

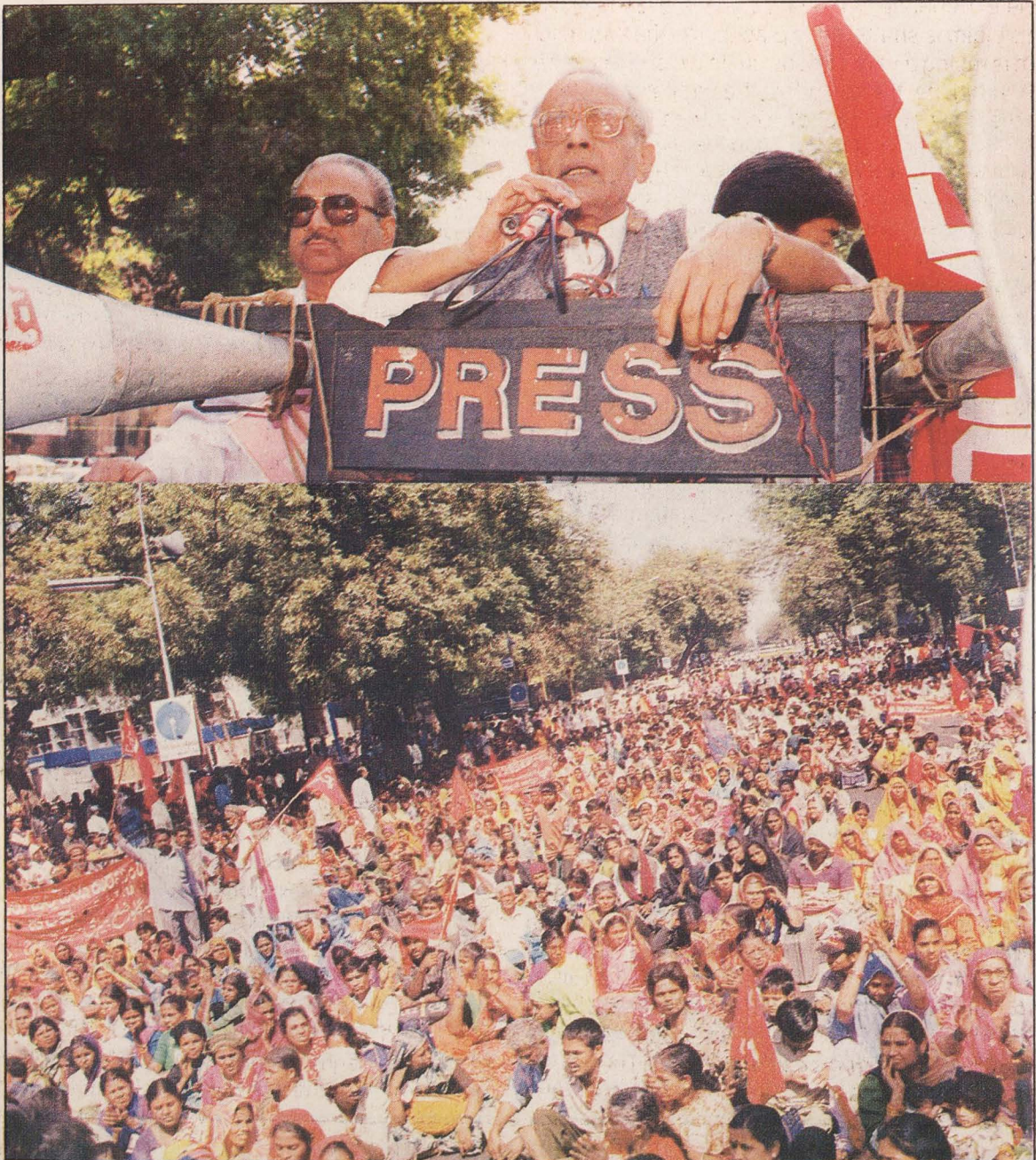


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THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

Mammoth Rally by CITU Beedi Workers



PK Ganguly, Secretary, CITU and General Secretary, All India Beedi Workers' Federation (CITU) addressing the rally on 3rd March near Jantar Mantar Delhi. Md. Nizamudin presiding over the rally. (Report on Page 7)

The Immediate Tasks Ahead

□ E. Balanandan, MP (President, CITU)

One cannot forget the tall claims made by the world capitalist leaders especially the then President of the United States in the wake of setback suffered by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries during the year 1991 that socialism has no future and is dead. The only sustainable system is capitalism, and they are going to build a crisis free society using the modern technology under capitalism”.

The experience of the last 5 years goes to show that this claim is shattered to pieces and the capitalist system is facing a very serious crisis which cannot be solved within the framework of the capitalist system.

In the developed capitalist countries not only the economic growth is slowing down while unemployment and poverty are on the increase. The globalisation and liberalisation being propagated and put into practice did not help them inspite of the use of modern technology. The World Bank report of 1996 and the UN development report of 1996 highlighted the results of this developments.

The world economy today is dominated by the big multinational corporations. The institute for policy studies, Washington in its recent report stated that 4.5 billion people, ie, 80% of the world's population earn only a little more than half of the income of the largest 200 top corporations. Many of these giant corporation's income is more than the national economies of many countries. A recent study by the United Nation's Commission on trade and development said that the sales proceeds of the multinational corporations generated 5.5 trillion dollars from their operations outside the country of their origin (one trillion one lakh crore).

The total foreign holding of the MNCs all over the world now exceeds two trillion dollars ó US 4 billion, UK 259, Japan - 251 billion dollars. This figure tell us that the world economy is increasingly being controlled by the multinational corporations. The growing income disparities between the developed and underdeveloped nations of the world and between the rich and the poor is projected in the UN Human Development Report. During the year 1993, the GDP of the world was estimated to be 23 trillion dollars, out of which the share of the developed world was 18 trillion and 5 trillion for the other countries where 80% of the world population live. This report has also given figures to show that the income of the

poorer people are going down while the income of the rich is on the increase. The accumulation of wealth by the richest in the world is noted like this. 358 richest in the world who are called dollar billionaire's combined income is equal to 45% of the world's poor people, that is 2.3 billion people (230 crore).

This small elaboration shows what kind of society is being built under the so called liberalisation and globalisation.

The ILO Report on World Employment 1996-97 says that approximately 30% of the entire labour force are unemployed or under employed in the industrialised and developed countries. And they also warned that the world employment situation is grim. This growing unemployment is aggravating the social and economic tensions. The average unemployment in Europe is 11.3%. In East Germany, it is 20%, in the OECD countries, it is said to be 34 millions. The latest figures available for Japan, United States, France and England including Germany, the unemployment is on the increase. The G-7 country leaders conferred to discuss the question of employment twice or thrice but could not find any solution. This growth model is called “jobless growth”. That means while production and productivity etc is going up, the jobs will be reduced. This jobless growth where the overall economy grows, it does not expand the opportunities for employment.

This growth model has been described by UNDP report as ruthless growth where the fruits of economic growth mostly benefit the rich, leaving millions of people struggling in ever deepening poverty. This also do not provide extention of democracy and empowerment of the people. The cultural development of the people are adversely affected. Beside the natural resources are indiscriminately being plundered causing anxiety for the future development of humanity.

This description of United Nation's Development Report gives the cruel nature of the system which is being built in the world by world capitalism.

In 1996, the economic growth is further reduced in United States, Japan, Germany inspite of the fact that they are utilising the world multilateral agencies like IMF-World Bank, WTO etc for furthering their interests to squeeze the third world countries. The government of India is following a line of least resis-

tance and trying to integrate our economy with global capitalism. This facilitates the penetration of foreign multinationals into our economy and finally control them.

The flow of foreign investment will generate more employment and improve the conditions of life of the people etc has been proved to be false. The World Bank now has been forced to admit that the people living on less than 1 dollar per day has been increased to 1.3 billion. The Bank has also admitted that poverty has increased in Latin America, Caribbean and Sub Saharan countries. The reality of world capitalist offensive is seen in the fact that 40% of people of the world are living with less than 1 dollar a day.

The plight of the working people in the advanced capitalist countries today is that of large scale destruction of jobs, cut backs in social facilities, and casualisation and contractisation of the work force. In developed capitalist societies, employment is not safe. The legal protection whatsoever was there is sought to be abolished and absolute higher and fire right is being demanded by the employers. Against these massive strike actions are taking place in many countries of the world. The last French truck workers strike which inspite of the heavy repression forced the government to retreat. General strike were there against these policies in Greece, Italy, Israel and in many other countries. The latest strike in South Korea is a big pointer. The government of Korea wanted to introduce changes in the legal framework to bring South Korean labour laws in line with the global standard". That is to impose the World Bank and IMF condition that there must be global standard in the labour laws. The government sought to pass a law taking away the right of the workers for permanent employment and allied system existed in the country. They wanted to give complete higher and fire right to the employers and to take away the right of the workers to strike etc. The opposition in the Parliament played a very big role in resisting this plan. Over 2 lakhs of workers went on strike on 26th of December and the next day more workers joined the strike demanding the attempt to bring the law should be dropped. However, the ruling party called a meeting of the assembly secretly at 6 in the morning and brought their members for voting for the bill and passed the Bill. However, the strike spread and almost all the trade unions joined in the fray. The strike was lead by 5lakh strong Korean Federation of Trade Unions which is supposed to be illegal and the legal trade unions also with a membership of 1.2

million supported this strike. Finally, the government was forced to make a retreat though temporarily. Thus, national action of Korean workers directly against the government policies forced the government a retreat.

No explanation is needed about the policies pursued by the Narasimha Rao government. Which under the plea that there is no way out other than integrating with the capitalist world submitting to the conditionalities prescribed by the World Bank and IMF. The development strategy we have followed after attainment of freedom was to achieve self-sufficiency in vital sectors of economy and to build infrastructural base to take the country forward. This was sought to be jeopardised by agreeing to implement the dictates of IMF and World Bank. The CITU took initiative to fight back this offensive. We have not only mobilised trade unions but also mobilised the mass organisations under the Sponsoring Committee of trade unions and mass organisations, in this fight. However, we must note that though our fight had its own impact but could not succeed in making the government retrace from this retrograde policies.

However, in the last general elections, no single political party could muster majority in the Parliament and a thirteen party United Front was formed with a Common Minimum Programme. A government came to power under the Prime Ministership of Deve Gowda. In the CMP, many steps are promised which are intended to improve the living conditions of people and a pledge has been made to uphold secularism and democracy. To quote, "The United Front declares that secularism means there should be separation of state and religion and also notes that it is this definition that has been accepted as correct by the Supreme Court in numerous decisions. Attempts by sectarian or communal forces to erode the multi ethnic, multi religious, muti linguistic character of our society will be strongly resisted".

In the sphere of economic policy, the Common Minimum Programme assured that "It is growth which create jobs and income. Self-reliance has been an article of faith since independence and the UF government will adopt such growth oriented policies that leads to greater self-reliance".

Thus, in the CMP, a growth oriented self-reliant development policy is envisaged. But the government is vehemently pursuing the policy of earlier Congress government forgetting the fact that, this was one of the reasons for the defeat of the Congress(I) party in the last general elections.

The government is succumbing to the World

Bank pressures and the policy of privatisation of public sector industries is continued. Of late, it has decided to open up the financial sector and as part of it, multinational penetration is to be allowed in the insurance sector. The transmission too is to be privatised in the power sector. Foreign and Indian private capital is invited to the atomic energy generation. The foreign multinationals are allowed to raise their equity to 74 to 100% in many industries.

While we talk of public sector, we must not forget that, today it comprises of 60% of Indian industry. Out of this 245 industries, 80 are in the sick list, of which 60 have been referred to BIFR. The remedy being sought by the government in a nutshell is that, profitable public sector units are to be privatised through disinvestment and the unprofitable ones are to be closed down and there is no fresh investment in the public sector. In other words, it is privatisation of profits and nationalisation of losses.

Till 1995, government carried out disinvestment of 10,000 crores. The latest report is that, the foreign multinationals are buying up shares in a big way. The UTI which bought lot of shares of the public sector companies is now selling it to foreign companies. Two lakh fifty thousand shares of Hindustan Petro Chemicals Ltd (HPCL) and six lakh shares of Bharat Petroleum and fifty thousand shares of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd (VSNL) were sold to foreign companies by UTI. Thus, the profitable companies are slowly transferred to foreign private capital. They will be controlling the companies. As I quoted earlier, the CMP enjoins the government to pursue the policy of self reliance, which exactly is practiced in the reverse.

Take the example of oil production in the country. When India became independent, the foreign companies operating in India such as Burmashell, COL-TEX etc, said that, there is no oil reserves in the country for commercial production. We later on organised ONGC and other companies for oil exploration and production. We could attain 73% self sufficiency in oil production at some point of time. When Rajiv Gandhi was in power, he took steps to reduce government investment in oil sector and private capital was invited.

30 oil fields which were developed by ONGC has been given to the private companies. But they could not produce much oil. Out of the 30 million tonnes of oil production, private companies share is only 0.66 million tonnes. The oil produced by the private companies is to be brought by government at international prices. We have to find 33,000 crores of rupees

to meet our oil needs for the current year. We know that the internal production is on the decrease while the demand is going up. In the latest budget, the Finance Minister Chidambaram offered lot of concessions to attract private capital into oil sector, which is a ruinous path, and will lead us to completely depend on foreign multinationals giving a go bye to self reliance.

The policy in power sector is also the same. During the 8th Plan, power production expected was 33,800 M.W. But production was only 18,000 M.W. This was mainly due to the refusal of government to give the required finance for the development of power. Instead they invited foreign and Indian private companies to the power sector. Though they have given permission to start six fast track projects, none could start production yet. The cost per unit produced by them will be Rs 4 to 5. The result is that, large part of the country is facing blackouts and load shedding which will lead to power riots in the country. The high cost power will lead to a high cost economy. The competitive edge of the Indian industry will be lost internally and externally which will hasten the process of de-industrialisation and India will become a market for the foreign multinationals. We cannot forget the fact that, low cost power and free power provided for our agriculture by the government helped us to achieve self-sufficiency in food productions. All these are going to face adverse conditions. The best power engineering industry we have developed will also be ruined. The privatising of the banking and insurance is also nothing but surrender to the foreign multinationals.

The government had promised level playing ground for Indian and foreign industries but as a matter of fact, private industry is preferred against public sector and foreign companies are preferred against both. The excise and customs duty policy will prove this fact. The customs relaxation as part of globalisation goes against many Indian industries, together with the excise duty hike. Any patriotic government of the world will definitely choose to protect its industry but to our bad luck, our government is following a policy of discrimination against our own industry.

Confederation of Indian industry (CII), ASSO-CHAM, Steel Authority of India Ltd Hindustan News Print Ltd and many others are complaining that the foreign companies are allowed to dump their goods in India and to sell it at below their production cost. Therefore, the level playing ground promised is also practiced in the negative.

The government of India has failed to implement the revival package of NTC Mills which will lead to the loss of employment for more than a lakh of workers. The steps being contemplated to privatise the drugs industry, which was producing all the essential medicines for our people at cheaper cost will be a bonanza for private capital, Indian and foreign to corner huge profit by raising the prices of medicines sky high. Many important industries which can be revived with some financial help is not being done. In sum, the path now being followed by the new government is not only against the working class but also against our nation as a whole. Country's self-reliant development is compromised and foreign domination in many sectors are encouraged and finally, it weaken the foundation of our independence too.

A dangerous situation is now developing in the sphere of employment. The new growth policy being adopted by the capitalist system utilising the modern technology not only not creating jobs but cutting down jobs in a big way.

What is being proposed in the Central Pay Commission Report? 3.5 lakh posts will be abolished and a reduction of 30% of the workforce in 10 years. In every state, the governments have stopped new recruitments and in industries no new job coming, but by the introduction of computers and other methods of rationalisation in the name of making the industry competitive job losses are in the agenda.

The annual rate of unemployment is on the increase year after year. By the year 2000, above 10 crores will be the total number of unemployed in India. The increasing redencies and sickness in various sectors will lead to the loss of millions of jobs.

We have to understand the fate of the jobless in the country today and the ever increasing frightening number of the unemployed. This question cannot be solved by any sectarian approach an all out fight for employment and unemployment benefit till jobs are provided is needed. National action is the only remedy.

The CITU was trying to mobilise trade unions and mass organisation in the fight against the new economic policies, launched strong movements but as pointed out earlier that we did not succeed in changing the same.

In this circumstances, we have to move further to mobilise all the trade unions of the country irrespective of their political and organisational identities. United collective nation based strong action only can force the government to retrace. Therefore, we have to address ourselves to the task of uniting the total

working class for a mighty national action.

The CITU while tying for the National Confederation of Indian Trade Unions must take steps to widen the unity of trade unions in all possible ways.

The workers irrespective of the trade union affiliations are coming together and join with the officers organisations to fight back the offensive in many industries. The industrywise public sector workers action is planned for April 2nd which will be also joined by the insurance workers. The bankmen have declared to go for action on 4th of April. All these goes to show that the workers are increasingly coming together in united actions.

The CITU should take the lead for mobilising the private and public including the government employees for a nation based working class action.

The government though promised did not take steps to bring the trade union recognition bill in the Parliament. They are trying to escape by saying that there is no unanimity among trade unions. This is an alibi to dodge the issue. This cannot be allowed. We must launch an agitation for forcing the government to bring forth a bill for the same.

The power price increase for agriculture and large part of the country goes without power will have its own impact among the peasantry. They have already started agitations. 30,000 peasants have assembled before the Rajasthan Secretariat in Jaipur holding dharna for many days demanding power and power at the earlier rates.

In Andhra Pradesh too, a movement is developing among the peasants against power rate hike. This is going to develop in every other state. The CITU should take steps to join with them in this fight and in the fight for allied issues.

The agricultural workers are agitating for a national minimum wage, which though agreed to in the national minimum programme is not yet implemented. We must rally around agriculture workers in their fight for a national minimum wage.

The disruptive forces trying to divide the working class on the basis of religion, caste and community is to be opposed by us since it will cut the root of workers unity.

In short, the CITU should not confine our activities to the day to day demand of its members must take the lead in the fight of all the toilers and above all mobilise everybody against the new economic policies which goes against our national interests.

8.3.1997

New Delhi

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX NUMBERS FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

(BASE 1982 = 100)

Centre	Dec, 96	Jan 97	Lining factor for Old Base	Centre	Dec, 96	Jan 97	Lining factor for Old
All India	350	350	4.93	Barbil	326	317	5.00
Gudur	361	360	4.33	Rourkela	309	310	3.59
Guntur	350	347	5.60	Amritsar	317	312	5.19
Hyderabad	319	323	5.23	Ludhiana	314	316	—
Visakhapatnam	330	337	—	Ajmer	350	348	5.01
Warrangal	336	333	—	Jaipur	344	342	5.17
Doom-Dooma Tinsukia	321	317	4.05	Chennai	377	378	-
Guwahati	351	349	—	Coimbatore	344	342	5.35
Labac-Silchar	307	293	3.96	Coonoor	377	378	4.80
Mariani-Jorhat	336	333	3.95	Madurai	371	379	5.27
Rangapara-Tezpur	339	330	4.29	Salem	375	379	—
Jamshedpur	337	333	4.68	Tiruchirapally	402	423	—
Jharia	294	295	4.63	Agra	327	326	—
Kodarma	310	306	5.43	Ghaziabad	338	335	—
Monghyr	341	339	5.29	Kanpur	344	343	4.69
Noamundi	339	335	4.58	Saharanpur	319	316	5.06
Ranchi-Hatia	334	329	—	Varanasi	363	359	5.12
Ahmedabad	348	348	4.78	Asansol	318	315	4.77
Vadodara	367	368	—	Calcutta	356	345	4.74
Bhavanagar	369	367	4.99	Darjeeling	298	300	4.55
Rajkot	353	351	—	Durgapur	359	355	—
Surat	367	368	—	Haldia	375	372	—
Faridabad	347	351	—	Howrah	361	353	4.12
Yamunanagar	334	333	5.53	Jalpaiguri	308	304	4.16
Srinagar	331	337	5.47	Raniganj	312	310	4.40
Bangalore	351	352	5.66	Chandigarh	329	330	—
Belgaum	369	370	—	Delhi	366	364	4.97
Hubli-Dharwar	349	349	—	Pondicherry	428	423	—
Mercara	367	368	—	<u>Additional series of Labour Bureau</u>			
Alwaye	361	362	5.19	Kothagudem	361	362	3.25
Mundakayam	369	362	—	Himachal Pradesh	332	333	3.75
Quilon	381	397	—	Bhilwara	353	348	3.20
Thiruvananthapuram	379	371	—	Chindwara	363	362	2.59
Bhalaghat	340	334	5.24	Tripura	337	323	4.37
Bhilai	316	318	3.49	Goa	394	399	3.40
Bhopal	371	367	5.46	Note: Figures on old base can be obtained by multiplying the Index Number on New Base by the linking factor given and rounding off the result to nearest whole number.			
Indore	354	348	5.18	—Dash denotes new centres under 1982 series,			
Jabalpur	358	358	6.41				
Mumbai	380	381	5.12				
Nagpur	361	366	4.99				
Nasik	368	368	—				
Pune	372	375	—				
Solapur	372	373	5.03				

MAMMOTH RALLY BY CITU BEEDI WORKERS

The Beedi Workers organised under All India Beedi Workers Federation (CITU) held a mammoth rally at Delhi in pursuance of their following main and long standing demands:

- 1) The Excise Duty concessions given to mini-cigarettes be withdrawn, and withdrawal of exemption of cess and excise duty from unbranded beedis below 20 lakhs.
- 2) Pending need based wage, Rs.50/- as basic wage for 1000 beedis at 1300 points of AICPI (1960=100) with 5 paise per point per day VDA. Equal wage to women workers.
- 3) Housing facilities be provided to all Beedi Workers. 4) Pension to all Beedi workers without diverting Provident Fund. 5) Identity cards to all Beedi Workers including the home-based workers. Around 10,000 (ten thousand) workers came from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, U.P., Bihar, W.Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. Most of the participants were women, particularly from Maharashtra, M.P., and Rajasthan. One woman of 103 years age

came from barmer, Rajasthan.

The huge procession started from Ramlila Ground and reached the Parliament Street police Station near Jantar Mantar after traversing about 6 Km. route. The Police blocked the processionists at Parliament Street Police Station, where a public meeting was held.

The public meeting was addressed by a number of MPs, namely, E. Balanandan, Hannan Mollah, Md. Salim, Dipankar Mukherjee, Nilotpal Basu, O. Bharathan, A. Sampath, Radhakrishna Murthy, Ram Chandra Dome, etc.

Among the CITU leaders who addressed the rally were P.K. Ganguly, Md. Nizamuddin, Vimala Ranadive, Mangala Hotgi, Nurjehan, Tanulal Mandalwar, Md. Rafique, Abdul Sattar, Md. Zaffar, Md. Khasim, R.K. Swamy.

A delegation will meet the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Labour Minister to submit the memorandum. The federation decided to meet at Jabalpur shortly to decide further course of action if the demands are not met.



Beedi Workers' Rally, 3rd March — A section of women workers preparing to join the procession at Ramlila Ground.

Finance Minister Assures to Gradually Raise Excise Duty in Mini- Cigarettes to give Succour to Beedi Industry.

Following the mammoth rally of Beedi workers organized by the CITU in the Capital on 3rd March, a delegation of the CITU and its A.I. Beedi Workers' Federation met the Finance Minister, Sri P. Chidambaram on 4th March afternoon.

The delegation was led by E. Balanandan, MP and President of CITU and accompanied by P.K. Ganguly, Secretary, CITU and General Secretary of the A.I. Beedi Workers Federation (CITU), Abdul Hasnat Khan, C.R. Sarkar and Md. Salim, M.P. and Nilotpal Basu, M.P.

The delegation put forward three specific demands:-

1) To raise the excise duty on Mini-cigarettes to the original Rs.120/- per thousand sticks.

2) To withdraw the increase of 2 paise in excise duty in Beediper packet of 20s as proposed in the present budget.

3) To withdraw the exemption granted in payment of cess and excise duty from unbranded beedis below 20 lakhs, because the benefits are being taken away by the big manufactures at the cost of the small manufactures, and Beedi workers are deprived of welfare facilities.

The Finance Minister listened carefully to the rationale of the demands explained by the delegation, who pointed out that the Beedi industry was in crisis due to the Mini cigarettes and workers were not getting work not more than 3 or 4 days in a week. He assured that he will consider them so that the goal is achieved gradually.

The delegation will also meet the Prime Minister and Labour Minister on 5th March.

Labour Minister Assures to Call Meeting to Discuss Beedi Workers' Demands.

Following the mammoth rally of Beedi Workers organised by the CITU in the Capital on 3rd March, a delegation of the CITU met the Labour Minister, Sri M Arunachalam on 5th March.

The delegation was led by Md Salim, MP and accompanied by PK Ganguly, Secretary of CITU and General Secretary of AI Beedi Workers Federation, Vimal Ranadive, Secretary, CITU, Abul Hasnat Khan, C.R. Sarkar and R K Swamy.

The delegation raised several burning problems



of the Beedi workers concerning Minimum Wage, Identity Card, Housing, Coverage under Provident Fund, ESI, Medical facilities, Welfare Scheme, Pension, Payment of Cess by the manufacturers for the Welfare Fund, etc which all are within the purview of the Labour Ministry.

[Cont'd On Page 16]

Beedi Workers' Rally, 3rd March — Women Workers lining up at the front

SOP FOR THE POOR, BONANZA FOR THE RICH

The Secretariat of Centre of Indian Trade Unions has issued the following statement to the Press:

The General Budget for the year 1997-98 presented in the Parliament by the Union Finance Minister, Shri P.Chidambaram though gives some sops to the poor and the middle class, is essentially extending a large amount of concessions to Indian and foreign capital and share market operators. The budget reflects continuance of the same pro-MNC liberalisation policies, the correction of which was much needed for self reliant economic development.

The budget does not reflect any serious effort for employment generation in face of rapidly increasing unemployment, nor any effective step for curbing the inflation, although unemployment and price rise are the two major ills affecting the overwhelming majority of population.

CITU welcomes the enhancement of Provident Contributions from 8.33% to 10% and from 10% to 12%. We also welcome the enhancement of Gratuity amount from Rs.1 lakh to Rs.2.5 lakhs to all workers. We express regret that the united demands of the Central Trade Unions to enhance the exemption limit of Income Tax to Rs.60,000/- has not been accepted by the Finance Minister. Though 5% reduction has been given to the lowest income bracket, the reduction to the higher brackets is 10% which also shows more favour to the higher income bracket groups and tells upon revenue income.

The Government proposal to amend the FERA by removing all the deterrent measures against the offenders has given a big concession to the foreign exchange violators who are funneling huge funds out of the country using dubious methods of over-invoicing and under-invoicing and indulging in hawala transactions. While we welcome the exemption of excise duty from all jute products which will help in revival of the Jute industry, the Government should have withdrawn the excise duty on cotton yarn which would help the cotton industry also which is already under severe stress. Strangely enough, the Government has given concession to the Polyester yarn industry. The reduction in excise duty on items used by upper strata, i.e. Air conditioners, cosmetics etc. is only meant to help the manufacturers of these products to sell more of their products in the market with

ease and would largely benefit the foreign producers also.

The budget does not provide sufficient funds for development of infrastructure industries. The recommendations of the Disinvestment Commission that the Government should not invest in the sick industries will seriously jeopardise the prospects of revival of sick industrial units. CITU strongly oppose this policy and demands that as committed in the CMP the sick units must be given necessary assistance by the government. In the name of boosting oil production, the government is giving concessions to the foreign multinational companies in the matter of indigenous oil production which will only strengthen their control over the Indian Oil industry. It is also a matter of concern that Urban land ceiling is also being enhanced which will facilitate the big business houses. The budget does not provide sufficient funds for development of R&D and technology within India. What is given is marginal and much below the requirement for developing self-reliant economy in the country.

The government has not made any serious efforts for the resource mobilisation in the budget. The corporate sector which has borrowed Rs.28,000 crores from the Nationalised banks and not returning the loan should have been forced to repay the loans since they all have sufficient resources to repay the loans. This money could have been utilised in the development of the infrastructural industry in the country.

The policy of patronising Foreign capital by reduction of customs duty on finished goods has been continued in this year's budget as well, although the need of the hour was to correct some of the distortions created by previous budgets.

The reduction in customs duty on cold rolled coils and pig iron will also adversely affect the domestic steel industry which is already reporting surplus stock and under severe strain because of reduction in customs duty in the last budget.

The steps proposed by the Finance Minister to mop up black money is just an eye wash. This was earlier tried by Dr.Manmohan Singh. The experience this time may not be different.

NOT MUCH CHEER FOR THE COMMON MAN

□ M.K.PANDHE

General Secretary, CITU

The General Budget presented in Parliament this evening by the Union Finance Minister, P.Chidambaram, has given some sops for the poor people which are very difficult to reach them since they are being implemented through corrupt administrative machinery. The real thrust of the budget however is to give concessions to share market investors as well as Indian and foreign big business houses.

The workers will no doubt welcome the enhancement of rate of PF contribution from 8.33% to 10% and from 10% to 12%, while the enhancement of gratuity ceiling to Rs.2.5 lakhs meets the long pending demand of the trade unions, the Finance Minister has not made any announcement regarding the removal of ceilings in the Bonus Act.

The proposed amendment in FERA will be a boon to the violators of this Act which is resulting in resources secretly going outside the country. The recent raids on the business establishments has hinted the need for stringent action by the Government against these violators.

The Finance Minister has not conceded the unanimous demand of the trade unions to enhance the exemption limit in the Income Tax Act to Rs.60,000/-. While for the lowest bracket the incidence of income tax reduction is only 5%, for the higher bracket group the reduction is 10% which will only help the richer strata.

The reduction of customs duty on cold rolled steel/pig iron and some chemical products will adversely affect the Indian steel producers who are already facing difficulties to find market in India due to reduction of customs duty in last year's budget.

The reduction of excise duty on Air-conditioners, cosmetics and several other items used by the elite class is only meant to help the producers of these products to find a market in India.

The extent of enhancement of tax of mini cigarettes will still enable their manufacturers to compete with Bidi industry affecting the job of lakhs of Bidi workers.

The claim of employment orientation in the budget is not likely to materialise since there is all round reduction in overall jobs in the country. The hopes expressed by the Finance Minister to reduce the fiscal deficit to 4.5% of the GDP is not likely to be achieved. The actual deficit may be much higher.

Despite concessions offered to the share market and foreign investors, the budgetary proposals will not reduce the stagnation in the economy since the population below the poverty line will continue to grow much faster and shrink the market as a result of the budgetary proposals. The budget will thus not bring much cheer to the common people of India in the long run.

Prime Minister fails to give Assurance on Revival of NTC Mills: Workers to Launch Demonstration Again.

Following the dharna and road jam by NTC workers at Delhi on 25th February, a large delegation of 28 leaders of all the constituent unions of the Joint Action Committee of Textile Workers belonging to INTUC, CITU, AITUC, HMS, BMS, UTUC and TUCC met the Prime Minister, Sri H.D. Deve Gowda on 26th February at his residence. The delegation was led by MPs, namely E. Balanandan, Basudev Acharya, Ajay Mukhopadhyaya, Amar Ray Proddhan and Pramathesh Mukherjee.

The delegation demanded immediate implementation of the agreed revival package as was earlier assured by the Prime Minister. But the Prime Minister failed to give assurance whether the Government will go ahead with the implementation process at all, on the plea that the Maharashtra Government is not willing to allow sale of the surplus land, and the Finance Ministry is not willing to advance any money.

On pressing demands, he only assured to call a meeting again at "high level" to discuss the issue. The trade unions demanded that they must be invited to attend the meeting, and pointed out that since the unanimous agreement on modernization of the mills as per the report of the Textile Research Associations was arrived at with the trade unions, the Government having approved the same, cannot flout that and make any separate scheme behind the back of the trade unions to seal the fate of the NTC mills.

Later in the evening, the Joint Action Committee held a meeting. They expressed total dissatisfaction at the attitude of the Government and decided to launch another demonstration in a more massive way at Delhi during the current Budget Session itself. The exact date of demonstration will be fixed in a meeting to be held on 20th March at Delhi.

Central Demonstration at Delhi on 29th April

The "Save IDPL Joint National Convention" held at Andhra Pradesh Bhawan, New Delhi on 19th March evening unanimously adopted a resolution calling for a mass demonstration by IDPL workers and their families at Delhi on 29th April, 1997. The workers and employees and their families will come to Delhi from all the plants and offices of IDPL in the country.

The convention was conducted by a presidium consisting of Sriballabh Panigrahi, MP, K M Khan, MP; Asim Bala, MP; Harish Rawat (INTUC); Sunil Shastri (INTUC); Y D Sharma (AITUC); Anil Wadhawan (FMRAI) and P K Ganguly (CITU).

The resolution was moved by P K Ganguly (CITU) and seconded by Harish Rawat (INTUC) and Y D Sharma (AITUC).

Among others who spoke were Sribhallabh Panigrahi, MP, President of IDPL Karmachari Sangh (Mktg) and IDPL Employees Union (Corp. office) (INTUC); K M Khan, MP, President of IDPL Staff and Workers' Union-Hyderabad (INTUC) and Chief Patron, Federation of IDPL Officers Association (INTUC); Asim Bala, MP; Jibon Roy, MP; Sunil Shastri, National President of IDPL Jai Mazdoor Forum (INTUC); M L Thaplial, General Secretary, IDPL Kamgar Union—Rishikesh (CITU); Jago Ram, General Secretary, IDPL Karmachari Sangh (HO) (INTUC); RC Gupta, General Secretary, IDPL Employees Union (Corp Office) (INTUC); A Srinivas Reddy, General Secretary, IDPL Hyderabad Kamgar Union (CITU); Sanak Khastagir (FMRAI); J P Tripathi, General Secretary, UPDPL Karmachari Sangh (INTUC); Dharpal (AITUC-Gurgaon); Dharmvir Shastri (BMS, Gurgaon); N P Singh, General Secretary, All India Managers' Association (INTUC); N Narasimha Reddy (HMS-Hyderabad); Mahinder Singh (Officers Association, Rishikesh); D K Singh (Supervisors Assn, Rishikesh); Ramkrishna Reddy (INTUC-Hyderabad); Mamchand (INTUC); L Ashok Kumar, General Secretary, IDPL Hyderabad Officers Association and GVS Rama Rao, Vice President, IDPL Hyderabad Supervisors Association.

The resolution condemned the Ministry of Chemicals for recommending closure of IDPL and called upon the government to reject the Ferguson's revival scheme and revive IDPL on the basis of the revival plans given by the trade unions without any retrenchment.

The speakers condemned the revival package

given by the Chartered Accountants, M/s A F Ferguson, which envisaged a cost of Rs 710 crores after retrenching 5200 workers, whereas the trade unions' revival scheme envisaged a cost of only Rs 92 crores without a single retrenchment.

The resolution further demanded immediate release of salaries of IDPL workers, which have not been paid since January, Salaries of UPDPL workers, which have not been paid since the last 10 months, for immediate start of productions, with installed capacity, which have been stopped from October, 1996 and release of working capital and accountability of the officials by a Monitoring Committee with the trade unions, and CBI enquiry against corruption at high level of management.

ACTION PROGRAMME:

The Action Programme called for mobilisation of all sections of workers and a campaign programme amongst the people through conventions, street corner meetings, processions, gate meetings, postering, leaflet distribution, etc culminating in the Delhi rally on 29th April with the slogan "29th April Delhi Chalo to save IDPL."

Sd/- Sriballabh Panigrahi, MP.
President, IDPL Karmachari Sangh
and IDPL Employees Union
(Corporate Office) (INTUC)

Sd/- Harish Rawat
President, National
Federation of IDPL
Employees (INTUC) and
Patron, Antibiotics Projects
(Rishikesh) Karmachari Sangh
(INTUC)

Sd/- K.M. Khan, M.P.
Chief Patron, Federation of
Officers Association (INTUC)

Sd/- Sunil Shastri,
National President, IDPL IDPL
Jai Mazdoor Forum

Sd/ Anadi Sahu, MP
Working President
IDPL Karmachari Sangh (INTUC)

Sd/- M L Thaplial
General Secretary
IDPL Kamgar Union
(Rishikesh) (CITU)

Sd/- Jago Ram
General Secretary
IDPL Employees Union
(HO) (INTUC)

Sd/- S Srinivas Reddy
General Secretary
IDPL Hyderabad Kamgar Union
(CITU)

R C Gupta
General Secretary
IDPL Employees Union
(Corp Office) (INTUC)

Y D Sharma
(AITUC)

Sd/- Sudhir Kumar
Joint General Secretary
FMRAI

Sd/- P.K. Ganguly
Secretary, CITU

Resolution of the Convention

The Save IDPL joint National Convention held at Andhra Pradesh Bhawan, New Delhi on 19th March, 1997, expresses serious concern and anguish at the report that the Ministry of Chemicals has recommended to the Cabinet for closure of the Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd. This was reported to Sri G Venkatswamy, Chairman of COPU by the Secretary, Ministry of Chemicals. Sri Venkatswamy accompanied the joint delegation to the Prime Minister on 11th March, 1997.

It is to be noted that the revival plan prepared by the Chartered Accountant, M/s AF Ferguson envisaged a cost of Rs 710 crores for the revival of IDPL, that too after retrenchment of 5200 workers. Already the workforce in IDPL has been brought down from 14,000 to 7,500 by VRS. This was unanimously rejected by all the trade unions in a meeting held by the Chemical Ministry on 11th February.

The trade unions have jointly prepared a revival plan which would cost only about Rs 92 crores without any retrenchment. This was communicated to the Minister of Chemicals, when a joint delegation met him on 25th February. But unfortunately, despite his assurance, he has recommended closure of the company.

IDPL is one of the largest drugs and pharmaceutical companies in the world in public sector, which manufactures all life saving and essential drugs from the basic stage to the finished product at reasonable cost. If this company is closed, it will adversely affect the life and health of the Indian people and the lives of 7,500 workers and their families. The multinationals will sell the drugs at exorbitant prices, to which the common people will have no access.

It is also reprehensible that the Govt has stopped productions in IDPL since October, 1996 and withheld salaries of the workers since January, 1997. In UPDPL workers have not received salaries for the last 10 months.

This Convention condemns the move of the Govt to close down this company and demands its revival in consultation with the trade unions.

This convention urges upon all the Members of Parliament in particular, and the people at large to come forward so as to exert pressure on the Government to save IDPL.

Action Programme

To mobilise all workers in all the plants and offices of IDPL in the country and other workers and the people with the slogan of "Save IDPL," this convention draws the following action programme for implementation throughout the country in pursuance of the following demands:

1. Gate meetings and conventions in all the plants and offices with immediate effect
2. Processions, rallies and street corner meetings in all plants and offices
3. Postering and leaflet distribution.
4. Central Demonstration at Delhi on 29th April, 1997 by workers and their families with the slogan "Delhi Chalo to Save IDPL"

Demands:

1. Revive IDPL with existing work force
2. Reject AF Ferguson's Revival Plan
3. Accept Trade Unions' Revival Plan
4. Grant Working Capital
5. Pay Regular Salaries, including in UPDPL
6. IDPL should be placed in the core sector.
7. The Govt must ensure that all Govt departments, including Defence, Para-Military forces, Railways, CGHS, etc must purchase the medicines produced by IDPL.

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9th Conference of the CITU

21ST TO 26TH APRIL 1997

Ernakulam (Cochin)

Reception Committee

Telephones: 0484-338470, 0484-338460 (Fax also)

V. G. Bhaskaran Nair Nagar

(Jawahar Lal Nehru International Stadium), Ernakulam 682 025

Special Issue of 'The Working Class' May 1997.

Date : 15.2.1997

Ref : Spectal Issue of The Working Class on to the Occasion of 9th Conference of CITU.

Dear Sir,

I am happy to inform you that the 9th Conference of the CITU will be held at Ernakulam (Cochin, Kerala) from 21st to 26th April 1997. The Conference will review the activities of the CITU since 8th Conference held at Patna in March 1994 and chalk out the programme of CITU. It will also review the National and International developments in political and economic fields and draw proper conclusions for the Trade Union Movement.

Over 2500 delegates from all over India will participate in the deliberations of the Conference. Several fraternal delegates from Central Trade Unions Organisations and industry-wise Federations will also be attending the Conference. We are also expecting about 35 to 40 foreign delegates from all over the world to attend and greet the conference.

on this important occasion we propose to bring out a special number of the CITU monthly journal 'The Working Class' to be released on 1st of May 1997. The Working Class is being regularly published for the last 26 years conveying news and views on various issues of national and international Trade Union movement and has wide circulation all over India and foreign countries.

We request you to please release a suitable advertisement for the journal. A folder containing the necessary information for the advertisement is enclosed herewith.

Kindly send the matters ensuring to reach us by 15th March '97 will Demand Draft payable to 'The Working Class'.

Soliciting your response.

With regards.

Yours sincerely,

(M.K. Pandhe)
General Secretary
& Chairman, Editorial Board of
'The Working Class'.

The Editor
The Working Class,
New Delhi-110001,
INDIA
Fax : 91-11-3355856

Dear Sir,

I/We wish to release an advertisement for the special issue of the 'the Working Class' on the occasion of the 9th Conference of CITU being held at Ernakulam (Cochin) from 21st to 26th April 1997. the relevant information is given below:

Yours faithfully,

Seal & Signature

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ON SECRET BALLOT: UF GOVT MUST KEEP ITS COMMITMENT

Jibon Roy, MP, and secretary CITU, has demanded in a zero hour mention in Rajya Sabha that UF Govt must keep its commitment made in Common Minimum Programme in respect of introduction of Secret ballot for recognition of unions and determination of collective bargaining agency. Jibon Roy commented that in the Common Minimum Programme various commitments has been made for various section of the society. But UF Govt is yet to honour both the vital commitments, made to working class regarding secret ballot and workers' participation in management. The govt is pressing through the liberalisation policy with all enthusiasm but in the matter of commitment made to the working class, nothing has been done. in stead of bringing in legislation regarding secret ballot as written in the Common Minimum Programme, the matter has been referred to so called bipartite committee. Referring to the reply of the ministry in reply to a question in the matter mentioning about objection of some trade unions in the matter, Jibon Roy, told in the Parliament that Govt has made the commitment in the CMP to the entire nation and not to some dissenting trade unions. "Workers should not be treated as slave and should be allowed to decide on their leaders" Sri Roy asserted in the Parliament demanding early legislation on secret ballot instead of further bungling on the issue.

SICK PSUs MUST NOT BE REFERRED TO BIFR; GOVT MUST REVIVE IT

Dipankar Mukherjee, MP and Working Committee member of CITU, while participating in the discussion on public sector, in the Rajya Sabha on 14-3-1997 demanded that sick PSUs must be taken out of the purview of BIFR and SICA and Govt must act on priority basis to revive the sick PSUs. He pointed out that Sick Industrial Companies Act (SICA) was never originally envisaged to cover public sector companies, but only to deal with sickness of industries in private sector where the security of huge public money in the form of loans/advances/investment from banks and public sector financial institutions at the disposal of private sector owners was involved.

SICA outlined its basic purpose as securing the principles of article 39(b) and (c) of the constitution dealing on the need to ensure proper distribution the material resource of the community for common good and to avoid concentration wealth and means of production to the common detriment. The inclusion of public sector in the purview of this SICA is thoroughly inconsistent with and infructuous to the basic spirit of the above Act, as enumerated above.

SICA was envisaged to provide for the process of locating the sickness in the companies in the private sector in incipient stage and also to provide for a revival package developed through BIFR route involving expertise of various agencies, which could otherwise be not organised by the sick company of their own. Moreover the aspect of security of the public funds already put in the sick company by the Govt owned financial institutions has to be ensured. But for public sector units wholly owned by the Govt such logic does not apply, since all expertise for drawing revival plan etc can well be organised by and from within the Govt and PSU network and revival process need not at all go through the most dilatory route of BIFR.

Shri Mukherjee reiterated that the time is the essence of any revival programme of sick unit since passage of time leads to escalation of revival cost. Experience of BIFR proceedings on various sick PSUs establishes beyond question that it is the concerned deptt/ministry of the govt that has consumed rather wasted maximum time in delaying the whole process and making revival costlier and difficult and it is the same govt that ultimately disowns the responsibility on the ground of high cost of revival. Meantime the particular sick PSU referred to BIFR has been denied even the working capital and sickness got further aggravated. The case of Hooghly Port and Dock was cited for which a revival plan was drawn in 1983 envisaging an investment of only Rs 8 crores but no action had been taken by the Govt on the same in long 13 years till date, and meantime cost has escalated manifold.

It was pointed out that Govt should not and cannot disown the responsibility of revival of the sick

PSUs and allow them to close down. It must seriously consider the replacement cost of the same. If the Govt has minimum concern over country's basic interest, it cannot allow public sector fertilizer units to continue in endemic sickness while importing thousands of tonnes of urea spending thousands of crores of rupees. If all the fertilizer units in PSU are revived, they can produce 22 lakh tonnes of urea for the country. It is because of the inordinate delay of the Govt in taking concrete decision, sickness got aggravated further. It must be noted that it would take Rs 2500 crores to have another fertilizer factory like one at Haldia but it would take Rs 900 crore only, to revive the Haldia Fertilizer factory. It must also be noted that the products of the most of the sick PSUs are needed by the country and are having vibrant market. And instead of allowing them to close down Govt must consider the "replacement cost" of the same and also the import cost. It must take into account the "opportunity cost" as well.

It has been pointed out that out of 244 PSUs 98 are sick of which 46 units have been taken over from private sector. It has been popularly told that in order to save the workers Govt had taken over those sick units from private sector which is not wholly true. The products of those units, like wagon building units, heavy engineering units like Jessop and others, steel making unit like IISCO are all urgently needed by the country and this is also one of the basic reasons that those units have been taken over by Govt. But they had been taken over in the seventies and no investment for modernisation was made thereafter by the Govt resulting in sickness. And only through modernisation sickness can be cured and by no other means.

While commenting on the attitude of the Govt in the matter of revival of sick PSUs, Sri Mukherjee stated citing the example of IDPL that "Govt is saying it was not techno-economically viable, but if some one else could take it over, it could be made viable. This is not techno-economic language...you are saying it will be techno-economically viable if ownership changes. This betrays all theories of industrial economics." Similarly by not providing working capital and not allowing the sick unit to produce, gov't seeks to measure productivity and profitability and then argue on its non-viability, Shri Mukherjee asserted.

While commenting on the most negative attitude of the Govt towards workers Shri Mukherjee pointed out that comprehensive revival cannot be done without the participation of the workers. Capital & Labour

make the industry and we cannot have revival of sick units turning away from the labour factor. Labour should be taken into confidence and unions of sick PSUs should be associated in formulation of the revival package.

It was also pointed out that introspection of the financial details of the sick companies would clearly reveal that the loan and interest burden from Govt, financial institutions and banks accumulated and multiplied over the period has been one of the major factor for making the networth negative. For techno-economical viability of the sick PSUs and drawing a workable and viable revival plan waiver of those burden of loan and interest and/or capital restructuring is a must. Minimum economic prudence on the part of Govt warrants prompt action in restructuring capital of the sick PSUs, as closing down/liquidation of sick units cannot ensure return of loan and interest accumulation to gov't corpus. Rather revival of the sick units can make that possible at a time lag. And all these decisions have to be taken by the Govt if they are really willing to revive the sick units and save public wealth, BIFR do not and cannot have any role to play in this regard.

Sri Mukherjee reiterated that experience of sick PSUs with BIFR established beyond doubt that BIFR cannot be the route for revival of sick PSUs. Revival of sick PSUs requires a "willing Government" to act as an ideal promoter, to take concrete step in capital restructuring, and draw the comprehensive revival plan on a case to case basis in association with the management, trade unions, officers associations, state government and representatives of Banks and financial institutions and experts on the line. BIFR could never be a solution for the sick PSUs and cannot be a solution even now.

[From Page 8]

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour and Welfare, which looked into all the above issues in details and placed its report in the Parliament on 29th February, 1996, had indicated the Government for its failure to implement its 13-point recommendations on the above issues. Even the tripartite Committee on Welfare of Beedi Workers has become defunct.

The Labour Minister, with whom the Labour Secretary was present, assured the delegation to call a meeting with the CITU Beedi Workers' Federation in April to discuss the issues and then convene a meeting of the Tripartite Committee.

FOURTH INDIAN OCEAN REGION TU CONFERENCE

February 17-22, 1997, the city of Calcutta witnessed an assembly of a galaxy of leaders of trade union movement from the countries of Indian Ocean Region and beyond in the 4th Indian Ocean Region Trade Union Conference.

The exercise of building up co-ordination and cooperation between the trade union movement of the Indian Ocean Region started in late 1980's. From India CITU took active initiative as one of the co-ordinators of the conference alongwith the trade unions from Australia, South Africa and Philippines. The initiative received eager response from the trade unions in the Indian Ocean region in the face of the onslaught of liberalization policy let loose by various international agencies like World Bank, IMF, WTO etc. on the working class of the entire region. An active co-ordination and mutual cooperation developed in the course of three earlier T.U. conferences held in 1987, 1989, 1992, as more and more countries in the regions joined hands in the effort of building up solidarity and co-operation between the working class movement in the entire region.

The Fourth Indian Ocean region T.U. conference held at Calcutta was a historic event in the sense that the conference could draw the participation of highest number of countries in the entire Indian Ocean region besides drawing observers from the trade unions of several countries beyond the Indian Ocean Region. It was also historic because the conference platform witnessed the coming together, for a common cause, of the trade unions cutting across the international affiliations - everyone with an unified understanding on the need to unitedly confront the menace of globalisation and liberalization affecting the life of the working people. Trade Unions affiliated to ICFTU and WFTU besides those unaffiliated to any international organization joined the same platform to workout strategies to jointly fight back the attack of international finance capital.

As host country of this august international conference India demonstrated joint initiative of all the major trade union centres of the country to form a National committee to welcome the delegates

and make arrangements for the conference. Alongwith CITU, AITUC, INTUC, HMS, UTUC, TUCC, AICCTU and a number of industry-based trade union federations from steel, coal, fertilizers, power, transport, engineering, banking, port and Dock, insurance, education, central and state govt. organisations, covering the entire industrial and service sector joined the conference on behalf of the Indian working class.

Trade Union delegation from Australia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Mauritius, Malaysia, South Korea, Philippines, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Srilanka and India joined the conference as delegates.

Trade union delegations from ACFTU(China), CGT,(France), Turkmenistan, Kazakstan, and U.K., attended the conference as observers and greeted the conference.

Notably, from Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka more than one trade union centre participated. All together 75 foreign delegates and 110 Indian delegates attended the conference.

The inaugural Ceremony of the conference was held on 17th February in the Netaji Indoor Stadium. It was attended by thousands of workers and employees coming from Calcutta and adjoining areas. Jyoti Basu, Vice President of CITU and Chief Minister of West Bengal inaugurated the conference. Extending



On the dias: (Left to right) Rubina Jamil (Pakistan), Rob Lambert (Australia), Young-Koo Heo & Shin Joon Shik (South Korea)

Photo: J. Ballabh

a warm and welcome to the delegates he emphasised the urgent need for a united action of the working class against the offensive of World Bank/IMF dictated policies and in defense of self-reliance of the developing countries. Raghunath Reddy, Governor of West Bengal was the Chief Guest at the inaugural function. In his speech he expressed concern over the growing inequality and the widening income gap in the society all over the world liberalization. The presidium of the inaugural ceremony consist of M.K. Pandhe (CITU), A.B. Bardhan (AITUC), Lal Bahadur Singh (INTUC), Sunil Sen Gupta (UTUC), D.D. Shashtri(TUCC) and P M Kumar (AICCTU).

The delegate session of the conference continued for three days from 18th to 21st February 1997. In these sessions all the participating countries deliberated upon their experiences consequent upon the onset of liberalization policies in various countries and their impact on the rights and being conditions of the working class.

On behalf of the Indian delegates Chittabrata Mazumdar, Secretary, CITU presented a report on India. K.L. Mahendra General Secretary AITUC and Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary AICCTU also spoke on the occasion.

Reports from all participating countries revealed increasing assault on the life and living conditions of the common people in the wake of liberalization policy pursued by respective countries and mounting attack on the trade union and democratic rights of the people.

The South African delegate detailed out their experiences in the new democratic setup after the

defeat of Apartheid rule. The COSATU leaders expressed their strong reservation over the economic policy being pursued by the ANC Govt and stated that COSATU had been intervening at every stage through the mobilisation of working class and was able to bring about certain changes as well.

The Indonesian comrades, who, are braving state-terrorism and brutal attack by police and gangsters and are mobilising workers at the factories and cities to fight back the employers and the oppressive regime, also deliberated at the conference. In Indonesia all trade unions except those sponsored by the govt. are banned. So at the factory level and in the localities various platforms are developing to pressurize the employers and the authorities. "Some time we get success, some time arrest and beatings. We are building from scratch a new trade union movement" stated one of the Indonesian comrade.

Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) from Philippines also narrated their experiences in the face of repression both by the employers and their henchmen and the state machinery. KMU chairman Beltran said in clear terms that Philippines govt was backed by imperialist powers and was serving their interests. He emphasised that anti-imperialist struggle should be the foremost task of trade union movement.

The Australian experience also revealed as to how the right to collective bargaining earned by the Australian workers was being sought to be taken away through introduction of "Individual Contract System" legalised by the conservative government. "The whole conspiracy is to make trade unions irrelevant in the workplace and to achieve the same employers are giving various allurements through



A view of the plenary session of the 4th Indian Ocean Regional TU Conference held in Calcutta from Feb. 17 to 21.

Photo: J. Ballabh

individual contract system to win away workers from the collective bargaining forum," the Australian delegate reported while talking about the movement organised by the Australian workers against the offensive both at the industry and national level. They also emphasized the need for strengthening solidarity action by the workers of various countries, particularly against the attack by MNCs on workers' right.

Trade Union representatives of other countries in the region also reiterated similar experiences and called for developing united resistance by the workers.

The ACFTU delegate from China while greeting the conference spoke about their experience in the process of economic development within "Socialist market economy" where Chinese working class played intervening role in protecting the interests of the working class and also in shaping the govt. policies. He stressed the need for co-operation and solidarity among Trade Unions of developing countries against the onslaught of international finance capital at the behest of advanced Western powers.

South Korean delegates from KCTU came to participate in the conference from the hotbed of continuing strike action by the South Korean workers against the atrocious labour-law sought to be imposed on them by the South Korean Govt. They narrated as to how the struggle got expanded beyond the horizon of trade union movement, to draw the South Korean people in general into direct action which symbolized the struggle for democracy in the oppressive South Korean regime. Even the govt-sponsored trade union centre was ultimately compelled to join the strike action.

The delegate from CGT France while greeting the conference stressed the need for building up stronger solidarity and co-operation in the face of consolidation of the forces of capital on a global scale. The conference also held several workshop based group discussions on the impact of globalisation on the workers of various industries and service trades on strategies of the trade unions for confronting such impact and strengthening their organization in the face of mounting offensive on trade union rights. Various Industry-specific groups also met separately to discuss on strategies for mutual cooperation.

The women delegates to the conference, numbering 28, also had a separate session to exchange their experiences.

The conference adopted various resolutions

besides sector-specific resolutions on mutual co-operation and action strategies. Notable were the resolutions in support of the struggle of South Korean workers, against repression in Indonesia, on Thailand garment workers and on workers of Swaziland.

HSCL Workers' Struggle

The workers of the public sector construction company, Hindustan Steel Works Construction Ltd (HSCL) have been in the path of agitation against the conspiracy to wind up HSCL in a phased manner by the Govt of India. The company was established for industrial construction work and had in its credit successful construction work in almost all the major integrated steel plants of the country, besides in other areas of industry. But owing to discriminatory policy of the Govt of India, HSCL is being deprived of necessary investment for modernization and also the work orders from particularly the steel sector, where modernisation work is going on. As a result HSCL is suffering with severe underutilisation of capacity and rising overhead cost resulting in huge losses. The co-ordination committee of HSCL employees unions (CITU) had decided to hold convention and dharna in all HSCL units and sites on 14th February and a central dharna at the Head Quarter of HSCL at Calcutta on 10th March 1997.

Report received so far, reveals that in all the centres of HSCL workers responded to the programme of day-long dharna in followed by massive demonstration.

In Bhilai the Joint Convention of all Unions in HSCL and other fraternal trade unions was held in Bhilai steel township on 2nd March 1997 which was attended by 225 delegates and addressed by the leadership of unions affiliated to CITU, AITUC, HMS, INTUC and AICCTU, besides the engineers and officers' association, and unions of LIC, steel plants, contract workers and others.

Report from Visakhapatnam confirmed that 47 HSCL workers participated in day along dharna on 14th February 1997 at the Visakhapatnam project, followed by workers' rally at the end.

On 10th March, 460 HSCL workers gathered from all major units/projects of HSCL at its head quarter at Calcutta and stayed in dharna demonstrated all day long. From the rally message was sent to union steel Minister demanding intervention and negotiation on more work and investment on HSCL and conveying resolve of HSCL workers to fight against the discriminatory policy of the Govt of India against HSCL.

CITU 7TH STATE CONFERENCE IN TAMILNADU

□ A.K. Padmanabhan

"The Common Minimum Programme of the United Front, provides for ensuring secret ballot for recognising Trade Unions and workers participation in Management and if the United Front Government fails to implement these promises the CITU will launch country wide agitation to force the Government to do so" So declared Com. M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary of the CITU addressing the concluding rally of the CITU Tamilnadu State Conference on March 8th at the Marina Beach named after Com P. Ramamoorthi, Founder General Secretary of CITU. The rally was attended by several thousands of workers, men and women, drawn from all the districts of Tamilnadu and this was the largest ever mobilisation by CITU in the state.

Com. Pandhe vehemently criticised the union budget as showering benefits on the rich while giving nothing to the poor. The recommendations of the Vth Pay Commission were conferring large benefits to the officers while it gave a raw deal to the Group D&C employees. The recommendations to slash 3.5 lakhs posts immediately and 30% of the posts during the next 10 years was atrocious he declared. Com. Pandhe disapproved the proposals for scrapping the FERA Act, the general amnesty to tax evaders and hoarders of black money, as also the refusal to receive Sick Public Sector Units. He called upon the workers to support the strike on April 2 called by Public Sector Trade Unions. He appealed to all Trade Unions irrespective of their political affiliations to join hands to fight the wrong policies harming the interests of workers. The rally was presided over by Com. W.R. Varadarajan, president of South Madras District Committee of CITU and state Vice President and addressed by Com. R. Umanath, A. Soundarajan, Rajeswari and J. Hemachandran President of Tamilnadu CITU. Earlier on 6th March the conference was begun at the venue of the conference Com K. Thiruvengadam & K. Vasudevan Hall in Com V. Karmegam Nagar. With the hoisting of the CITU flag by Com R. Umanath President of CITU. Amidst thunderous slogan of CITU Zindabad, Working Class Unity Zindabad. The flag, the flag and Two Jothies in martyrs were brought by volunteers from Coimbatore, Kanyakumari, Madurai, Nagapattinam

who traveled more than 1600 Kms. through various villages and town of Tamilnadu. Thousands of people participated in the receptions attended to the seen rite. The Bank Employees are troupe (BEAT) song patriotic song.

Inaugurating the conference, Com E. Balanandan, President of CITU referred to the struggles launched by the CITU and other organisations during the six years against the economic policies of liberalisation, globalisation, Privatisation etc. and congratulated the working class on their determination on fighting these dangerous policies. The New U.F. Government is also proceeding on the same lines and cautioned them against it communal, casteist, fissiparous tendencies are rearing their ugly head, trying to jeopardise the working class unity, helping the ruling classes. He called upon to fight that evil forces Unite the workers irrespective of religion, community, caste regional condeavation and make the CITU a strong force in order to defend and advance the interest of the working class. Com T.K. Rengarajan, General Secretary, placed the work and organisational reports and proudly stated that since the last conference in 1993, the CITU membership in Tamilnadu has gone up from 1,75,000 to 2,28,000. He referred to the various struggles launched since the last conference and called upon the delegates and other activists to strengthen the CITU.

D. Janakiraman, presented the financial report for the years 1993 to 1996.

Leaders of other Central Organisations S.S. Thiagarajan AITUC, S. Duraisamy of MLF, Kumarasamy of AICCTU, Sivakumar of UTUC(LS) Shanmugam of ATP, greeted the conference.

The conference has attended by 613 delegates out of which 65 were women, 56 comrades including 8 women participated in the discussion of on the report of the General Secretary, and more valuable contributions in enriching the report and for strengthen the organisations. A note worthy feature was the General Secretary report was circulated to all the delegates nearly 10 days earlier, which helped them to strong discussion in that respective district committee and other comment

On 7th, the second day of the conference, the

delegates divided them into six commissions as the following subjects:-

1. Problems of Unity among workers
2. Technology
3. Unorganised workers
4. Child Labour
5. Social Security
6. Trade Unions and Working Women

Papers had been prepared earlier and the delegates offered constructive suggestion on all the issues. The views expressed during the commission discussion were reported to conference later. The State Committee will initiative further action on the suggestion & views expressed in the conference. On the final day Com S.Dev Roye, Secretary CITU greeted the conference. He called upon the state CITU, to further strengthening the organisations in modern industries also while organising the unorganised workers in large numbers.

Com Thirunavukkarasu, President Agricultural Workers Union greeted the conference and thanked the CITU for the annual contribution being made to the peasants movement in the state.

Summing up the discussion of the Report, T.K. Rengarajan clarified various points made by the Delegates and accepted various suggestions. The report and the accounts were accepted unanimously.

New Leadership

21 office bearers were elected unanimously by the conference. This includes 5 New Secretaries. J. Hemachandran was elected the new president and T.K. Rengarajan the General Secretary. A.K. Padmanabhan, A.Soundrajan, P.M. Kumar elected Asstt. General Secretary and D. Janakiraman Treasurer. There are 7 vice president and 8 secretaries.

Call of the Conference

A resolution, on the immediate programme of action was moved by A. Soundarajan. This resolution called upon the CITU members to make the 27th March programme of National Plat Form and 2nd April strike of the Central Public Sector Unions a great success.

On pension and ESI Scheme while listing out the demands of the unorganised sector, including contract, casual and Trainees, it called upon the workers to be prepared for a day's state wide strike.

The resolution also called upon the workers to fight the communal and casteist forces, while under lining the necessity of struggling against oppressions and obscurantist practices.

The conference decided to organise eye dona-

tions on 15th December, and blood donation camps on 8th May, the day of remembrance of Comrades P. Ramamoorthi and V.P. Chintan. Com Pandhe greeted the delegates session and called upon further strengthening the organisation so as to meet the challenges thrown by various forces. He explained the efforts being made by CITU for strengthening working class unity.

R.Umanath, the out going president, in his concluding address called upon the delegates to be prepared for any sacrifice to safeguard the interest of the working people in the country and recalled the great traditions of our leaders.

The conference concluded amidst shouting of slogans of expressing determination to carry forward the decisions of the conference.

Protest Against Denationalisation of Coal Industry

(The following protest letter against denationalisation of coal industry was sent jointly by the trade unions to the Prime Minister on 6.3.97)

We are seriously perturbed to note that the Central Government is planning to denationalize the Coal Mines in our country and handing over the same to multinationals and monopoly private business succumbing to the growing pressures of World Bank & IMF.

Keeping in view the seriousness of situation, we the representatives of all the 5 central trade unions met today (6.3.97) in the office of the RCMS at Dhanbad and unanimously decided to oppose privatisation of coal mines and reduction of taxes on imported coal.

We have also unanimously decided to hold a joint convention on 30th March, 1997 at Dhanabd and one day all India Coal Mine Workers' strike to protest against privatisation of coal mines.

In view of the above, we request you to kindly intervene into the matter immediately and save the Nationalised coal industry from denationalisation.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours faithfully,

Sd/- (S Das Gupta)	Sd/- (SK Rai)	Sd/- (Kumar Arjun Singh)
(INTUC)	INTUC	BMS
Sd/- (Govind Singh)	Sd/- (K K Karan)	Sd/- (K Bakshi)
HMS	AITUC	CITU

Thousands arrested in Tamilnadu

□ A K Padmanabhan

Thousands of workers including large number of women courted arrest by picketing central government offices all over the state, on 25th February.

This massive programme, responding to the call of National Platform of Mass Organisations, was preceded by campaigns and conventions in many districts.

In Chennai, picketing was organised in two centres. In North Chennai, nearly 3000 volunteers including 500 women courted arrest. T N Nambirajan, P N Unni (CITU) Murali, Thiruvettai (DYFI), Radhakrishnan (AICCTU) Desingh (AITUC), Mohanasundari (AIDWA) and others led the volunteers. As they moved on to the flower bazar telephone exchange. They were stopped and volunteers sat on the main road, blocking traffic for a long time. All volunteers were arrested and removed.

In South Chennai, nearly 2000 volunteers were arrested. Here also volunteers were not allowed to go near the Nandanam Telephone exchange area they blocked traffic on the main road, till all of them were arrested and removed by police. E Ponmudi (CITU), Chellappan (AITUC), A S Kumar (AICCTU), C Usha (AIDWA), M Kumar (DYFI) and other led the volunteers. Among the other organisations participating were AIIEA, TNMSRA, Kisan Sabha in various parts.

Thousands were arrested in various other centres including Madurai, Coimbatore, Tuticorin, Trichy, Nagarkoil. In Pondicherry more than 500 volunteers from various organisations including CITU, AITUC, DYFI, AIDWA were arrested. On the whole, the first phase of the present struggle of the National Platform has been effective and preparations begun for the second phase on 27th March.

PURCHASE PREFERENCE FACILITY TO PSUs BY GOVT DEPTT MUST CONTINUE

Dipankar Mukherjee MP (Rajya Sabha) and Jibon Roy, MP (Rajya Sabha) in thier letter to Industry Minister Shri Murasoli Maran demanded continuance of the Purchase Preference facility to public sector companies in respect of Govt contracts which is slated to be discontinued after 31st March 1997. The main text of their letter is reproduced below:

Dear Thiru Murasoli Maran,

As you are kindly aware that all the Public Sector Companies have been allowed purchase preference facility in respect of orders/contact from various Govt departments while participating in tender with other private sector and foreign producers. Such purchase preference in respect of price or actual contract to the PSUs. As per said provisions the PSUs are allowed just an opportunity to match the lowest quoted prices, if price quoted by the PSU falls within 10% range of the lowest price.

] In view of the facility of sales tax exemption enjoyed by the new units in private sector as well as the foreign companies in particular, and also in view of various compulsions and obligations on the public sector companies, the purchase preference facility to the PSUs is of immense importance. I understand that such purchase preference facility to PSUs is ending on 31st March, 1997.

In view of the present stage of the PSUs in the country many of which have been struggling for viability and turn around, discontinuance of the purchase preference facility of denial of the opportunity to adjust their offers even in respect of Govt contracts would severely affect their capacity utilisation and viability. This holds good for many profit making PSUs, not to speak of others. I am afraid in the event of discontinuance of this facility, many PSUs still making positive contribution would be put to utter jeopardy much to the detriment of interest of the country.

I would, therefore, request you to kindly consider the urgency and relevance of continuance of said purchase preference facility to PSUs beyond 31st March, 1997 in the overall interest of the country's economy and the PSUs in particular, Department of Public Enterprises may be suitably advised to do the needful.

This may be kindly treated as URGENT

With regards,

Yours sincerely

Sd/- (Jibon Roy)

Sd/- (Dipankar Mukherjee)

Thiru Murasoli Maran
Minister of Industry
Govt of India New Delhi

Intellectual Slavery of the Bankrupt Economic Policies

□ B Sanyal

The long awaited report of the Fifth Pay Commission was submitted to the Union Finance Minister by its Chairman Justice S R Pandian on January 30, 1997. Though the public at large formally came to know about the contents of the report after its official release, the AIEA's presumption and anticipation of its elitist bias came cent percent true. For anybody with the capacity and capability of analysing the social, economic and political developments in the country, there was no scope whatsoever to be surprised by the class orientation of the report. Any committee constituted by the ruling classes who have never been tired of chanting the virtues of liberalisation all these years, could not be expected to go beyond its brief. In fact, the very nature and constitution of the commission was an unambiguous indication of the type and shape of its recommendations. The bonanza for the higher echelon and simultaneous ugly and naked attack on the lower and middle strata of the employees, only reinforce our convictions about the nature of the commission and its elite character.

It is a paradox indeed, that even after 47 years of adoption of the constitution declaring India as a democratic republic, the central government, the largest employer in the country did not confer to its own employees, the right to collective bargaining in the matter of determination of their wages and service conditions. The demand of the employees' organisations for wage revision had every time been met by the Central Government with the constitution of commission at its whims and the commissions true to their character had always come out with recommendations generally detrimental to the interests of larger sections of the work force in government departments. No Pay Commission so far had in it, representatives of any of the trade union organisations belonging to the government employees. Although the employees unions did have the satisfaction of submitting memoranda to the commission giving their view points on the question of pay revision, but however justifiable and rational those submissions might be, they did never form the basis of the recommendations of any Pay Commission.

A proper and deeper analysis of the recommendations of the fifth pay commission would reveal that if implemented, they would lead to further widening of the already existing gap between the highest and lower paid employees to disastrous extent. For example, at the lowest level, the minimum basic pay is Rs 750/- On this the employee gets DA of Rs 1,110/- each are added to the above, the minimum salary comes to Rs 2,160/- But in the proposed pay scale, the corresponding basic pay at the minimum would be Rs 2,440/-. It means the increase in the basic pay is a meager Rs 280/- At the salary of Rs 2,160/- the employee gets Rs 150/- and Rs 30 as HRA and CCA respectively. Whereas in the new scale i.e. Rs 2,440/- the employee would get Rs 960/- Rs 90/-, Rs 75/- as HRA, CCA and conveyance allowance respectively. The total comes to Rs 3,565 as against Rs 2,340/-. It means, as per the fifth Pay Commission recommendations, an employee at the minimum of the scale at the lowest level would get a pay hike of Rs 1,225/- but at the Secretary level, the hike would be an astounding Rs 18,920/-

The very nomenclature of the 'Pay Commission' might suggest that the commission's main job was to deal with the question of pay and allowance of the Central Government employees. But it appears, the commission worked overtime to suggest drastic cut on the size and number of the employees. It has recommended the immediate abolition of 3.5 lac vacant posts (the number of actual vacant posts might be much more than this). The commission has further recommended reduction of posts at the lower level by a huge 30% in next 10 yrs. This is not all. The recommendations further suggest that vacancies arising out of retirement should not be filled in and they should be abolished. The commission in its wisdom has also suggested introduction of contract system in place of abolished vacancies. According to the commission the process of reductions of staff strength through voluntary retirement and golden hand shake should be set in motion with all seriousness. If accepted, the recommendations of the Pay Commission would lead to gradual reduction in the strength of government employees and in the days to come, the

majority of the posts excepting those of IAS and other associated officers would vanish in the air, and the Central Government, the biggest employer in the country today, would become the employer of few officers after getting rid of lacs of central govt employees, Can there be any worse example of intellectual slavery of ill-advised economic liberalisation, than this?

The commission's recommendations on raising of retirement age, maternity leave and some suggestions relating to the women employees should be viewed in the overall background and contents of the report. The above recommendations are nothing but an attempt to add some respectability to the otherwise reactionary and retrograde report. The recommendations with regard to reduction of gazetted holidays is absolutely bogus and impracticable.

We are happy, that most of the trade unions belonging to various segments of Central Government employees have come out with sharp reaction against the obnoxious recommendations. It is crystal clear that Pay Commission recommendations are diametrically opposite to the declared employment policy of

the UF Govt. The UF through its Common Minimum Programme is committed to evolve ways and means to create more employments, whereas, the Pay Commission suggests immediate drastic cut on the existing employment opportunities. The hawks of liberalisation would definitely try to utilise the fifth Pay Commission Report as a weapon against the working class. The entire working class of the country, particularly the Central Govt employees must unitedly oppse the recommendations tooth and nail to frustrate the ugly attacks engineered by the imperialist vultures through the Indian ruling classes. All organisations of the Central Govt employees irrespective of their ideological differences must rise to the occasion beyond any vacillation and stand like a solid rock in total opposition to the utterly reactionary recommendations of the Fifth Pay Commission in association with the entire trade union movement of the country to force the UF Govt to reject the anti-working class, anti-people recommendations lock, stock and barrel. The insurance employees led by AIIEA true to their tradition would surely become proud participants in any such movement.

OVER ONE HUDNRED IDPL WORKERS ARRESTED

More than one hundred workers of Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Ltd, were arrested today from inside the premises of the Ministry of Chemicals at Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi.

Among those arrested were Dr. Ashim Bala, Member of Lok Sabha (CPI-M); P.K. Ganguly, Secretary, CITU, D.P. Dubey, General Secretary, FMRAI; S. Srinivas Reddy, General Secretary IDPL Hyderabad Kamgar Union (CITU); M.L. Thaplial, General Secretary IDPL Kamgar Union (Rishikesh)CITU; K.K. Srivastava, Vice-President, UPDPL Karmachari Union (INTUC).

The workers came to Delhi from all the five plants of the and other states demanding revival of the company.

IDPL, one of the largest Pharmaceutical company in the world in the Central Public Sector, manufacturing all life saving and essential drugs from the basic stage to the finished products, have been made

sick by the Government's policy of destabilising the public sector, coupled with rampant corruption in the management.

The Govt. has stopped productions in all its plants and withheld the salaries of the workers since January. The Finance Ministry was stopped advancing any working capital.

The revival scheme prepared by a Chartered Accountant, namely A.F. Fergusson at the instance of IDBI has called for retrenchment of more than 5000 workers, which all the trade unions have rejected. The revival scheme, prepared by the trade unions however have not been accepted by the government.

Workers including the MP were released after detention for two hours. The agitation will continue on 25th February and extended further till the Prime Minister meets the trade union delegation and announces revival of the company and disbursement of working capital and salaries.

CHANGE OF GOVT PENSION SCHEME DEMANDED

(Jibon Roy, MP and Secretary CITU demanded radical change in Govt. Pension Scheme in view of the recent interim judgement of Calcutta High Court on the Scheme which has vindicated the opinion and observation of the common workers on the scheme. reproduced below is the text of his letter to Union Labour Minister Shri Arunachalam dated February 27, 1997:- Ed.)

" I would like to draw your attention over the unprecedented situation arising out of the order passed by the Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta staying the implementation of Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Act 1995 in respect of number of Industries. The Division Bench of High Court chaired by Hon'ble Justice Ruma Pal and Hon'ble Justice Devendra Kumar Jain in response to writ filed by Steel Workers Federation of India, I.E.L. Employees union and ICI and Allied Companies union in a landmark judgement on 20.2.1997 observed that the denial of the right of employees to apply for exemption from new scheme appears prima facie to be arbitrary. The Hon'ble High Court of Kerala also has ordered interim stay on the implementation.

I do not wish to vindicate myself but I am on record that a number of times I requested the government not to pursue the amendment. No other issue could get a govt. also discredited to labour, as the 1995 amendment to EPF and miscellaneous provision Amendment Act could do. The government has unnecessarily decided to take the responsibility of misdeeds of other. It was unfortunate that it had refused to pay heed to the largest supporting political party within United Front, next to Janata Dal.

The interim judgement has vindicated the view which has opposed the enactment that since EPF and Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Act has extended some facilities to the workmen and those are flowed to individuals, any encroachment of that without providing the opportunity of option stands ultra-virus to fundamental right and the constitution. The lordships in their judgement have observed"....where the professed object of th new scheme is the benefit of the employees, such margi-

nalisation of employees' point of view by denying them the right to apply for exemption from the scheme is prima facie inexplicable and irrational. In these days of organised Labour it is unacceptable that the employees are to be forced a scheme on the patronizing presumption that they are unable to assess what is for their benefit".

While dealing on the distinction between system of exemption offered by the Scheme under the Act and the right of option by the workers, the High Court raised question on the validity of classification and the nationality of depriving the members of family pension scheme either from option or exemption. It was observed by the Hon'ble High Court: "The distinction between an option and an exemption is that an option is given to someone who is not otherwise covered by the scheme, to choose to be covered thereby. An exemption on the other hand can be asked for only by someone who is covered by the 1995 Scheme. Employees covered by the 1971 have according to the Government, neither an option nor the right to apply for exemption. The Standing Committee felt that no option should be given to individual workers to join the scheme because then the scheme will be non starter'. Nevertheless under the scheme an individual option has been given to those workmen who were not members of the family pension scheme 1971. All other workmen covered by the 1995 scheme except for the members of the 1971 scheme can apply for exemption. Is the classification a valid one? We are not required to decide the matter finally now, but it can at least be said, having regard to the nature of the option given in 1971 that the submission of the appellant in this regard isn't without force."

The lordships have further observed that the right of the exemption provided under clause 39 appears to be fallacious. The Judgement says " it is no argument to say that an employer could be forced to apply if the majority of the workers' demand such application. The court is not concerned with the future probabilities of a case but with the reason for a present denial by statute. No reason has been given as to why the privilege to apply for exemption has been limited to the employer alone under the 1995 scheme."

[Cont'd On Page 26]

INSURANCE WOMEN CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Attended by women employees working in LIC in various offices in the City, International Working Women's Day was celebrated on 8th March under the auspices of Insurance Corporation Employees' Union, Secunderbad Division through a lecture session at Secunderbad Divisional Office premises.

MI Baig, General Secretary welcomed the gathering and President VVR Shastri informed that as part of the efforts of creating awareness among the women employees of LIC working in the City about women's issues the celebration was organised.

Professor Sonia Gupta of Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, the main speaker, emphasised that the Day belonged to women. There was a general lack of awareness among middle class women about women's issues as a whole. She told that apparently though India appeared to be orthodox and modern at the sametime as revealed in the Sati tradition and beauty pageants, it was actually indicative on the whole, of trampling upon the rights of women and degrading them. Through the media it was sought to be propogated that the salvation of women lay in consumerism which was pure deception and far removed from actual reality. She explained that women had to bear more the brunt to any adverse policy of the government. She cautioned that as the women's movement had come to stay, its slogans were being stolen by the rulers. She paid tributes to the Andhra rural women who spear-headed the antiliquor struggle which found total prohibition to be brought about and inspiring other states too. Prof. Sonia Gupta exhorted the insurance women to organise such meetings more of ten and discuss about issues of vital importance to them and try to contribute to social process.

Smt. Padmasri of AP Working Women's Coordination Committee, spoke about the miserable conditions of women working in agarbatti, safety pin and beedi industry etc. in the City and called upon the insurance women to appreciate the better conditions they were placed in and to think about their sisters in other fields and to try to come

forward to help them.

Smt. K. Sarojini, the President of the meeting stated that women gathering in a meeting was not for only criticizing men but to discuss about their own problems and to try to find solution for these taking help of men also where possible.

Shri K. Venugopal, Joint Secretary of All India Insurance Employees Association expressed satisfaction over the meeting organised for celebrating International Working Women's Day and expressed the hope that insurance women will hold more such meetings and discussing about women's issues in future.

The meeting closed with vote of thanks proposed by Smt. G. Rajyalakshmi.

[From Page 25]

I believe you will appreciate the fact that judgement of calcutta High Court will go a long way demanding a change in the Act and the Scheme. Several High Courts in the country have deliberated on number of writs, the Calcutta appex court has dealt with the issue comprehensively including underneath constitutional aspects. The Andhra High Court did not allow any stay with the assumption that workers are allowed option, Hon'ble justice of Calcutta High court has observed. The Madras High Court on the other hand did not deliberate on the constitutionality of not providing option to a section of workers covered under the 1995 scheme. In view of the constitutional point arisen out of the judgement and the unsustainably of 1995 amendment to the Act, I feel the need of urgent review and necessary amendment to the Act providing the right of option to all individual workers. I do not think it would-be judicious for the government to keep the matter of amendment of the Act hanging till the writ is disposed finally, or by that time the operation of the scheme in present form, as it would make the entire system of provident fund vulnerable, much to the detriment of the basic interest of the workers.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-
(Jibon Roy)

MEMORANDUM OF BEEDI WORKERS' DEMANDS

(We are publishing hereunder the memorandum on Beedi Workers' demands submitted to the Labour Minister for campaign among the Beedi Workers-Ed.)

March 19, 1997

Dr L D Mishra
Secretary
Govt of India
Ministry of Labour
Shram Shakti Bhawan
Rafi Marg, New Delhi -110 001

Dear Dr Mishra,

This has reference to our talks on Beedi workers' demands, when a delegation met the Labour Minister and you on 5th March and submitted a small memorandum of 5-point demands.

As per our talks on that day, I am giving hereunder a slightly detailed note on the issues for your perusal, which are based on the 21st Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour Welfare on the 'Welfare of Beedi Workers' submitted to Parliament on 29th February, 1996.

1. Data on Number of Beedi Workers:

The Standing Committee had noted that 70 per cent of Beedi workers in the country were home-based workers, majority of them are women. The Standing Committee had asked the Government to complete the survey of all Beedi workers, both in factories and home-based and submit its report to the Committee within three months from February, 1996. But it has not been done as yet.

2 Identity Cards:

The Standing Committee had recommended that the Govt should ensure that each and every Beedi worker, whether a Ghar Khata (Home based) or working in a factory, is issued an Identity Card and the progress should be communicated to the Committee every six months.

In this respect, the Govt has hardly made any progress. So far only about 23,76,724 Identity Cards have been issued out of the Govt estimated (an underestimate) about 44,72,800 Beedi workers in the country. Majority of the home-based workers have not been given Identity Cards. They are therefore deprived of any minimum wage, social security and other welfare measures.

3 Minimum Wage:

The Standing Committee had noted the extremely low wages and wide disparity of wages in different regions of the country. It further noted that due to the wide disparity, there was continuous shifting of manufacturing units from one state to another of lower wage. This resulted in unemployment in the former state while the manufacturers earned larger profits in the other state. The Committee therefore recommended uniform wages on national level and a central legislation regarding Minimum Wage and related matters. It also recommended that wages should be linked with Consumer Price Indices and that Variable Dearness Allowance should be revised every six months.

A Committee of State Labour Ministers was constituted under the Chairmanship of the W. Bengal Labour Minister. This Committee also urged upon the Govt to consider the recommendations of the Standing Committee. The Regional Labour Ministers' Conference of Eastern and North Eastern, Southern, Northern and Central Regions held during September-October 1994 also recommended in the same manner so as to do away with the disparity of wages. But still the Govt has taken no steps to implement the recommendations.

Our demand is Rs 50/- as basic wage for 1000 Beedies at 1300 points of AICPI(1960=100) with 5 paise per point per day VDA, and equal wages for women workers and working children.

4 Coverage under Provident Fund:

The Standing Committee noted that only 12.99 lakh of Beedi workers were covered by EPF, out of the identified 23,76,724 workers. It stated that the Govt was not at all serious in extending the coverage to all Beedi workers including the home-based workers and asked the Govt to communicate the steps taken within six months. But it has not been done.

5. ESI Scheme, Medical Facilities under Welfare Scheme:

The Standing Committee noted that out of 23,76,724 identified workers, only 21,725 workers were covered by the ESI Corporation. The Committee also found that there are only 3 hospitals and 155 dispensaries spread over the country to cater the

needs of the Beedi workers. The proposal of the Govt to set up 62 dispensaries more has not been implemented. The Committee had recommended for establishment of hospitals in each Taluk and district with Beedi workers' concentration and these to be provided with basic diagnostic facilities like X-Ray, pathology, etc. Because of lack of medical facilities, the Beedi workers run from pillar to post for treatment.

6. Chhat Beedis:

The workers are severely exploited by the principal employers and contractors through Chhat (rejected) beedis. Beedis rolled by the workers are rejected (Chhat Beedis) to the extent of 25 per cent (250 per thousand), while the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Condition of Employment) Act, 1966 provides that no employee or contractor shall arbitrarily reject more than 2.5 per cent of Beedis as of substandard quality.

The Standing Committee acknowledged this reality and recommended that the provisions of the Beedi and Cigar Act should be strictly implemented. The reason for the Chhat should be stated in writing to the workers and half the rate of payment should be given to the workers. It also recommended that good quality of Tendu leaves of optimum quantity must be supplied to the workers. The State Govts should set up Tripartite Committees at District level to monitor the above.

7. Housing Problem:

Housing is one of the major demands of the Beedi workers. According to the estimate of the Standing Committee, over 95 per cent of Beedi workers do not have houses and live as slum dwellers under most unhygienic conditions. The plea given by the Labour Ministry was non-receipt of proposal from State Governments for construction of houses under the Economically Weaker Section Housing Programme for Beedi Workers Scheme. The Committee reprimanded the Labour Ministry for its lackadaisical attitude towards the housing problem and called for taking initiative of its own without waiting for the state governments.

8. Problem of Tendu Leaves:

The small and medium Beedi manufacturers are not getting optimum amount of Tendu leaves of good quality, because big manufacturers are cornering the lion's share, and the traders, who are not manufacturers are exporting good quality of Tendu leaves. The workers are the ultimate sufferers.

The Standing Committee looked into all pros and cons of the problem and recommended that the government should set up a national level agency to pool Tendu leaves collected from the states and to fix rates quality wise and supply to the Beedi manufacturers according to their needs by eliminating the Tendu leave traders.

9. Residential Schools for Children:

Beedi workers in overwhelming majority belong to the minority community and SC/ST, who are the most deprived sections of the society. Economic compulsions prevent the workers from sending their children to schools. We have been demanding free compulsory schools for the working children in the Beedi producing centres.

The Standing Committee took cognizance of this fact. It recommended that the Govt should open at least one residential school or Ashram school in each area of Beedi workers' concentration. The funds for this purpose could be made from the Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund. But this recommendation was also not accepted by the Govt on the ground of resource constraints.

10. Withdrawal of Exemption of Cess:

In order to avoid hardship which a small Beedi manufacturer may face on account of levy of cess on Beedi, the Govt had allowed the small manufacturers, manufacturing upto 20 lakh of unbranded Beedis per annum, exemption of paying the cess. The provision of payment of cess is in the Beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act of 1976. Taking advantage of this so-called benevolence of the Govt, many manufacturers started making unbranded Beedis and availed of the exemption. This has put the other manufacturers at the receiving end. We therefore have been demanding withdrawal of this exemption.

As suggested to you on 5th March, we again request you to call a meeting of our federation, so that the above issues can be discussed to arrive at an amicable resolution of the problems.

Kindly fix up the date for such a meeting with the undersigned, so that I can inform other leaders of our federation to attend the meeting.

Soliciting your early reply,

Yours sincerely,

(P K Ganguly)

General Secretary,
A.I. Beedi Workers Federation
General Secretary,
and Secretary of CITU