cannot say that our workers and some of our trade union leaders are free from this outlook."

The National Convention of Working Women constituted the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women as a distinct part of the CITU. It also adopted a National Charter of Demands for Working Women in India.

EXPERIENCE OF TWO DECADES

For over two decades, the AICCCWW had been functioning as the CITU's arm for spearheading the campaign and struggle on the working women's front. State-level coordination committees of working women have been formed under several state committees of CITU. In a few states, even at district level, working women coordination committees were formed. They have functioned with varying degrees of activity parameters. Women-sub-committees in unions, where sizeable number of women workers were in membership, were to be formed, as per decisions taken by the CITU. Such committees have also been formed, though relatively in small numbers and at very few places. Repeated emphasis had been laid at every forum of the CITU on development of working women cadre and promoting them to positions of leadership in all levels of the organisation.

The meetings and conferences of All India Coordination Committee of Working Women, the meetings of the Working Committee and the General Council of the CITU and the all India conferences of the CITU have all been constantly reviewing our progress on the working women front. The CITU Report on Organisation adopted by the CITU Working Committee in its meeting at Bhubaneswar in 1993, self critically evaluated our efforts in this regard and redefined the priority tasks to be undertaken on the question of working women. This Bhubaneswar Document has also been on the agenda of successive meetings of the CITU for review and implementation.

The Sixth All India Conference of Working Women, which was held separately ahead of this 10th conference of CITU,

in September 2000, had drawn a picture of our organisation, in its report. It states:

“More than two decades after the formation of the AICCWW, though there is a marginal improvement in the attention paid to the issues of working women, still, most of the CITU committees, particularly at the lower levels, have not understood the importance of organising the working women.

The Report has also pointed out:

“The feudal attitudes of looking down upon the abilities of women and not promoting them continue in different degrees at various levels. Women are also subject to this attitude and hesitate to come forward to take up responsibilities in the union.”

WHY THIS CALLOUSNESS?

Why this “utter callousness on the part of our leaders, unions and various committees” (as described in the Bhubaneswar Document) is still persisting? Why we have stopped with “a ritual to criticise our neglect in this regard and “put up with this criticism without making serious improvements in our approach towards working women”, as pointed out in the same document?

In our social set up the rights of women are generally ignored or belittled. Participation of women in all spheres of social, political and economic activity, on equal footing with the men, is not considered a relevant issue at all. The extent and magnitude of direct and indirect discrimination against women in the prevailing socio-economic environment is not perceived as an atrocious injustice. It is widely assumed that women are destined to play only a subordinate role to men. Unfortunately, women themselves are victims of such notions and take every impediment in their way to be a natural and unalterable state of affairs. Such inverted norms, opinions, values and attitudes, which have contributed to hamper the development of women, have an all-pervasive and profound

influence on men and women alike. Even the few feeble attempts on the part of women, somewhere or other, to unshackle them and break into hitherto male domains are fiercely resisted.

We in the CITU have not been able to "BREAK OUT" from this syndrome prevalent in our society. This is a basic reason for the signal failure on our part to advance on the working women's front.

TASK, PART OF CLASS STRUGGLE

First and foremost, we must reassert that the tasks on the working women's front we have enjoined on ourselves is an inextricable part of our commitment to class struggle. It is not borne out of any false notions of 'sympathy' towards women who constitute a 'weaker section' in our society. The whole womankind is described as 'weaker sex' in common parlance, is it not? It is not a question of granting any patronising favour to ameliorate their sufferings. Nor it is a chivalrous gesture of extending a protective arm towards them, as they are the least privileged and most oppressed.

We should remember that our tasks towards working women are rooted in the very constitution of the CITU. We have inscribed as our very first aim and object that:

"The CITU believes that the exploitation of the working class can be ended only by socialising all means of production, distribution and exchange and establishing a Socialist state. Holding fast the ideal of socialism, the CITU stands for the complete emancipation of the society from all exploitation."

The task of emancipating the society from all exploitation can never be complete without emancipation of women who comprise half of the society.

More pointedly the CITU constitution has pledged that:
"The CITU fights...for the abolition of discrimination based

on caste, like untouchability, on sex and religion, in relation to employment, wages and promotion”.

Lenin, who led the first victorious struggle of the working class towards establishing a socialist state, defined the gist of the great October Revolution as “getting into politics the very people, most oppressed under capitalism”. He went on to point out:

“But you cannot draw the masses into politics without drawing the women into politics as well. For the female half of the human race is doubly oppressed under capitalism. The working woman and the peasant woman are oppressed by capital, but over and above that, even in the most democratic of the bourgeois republics, they remain, firstly, deprived of some rights because the law does not give them equality with men; and secondly, and this is the main thing – they remain in “household bondage”, they continue to be “household slaves”, for they are over burdened with the drudgery of the most squalid and back breaking and stultifying toil in the kitchen and the individual family household.”

Lenin also emphatically asserted: “There can be no real mass movement without the women”.

Hence, it is important that the CITU functionaries at every level should comprehend that organising the working women is part of the historical task assigned to the working class for transforming the social system – and not a humanitarian or a good Samaritan job.

DEALING WITH WOMEN OF OUR CLASS

Women are mobilised for social action by organisations of their own, All India Democratic Women’s Association for instance. But, when we in the CITU deal with the question of working women, our objective is different. There is a general tendency to bracket the AICCW with the AIDWA. Many a time, CITU committees tend to push over all issues

concerning working women to the AIDWA comrades or the working women cadres, to deal with them in association with the AIDWA. Our comrades on the working women front also tend to treat these issues as those of general women's movement, as if there is no or very little role for CITU.

That the AIDWA and the AICCWW have many areas of common concern is, no doubt, true. But while the AIDWA deals with women as women, irrespective of the class to which they belong, the AICCWW deals with the women of our class, the working class. The AIDWA and other women's organisations take up issues like:

- ◆ Child marriage
- ◆ Sati
- ◆ Dowry related harassment
- ◆ Bride burning
- ◆ Atrocities against women
- ◆ Issues related to empowerment of women in general
- ◆ Social reform oriented issues related to women
- ◆ Commodification of women, etc.

The working women committees can and should partake in the activities of general organisations of women on these issues. The CITU also will have to intervene in many of these issues and extend support.

But the CITU, through the working women committees, seeks to mobilise the women who are part of the working class, and mainstream them with the class struggle - from the initial struggles for pursuing immediate demands to the ultimate struggle for establishing socialist state.

In this, the CITU and the working women will definitely strive to enlist the support of other democratic sections of women as well. That is why Com BTR, in his foreword to the document of the National Convention on Working Women,

1979, stressed:

“The fight for working women’s demands – for the demands of the factory workers, teachers, employees, etc – should not be the exclusive concern of the trade unions. All women’s organisations should lend their support and actively help the trade union movement in this struggle.

The issues and demands concerning working women, viz.

- ◆ Equal remuneration
- ◆ Maternity benefits
- ◆ No deployment during night shift
- ◆ Provision of crèche/hostels
- ◆ Sexual harassment at workplace

etc fall in this category, i.e. the issues on which primarily the trade unions will fight and women’s organisations should support.

To lend more clarity, the general women’s organisation can take up the issue of a woman in a bourgeois family, even in the matter of her deprivation in family property related disputes. But, working women committees and trade unions must always have a class approach towards women’s issues. We must at all times keep in mind that when we deal with working women, we are dealing with our own class.

As an illustration, the issue of atrocities against women can be one, where general women’s organisation will bear the primary responsibility of taking up and the trade unions must intervene by way of support. (Here again, if the atrocities are committed by landlords against women agricultural workers, the primary responsibility will devolve on trade unions, as it is a class offensive). Instances of sexual harassment at workplace are issues that the trade unions must take up at the first instance, where general women’s organisations could lend support.

Thus, the child labour issue is also a class issue. It is not a humanitarian issue concerning child welfare!

EMANCIPATION IN REAL TERMS

Extending this further, we must also be clear as to what "emancipation of women" means in "class" and 'non-class' terms.

'Emancipation of women' 'women's equality' 'equal rights and opportunities for women', etc are slogans raised by all organisations of women without exception. International conferences of women have asserted that 'women's rights are human rights'. Across the globe in all countries, women's groups have taken up the fight. Barring a few fundamentalist outfits like the 'Taliban' in Afghanistan, almost every party in the political spectrum, in all countries, have, at least in word, come out in support of the women's quest for equal rights.

But, the CITU is firmly of the opinion that 'emancipation of women' is well nigh impossible without complete emancipation of the society as a whole from all exploitation. True emancipation of women is not possible under capitalism. Lenin very lucidly and emphatically explains this in the following words:

"You must lay stress on the unbreakable connection between women's human and social position and the private ownership of the means of production. This will draw a strong ineradicable line against the bourgeois movement for the 'emancipation of women'. This will also give us a basis for examining the women question as part of the social, working class question, and to bind it firmly with the proletarian class struggle and the revolution."

Writing on the occasion of 'International Working Women's Day (1920), Lenin further elaborated this point. He wrote: "Capitalism combines formal equality with economic and,

consequently, social inequality. That is one of the principal features of capitalism, one that is deliberately obscured by the supporters of the bourgeoisie, the liberals, and is not understood by petty-bourgeois democrats.

"But even in the matter of formal equality (equality before the law, the "equality" of the well-fed and the hungry man, of the man of the property and the propertyless) capitalism cannot be consistent. And one of the most glaring manifestations of this inconsistency is the inequality of women and men."

In some other context, Lenin laid bare the hypocrisy of 'non-class' approach towards 'equality' and freedom.

"In words bourgeois democracy promises equality and freedom, but in practice not a single bourgeois republic, even the more advanced, has granted women (half the human race) and men complete equality in the eyes of the law or delivered women from dependence on and the oppression of the male"

He declared:

"There is no "equality", nor can there be, of oppressed and oppressor, exploited and exploiter. There is no real "freedom" nor can there be, so long as women are handicapped by men's legal privileges, so long as there is no freedom for the worker from the yoke of capital, no freedom for the labouring peasant from the yoke of the capitalist, land owner and merchant."

Com.Vimal Ranadive, one of the tallest women leaders of the working class movement in the country and the CITU, in her report to the National Convention of Working Women (1979) underlined the link between the working women's problems and the fight for socialism, in the following words. "... The working women should realise that under capitalist-landlord society, their basic problems will never be solved and their sufferings will never end. It is only under socialism that their problems can be solved and they would enjoy equal rights and have a free and happy life. And, therefore, they should organise themselves against this capitalist landlord

rule and for establishment of socialism in our country.

It is precisely for reaching this message to every women worker, the CITU has ordained the tasks on the working women's front. The coordination committees of working women at every level must have this basic perspective.

CLASS ORIGIN OF WOMEN'S INEQUALITY

What impedes our making progress on the working women front is the absence of systematic effort to sensitise the trade union leaders and activists at different tiers of our organisation on the gender issues and equip them with a proper understanding to address equality concerns, in all matters of trade union functioning.

Not infrequently, we come across views from workers, both and men, that the women's right question is a "men vs. women" issue. Male workers often feel that it is only women who need to exercise on the question of their equality. In their perception women's rights are a 'feminine' issue and therefore not the concern of men. Women workers also feel that they have to fight for their rights pitting themselves against menfolk as a whole.

The point missed here — both by males and females — is that gender inequality must be fought against by the workers as a class — by both men and women.

But, the fact is that this is not the understanding of most of the workers — of even those who are in the leadership of trade unions.

Enslavement of women, historically, is the legacy of development of capitalist private property relations. Frederick Engels, in his illuminating treatise on 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' had elaborately discussed this aspect. He pointed out:

“That woman was the slave of man at the commencement of society is one of the most absurd ideas. Woman occupied not only a free but also a highly respected position among all savages and all barbarians of the lower and middle stages and partly even of the upper stage.”

Engels established that only with the development of property rights, and as wealth increased, man gained a more important status in the family than the woman. He described the transition from matriarchial to patriarchial family and the overthrow of mother rights as the world historic defeat of the female sex and added:

“The man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man’s lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. This lowered position of women has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in fact, clothed in a milder form, but by no means abolished.”

Engels narrated how only as a result of property and inheritance rights, women became victims of economic oppression in the family, losing her equality. In comparison, he explained how though the worker and the employer are equal on paper under a labour contract, the concrete economic situation compels the worker to forego even the slightest semblance of equal rights. He concluded:

“The modern individual family is based is based on the open and disguised domestic enslavement of the woman. Today, in the great majority of cases, the man has to be the earner, the breadwinner of the family. In the family he is the bourgeois, the wife represents the proletariat”

Under capitalism the worker is the victim of the domination of the capitalist class and undergoes economic suppression. In the family, man’s domination over woman makes the wife as ‘the first domestic servant,’ Engels pointed out.

Women’s inequality — rather enslavement — and male domination are concepts which are a baneful legacy of the

landlord and capitalist classes. A class-conscious worker will have to struggle to free himself from such concepts, which are alien to our class.

The question here is: how far we in the CITU had attempted to sensitise the working class leaders and cadres on this scientific and historic background of women's present status in the society? Unless such a sensitisation exercise is embarked upon targeting trade union functionaries upto the unit level, we cannot succeed in overcoming the present impasse on the working women front.

Lenin urged:

"It is perfectly right for us to put forward demands for the benefit of women. Our demands are no more than practical conclusions drawn by us from the crying needs and disgraceful humiliations that weak and underprivileged woman must bear under the bourgeois system. We demonstrate thereby that we are aware of these needs and of the oppression of women, that we are conscious of the privileged position of the men, and that we hate—yes hate—and want to remove whatever oppresses and harasses the working woman, the wife of the worker, the peasant woman, the wife of the little man, and even in many respects the woman of the propertied classes."

This, Lenin in another context, stressed, "involves considerable educational work among the men. ... We must root out the old slave owner's point of view."

In fine, without a thorough theoretical and practical training of our cadre — both men and women — the real work among working women, will not get to the take off stage.

TWO MAIN WEAKNESSES

Yet another common place occurrence is that whenever, we confront our comrades in the States, Industrial Federations

and Unions, why they are not taking even minimal steps on implementation of the tasks on the working women front, the reply we get is: "we do not have any women". They mean that they do not have any suitable woman cadre for this work.

This underlines two weaknesses. One is an improper understanding that whatever work has to be carried out among women workers, it has to be done only by women comrades and not by men. The second is the lack of seriousness to train and develop the women workers and equip them to undertake the task.

These weaknesses are persisting even after over two decades of CITU harping on and on the imperative need to take up the tasks on working women front on an utmost priority. This only indicates that our State Committees, Federations, etc affirming their agreement with the tasks outlined and 'suffering' in reverence the repeated critical references to the failures in this regard, is only a symbolic assent and their practice is a virtual dissent.

Here again it will be very instructive to quote what Lenin said on the work of the communists in post-October Revolution Soviet Russia:

"They adopt a passive, wait-and-see attitude when it comes to creating a mass movement of working women under communist leadership. They do not realise that developing and leading such a mass movement is an important part of all party activity, as much as half of all the Party work. Their occasional recognition of the need and value of a purposeful, strong and numerous communist women's movement is but platonic lip service rather than a steady concern and task of the Party.

"The regard agitation and propaganda among women and the task of rousing and revolutionising them as of secondary importance, as the job of just women communists. None but the latter are rebuked because the matter does not move ahead quickly and strongly. This is wrong, fundamentally wrong! It is outright separatism. It is equality of women a

rebours, as the French say, i.e. equality reversed. ... In the final analysis, it is an underestimation of women and their accomplishments”.

True, what is quoted above is in the context of the tasks of the communists at the stage of socialist construction. But the attitude Lenin so vehemently reprimanded manifests in the inertia of our comrades, when it comes to undertaking the tasks prescribed by the CITU, with regard to working women.

There is no dearth of experience, which confirms that even in the States where the CITU is not a big force, women had come forward with a heroic display of their determination to take on countless repression, in the course of struggles conducted by our unions. It is inexcusable that our State Committees have been reckless in the matter of developing such fighting women into able organisers and leaders.

The working women face innumerable handicaps, in engaging themselves in trade union activities. To cite a few:

- ◆ They have to bear a triple burden
 - work at factory/office
 - work at home
 - work in the trade union.
- ◆ They have very low literacy level and less access to education and training.
- ◆ They are victims of religious taboos, inhibitions imposed by custom and tradition.
- ◆ They are very often restrained by their husbands/parents from participating in trade union work.
- ◆ They are easy targets of character assassination, when they work in public along with male colleagues.
- ◆ They have very little opportunity for self-study and development.

Our State Committees and other leading bodies must take into account these and other handicaps working women face and make sincere efforts to enable them overcome the same. Then, there will be no dearth of cadres of talents for deploying on this front. It is necessary to draw up specific training programmes and design them to accommodate the genuine difficulties faced by the working women. They will not be wanting in response. In the recent past, the AICCCWW had organised some training programmes exclusively for working women. The experience gained in them testifies this optimism. But, at the State/Federation level, very few such special training programmes have been conducted. Whenever the CITU Centre, while holding all India/industry level training programmes, had sought nomination of women comrades, all the difficulties encountered by women are cited to justify non-compliance. It is quite understandable, though not fully justified in several instances. But, these very same difficulties warrant organising of separate training programmes for women in the states/federations. This is not sufficiently realised.

It is also necessary that working women must be motivated to undertake self-study and self-development to the extent possible. Working women committees, in particular, need to pay attention to this.

In the syllabus for the general trade union programme of the CITU "Working Class Perspective on Women's Issues" should be included as a separate subject.

ROLE OF CITU VIS-À-VIS AICCCWW

Even after two decades of functioning of the AICCCWW, questions are raised as to the status, role and nature of functions of the working women coordination committees, vis-à-vis, the CITU committees at various levels. Instead of tabulating such questions, it would be better to reiterate CITU position in this regard.

The All India Coordination Committee of Working Women, right from the inception, is a sub-committee of the CITU at the all India level. It is not a separate organisation. It has no separate membership, subscription or affiliation fee etc. The same is true of State level or district level or federation level committees, wherever they have been in existence.

The functions of the working women's coordination committees are broadly;

- campaign
- advocacy
- mobilisation
- coordination
- publications
- on working women related issues and
- training and education.

Decisions of the coordination committees at various levels must necessarily be reported to and implemented through the CITU committees at the corresponding levels. This, besides being organisationally a sound practice, will also ensure that the CITU committees have a sense of ownership (of these decisions) and ensure their total involvement. The practice of issuing circulars in the name of the coordination committees can be replaced by issuing circulars by CITU itself, using the 'coordination committee' name within brackets below the 'Centre of Indian Trade Unions'.

Another other aspect concerning the working women coordination committees is the association of some women comrades, who are from industries/unions, which are not directly affiliated to the CITU. Mostly such comrades belong to middle class employees' unions, which have fraternal relationship with the CITU.

As had been repeatedly stated, and made amply clear in this paper also, our work among working women is to advance the class struggle of the proletariat. Hence, it should always be our endeavour to organise the working women and enroll

them in the trade unions affiliated to the CITU. But, we do not seek to create any split in the existing unions in the industries where the CITU does not have a presence and start new unions with the women, whom we contact. On other hand, the coordination committees will motivate the working women in such places to take an active and leading role in their respective unions.

This does not mean that the women comrades, who are working in unions not affiliated to the CITU, but willing to associate themselves with the coordination committees of working women, have no role to play. These comrades come with a rich experience of trade union work in their respective unions. They have fewer handicaps to face in comparison to the women workers in factories or unorganised sectors. They have better access to education and training. Hence, they can organise the working women and help in improved functioning of the coordination committees. Their services will be of immense help to our State Committees, especially when we do not have competent women cadres in the affiliated unions to undertake the tasks of the coordination committees.

But, the lacuna here is that such comrades are not utilised by the CITU committees for organisational work in the trade unions affiliated to the CITU or among the women workers in such sectors, from where they can be brought into the CITU fold. In the absence of such utilisation, these comrades do not get integrated with the CITU functioning. Their role remains confined to attending the coordination committee meetings, participating in some general campaigns, making representations, etc. In some places, this leads to an uneasy divide inside the coordination committee itself as "CITU women" and "non-CITU women" or "worker-comrades" and "middle-class comrades". It must be emphasised here that such situations are not the making of the women comrades concerned; they arise because of the failure of the CITU committees to skillfully utilise them and develop them as active CITU functionaries.

This eventually leads to a drift where the coordination committee remains very much aloof from the CITU committee. CITU leaders view it to be an appendage or separate or parallel outfit, rather than treating it as a part and parcel of the CITU organisational set up. CITU committees must ensure that this artificial isolation is ended.

The coordination committees, as a part of their work take up the issues of women office-employees working in different sectors such as banks, government and insurance and also nurses, teachers, etc. This helps in drawing them into trade union activities, even cutting across affiliations. This is a healthy trend and needs to be continuously pursued. But our coordination committees, sometimes come with a plea that their activities among such sections of working women will gain strength, if we can approach them keeping aside the CITU label. This is a wrong tendency. Our work among these sections is not for charity; though we are conscious that these women may not be organisationally drawn to the CITU fold, our work among them must bring them ideologically closer to the CITU. If this purpose is not served, our work will remain some sort of an apolitical activity. Hence our comrades in the coordination committees must shun such pleas for 'non-CITU' identity and must always carry forward the message of the CITU, wherever they work.

In the final analysis, all the questions or doubts over the role of working women coordination committees vis-à-vis the CITU committees are the result of the latter not feeling a sense of ownership of the former and the former entertaining confused thoughts over identification with the latter.

THE 'STAND ALOOF ATTITUDE !

Very often we hear complaints from the male comrades in the trade union leadership that the women workers, under plea of family responsibilities, do not participate in gate meetings, demonstrations general body meetings etc of the

union. The women members in the union pay their subscription all right; but otherwise tend to remain passive onlookers. A sort of 'stand aloof' is practised by the women workers. Thus goes the refrain.

Our comrades must keep in mind that this 'stand aloof attitude' is not a problem with the women members alone. The percentage of union members actively participating in all the programmes of the union, even in respect of male members is very small. We, in the CITU have laid much emphasis on the question of ensuring participation of ordinary workers in all the functions of the trade union, upto decision making on policy matters, as part of our tasks on democratic functioning. This applies without exception to the women members of the union also.

But, what has been our experience in several struggles? During processions, dharnas, hunger strikes, picketting, barricade jumping, etc agitation, our comrades always field the women on the frontline. There may be some initial hesitation expressed by women workers, but they overcome it and respond to the call of the leadership. They also exhibit exemplary heroism while facing police repression. This is not denied. What our comrades complain is that the number of such women coming forward is very small.

True as it may be, we should introspectively analyse why it is so. The other side of the story is women complaining: "Our leaders want us to participate in union agitations, but when it comes to our demands, they do not take them up"; "We are asked to bring women for the meetings, but seldom we (women) are allowed to address"; "We are asked to occupy front row in demonstrations and the like. But while going for negotiations, we are not called"; "We will be called to come, with our babies even, and squat before the police picket. But when conferences are held, no one remembers to take us". And so on.

There is truth in both these versions; but it is not the whole truth.

We must remember that the women workers whom we approach belong to most backward segment of our class – not by their option but by historical circumstances. We are trying to win the confidence of the mass of the women workers who have, for ages, been ‘exploited, enslaved and crushed by the domination of the man, by the power of their employers and by bourgeois society as a whole’, as Lenin put it.

Lenin reiterated that ‘the struggle for women’s rights must also be linked with our principal aim – the conquest of power and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat’. He added:

“But the broad masses of working women will not feel irresistibly drawn to the struggle for state power, if we harp on just this one demand. We must combine our appeal politically in the minds of the female masses with the sufferings, the needs and the wishes of the working women. ... We must fight now for these and now for other demands (of the women), depending on the existing conditions, and naturally always in association with the general interests of the proletariat.”

To promote active participation of women workers in trade union agitation and other activities it is necessary that we must first of all provide them due opportunities to articulate their problems. We must lend them confidence that by their participation in trade union, they can not only present their grievances, but those will also be taken up for redressal by the union. The trade union leadership must not only mete out justice to the demands of the women workers but also take care that, to the women justice appears to have been done.

For the working women – and more particularly, the comrades working on the coordination committees – it is imperative to remind themselves that women’s demands do not form an

exclusive agenda. It is part and parcel of the trade union agenda itself. And their demands must be pursued in association with the general demands of all sections of the workers.

In conclusion, the working women comrades must bear in mind that all said and done, progress on this front depends on the initiative they take and on how much they assert. Our CITU committees and leaders of unions and federations, confronted with the magnitude of the challenges and tasks faced in the present times, are prone to losing sight of the priorities, however much sincerely and earnestly they may affirm their commitment to the cause of working women. This is not to exonerate them; but only to underline the necessity of women comrades to relentlessly pursue their fight, within our organisational forum itself. They must speak out.

This is how Lenin exhorted the women of his times, when the Third World Congress of COMINTERN, was to examine the women's question:

"Don't twitter like a bunch of chatterboxes, but speak out loudly. A Congress is not a parlour where women display their charm, as we read in novels. A Congress is a battlefield in which we fight for the knowledge we need for revolutionary action. Show that you can fight. In the first place, of course against our enemies, but also within ... should the need arise!"

We end here with what August Babel, who authored the book "Women in the Past, Present and Future" (described as the most valuable contribution on the women's question) stated: "Women too as summoned not to remain behind in a struggle in which their own freedom and deliverance is at stake. It is now their part to show that they have comprehended their true position in the movement and that they are resolved to take their share in the present contest for a better future. It is the part of the men to assist them in freeing themselves from all prejudices and to support them in the fight."

ORGANISING WORKING WOMEN – OUR OBJECTIVES

(Commission paper adopted at 13th Conference of CITU held from 17-21 March 2010 at Chandigarh. 318 delegates from 20 states participated in the Commission, which was chaired by Kanai Bannerjee, Treasurer of CITU. Mercy Kutti Amma, Vice President of CITU made a brief presentation of the Paper to facilitate discussion. All the delegates who participated in the discussions endorsed the points made in the Commission Paper and narrated their own experiences in support. Many delegates highlighted the necessity to increase the awareness of CITU leadership at the state, district and union level and sensitise them to gender issues in trade unions. The task of developing and promoting women to leadership position was emphasised also emphasised)

Attacks on the working class have enormously increased in the era of globalisation and liberalisation. The employers have further intensified their attacks on the working class in the name of global recession. The capitalist system, whose failure in solving the basic problems confounding humanity, has once again been glaringly exposed by the recent global economic crisis, intends to overcome it by shifting the burdens on to the workers. The governments in all the capitalist countries connive with the business and corporate interests in punishing the workers for the crisis created by the capitalist system.

In this situation, what is required is united resistance by the working class not only to the present attacks on their jobs, working and living conditions, but also offensive struggles to dismantle the failed system. Strong campaigns and struggles have to be unleashed that expose the failure of the capitalist system and make the working class conscious of its role in

bringing about a society free from all exploitation, as per the vision of the CITU, enshrined in its constitution.

The CITU has taken upon itself the task of uniting the entire working class to fulfil this objective. However, uniting the entire working class and making it aware of its role cannot be accomplished as long as a large section of the working class – working women, who comprise around one third of the working class - is outside the purview of the trade union movement or remains aloof of trade union activities.

It is with this perspective that the CITU has taken up the task of organising working women and ensuring that they discharge their due role in the trade union movement, as a priority task. CITU firmly believes that trade union unity will remain partial or incomplete and that the trade union movement would be deprived of its full striking power as long as the vast sections of working women are left outside the mainstream trade union movement. Thus, the task of organising working women is, for the CITU, a class task, a priority task aimed at strengthening the general trade union movement itself.

It is now more than three decades since we have formed the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women to help in accomplishing this task. We have tried to pursue and monitor the efforts by discussing it regularly in all our conferences and meetings of the general council and working committee.

But very few state committees of CITU have planned their work among working women with this perspective. The number of state committees of CITU that have taken up this task as a priority task can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

No doubt there is some progress in our work among working women. Women's membership, their participation in the

activities of CITU and to a lesser extent in its decision making bodies have definitely improved though not in a uniform manner all over the country. The coordination committees of working women at the national level and in states, wherever they have been constituted, have helped in identifying the sectors with large number of women workers and in organising them. The initiative of CITU in organising the anganwadi workers and helpers at the national level and to pay special attention to organise the unorganised sector workers have contributed to this advance. In states and unions where conscious efforts are being made, working women activists in more numbers are today discharging responsibilities as committee members and office bearers.

The membership of women in CITU has been gradually growing over the years. Women constituted 12,77,880 out of the total 50,97,533 members of CITU in 2008, i.e. 25.06% of its membership, up from 22.52% in 2005. While the CITU membership in 2008 increased by 27.81% over its membership in 2005, women membership increased by 42.27%. In some states like Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka women membership constitutes around 60% of CITU membership. In Maharashtra, Assam and Bihar, women's membership is more than 40%; in Orissa, more than 30%; and in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura and Uttarakhand, it is close to 30%. However, considering the fact that, around 60% of the CITU membership comes from the unorganised sector, where women workers are concentrated in large numbers, there is a vast scope of further increasing women membership in CITU.

The participation of women in the activities of CITU has also increased. Today, in many states, working women comprise around half of the mobilisation of the CITU at the state and district levels, on the occasion of its struggles, campaigns and conferences. Women workers like the anganwadi employees, ASHAs, etc in many states are launching militant struggles on their own demands, as well as participating in

the struggles called for by the CITU. They are in the forefront in facing police repression and are also subjected to victimisation by the employers.

But, this participation of women in CITU activities is not reflected in the number of women in the conferences and decision making bodies of CITU, though there is some improvement. Since the 8th conference of CITU in Patna, conscious efforts are being made to ensure that at least a certain percentage of delegates in the CITU all India conferences are women. But till now, we have not been able to implement this limited objective.

In several states, there is resistance to elect women as delegates to conferences. Large numbers of working women are active in union work at the ground level; they enrol members, mobilise the workers for the rallies and campaigns of the unions and CITU. But, when it comes to electing delegates to state or national conferences, they are ignored. Their family problems, their difficulty in leaving their homes and children, their work place problems etc are all cited as reasons for not electing women as delegates. This situation is not confined only to states where women's membership is more or less confined to a few sectors; it exists in greater extent in some states where CITU's membership is mostly from the traditional sectors where women constitute a large proportion of the workforce and our membership.

The reluctance in electing women as delegates is continued in the resistance to elect women into the committees and as office bearers. In several states, particularly in some states where the CITU is relatively strong, women's presence in the committees and as office bearers, at the state and district levels, is only nominal. Even where capable and active women cadres are available, their perceived inability to attend meetings, travel long distances etc are given as excuses to justify their exclusion.

What is the reason for such reluctance by our state committees and industrial federations to effectively plan the work among working women, develop women cadres and promote them to leadership positions?

There might be several reasons. Some of the major weaknesses have been identified and sharply pointed out in several of our conferences and documents. Unless serious and conscious efforts are made to overcome them, the advance of our work among working women will continue to be tardy; not only that, it will also jeopardise whatever advances we have made till now.

Criticising the CITU committees for ignoring the issue or making only 'some cosmetic changes', in his address to the sixth conference of CITU in Bombay, Com BTR, the founder president of CITU pointed out that it was 'nothing but underestimation of women and their work'. The CITU Document on Organisation popularly known as the 'Bhubaneswar Document' noted the 'utter callousness on the part of the leaders, unions and various committees' that just 'put up with criticism without making serious improvements in our approach towards working women'.

This approach towards working women is part of the prevalent social attitude towards women. The Commission paper adopted by the tenth conference of CITU, 'Working Women, A Class Perspective', observed 'In our social set up, the rights of women are generally ignored or belittled. Participation of women in all spheres of social, political and economic activity, on equal footing with the men, is not considered a relevant issue at all.... It is widely assumed that women are destined to play only a subordinate role to men... Such inverted norms, opinions, values and attitudes, which have contributed to hamper the development of women, have an all pervasive and profound influence on men and also on women. Even the few feeble attempts on the part of women, somewhere or other, to unshackle them and break into hitherto male domains

are fiercely resisted' The Commission paper also acknowledged that 'We in the CITU have not been able to 'BREAK OUT' from this syndrome prevalent in our society'.

This attitude of underestimating the abilities of women is one of the main reasons for the lack of any conscious efforts on the part of our state committees to advance CITU among working women and to train and promote women to the leading bodies of unions and CITU. This is manifest in different manners in different states. In many states, no effort is made to constitute the coordination committees of working women at the state and district levels and women's sub committees within the unions; no effort is made to train and develop working women who are active in their unions like the anganwadi employees, ASHAs etc to lead their own unions as well as play more active role in the CITU; in stead, even if a few are included as office bearers or working committee members, they are expected to simply follow the directions of the CITU leaders, and not to take any initiative on their own.

In some other states, it is manifested as strong resistance, on the part of a section of the male leadership, to elect women as delegates to the union and CITU conferences, at least as per their proportion in the membership and duly represented in the decision making bodies. This is evident even in states where the coordination committees of working women and women's sub committees within unions have been formed and have been effectively functioning with the initiative of the women comrades.

Another reflection of the same attitude is the lack of any initiative on the part of the union and CITU leadership to ensure the attendance of women members to the meetings, be it of the coordination committees of working women or of the CITU, at different levels. Even today, many women members find it difficult to attend the meetings because of the lack of financial resources. While at the time of constitution of the coordination committees, some state committees of CITU do evince interest

in the inclusion of more women representatives from their states, the same eagerness is not shown in ensuring their attendance in the meetings.

In stead of the concerned CITU committee as a whole being considered responsible for the advance of our work among working women, often the individual women members are blamed for the lack of advance in our work among working women. We must remember what Lenin said about such attitude 'They do not realise that developing and leading such a mass movement is an important part of all (our) activity, as much as half of all (our) work. Their occasional recognition of the need and value of a purposeful, strong and numerous women's movement is but platonic lip service rather than a steady concern and task'.

Even when women are elected as delegates to the conferences or to the decision making bodies, often they are not given an opportunity to express their views. Some women do feel hesitant and nervous in the initial stages to place their views in the meetings and conferences. In stead of encouraging them, this is seen as vindication of the false notion of their ineptitude. Even holding conventions of working women are seen by some committees as rituals to satisfy the higher committees; the occasion is utilised to gather some women workers and deliver lectures to them rather than to hear them, understand their problems and identify the women activists so as to train and develop them. Many unions and committees of CITU do not have this concept at all.

As more women are coming forward to work in our unions and many as full timers also, it is important on the part of the male leadership to be sensitive to the problems they face as women while working in the unions. CITU committees at all levels have to take the necessary measures to ensure that working women activists can work freely without being subjected to harassment including sexual harassment while working in the unions.

The domestic responsibilities of women in the present society must also be kept in mind and the male comrades, union activists and members must be sensitised to share the domestic responsibilities to enable women to play their role in their unions. As Engels has remarked in his famous book 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State', '...to emancipate woman and make her the equal of man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time...'

At the same time women activists of CITU also have to make more efforts to shed their hesitation, assert themselves and come forward to take up more responsibilities within the trade unions. They, like all other trade union activists, must also make efforts to up grade their knowledge and skills to lead trade unions.

While the attitude of underestimating women's abilities is the major reason for the slow progress of our work among working women, there are a few other reasons as well, for the state committees of CITU not taking the required initiative. However, these are not entirely unrelated to the above mentioned attitude.

The Commission paper on working women adopted by the 10th Conference of CITU noted that 'even after two decades of functioning of the AICCWW, questions are raised as to the status, role and nature of functions' of the coordination committees of working women. Again, the need to develop a 'common understanding on the objectives, composition and functioning' of the coordination committees of working women was felt by the 12th Conference. These questions have been addressed in several meetings and in the conferences of

CITU, making it clear that the ccww are not separate organisations but sub committees of the concerned CITU committees with the specific objective of advancing CITU among working women. But still many state committees of CITU have not constituted the sate ccww; no efforts are made to ensure effective functioning of the ccww even in some states where they have been constituted.

The CITU committees have to seriously ponder the reasons for the reluctance for planned work among working women by forming the coordination committees and guiding their functioning.

After the 12th conference, the CITU secretariat discussed the issue in detail following which the CITU working committee adopted a note in its meeting in January 2009 in Mumbai. The working committee resolved that the occasion of completion of 30 years of the formation of AICCWW should be utilised to review the work among working women in all states; but very few state committees of CITU have taken up this task.

There is a tendency to consider that the job of the CITU state committees is over once the ccww is constituted; thereafter the entire job becomes the sole responsibility of the ccww. The issue is never discussed in the meetings of the office bearers or state committees of CITU. It should be realised that given the perspective and objectives of the CITU in organising working women, it is the responsibility of the CITU committees to identify the different industries/ jobs where women work in large numbers and organise them and to ensure that women are developed and promoted to leadership positions. The coordination committees of working women are constituted to actively help and assist the CITU committees in this task.

Similarly, the specific problems of working women and their demands have to be treated and addressed as the demands of the concerned union; campaigns and struggles should be

launched on these by mobilising not only the women members, but also the entire union membership. There are very few instances of the union taking up specific problems of women workers even today, though there is some improvement. Leaving these issues to be addressed only by the ccww gives the wrong impression that women's issues should be taken up by women alone and that ccww are organisations created for this purpose. In stead of leading to the unions taking up working women's issues as union issues, this practice encourages the unions to continue with ignoring the specific problems of working women, leading to further alienation of the women employees from the union.

It may be necessary to reiterate the functions of the ccww, which are broadly:

- ◆ To help the CITU to formulate its stand on various government policies related to working women
- ◆ Study the employment of women in various industries and their problems; determine priorities and suggest steps to organise them, to the concerned committees of CITU;
- ◆ To assist in organising working women in the sectors as decided by the CITU committees
- ◆ Make periodic reviews of the functioning of the unions among working women; of the subcommittees of the union; of the progress in enrolment of women members in the union; of promotion of women cadres to positions of leadership etc
- ◆ Discuss the problems of education and training women cadres and submit suggestions to the concerned CITU committees and pursue taking decisions and their execution
- ◆ Make efforts to develop coordinated movement on the specific issues of working women by involving the women's sub committees in different industries, including those in the non CITU affiliated fraternal trade unions
- ◆ Make efforts to take the policies and programmes of CITU to broader sections of working women through the CITU

journals and other literature etc

The ccww should be guided by the CITU committees to work directly among working women on behalf of the CITU. The approach of CITU to united actions should be implemented by the ccww in their work among working women belonging to other unions. Effective functioning of ccww should mean that women membership of CITU increases and more women are promoted to union and CITU leadership, in addition to achieving their specific demands.

Problems

There are of course some problems faced by the CITU committees, like financial difficulties and cadre shortages, which impact all work of CITU, but the work among working women becomes the first casualty.

While making conscious efforts to overcome these difficulties, it is necessary for the CITU state committees to prioritise the sectors for organising. But gender cannot and should not be the excuse to avoid taking up our work among a section of workers as a priority. When asked about the work among working women, the oft heard response of some CITU leaders, particularly from the weaker states, is 'We have no resources to carry out the work of CITU (meaning among the male workers). Where do we find money and cadre to organise women'. This method of deciding priorities is not correct.

Experience of such states like Haryana, Himachal Pradesh etc clearly show that if conscious and planned efforts are made, financial difficulties can be overcome; once financial problems are overcome, deploying cadres becomes less difficult.

Prioritisation, to organise the workers, male or female, in the organised or unorganised sectors, should be on the basis of

the long term objectives of the CITU – of uniting the working class and raising its consciousness to enable it discharge its role in ending all exploitation. Keeping this objective in mind priorities have to be decided depending on the concrete situation in the state - industrial scenario, the availability of cadres and their abilities etc.

At the same time, it is to be kept in mind that organising the workers in the sectors that have state wide presence and are related to the government, like the anganwadi employees, ASHAs, Mid Day Meal workers, teachers in the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan etc (where large number are women) will help in putting pressure on the government and achieving some benefits which in turn will give confidence to the workers. Similarly, women workers in the manufactured sector, like garments, beedi etc, including the home based workers should be given priority in organising.

With conscious efforts, the union activists among the anganwadi workers, most of who are educated and develop organisational abilities as part of their work, can be a source for recruiting cadres not only for their own unions, but for the CITU as well. In Andhra Pradesh, anganwadi workers have been elected as president or general secretary in around 200 mandal committees, the lowest tier of CITU committees in the state. They play an active role in implementing CITU calls at this level, mobilising the other members of CITU. In Karnataka, the anganwadi workers played an important role in the recently held struggle on the demands of the unorganised sector workers. These women workers have demonstrated beyond any doubt that if made conscious and provided the necessary training, women cadres can and do overcome all their domestic problems to play an active role in the trade union movement. The ASHAs, working in the National Rural Health Mission, who are already being organised by the CITU in several states, also have the potential to be developed as CITU cadres.

In this regard the commendable contribution of the women employees belonging to the fraternal organisations of CITU in insurance, banking, state and central government employees, BSNL etc to the CITU's work among working women in several states need to be noted. In several states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka etc these women employees have contributed to the functioning of the ccwws. In some states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, they have been helping in organising the women workers in construction, tailoring, food processing, khadi, etc, the anganwadi employees, ASHAs, mid day meal workers, small savings collectors etc, under the banner of CITU. In Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, some of them have been elected to the state and district committees of CITU. The services of women activists of these middle class organisations, who are willing to spare their time and energies for the CITU, can and should be utilised to organise working women. Obviously, they will work for the CITU and the ccww on their individual capacity as supporters of CITU and not as representatives of their respective organisations.

The experience in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka show that allotment of a full time functionary for the work among working women greatly helps in our advance in this field. While the state and district committees of CITU provide the allowances of the women full timers in Andhra Pradesh, the Tamil Nadu state committee has raised fund specifically for this purpose from the unions in the organised sector. Other state committees of CITU may make the necessary arrangements as per the specific conditions in their states.

Earlier, when asked about the formation of the ccwws, several state leaders of CITU used to reply that they 'do not have working women', probably meaning that there were very few women members of CITU, that they were not working in areas with large numbers of working women or that they did not have women cadres to work among working women. But, that situation has considerably changed now. In most of the

states, including the relatively weaker ones, we have unions of anganwadi employees, ASHAs, mid day meal workers etc. The nucleus for forming ccww and the potential cadres to function them exist in almost all the states today. What is required is conscious effort on the part of the CITU state committees to form the ccwws and plan the work.

Experience in states like Tamil Nadu indicate that organising campaigns and movements on the common demands of working women in different sectors, be it the organised or the unorganised sector, like minimum wages, equal wages, maternity benefit, crèches, sexual harassment etc would help in advancing our movement among working women. Such campaigns help us to approach working women in different sectors and attract them towards the CITU.

The incessant price rise without any corresponding increase in wages, the deteriorating working and living conditions, the attacks on the existing trade union rights pose a serious challenge to the working class today including the working women. The situation calls for gathering all our strength and launching a counter attack against the discredited capitalist system. Our experience indicates that wherever the CITU has taken the initiative to address their problems, working women have responded magnificently.

What is required is overcoming the attitude of underestimating women's abilities – by men and also by women themselves - and developing the correct perspective of our objective of organising working women among all the CITU cadres with due urgency.

STATEMENT SHOWING STATEWISE MEMBERSHIP AS PER ANNUAL RETURNS RECEIVED TILL- 3/3/2010

State	Unions Submitting Returns		2008	Position of membership according to Annual Returns					
	2006	2007		2006		2007		2008	
				Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Andaman & Nicobar	8	7	7	3078		2692		2992	
Andhra Pradesh	769	727	676	470532	102940	341916	104737	440381	131186
Assam	85	85	84	52022	22478	55020	23133	71851	31854
Bihar	19	19	19	5430	28	19188	10598	26664	11577
Delhi	100	93	85	32684	1435	33320	1509	38460	1799
Goa	7	7	5	618	17	788	47	677	
Gujarat	24	25	23	13135	1457	13129	1167	13248	1244
Himachal Pradesh	40	46	42	13448	7274	30089	14422	40363	24425
Haryana	28	32	33	13660	4277	51394	14105	65295	18078
Jammu & Kashmir	8	8	2	276	35	5589	98	4372	32
Karnataka	139	136	124	110656	53617	140059	73159	160870	95154
Kerala	916	861	822	1088091	329740	1149008	355015	1258646	375266
Madhya Pradesh	78	77	76	24297	5792	30677	11313	31457	8683
Maharashtra	104	94	83	86185	37251	93851	32277	103136	49462
Orissa	84	80	70	88553	25915	84253	20736	104042	35647
Punjab	85	73	65	72535	14185	66555	13390	78301	15226
Rajasthan	73	65	54	30521	2575	33250	1727	37534	2262
Tamilnadu	591	572	574	359218	73784	454494	114341	514719	122155
Tripura	41	41	39	139511	45007	139183	47091	160035	46491
Uttar Pradesh	105	98	97	25573	758	27985	864	31390	703
West Bengal	1305	1282	1084	1397002	168324	1887130	288674	1776305	276896
Uttaranchal	48	52	51	11166	3066	13867	3727	20102	5761
Chhatisgarh	23	23	20	19052	2495	20119	2971	21456	2797
Jharkhand	32	32	32	72956	13401	74293	13726	99503	22759
Total	4712	4535	4167	4130199	915851	4767849	1148827	5101799	1279457

Women elected in the 13th Conference of CITU

Office Bearers – 20% (including a woman treasurer)

Working Committee – 9.37%

General Council – 10.65%

% women in leadership of CITU in different states

Sl no	State	% in OB	% in WC	Sl no	State	% in OB	% in WC
1	AP	15.38	31.25	13	Kerala	6.66	5.33
2	Assam	11.11	20.83	14	MP	5.55	11.94
3	Bihar	-	-	15	Maharashtra	19.35	27.02
4	Chattisgarh	15.38	11.42	16	Orissa	8	11.53
5	Delhi	0	8.10	17	Punjab	-	-
6	Gujarat	-	-	18	Rajasthan	-	-
7	Haryana	10.52	12.24	19	Tamil Nadu	14.28	14.50
8	HP	17.64	28	20	Tripura	9.09	10.25
9	J&K	0	7.40	21	UP	-	-
10	Jharkhand	3.03	12.94	22	Uttarakhand	18.18	28.12
11	Karnataka	21.21	28.73	23	WB	6.66	9.09

ON CENTENARY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Resolution adopted by 13th Conference of CITU

The Thirteenth Conference of the CITU, held from 17 to 21 March 2010 in Chandigarh, Punjab, greets women in struggle all over the world, on the occasion of the centenary of the declaration of International Women's Day, and expresses solidarity with them. The CITU calls upon the Indian working class in general and working women in particular, to observe this occasion by a nationwide campaign focusing on the three demands of equal wages, an 8 hour working day, maternity benefits and crèche and 33% reservation for women in legislatures. The demands for improvement in the working conditions and increased participation of women in the democratic process are as relevant today as they were a hundred years back.

The origin of the women's rights movement is very closely linked with the working class movement. As democratic and egalitarian consciousness developed along with the advance of capitalism, the working class and working women became more aware of the fact that the end of exploitation is linked with the capture of political power. Thus the movement for universal voting rights and the working class movement, which are interlinked, gave birth to the women's movement.

The International Women's Day has a legacy of women's struggle, for a decent life and decent work and to achieve this, their political rights. It has put the special problems of women and their rights in the development as well as political process, onto the agenda.

Now, a century later, women have advanced in many spheres, but during these years, particularly after the advent of

imperialist globalisation, there is a concerted effort to strip International Women's Day of its class and political content. There is also propaganda by the feminists that the class struggle is 'non inclusive' of the problems of women and other marginalised sections. It is therefore the responsibility of the working class and working women to reassert the legacy of this day, which is one of struggle, for the rights of women as citizens, as workers and as women.

This Conference calls upon all the state committees of CITU and its industrial federations to start the campaign by organising meetings on 10th April 2010, the birth anniversary of Vimal Ranadive and continue it throughout the year by publishing booklets, pamphlets, organising conventions, meetings etc and conclude with mass mobilisations of workers, both men and women on these demands. This Conference also resolves to utilise the occasion for multiplying the organisational initiatives of CITU to increase women's role in its activities.

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