

**FIGHT UNITEDLY
FOR THE CAUSE OF
INDIAN WORKING WOMEN**



**Report
of
the
National
Convention
of
Working
Women**



**held
in
Madras
April 9-10, 1979**

CITU PUBLICATION

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Foreword

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 union.

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 creches 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 women 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 creche, 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 large 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 are participate in strike struggle, 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.

B. T. Ranadive

9-6-79

Report of the National Convention of Working Women

—*Vimala Ranadive*

In thirty-one years of independence, the social and economic position of Indian women has not very much improved. The conditions of women is an 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 were 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 1973 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 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-complete 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 labourers, 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 Paraganas 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, 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 of 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 a 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 of India stated in the "Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83" that "the Census of 1971 grossly under-estimated 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 33.6 million. 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 come 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 wilfully and drastically reduced.

Large number of women workers would have been further employed, had there been no modernisation 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 Shrimati Renuka Barkataki in her address to a Conference on the prob-

lems 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 practised 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 seconadry 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 are not justiciable, they have not been implemented in 30 years of Congress Rule. In the way the present Janta 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 justiciable 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 job 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 stage 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 labour 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 women 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 fulfil 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 fulfil 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 full 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 unrecognised 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 creche is a basic necessity for the working women wherever they work. For want of creche 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 creche 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 bond' 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 jobs have no facility of

creche 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 with trees with nobody to look after and these desperate acts invite very sad tragedies sometimes.

The creche is also a burning demand of the working women coming from middle class families as there is no provision of a creche 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 Samittee of Bombay on the working conditions highlighted the demand for creche 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 creche, in one voice. In State Government and Central Government Offices, in P & T and Railway Offices—large number of women are employed but no where creche is provided by the Government. Creche 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 creche is provided. In some cities, private creches 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 creche 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, creche 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 creche 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 creche with confidence.

Out of 15,468 factories all over India in 1972, creche 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 creche was only 900. Out of 1,322 mines in 1976, 741 mines had no creche.

In the industries where women workers constitute a majority like Tobacco, Beedi, Plantation and Cashew etc., the arrangement of creche 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 creche 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 creche 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, creche 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 contracts or resorting to cancellation of contract for non-fulfilment of this provision.

The Labour Welfare Committee of 1969 recommended that "the setting up of creche 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 creches 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. Creches 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 creche in the work places, we want to say that setting up of creche 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 creches. At present, the Municipalities and Local Bodies cannot undertake this responsibility as their financial resources are very meagre. 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 creche 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 creche should be such that women workers can keep their babies without any worry. The creche 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 a 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-official 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 women is a worker at her work-place and at the same time she has household responsibilities. When a working women 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 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 foot-boards 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 sufferers 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 employ large number of women in the second shift which ends at 10 P.M. On the 3rd September, 1978 a women 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 creches 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, shollac, beedi and tobacco, fisheries and in various other industries. The women working in Prons-Processing for Exports in Calcutta and Vishakhapatnam 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 AREA AND NIGHT SHIFTS NEED PROTECTION

Protection of working women from mis-handling and mistreatment by anti-social and lumpent 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 misbehaviour and insulting treatment from 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 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 concerns 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 creche. These facts came out in the discussions in 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, 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, these companies still persist in refusing to employ married women.

We should demand immediate withdrawal of this 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 sectors 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 .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 is 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 lies 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 Centres 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 WOMAN OF UN-ORGANISED 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 'chikon' 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 women 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 declare 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, Bellmetal 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 DISCRIMINATIONS 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 in-take 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 Union 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 percent 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 indicate the task the Indian Trade Union Movement will have to fulfil in this regard.

**PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN WORKERS
DURING 1961-1974**

Year	No. of Unions submitting Returns	Membership of Unions submitting Returns			Per- centage of women to Total No.
		Men	Women	Total	
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 break-up 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.

In the Teachers Front, 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 Feder-

ations should give a 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 & 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 strikes 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 women "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 THEIR OWN DEMAND

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 section 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 burden 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 encourage 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 an united platform for realisation of the said demands for 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 creches 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 Industry, in Mica, Tannery, Coal, Chemicals, Cement, Mines etc.

14. The working women should be given training free of cost for acquiring higher skill 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 women 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 leourgious 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 materniyy leave and child care is the responsibility of the Government. There is a large net-

work of creches 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 mite to protect the rights of Indian Working Women and uphold their dignity.

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