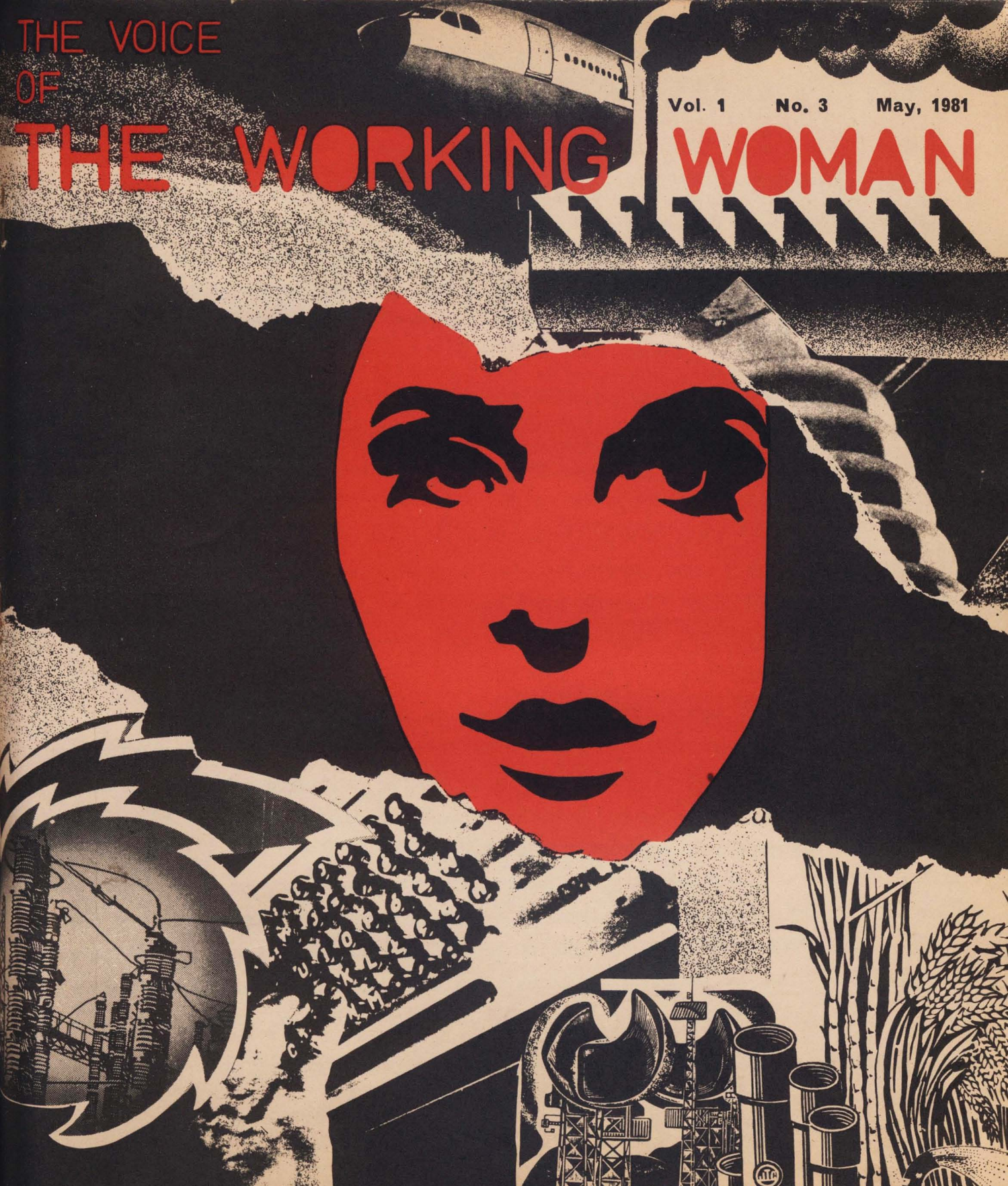
THE VOICE OF

THE WORKING WOMAN

Vol. 1 No. 3 May, 1981



HEROIC STRUGGLE

BY 2,500 ADIVASI WOMEN WORKERS

IN JAMSHEDPUR

Since February 11 last, 10,000 contract workers in the TISCO plant at Jamshedpur, have been on indefinite strike, demanding absorption as permanent workers under the Central Government Act of 1970, Of these, 2,500 are Adivasi tribal women workers, who have shown exemplary courage and determination taking an equal part in the common struggle, even seizing the initiative in repelling the attacks of the police and factory security personnel.

From February 11 to 15, the workers remained inside the steel plant. The two thousand women workers inside fought vigorously, leading the different processions within the plant premises even carrying their small babies. The workers thus frustrated all attempts of the management and police to terrorise them. Consequently on February 15, more than 1000 policemen were deployed inside the factory to remove the workers. The women workers were beaten and dragged into waiting buses, which then drove over 40 to 50 milometres outside the town to a jungle area where the women were again forcibly removed and left stranded.

Far from being frightened or their militancy dampened by this experience, the women set to and started marching back to the city on foot. Immediately on arrival at Jamshedpur they joined in a rally going to the XLRI Auditorium where the Union Steel Minister was to address the All-World Steel Experts Conference. There the Tata Security Officers stoned and lathi-charged the workers, and the Chief Security Officer of TISCO fired on the women workers. Despite the nearly 15 women and 20 men injured, the workers refused to retreat, demanding instead the immediate arrest of the Chief Security Officer. At first reluctant the local administration was ultimately compelled to arrest this already notorious security guard.

Meanwhile from the very beginning of the strike, men and women workers

sat in dharna daily at the seven gates of the TISCO plant. At midnight of March 1, the police swooped on the 400 men and 100 women sitting outside the Sakchi Gate, arresting and sending all 500 to Sakchi Jail, where they were subsequently detained for the next 18 days.

The next morning, March 2, about 50 workers, including 10 women, broke Section 144 at the TISCO General Office Gate, and were also all arrested.

On March 27, more than 300 workers, led by the CITU & AITUC Secretaries, staged a dharna before the Labour Ministry in Delhi and a deputation met the Union Minister of State for Labour, as well as the Prime Minister, and submitted a memorandum on the demands.

Again on March 27, the Labour Advisory Board at Patna recommended the absorption of contract workers as permanent employees where they are engaged in jobs of a permanent nature. While in West Bengal through a notification of the Left Front Government, more than 1700 contract workers of TISCO and 2000 of the Durgapur Steel Plant and Alloy Steel Plant were regularised as permanent workers, the Bihar Congress (I) Government, instead of implementing the recommendation has turned the Steel City of Jamshedpur into a police camp. More than 500 workers are behind bars, and 18 permanent workers, office-bearers of the CITU and AITUC unions, have been suspended.

In March also two impressive solidarity actions took place - one by the peasants in the surrounding villages of Jamshedpur in support of the heroic steel workers' struggle, and one by the workers of Patna, Bihar's capital city. Until they were brutally attacked and removed, men and women workers squatted on the railway tracks to stop transport into and out of plant.

It is three months now since the strike began. The management refuses to negotiate, even to attend any meetings which the State Labour Department may call. The Government refuses to intervene against the mighty Tatas. But the morale and determination of the workers, men and women, remains unbroken, bewildering the management and Government alike. Shoulder to shoulder, men and women workers have pledges to carry on their battle till their demand is conceded.

DISCRIMINATION IN AIRLINES

AIR HOSTESSES FILE WRIT PETITIONS

While Indian Airlines hostesses are fighting discrimination in regard to retirement rules in comparison to their male colleagues doing exactly the same work aboard the aircraft, the air-hostesses and other female employees of Air India have taken up the cudgels, in turn challenging the constituticnality of Air-India rules on the question of the marriage bar. The existing rules require air-hostesses recruited in India, to compulsorily retire on marriage, if the marriage takes place within four years of their joining or if they become pregnant. The case was transferred to the Supreme Court for hearing, and all promotions in the service were made dependent on the Supreme Court decisions.

The three judges hearing the writ petitions reacted sharply to the remarks made by the IA management. Mrs. Margaret Alva, counsel for the IA air-hostesses, read out the statement of the management that the IA management "could not be compelled by the courts to employ for its job requirements, females as cabin crew attendants". The presiding judge, Justice Murtaza Fazal Ali, remarked that the airline's statement "was in bad English, in bad taste, and the attitude was uncouth. It is a veiled threat to the courts, and is like saying "what can you do if we don't obey you?"

Justice A.N. Sen said it was most unfortunate to hear such remarks from Indian Airlines. He pointed out that this amounted to contempt of court.

When Mr.F.S. Nariman began replying to the Air-India hostesses' petition, Justice Sen told him: "We are definitely against you on the points of promotion and retirement." Mr. Nariman tried to light-heartedly remark that he found resistance both in the front (bench) and the rear (where a number of airhostess activists were listening to the proceedings). The judges retorted that there was resistance all round.

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QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT

On a question whether Government had taken any steps to implement recommendations made in 1975 by the Committee on the Status of Women, the Minister of State for Education, Srimati Sheila Kaul, informed the Lok Sabha that the recommendation permitting women to work upto 10 p.m., wherever practicable, provided it does not adversely affect their employment, has been accepted. Other recommendations being implemented were:

* establishment of a creche where 30 or more women are employed as against 50 earlier;
* setting up of a cell in the Ministry of Labour to deal with women's problems;
* a Women's Welfare and Development Bureau in the Ministry of Social Welfare for co-ordination of programmes for women, collection of information on matters relating to women, and implementation of measures to improve the status of women under the guidance of the National Committee on Women.
* Amendment to the Marriage Laws, providing for divorce by mutual consent, grounds of "cruelty" and "desertion" for divorce, and the right of a girl to repudiate her marriage as a child on attaining majority.

WOMEN WORK-SEEKERS

Women work-seekers on the Live Register of Employment Exchanges numbered 23.45 lakhs at the end of December 1980 as against 19.04 lakhs a year ago, in December, 1979, i.e. an increase of 4.41 lakhs.

THE WORKING WOMEN'S COORDINATION COMMITTEE -

KERALA STATE

from A. NAZIMUNEEZA

The activities of the Working Women's Co-ordination Committee in Kerala are well in progress. District Committees have been set up in eight of the twelve districts of Kerala, consisting of employees from all fields, such as Central and State Government offices, Schools, Hospitals, Public Sector Undertakings, Handloom, Cashew and Coir Industries, farms, etc. The State-level office-bearers attend the District Committee meetings, so that effective guidance can be given. Apart from this, Women's Committees have been formed in institutions where there are a large number of women workers, with a view to dealing with any particular issue that may come up in their respective work-places. Efforts are being made to constitute District Committees in the remaining four Districts.

At the State level, a memorandum demanding immediate implementation of certain welfare measures, was presented to the Chief Minister, who in turn promised to look into the demands and try to concede them soon. The main demands are:

1. To appoint a Mahila Commission vested with statutory powers, to prevent non-implementation of existing protective legislation and discrimination against women workers, and to take steps to find out more job opportunities for women.
2. To run buses exclusively for women during peak hours, in important centres.
3. To set up creches and kindergartens at all working places where an adequate number of women are employed.
4. To speed up construction of working women's hostels.
5. To end appointment of women as casual labourers.
6. To fix minimum wages in unorganised sectors.

When the management of a private ladies hostel at Perumbavoor, (Ernakulam District), continued to ill-treat its members, the Co-ordination Committee intervened and took up the matter with the Minister for Social Welfare, to find a solution to the problem. A similar problem which arose in one of the women's quarters at Chalakudy, (Trichur District), has also been taken up by the Co-ordination Committee with the authorities concerned, and solved.

The Trivandrum District Committee.

The Committee now consists of employees from the Electricity Board, Transport Corporation, Government Secretariat, Accountant General's Office, P & T Offices, State Government Offices, Government and Private schools, hospitals, the cashew, coir and textile industries, presses, as well as representatives of Kerala Mahila Federation and the Working Women's Association. A Women's Committee formed in the Government Secretariat has taken up the demand for creches, and one creche has been sanctioned for the children of the employees of the Government Secretariat, by the Left & Democratic Front Government, and is running satisfactorily. A Women's Committee has been formed in the Kerala State Electricity Board, and a memorandum presented to the authorities pressing their demands. The Working Women's Association, which runs the Working Women's Hostels and creches in Trivandrum City, is working under the banner of the Co-ordination Committee.

WORKING IN THE MINES

The situation of women in the mining industry exhibits the same disturbing trends as are seen elsewhere with regard to employment and raising of productive skills, as well as with regard to the impact of protective legislation. With the failure of Government and trade unions to effectively intervene, employers, including the public sector are circumventing such legislation by the simple process of not employing women labour. Since Independence and even prior to that, since 1941 the number of women workers in the mining industry has been declining. Today less than 10% of the total female workers participating in the industrial sector are in mining and quarrying. With introduction of legislation on equal pay for equal work, women workers have ceased to be attractive as a source of cheap labour.

Where they are employed, women are concentrated in occupations which are mostly unskilled, or which require only a rudimentary skill, e.g. wagon loading, quarrying, head-load workers, stone-breaking, shale picking, stacking, over burden removing, ash removing, soft coke making, clay cartridge making and as general 'mazdoors'. Mechanisation has now reduced the demand for even such types of unskilled labour. By comparison, male workers engaged in occupations employing women form only about 13 per cent of the total male employment in mines; the rest are mostly employed at higher levels of the production process.The high rate of illiteracy lack of skill and professional training, lack of on-the-job training and the prevalent social attitudes towards women come in the way of women's employment at the higher levels of production. Needless to say the prospects of their promotion to semi-skilled or supervisory jobs are non-existant.

As many as 56 per cent of the women workers hold temporary jobs,

the percentage rising in some types of mines such as manganeze, stone, china clay and iron, or they work as contract labour. In this way the employers can avoid paying for the protective services for women by resorting to breaks in their service. This is despite the fact that the cost of such welfare facilities as creches, maternity payments, separate toilets, etc., come to less than 2 per cent of their total wage bill. And despite the fact that absenteeism amongst women is on the average only slightly higher than amongst men workers, and in many cases, their rate of absenteeism is much lower.

In some mines - coal, iron-ore, stone - women are on piece-rate wages in others the wages are time-rated. In most occupations the average rates of pay of men and women are identical, or the differences are marginal. In most mines women work only one shift in the day - night shift and underground work being prohibited by law. Many mines do not comply with the statutory provisions for separate toilets for women, nor are there any arrangements for supply of water and washing facilities. Again despite the law, it will be found that the majority of women carry headloads far above the statutory limit laid down and up to as much as 35 kgs. a load.

Where creches are provided, they lack the proper facilities, or trained ayahs, or are far from the work-site. The permanent women workers face delay in the payment of maternity benefits, and lack of arrangements for pre-natal and post-natal care, and receive trifling amount of Rs.25 as medical relief.

To receive even all this, the woman worker must be continuously employed for 160 days to be eligible for such 'facilities'. In the dispensaries only male doctors are employed. The incidence of anaemia and malnutrition is the greatest among a large number of women workers.

The majority of women enter mine employment after marriage, at between 16 and 19 years of age, usually between the ages of 21 to 25. Thus from 75 to 90 per cent of women employed are below the age of 40. Of these some 5 to 13 per cent are widows. Less than 5 per cent of them

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* * * "IT IS THE TASK OF THE UNIONS * * *

* * TO DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF OUR WOMENFOLK" * *

(Extract from the Inaugural Address by the President, CITU, B.T.RANADIVE, to the All-India Coal Workers' Convention, April 1981, Raniganj)

".....Comrades, our unions have a special responsibility to fight for the specific demands of women miners, to fight against discrimination practised against them, and to protect their rights as workers and women, as wives and mothers of workers. Women form a substantial part of our working force - their total strength, though rapidly declining, was 45,000 in 1975.

We are not a men's organisation, but a workers' organisation - comprising both men and women. And yet it cannot be said that our trade unions discharge their minimum duty by the women workers and carry on the fight for their special demands. Our women workers, having the double responsibility of looking after the job as well as domestic work, have little time to devote to trade union activities and participate in our organisation. But we do not make any special efforts to secure their enrolment, to secure their participation in union activities, much less to promote them to the post of office bearers in our organisation. We are still not free from a feudal outlook in this respect, though we claim to fight for socialism.

The authorities are planning a big offensive against women workers in our industry. The Baweja Committee Report demands dismissal of almost the entire women forces from the industry. Our Unions must unitedly resist this offensive."

Referring to the working conditions in the industry, B.T.Ranadive continued:

"All this makes the life of a working woman far more arduous than that of men. It is the task of the unions to take up these questions and defend the rights of our womenfolk.

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FROM PAGE 10

are literate; unfortunately the programmes run by the Labour Welfare organisations have proved to be unsuitable for the women workers. Few mines run schools for the children of miners, so it is not surprising that only a quarter to a half of the children of school-going age actually go to school. Here also there is found a wide variation between the education of boys and girls.

About half the number of women employed are enrolled in their trade unions. Any improvement in the conditions and employment of women in mines, as in other industrial centres, can come about only with the more active participation of the women themselves and strong intervention by the trade unions.

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DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF OUR WOMENFOLK

FROM PAGE 11

The CITU calls upon all our fighting coal unions to establish special committees of women workers to help the unions struggle on their behalf. No other organisation can protect the women workers' interests, if the trade union does not do it. Such committees should be formed in all unions and linked together under the guidance of the CITU.

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EXPULSION OF S. E. W. A.

FROM TEXTILE LABOUR ORGANISATION

GUJERAT

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and its founder and General Secretary, Mrs. Ela Bhatt, have been expelled from the Textile Labour Association, the parent body of SEWA. Mrs. Bhatt was forced to leave the TLA, founded in Ahmedabad, Gujerat, by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, and with Anasuyaben Sarabhai as its first President, which she joined as a sevak in 1968. Her 'fault' was her public advocacy of the Harijans' cause during the recent anti-reservationist stir in Gujerat, and that of SEWA the appeal for peace made by its members during the agitation which had "deprived thousands of Harijan working women of their daily bread." On their demand a meeting was held to protest against the anti-reservationist riots currently rocking the city - one of the few such protests. Following this, Ela Bhatt also spoke in defence of reservations in a peace committee meeting, the proceedings of which were widely publicised by the Central Government through advertisements in the local press, Radio and T.V. When, as a consequence of her outspokeness, Ela Bhatt's house was stoned on successive evenings fo one week, neither the TLA nor the Government came forward to extend any protection.

The TLA, despite the fact that about one-third of its claimed membership of 1,20,000 belong to the scheduled castes, itself had not the courage to openly commit itself on this issue, evading its responsibility to its members and the Gandhian principles by which it swears, on the plea that this would amount to taking part in a 'political' conflict! Ironically, SEWA was asked to shift its office from the TLA premises on May I - International Workers' Day.

A cooperative bank run by SEWA, with 300 members has also been disowned, and three and a half lakhs rupees TLA deposits withdrawn from it, in an attempt to financially damage the bank. However further deposits worth

Rs. two lakhs have been arranged.

Sewa members and Mrs. Bhatt are determined that this action, far from adversely affecting the organisation, will in fact help to expand it. This is not unlikely in view of the fact that SEWA which started off in March 1972 with 80 members, in response to the demand by some working women, for protection against harassment by wholesalers, money lenders, police men and municipal authorities, now has a membership of over 13,000 women engaged in various occupations - vegetable sellers, junksmiths, used garment dealers, hand cart pullers, sand carriers, etc., including a few rural groups like agricultural workers, handloom weavers and firewood collectors. It is legally recognised as a trade union, and runs its own bank for which the members raised the initial Rs.70,000 from their daily savings. SEWA members have also organised their own maternity, health and death insurance schemes for dependents of SEWA members, runs 59 child care centres in villages and the slums of Ahmedabad, as well as providing productivity training in various trades and functional literacy to increase members' earnings.

A meeting was held in Delhi on May 21, 1981, sponspored by a number of women's organisations including the All India Democratic Women's Association, the National Federation of Indian Women, the Centre for Ddvelopment of Women's Studies and the National Coordination Committee of Working Women, to protest and condemn these actions of the leadership of the T.L.A. Ahmedabad, and to declare its solidarity with the members of SEWA and Ela Bhatt on their courageious stand in defence of reservations for scheduled castes. As the speeches and resolution at the meeting stressed, this is not an isolated case, but comes in the wake of attacks on other individuals who have upheld democratic rights and civil liberties, as in AMU and Assam. It is necessary to resist all such incidents, otherwise they will only presage future attacks on united workers' and women's organisations.

&&& A DIFFERENT KIND OF CONFERENCE &&&

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES

BAOMBAY -- APRIL 20, - 24, 1981

In Bombay between April 20 -24, there took place, in the spacious Juhu campus of the SNDT Women's University, a rather unusual, a conference of a different kind. Gathered together were 400 women delegates, many of them belonging to different Universities across the country, teachers and Vice-Chancellors from Kashmir to Kerala, Bengal to Rajasthan; other women with decades of service in Women's political or service organisations; women government officials, representatives from international agencies, UNICEF, and from the American Ford Foundation. Inaugurating the Conference and Chairman of its Organising Committee, was Madhuriben Shah, presently Chairwoman of the University Grants Commission and before her appointment, the Vice Chancellor of the SNDT Women's University.

There were also nearly 50 male delegates, including the Vice-Chancellor of Gahrwal University. But by and large it was a conference of women, by women and for women - to discuss the present state of studies on women's questions in the economic, social, political, legal and cultural fields.

A striking fact which became apparent through this gathering, was that most of the women present, and many others who were unable to come, had all done some work on women in their respective fields. This bears witness to a new phenomenon that a women's intelligentsia has silently come up in the last two decades, given over to studying the origin and current status of women - raising possible solutions also. Thus serious thinking became articulated only a few years ago; the wide and varied representation at this conference indicates that a more coordinated attack is now feasible,* *challenging the accepted social moves, attitudes and thinking in this country about women and their role.

There are differences, of course, both on the theoretical as well as at the level of practice. But this is the kind of debate between women and between women and men, which is required to clarify our understanding

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Earlier Justice Sen had strongly opposed the idea of employing air-hostesses merely as "Show-Pieces". He said this was an "undignified" approach and unbecoming of the tradition and culture of the country.

We have argued before in this bulletin, that such open penalising of the working woman is intolerable and must be resisted wherever it is met, most particularly in Government services. The air-hostesses and other women employees in Air-India and Indian Airlines are to be congratulated for challenging these rules, and have the full support of all working women and all women's organisations in their fight to abolish this particular form of discrimination.

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BOMBAY CONFERENCE

on the particular and specific position of women in Indian society, as contrasted to the position of women in the world in general and the industrially advanced countries. Many interesting points of debate have emerged.

In a conference of this variegation, it was inevitable that controversies should surface. Two of the more important ones dealt with (i) the character of women's organisations, and (ii) the link between woman's studies and these women's organisations.

In connection with the first the point of view of international agencies with which Government agencies not surprisingly concern, is that women's organisations should remain strictly service organisations without taking up or becoming involved in political questions.But when questions relating to survival and employment bring women up against the economic policies which engender this disress, or life-saving drugs are available only at exorbitant prices, is it possible to demand that women and their organisations should not debate and challenge such policies? The representatives of women's organisations on the contrary, felt it necessary to reassert the right of women to organise themselves and to freedom of opinion.

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DOMESTIC SERVANTS ORGANISE THEMSELVES

Women domestic servants are employed by the middle class and upper class families in all States. Sweeping, cleaning, dusting, washing the utensils and clothes, and other odd jobs around the house, they serve at least four to five families, and have a working day of more than 8-10 hours. Working Women particularly are very dependent on them. No working hours are specified for them, no wage-scales formulated; often they are ill-treated, with no recourse against unfair dismissal. Many times Scheduled Caste women find it impossible to get work in Hindu families. Clearly they need legislative protection by the Government. Some years ago a private Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha to regulate their working conditions, etc., but was not followed up.

In January of this year, such women in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra formed a union - the Vidarbha Malkaran Sanghatan, with Rukmani Roopa Kulkarni as their Secretary.

The following demands have been placed before the Maharashtra Government.:

1. Women domestic servants be included in the legislation covering 'Mathadi, Hamal and Manual Workers' Act of 1969.
2. Domestic Servants be paid Rs.30 a month where there are four members in the household, and a higher wage where there are more than four in the household worked for. In this way, by working in six or seven households, a minimum of Rs.200 may be earned.
3. One day's leave a fortnight on any day suitable to both.
4. One month's bonus at time of Diwali.
5. Increase in pay as per the increase in cost of living.

WHAT IS THE NEUTRON BOMB ?

In less than one month of assuming office in January 1981, the new Reagan Administration in the U.S. began threatening the world with its plans to unearth the universally rejected Neutron Bomb. What is the Neutron Bomb?

It is a nuclear weapon of mass destruction, but one more dangerous than all the nuclear weapons developed and applied so far, including the Atom and Hydrogen bombs. In an 'ordinary' A or H bomb, the energy release is very quick and sudden, and large quantities of neutrons are released. There is a strong and intense blast explosion, which completely demolishes buildings over a wide area, killing or burying alive those inside; the searing heat flash in an instant burns to ashes those caught in the streets over a similar area; the persistent radio-active fall-out is projected over an even wider area by the force of the explosion.

In the neutron bomb the energy release is much slower; there is no sudden explosion but the same neutrons and radio-active by-products are produced, in similar quantities, spread over a longer time. In the absence of the strong blast explosion, the radio-active by products remain close to where the bomb was dropped and are not spread over a wide area, so there is no fall-out.The neutrons however, go just as far as in the ordinary A and H bombs, so that people found withinone or two kilometres of the bomb centre, receive terrible and usually lethal injuries. The bomb does not kill instantly, except at the point of impact, but causes people to die a slow, lingering, often terribly painful death after a few weeks, months or even years, depending on how close they were to the place where the bomb was dropped. If they were expectant mothers at the time of the exposure, there is a high probability of mis-carriage. If they live long enough to conceive after the exposure, the chance that their

children will be born with congenital defects will be greatly increased. The rest of their lives will be like those of the 1945 A bomb victims in Japan, some of whom eke out a miserable existence, even till this day, with injuries so terrible that even their closest relatives shrink with horror and revulsion when they see them.

But the factories, businesses, homes remain undamaged except close to the bomb centre. The depopulated area can then be simply taken over and occupied.

The political and military creators of this weapon are now playing with the idea of fighting limited wars with the bomb. It is intended to deliver neutron bombs, not from aircraft, but by means of ordinary artillery shells or missiles, which makes their utilisation much more simple. Thus the bomb can be used against targets a mere 100 kilometres away, or fired at objects up to 32 kilometres distant. In addition it can be detonated at a certain height above a specific target. While the effect of mass killings in all cases is the same, the degree of destruction of property is reduced --- and so is the period which has to elapse until a depopulated area can be occupied.

The creation, threats to use and consideration of the possible ways to use such weapons as the Neutron Bomb, reveal the utter contempt in which its promoters hold human beings.

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WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE

UNITE BUT YOUR CHAINS

M A Y D A Y !

The First of May is a date of special significance for working men and women all over the world, especially those who have joined the ranks of the undaunted fighters for a new life. On this day, the common demands of working people are voiced, cutting across lines of nation, language and religion, expressing deep international solidarity with one another in the long and costly struggle to end forever this exploitation which takes the life and the blood from a worker and his or her family, and gives nothing but poverty and misery in return.

In the Socialist countries of the world the dream of a life free of exploitation has been realised to varying degrees, depending on their stage of development. But every day sees an improvement in their living. In the remaining capitalist, and underdeveloped countries of the world, including India, the fight continues. In the Socialist world, May 1 is a day of rejoicing as well as solidarity with their less fortunate sisters and brothers. In the rest of the world it is day of pledging anew the resolution to carry on the struggle for emancipation.

Wherever is raised the flag of struggle for a new way of life, free from exploitation and suffering, where men and women may raise families without fear of any kind, there women have a particular interest and a very heavy stake. Here in India, unless the conditions of all toiling people improve, the freeing of women from the double yoke and chains which oppress them as women, in the home, in the workplace, in society, is not possible.The largest numbers of our women in the agricultultural as well as industrial fields, are unorganised, working in conditions similar to those in Europe and America a hundred years ago before the rise of the trade union movement. An 8-hours working day is still to be achieved, night shift still continues at a number of places despite

its legal prohibition, other protective legislation giving facilities to working women, ameliorating their conditions and wages, still remain only on paper. To get employment is still a far cry when lakhs are unemployed. These are the common demands raised on May Day. But the fight for women's emancipation is bound up with the common fight of the working people; and without their common fight there can be no liberation for men or women, from the feudal - capitalist yoke. So, while raising their voice for their specific demands, working women particularly, must join hands with and actively take part in the common struggles under their trade unions.

In this they can take inspiration from the fact that in the First May Day of 1886, nearly a hundred years ago, in Chicago, U.S.A., women workers were among the foremost participants; that it was a woman worker who, tearing off her blouse and dipping it in the blood of the martyrs of that first May Day demonstration, gave to the international working class its very own banner - the Red Flag. . . .

In those days workers in America, Britain, Germany, Japan, and all countries where industrialisation had begun, were toiling for 16 to 20 hours a day, under hazardous and dangerous conditions. At the 7th October Convention, 1884, of the Federation of Organised Trades and Labour Unions of the United States, it was resolved that 8 hours should constitute a legal day's labour, from May 1, 1886, - the demand of the first organised workers' movement in Britain in the 1830's. A 25,000-strong demonstration took place in Chicago on the day before May 1, a Sunday, in support of the decision. Three days later on May 3, there followed a massacre of striking workers at the "Hay Market", outside the McCormck Harvester plant, where six workers were killed, and large numbers injured. It was then that the woman worker, dipping her blouse in the blood of the martyrs, exhorted the workers to avenge their death by continuing the struggle with greater vigour. The workers took up the challenge with a bigger rally on the next day, May 4, which was again

attacked by the police, killing four more workers and seven policemen. This rising movement angered the Government which sent four activists of Federation to the gallows, and its leaders to jail - just for demanding an 8-hour working day!

The repression continued thereafter, while the movement grew. By 1889, the Federation was able to give a nationwide call for strike on May 1, 1889.

In Europe, the July 1889 Foundation Congress of the Second International Working men's Association, taking note of this great episode, passed a historic resolution declaring May 1, as a day of international working-class solidarity - and workers all over the world began to respond and continue to respond, to that resolution. The call of the woman worker who dipped her blouse in the blood of the Chicago martyrs was thus answered by workers all over the world, and the Red Flag was hoisted on high - the symbol of their struggle, their sacrifice - and their hope for the future.

In this spirit working women in India joined in the May Day rallies this year. It is this understanding which must be carried to all corners of our country where women toil without relief, and without hope.

" A Victory For One Is A Victory For All,
United We Stand, Divided We Fall".

-.-.-.

FURTHER PROTECTION OF WOMEN WORKERS

The USSR Government has recently increased the number of occupations in its list of "heavy and dangerous occupations" in which women's labour is banned, according to new laws which came into force on January 1, 1981. These newly-cited occupations have been categorised as being physically arduous, or unsuitable for women. Covering 460 occupations, the new laws now apply to mechanical repair work, driving buses, trains or any other vehicle with more than 14 passengers, working in the chemical industry, or on outdoor sites in very cold weather.

Already women's labour in a number of heavy jobs was banned. Since 1957, for example, no woman has been allowed to work underground as a miner. The head of the Moscow Metro, a woman, who began her career as a tunneller before the war, pointedout that today's tunnellers are all men.

This change, prompted by the care and consideration for women, which characterise the Soviet system, has come at a time when, and even despite the fact, that, the Soviet Union is currently facing a critical shortage of manpower.

In the years following the revolution, up to and during the Second World War, women were needed and encouraged to put their hands to all types of work, barring those that were patently dangerous or injurious to them, as women, and potential mothers. With the terrible loss of lives sustained during World War II by the Soviet Union, particularly of the men (20 million was the total sacrifice the Soviet people had to make), women outnumber men in the Soviet Union by a larger proportion than anywhere else in the world, and constitute more than half of the Union's total workforce. In the 1950's and early 1960's, when this labour shortage was most acutely felt, women entered to replace men in a number of occupations digging roads, working on building sites, driving tractors; bus and trolley drivers were a common, though novel sight for visitors from abroad to help maintain and

expand the country's production and progress.

Today that situation has changed, aided by the increasing introduction of labour-saving technology, which under a socialist system lightens the work-load, increases the workers' leisure without any fear of greater exploitation or unemployment. Hence Soviet society can now release its women from the more arduous jobs they had earlier willingly undertaken, at the same time as it creates greater opportunities and greater facilities for Soviet Women to undertake more sophisticated and highly skilled jobs.

To this end, since July, 1979 special measures have been undertaken to modernise all forms of training, retraining and upgrading at the enterprise level. The annual plans for on-the-job training drawn up by all enterprises are obliged to contain special targets relating to women workers. The courses for working mothers with children under eight years of age are organised solely on a full-time basis with participants continuing to receive their average monthly wages. Great urgency has been imparted to the task of achieving a sharp rise in the enrolment of girls in vocational technical schools where they receive secondary education at the same time as acquiring a skill.

SEVERE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGIES ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The rapid introduction of new electronic technologies in commerce and offices, is expected to have a serious impact on employment in these fast-changing sectors, which are both characterised by the extensive employment of women.

Women represent a growing proportion of employees in the distributive trades, banking, insurance, real estate, and offices in general. The preponderance of women in commerce and offices is most pronounced in the industrialised countries. Thus in Finland women account for 84.9 per cent of administrative staff, 57.9 per cent of sales and vending staff 79.6 per cent of those employed in services. In Hungary the corresponding proportions are 67 per cent, 61.3 per cent and 70.6 per cent. In France they number 66.6 per cent, 49.7 per cent and 66.7 per cent, and in the United States 79.8 per cent, 45.5 per cent and 62.8 per cent.

Narrow range

What is so distinctive about women's employment in commerce and offices, compared to the employment of men, is their concentration into a narrow range of occupations, particularly in the clerical occupational group. In many countries women account for the near-totality of all secretaries, stenographers, typists and related workers and for the majority of cashiers There have, of course, been exceptions to this pattern, notably in some African and Asian countries where men account for the substantial majority of all clerical and sales workers.

These occupations, compared to those of managerial and professional jobs where women represent a very small minority of those employed, are at lower end of the hierarchical structure and are usually characterised by low skill qualifications, routine and repetitive tasks and low pay.

What will be the result of the more widespread use of electronics and telecommunications in commerce and offices?

Employment in this sector has grown everywhere in the world except in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Finland. Nevertheless, the new technologies not only reduce the labour-absorbtive capacity of the services, which until now had been considered almost unlimited, but could also cause a diminution in the numbers of people already employed in commerce and offices. These technologies will make superfluous many repetitive and unqualified jobs, thus threatening in particular the employment of women and young persons.

If, as is desirable, undertakings that have to retrench their workforce, endeavour to retain their staff through natural wastage, this will doubtless result in cuts in recruitment and greater use of temporary or part-time workers, and the sub-contracting of certain tasks.

Women already represent a large majority of part-time workers in these sectors; 96 per cent in the insurance business in the Federal Republic of Germany; 89 per cent in commerce, 96 per cent in accounting and office work and 97 per cent in Swedish banks.

The danger is of a situation arising where two categories of workers will co-exist. On the one hand, those who are offered certain guarantees under legislation and collective agreements and, on the other, a growing number of persons - mostly female, young or unskilled,- who will be unable to find themselves a niche in the world of work and who will from time to time be called upon to do uninteresting jobs with no perspective, and under unstable conditions of employment.

On the subject of working conditions, experience has shown that the effects of computerisation may be both positive and negative. For example, cash register operators in department stores and supermarkets who, under present conditions, are frequently subjected to mental and psychological strain arising from the large number of clients whom they have to service - some 500 a day and the concentration demanded by the job. As electronic

cash registers come into more general use, the operators will no longer have to fear mistakes in reading prices and codes or in pressing keys, and a major element of nervous strain will be eliminated. On the other hand, the time factor may become still heavier if the system is used - as it may well be - to increase workload.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE NEWS

RETROGRADE STEP IN SRI LANKA

The Government of Sri Lanka is considering a proposal to introduce legislation which will sanction night work for women. It is not specified in which industries or occupations it is proposed to introduce this practice. Whatever facilities may given to women employed at night, in fact night shift always means a double-shift for women - for the domestic responsibilities and work still remain for the woman worker, to be done when she returns. Unlike male workers, she cannot spend the day resting, to compensate for the loss of sleep at night.

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