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**UNORGANISED SECTOR WORKERS RALLY
AT LUCKNOW ON 27TH AUGUST 2004**

SUCCESSFUL STRIKE OF BANK EMPLOYEES

More than a million bank employees and officers stayed away from work on August 24 crippling banking services in a nationwide strike demanding early wage settlement.

The strike was called by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) - a conglomerate of all major bank unions and all affiliated bodies in states, all public sector, private, regional rural and foreign banks. Nearly one million employees are members of these unions.

The bank employees and officers are demanding a wage increase of 18 per cent, but the Indian Banks Association (IBA) is willing to increase by only 9.15 per cent. The increase was 12.25 per cent in the last wage settlement four years ago.

MASSIVE RESPONSE

The strike crippled banking services throughout the country. The workmen and the officers joined the strike enthusiastically and jointly resulting in total success of the call. In Delhi and many other places across the country, the protestors staged demonstrations in front of bank branches demanding revision in the wages and service conditions with effect from November 1, 2002.

Reserve Bank employees throughout the country, at the call of the All India Reserve Bank Employees Association (AIRBEA), extended total support and expressed solidarity with the striking bank employees by holding massive gate demonstrations in all offices and submission of memoranda to the officers-in-charge demanding immediate wage settlement in the industry. The RBI employees in Kolkata, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kochi have observed total strike in solidarity. Even though RBI employees' wage demands get settled by separate negotiation between RBI management and AIRBEA, still the settlement in banks has its impact thereon. The AIRBEA has demanded RBI management to commence immediate meaningful discussions on the association's charter of demands and also to prevail over Indian Banks Association not go for confrontation with bank staff but sort out the contentious issues without any further delay by amicable discussions in national interest. It congratulated bank workers and officers for

making the strike a success.

While congratulating the bank workmen and officers for their enthusiastic response to the strike call, the UFBU in a statement on August 24 called upon them to remain in preparedness to implement further programme of action that may be decided by UFBU in the near future. It requested the bankers to settle the wage demands of the employees immediately without insisting on unreasonable quid pro quo so that the public may not suffer inconvenience due to dislocation of banking service.

IBA's UNREASONABLE ATTITUDE

It may be mentioned here that the earlier settlement expired on October 31, 2002 and since then several rounds of discussions took place between Indian Bankers Association (IBA) and the five recognised unions of the workmen, including BEFI. In spite of these discussions, no settlement could be arrived at on account of IBA's unreasonable attitude and arrogance meager wage increase and its insistence on the workmen unions' agreeing to its counter demands. The workmen unions went a long way to meet the bankers' demand for redeployment of staff, computerisation of jobs, rationalisation of special pay, rationalisation of special leave facility etc., but IBA remained adamant on its proposals in this regard and on denying a reasonable wage increase to the employees.

OPPOSED ANY RISE IN FOREIGN STAKE

The All India Reserve Bank Employees Association (AIRBEA) has urged the government not to accept the recommendation of doubling the foreign institutional investment allowed in public sector banks from the present 20 per cent to 40 per cent. This recommendation was made recently by a government committee headed by chief economic adviser, Ashok Lahiri, as reported by some national dailies.

In a statement on August 16 from Kolkata, the AIRBEA general secretary Samir Ghosh felt "any further relaxation is inappropriate and unwarranted - rather the current investment limit itself should be reduced, better still if the foreign investment is totally stopped".

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Isn't Vajpayeeji meant to clarify why the BJP is not able to accept being in the Opposition till date!

Courtesy: The Pioneer

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EDITORIAL

THE TAINT AND PAINT GAME AND THEREAFTER

First it was on the issue of tainted ministers. No matter, howsoever tainted they themselves are, checkered with scams and scandals, from the coffin-scam to scandals on petroleum dealership, from the stinking deals of Modern-food sell-off to latest centaur Hotel (Juhu) privatization deal and host of others, the BJP bandwagon banked on the issue of so called "taints" in the UPA cabinets to disrupt parliament and let the budget pass without any debate.

Then came their project of painting their tainted faces and stained features to look like a nationalist brigade as is evident from the flop show of Uma Bharati in the so called "Tiranga yatra" following her drama of resignation from the chief ministership of MP.

But the 'taint and paint' game could not deliver anything tangible to enable them to recover from the shock of the defeat and demoralization.

And hence their self-introspection (or recapitulation?) in their "chintan baithak" in the form of hurling mutual blames for alleged sidelining of their so called hindutva agenda by their players in the-then seats of governance and then the renewed pledge to adopt hard-line on all their extremely right wing saffron agendas. The preparatory parade in that direction in the communal camp has already started, the indication of which is already visible in the attempts to rouse communal and divisive passions in Bhopal, Jaipur and some other centers, in their attempts to whip up communal tension by distorting historical facts concerning the role of Savarkar in the freedom struggle, the latest being in Satara of Maharashtra through unsuccessful attempt by VHP hoodlums to demolish Afzal Khan's tomb in the run up to the Assembly election in the state. Clearly, the communal combine is putting into practice their understanding that their political existence is crucially, if not entirely, dependent upon communal polarization.

In the run up to the forthcoming Maharashtra election, the BJP combine will try their luck that way. Despite being the main opposition at the center, they are not raising their voice on economic policies and the surging inflation rate, since they are also an integral part of the right wing economic policy formulations of neoliberalism. Hence they will bank on rousing communal passion in their venture to stage a come-back in the forthcoming assembly elections.

The working class movement must take serious note of the ploy of the communal combine and foil their nefarious game plan. They have to carry on consistent resistance against the extreme right wing political combine under the Sangh parivar along with their determined struggle against the right wing economic policies of neoliberalism.

INVESTMENTS, MEDIA SLANDER AND THE CITU

Shyamal Chakraborty

The ABP Ltd, which owns the Ananda Bazar Patrika and the Telegraph dailies, organised an interactive session of top-ranking industrialists with the West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in Mumbai on August 21 in order to promote the possibilities of investments in West Bengal. The chief minister had a frank discussion with the captains of industry from various parts of the country regarding the prospects for investment in the state. He urged upon them to come forward and invest more and more in the state. There can be no doubt that the objective of this meet was laudable because industrialisation will boost the economic growth of West Bengal, which in turn will benefit the people.

LET US AGREE TO DISAGREE?

It was entirely a Q & A session, so to say. The media people were not invited. Only three leading representatives from Ananda Bazar Patrika and/or Telegraph were present. The chief minister was accompanied by Avik Dutta, assistant editor Ganashakti. They brought out reports of the meet in their respective dailies. However, there appears to be a marked difference between the version of Ananda Bazar Patrika and/or Telegraph and that of Ganashakti.

Interestingly, when someone is selling half-truths or downright lies he always runs the risk of getting caught on the wrong foot which gives the keen observer a clear idea of what really happened. That is just the case here. The Ananda Bazar reporter writes: "The final question to the CM was, 'Can you convince your party men on the question of FDI so that they do not cause trouble?' The CM's reply was, 'Talks are going on about this in the Party and there shall be more. But I shall have to finally tell the opposition - okay, let us agree to disagree'".

Now, let us turn to the report in the Telegraph. The chief minister is reported to have said, 'I tell you that they (the vocal members of the Left) will speak their mind to the finance minister (P Chidambaram), but finally agree to disagree'.

Two entirely different stories, one may wonder. The Ananda Bazar Patrika is talking about opposition within the Party. But the Telegraph's view is completely different. Which one is speaking the truth? Interestingly, both of the comments have been put within quotes.....

ON PRODUCTIVITY

Ananda Bazar reporter also writes: "The trade unions should now be attentive to the need for increasing production. They should also take care of the quality of the products". I request the concerned reader to take note of the adverb "now". Is this issue, one wonders, a new one? Something that has been made known only recently? Has the CITU never spoken about the need for increasing production before? Has it ever opposed rise in production?

The point is being raised in a manner that seems to suggest that the CITU has always been a staunch opponent of improved production. "Now" it is much more enlightened in its views.

The fact remains that barring some isolated cases of aberrations at the grass root level, the CITU has upheld a clear, consistent stand on industrial production. The political-organisational report of the 5th state conference of CITU West Bengal committee held in 1990 clearly enunciates our stand:

CITU in principle supports rise in production. There are workers who feel that rise in production is a component of exploitation and try to resist it. On the other hand there are employers who, in the name of rise of production try to reap as much profit as possible with the minimum work force, taking no heed of market demands or limits of productivity of the workers. Consequently the unit falls prey to the crisis of overproduction in a squeezed market and slides towards closure. If the workers start viewing the need to raise production only as a tool for enhanced exploitation, the existing industries will turn sick and shut down. So the workers must take care of increase in industrial production.

This decision was taken, dear reader, by the CITU 14 years ago when Jyoti Basu was the chief minister of West Bengal.

ON FDI

According to the Ananda Bazar Patrika, the chief minister has allegedly said, 'I have told my Party men I cannot oppose FDI. I want foreign investment in West Bengal'. The Telegraph has gone one step further. It quotes the chief minister as saying that his views are not fashioned by the dogmas of the past.

Avik Dutta, however, presents an altogether different version in Ganashakti. According to him the CM has said, 'The Party and the government are in harmony. We need foreign investment but we should take a cautious attitude towards it in the interest of the country. In some spheres, where we are deficient in suitable or developed technology, we do need foreign investment. But in areas where we have them, have them on our own in plenty, do we really need investment from outside? That will only cause harm to the country'. Nothing more needs to be said.

The Ananda Bazar Patrika has talked about 'now'. Ten years from now, to be precise in September 1994, Jyoti Basu on behalf of the LF government made a policy statement on industrial development on the floor of the assembly....

The response was overwhelming. New industrial units began to come up in different parts of the state. Particular mention needs to be made of Haldia Petrochemicals and the Electronics Complex in Salt Lake.

It should be also borne in mind that the strides in the field of agriculture, by the LF government under the leadership of Jyoti Basu, particularly the policy of emphasis on land reforms and strengthening of Panchayati Raj, have created the necessary base for industrial development. Jyoti Basu successfully overcame all hindrances and obstacles and led West Bengal towards industrial development. His dedicated initiative prepared the ground and Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is carrying on effectively from where he had ended.

Buddhadeb has reportedly said, that his Party men (i.e. you and me) have opposed FDI. When? Where? The Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation PTA plant has come up in West Bengal. Many other

projects are going on. From August 1991 to March 1995, 79 foreign investment proposals were finalised with a total investment of Rs 3,483 crore. Foreign technology was involved in 55 projects. (Source: A Review of Industrial Scene in W B - Annual Report pages 274-275)....

How did the captains of the industry develop such panicky attitude towards the trade unions in general and the CPI(M) in particular? This question came up during the meet. Buddhadev Bhattacharjee gave a straight reply. According to him (to quote Ganashakti), this misconception stems from a systematic campaign of slander by a section of the media. In reality, there is absolutely no difference between the position of the Party and the point of view of the government. Ananda Bazar Patrika has chosen to omit these words of the CM. Why? It is perhaps because it is not convenient for them to bring this out.

TWO IMPORTANT POINTS

The alert reader may note that the CM has spelt out certain principled views. Firstly, he has made it clear every decision is taken at a political level in the Party. Secondly, we are taking concrete decisions based on the objective analysis of the situation. Some people are mistakenly describing it as pragmatism. There is a wide difference between pragmatism and realism. 'Pragmatism' conveys a sense of opportunism.

ON IISCO

The Ananda Bazar Patrika states that the CM has reportedly told Jindal (a leading industrialist), that the central government might take over IISCO and run it for one or two years. But if there is no privatisation, its future will be doomed. Then the paper reports within quotes the CM telling Jindal, 'You take over IISCO, otherwise it will not survive.' Then the reporter has remarked: 'This appeal from the Leftist chief minister of Bengal must have surprised Jindal.' I venture to add in this connection that if some one goes through the two reports in the two dailies he will be less surprised.

Now let us see what Avik Dutta has to say in Ganashakti. He writes: "In reply to a query from the Jindal group, the CM said, 'you have discussed this issue once. Our point is to save IISCO. If someone gives me a good proposal I will have a talk with the centre. But we do not support privatisation of profit making PSUs. This should

not be done.'

ON MILITANT TU MOVEMENT

The chief minister has supposedly said (as stated by Ananda Bazar Patrika) 'The trade unions are still carrying on along the wrong path of the 60's and the 70's. In the name of movement they are breaking the law. This cannot be allowed. Gherao, militant movement has to be stopped; otherwise I'll have to send the police. Bandhs do not help in getting anything. They only tarnish the image of the state.'

But the Ganashakti has an entirely different story to say. It reads: "(The CM said), 'LF government is of course in favour of trade union movement but that movement has got to be responsible. We are in favour of movements for the protection of the democratic rights of the workers and for putting forward their reasonable demands. We also tell the employers and management that they must also look after the grievances and demands of the workers. It must also be remembered that while labour is an indispensable component of the industry, the workers must also study the industry they are working in. If they do not do so, their own future will be at stake.'

According to the Ganashakti, the CM had also said that a movement for just demands and breakdown of law and order are not one and the same thing. The chief minister informed the gathering that except for one or two isolated cases, the labour situation in West Bengal is positive. This part has also been left out by the Ananda Bazar Patrika.

"Gherao" is now a thing of the past. Long before the Left Front assumed power in West Bengal, the CITU had decisively stated that "Gherao" could not be regarded as a valid form of workers' struggle. We do not think that "Gherao" (pressurising an employer or management staff to concede a demand by detaining him) helps the cause of the working class. The trade union movement, or for that matter the democratic movement cannot rely on such short cuts. We have annulled such "quick" methods way back in 1969. So where does the difference lie between the CM and the CITU regarding "Gherao"?

And talking about militant movement, one may do well to remember that carrying a gun or wielding a stick does not make a person militant. Militant is

a word having a positive sense but it is being misused. If someone uses force he is called a "militant". If he carries a gun or hurls a bomb he becomes militant. The terrorists of Kashmir, ULFA, KLO, the Bajrangis with their tridents are all being labelled "militant" by the media. But the CITU does not consider these to be militant movements. These are simply terrorist activities - a handful of people using violence or threat of violence to achieve their means. This does a lot of damage to the organised movement, deters people's participation and initiative giving a clear advantage to the forces of reaction and the opportunistic employers and management....

In fact, whether a movement is militant or not is determined by the circumstances in which it happens. In a terribly hostile environment, even a rally or a march may be considered a militant movement. To brave the extremist violence (or threat of violence) and organise a rally of 100 people in the Kashmir valley is a militant act. Even if the whole rally is unarmed. The brave employees in Tamil Nadu who went on strike even after Jayalalitha declared it illegal and clamped the draconian TESMA on it, had taken a militant position. And of course, a workers strike anywhere is a militant step.

Our friends in the media may do well to remember that it was through strikes and bandhs, rallies and marches that the Common Minimum Programme and the UPA government, dependent on the "untouchable" Left, came into being....

Our stand is crystal clear: the industrial development in Bengal shall continue and the CITU shall go on supporting the endeavour. In some spheres we do need foreign investment. We shall open the doors to it. But in other areas, say for example, the banking sector, the insurance sector, the telecom industry and the civil aviation sector we do not need any thing from outside. If these are handed over to foreigners, there will be firm resistance from our end. If need be, there will be strikes, state-wide bandhs, Bharat bandhs and other 'militant' movements.

And about slanders against the CITU? Well if they are not there, it will seem that we are going the wrong way. Just like Karna's armour (in the Mahabharata), the hate campaign against us has been a part of our existence since the inception...

(On the question of launch of the National Social Security Number, the EPFO, at the behest of Sahib Singh Verama, Minister of Labour under the NDA regime, had indulged in a fraudulent gimmick, involving even the high office of the President of India, on which the Prime Minister has been requested to order an enquiry. Text of Letter addressed to Prime Minister by Dipankar Mukherjee, Secretary, CITU & M.P. is reproduced below. -Editor)

NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: A FRAUD?

"As you are kindly aware the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP), adopted by the UPA Government had, inter-alia, asserted that the UPA Government is firmly committed to ensuring the welfare and well-being of all workers, particularly those in the unorganised sector who constitute 93 per cent of our workforce. I am sure the government will accord utmost priority to translate the above commitment in the NCMP into action. However, there have been several disquieting developments in respect of social security and of the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), mainly as a result of arbitrary and ad-hoc measures resorted to in the past. I deem it necessary to bring these to your knowledge for remedial measures.

"EPFO had started issuing National Social Security Numbers (NSSN) for "unique identification" of the beneficiaries of social security schemes, not only under the Employees Provident Fund (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1952, but also under the 'Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Scheme,' launched by the predecessor government during January 2004, in the run up to the General Election. However, in

response to a starred question No.441 dt 26.8.2004 in the Rajya Sabha on August 26, 2004, as to whether Government had designated the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) as the nodal agency for administering social security schemes in the country; and (b) whether the EPFO, as a nodal agency, has been authorised to issue National Social Security Numbers to the workers covered under various social security schemes, Minister of Labour specifically denied any such authorisation to EPFO as a nodal agency to issue NSSN. "This denial raises a serious issue as even the high office of the President of India was dragged in this unauthorised venture of issuing the NSSN during a function organised on the occasion of Golden Jubilee Celebration of the EPFO on February 25, 2003. In fact, the programme, initially drawn up by the EPFO for the launch of NSSN, envisaged presentation of the first "Social Security Card" to the President of India himself. Later, however, the programme was changed to handing over of NSSN cards to two employee-members of the EPF by the then Labour Minister in presence of the President of India. The then Minister of Labour, in his

speech, declared that the EPF has already acquired 10 acres of land at Dwarka, New Delhi to create a state of the art National Social Security Registry and Processing Office. An expenditure of over Rs. 25 crore had been sanctioned for setting up of the National Social Security Registry, with a substantial position of the amount having been expended already.

"All this was done without taking any action to set up the National Social Security Authority as announced earlier and the then Minister of Labour, utilised EPFO as a fraudulent cover for a non existent scheme without any authorisation. Such allotment of NSSN is still being proceeded with by the EPFO notwithstanding the unambiguous reply by the present Minister of Labour in Rajya Sabha on 26th August 2004. The much hyped launch/ allotment of National Social Security Numbers has created illusions even amongst sections of trade unions, and also among the workers.

"I, therefore, request you to please order an immediate inquiry on these vital issues of (a) the so-called Social Security Scheme for Unorganised Sector Workers, (b) launch of NSSN and (c) the unauthorised role of EPFO in allotment of NSSN.

PUBLIC SECTOR SPENDS FOR DISCOVERY PRIVATE SECTOR REAPS THE FRUITS

International bids are being invited for developing and exploiting 19 off-shore oil/gas fields under ONGC and already 40 national and international companies have submitted their expression of interest for the same. Interesting to note that all these 19 off shore fields are discovered fields, i.e., ONGC has already spent crores of rupee in searching, exploring and discovering the prospective oil/gas bearing fields over a much larger area to spot availability of oil/gas reserves in these 19 off shore blocks. In fact the most difficult part of locating the proven fields was accomplished by ONGC only and that part of the job yielded no return. And now these ready-made proven oilfields are going to be handed over to private hands, in most cases to foreign companies for producing oil/gas and earn revenues. Such steps are taken in persuasion of the disastrous policy of the successive central

Governments.

As per estimate, these 19 proven oil/gas fields contain 63 million metric tones of oil reserve and 29 billion cubic meter of gas which is equivalent to India's 2 years' domestic oil production and 1 year's gas production. And these 19 proven oil/gas rich fields, explored by a PSU with public money are slated to be handed over to private companies for production and commercial exploitation within December 2004. And it is not only these 19 oilfields, ONGC management has been made to identify 94 more proven oil/gas field for contracting out for exploitation and commercial production by private companies. These 94 proven oilfields are estimated to have huge reserve of 200 million metric tones of oil and 120 billion cubic meter of gas. The terms of contracting out will allow the private companies exploiting the field with 70% of the production as operational cost and 30% will come to ONGC. This term is practically a bonanza to the private operators as the huge expenditure incurred by ONGC for discovering the gas/oil field has not at all been taken into account while deciding on the economics of the entire contracting exercise.

Further, the experience of operating the Rava, Mukta and Panna fields under joint venture with Indian and foreign private companies by ONGC (as 10% partner) raised doubt over the correctness of the declared estimate of oil/gas reserves in these 19 proven oil-fields. The declared estimate of oil/gas reserves in Rava, Mukta and Panna fields was shown to be much less while deciding the terms of contract than the actual reserve as had been exposed by actual production in these three fields. Hence there is every possibility that the MNC-friendly Government will make ONGC declare much undervalued estimate of reserves in these 19 oilfields slated to be handed over to private operators to facilitate under-priced transfer of oil-reserves as had happened in all cases of

WORKERS-PEOPLE RESISTED THE CANADIAN FIRM IN AMGURI OILFIELD

On 17th September 2004, again there was a move to hold handing over formalities of the Amguri oil-field to the Candian Company, CANARO. Mr Janagir of CANARO and S K Singh, Area Officer of that company along with ONGC official came to Amguri for that purpose. There was spontaneous demonstration on the spot by around 500 people comprising ONGC workers and the people of the Sivsagar district under the banner of "Sivsagar and Amguri Oil Field Protection Committee". The leadership of ONGC Workers' Association (AITUC), Amguri addressed the demonstration. Total Bandh was observed in Sivsagar and the demonstration blockaded the main road for hours. The Canadian company official had to go back ultimately.

privatization.

Under the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), ONGC has been made to go for more contracting out despite the departmental operational fleet remaining virtually idle. Side by side, in tune with the neo-liberal policy regime, proven oilfields are being handed over to private operators to the detriment of national interest.

Besides above, 18 isolated on-land fields have been identified for contracting out both for development and production operation. Contracts have been finalized for total 12 fields (6 oil-bearing, 4 gas-bearing and 2 nomination basis), which are located in Assam, West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Gujarat.

It is a matter of hope and encouragement that the shocking development of gifting away the proven oilfields is coming under concerted protest by the workers and public. For example in Assam the Amguri field, after the ONGC's geophysical party identified oil-reserves, the drilling crews started drilling 9 wells of which 4 are producing oil and 3 are producing gas and the other two were found dry. In this ready-for commercial exploitation condition this Amguri field has been slated to be handed over to a Canadian Company, CANARO Inc with effect from 1-07-2004. But as a result of the physical resistance organized by ONGC employees under the banner of their united platform of struggle along with the local people the representatives of the Canadian oil company had to stage retreat from the visit of the site. There cannot be any valid argument against the fact that handing over proven oilfields to private-foreign companies is against the national interest. The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UPA Government does not endorse such anti-national move and frittering away national assets.

Alongside the growing onslaught of privatisation of oil sector operations - both in up stream and down stream, particularly the oil/gas fields with established reserve, the resistance movement is also witnessing encouraging intensification. The working class movement in the oil industry must break the narrow organizational perspective of company specific confine and consolidate the unity to resist the dangerous move. The continuous success of the anti-privatisation movement can be ensured only with the leading

role of Oil - sector workers and their union.

*(Report from Tushar Dutta Majumdar, General Secretary,
ONGC Workers' Union, Agartala.)*

CENSUS FOLLIES AND COMMUNAL PLOY

Falsehood and tendentious allegations are a dime a dozen in politics. It is hardly surprising that statistics-this time in the form of the First Report on Religion Data of Census 2001 -have become a weapon in the hands political parties with a divisive agenda. Naturally the Bharatiya Janta Party is not going to be mollified by the explanation that the growth of the Muslim population by 36 per cent over the decade was a function of a gross methodological goof-up: Census 2001, unlike Census 1991, included Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir but the growth rates were released without making the adjustments every numerate undergraduate knows is elementary! The adjusted data show that the growth of the Muslim population has decelerated from 32.9 per cent during 1981-91 to 29.3 per cent during 1991-2001. But communal formations will still talk about higher fertility rate of Indian muslims....The decision to release religion-wise data without taking into consideration other socio-economic parameters such as income disparities and social backwardness unwisely played in the hands of those who are waiting to make a tendentious use of data to serve disintegrative ends. Indeed the unseemly haste shown in releasing the religion-wise data and release of religion-wise growth rates without making elementary adjustment for the exclusion of J&K in 1991 Censusspeaks poorly of the competence and professionalism of the office of the Census Commissioner. This also raises questionwhether such key data-gathering institutions are beginning to lose their autonomy and whether they are being manipulated by vested interests.

(Editorial, The Hindu, 13-09-2004)

(Dipankar Mukherjee M.P. and W.R. Varada Rajan, both Secretaries of CITU addressed a Press Conference held at B.T.Ranadive Bhawan, New Delhi on September 2004. The communiqué released thereat is reproduced hereunder. - Editor)

EPFO AND SOCIAL SECURITY: A FACT - SHEET

Today, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation is hot in the news for reasons other than that of social security. The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) with its new Chairman, following the change in government at the Centre, was preoccupied with the interest rate issue and could not take up several other pressing issues.

The Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security Scheme (USWSSS), launched with undue haste by the previous NDA regime has, as predicted earlier by the CITU, turned out to be a serious scandal. Despite the hype generated in the run up to the elections to the 14th Lok Sabha, of bringing 37 crore workers in the unorganised sector under the protective umbrella of this so-called social security, the EPFO which was arbitrarily directed by the then Labour Minister to launch the USWSSS as a 'pilot scheme' has only enrolled around 3500 members till July this year. According to the EPFO, the total collection is around Rs. 17.5 lakh, of which around Rs. 4.3 lakh only is available in the Pension Fund and the balance has been remitted for insurance benefits. The Consultant Actuary of the EPFO had examined the scheme and observed: "an amount of Rs. 601 shall be

available in member's account towards pension fund contribution for each year failing which the fund will not be adequate to meet the liabilities."

The EPFO promptly referred the issue to Government of India, being sponsor of the Scheme, to examine the sustainability of the Scheme. The Government of India, during the NDA regime, had contributed only a token amount of Rs. 1 lakh for the year 2003-04, while the EPFO had spent nearly Rs. 13 lakh till 31.3.2004.

The UNWSS Scheme is not a scheme under the EPF Act. There is no statutory backing for this scheme. The contingent liability under the scheme cannot devolve on the EPFO. There is confusion over the role of the EPFO in this USWSS Scheme - whether it is a facilitator or an active player in its implementation. But, the EPFO has not only been implementing the Scheme at the behest of the then Minister of Labour but also allotting National Social Security Number to the workers under this Scheme as well, for which is the EPFO has no mandate even. The EPFO is of the view: "Even now for lack of clear directive on the future course of action in relation to the scheme, the scheme is not being adequately pursued by our (EPFO) functionaries in the field. Hence

a view has to be taken by the government on the future of the scheme and a decision has to be taken as to whether the same has to be abandoned or implemented. In case of the latter, a review of the funding as well as implementation arrangement would be necessary".

At the same time, the previous NDA regime itself had commissioned an Asian Development Bank (ADB) Technical Assistance study on Pension Reforms for the Unorganised Sector with a consulting team of three international and two domestic consultants. "The Government has also stressed that the arrangements must be budget neutral."

Thus, the USWSS Scheme is a cruel hoax played on the unprotected gullible unorganised workers of the country. The present UPA government is also persisting with this Technical Assistance programme under the aegis of the ADB and the fate of the USWSS Scheme is now anybody's guess!

On the question of launch of the National Social Security Number, the EPFO had indulged in a fraudulent gimmick, involving even the high office of the President of India, on which the Prime Minister has been requested to order an enquiry.

The Employees Pension Scheme, 1995 needs a thorough review in view of the different assessments emanating from the actuarial valuations made. Though eight valuation periods have expired as on 31st March, 2004, only six valuations (up to 31.3. 2002) have been completed.

While the Govt gave vague assurance of taking up the question of cost of living index linked pensionary benefits during the annual valuations contemplated as part of the Pension Scheme, the first four valuations yielded only a paltry 4 per cent relief on each occasion.

The benefits under EPS 1995 have been insignificant, when compared to diversion of 8.33 per cent from employers' contribution to the Provident Fund. Yet, the actuarial exercise undertaken by the EPFO valuation has put out an alarmist view that the Fund is in deficit of Rs. 17,126 crore as on 31.3. 2002. The Actuaries have mooted proposals aimed at further increasing the rate of contribution and reducing the benefits. This has led to widespread speculations on the sustainability of EPS, mediareports predicting that EPFO is going the UTI way! The

process of actuarial valuation is statistical involving probabilistic assumptions and the projected deficit is not a present liability but only an assumed contingent liability.

The number of members exiting from the EPF has been on the increase, as revealed by the figures of ceased members (see table).

As against this huge figure of over 1 crore members having exited the EPF since 1995, the total number of EPF members availing benefits from the Employees' Pension Scheme, under different classifications of pension, as on 31st March, 2002 is only 9,33,561, excluding the cases of children pension, as it is payable concurrently with the spouse pension. (Source: Annual Reports of the EPF Organisation)

Thus, with less than 10 per cent of the exit cases being extended pensionary benefits, neither the false alarm that is created nor the proposal to hike contribution and scaling down of benefits is tenable. Surely, the soft interest regime and reduction in the administered rate of interest are casting a long shadow on the Pension Scheme. The immediate need is to review the EPS 1995 to make it beneficial for the workers, if the government concerns towards a

social safety net for workers have any meaning.

The EPFO had undertaken an ambitious Business Process Restructuring named "Reinventing EPF India", which has run into serious 'project slippages, bottlenecks and accumulated delays' even according to the EPFO, after incurring a total expenditure of over Rs. 18 crore! Added to this is the expenditure of over Rs. 25 crore for the setting of a National Social Security Registry, besides over Rs. 6 crore on publicity in the name of Golden Jubilee celebrations.

The EPFO under the earlier NDA regime had resorted to various measures like bifurcation of Regional Offices, creation of new posts, including that of a new cadre of Social Security Assistants, which are a drain on resources of the EPFO. On the other hand, at the ground level the staff is overburdened with the ever-increasing workload without corresponding staff requirements in place.

All these call for urgent measures by the Government taking into confidence the CBT and the Central Trade Unions on policy issues. Unless this is taken up urgently it is difficult to stem the rot that has set in.

Year	Unexempted Establishments	Exempted Establishments	Total
1995-96	11,13,883	1,10,685	12,24,568
1996-97	11,79,311	2,97,002	14,76,313
1997-98	10,15,212	3,31,955	13,47,167
1998-99	15,16,037	5,20,517	20,36,554
1999-00	16,02,110	2,23,741	18,25,851
2000-01	14,26,663	2,20,645	16,47,308
2001-02	15,23,155	5,05,711	20,28,866
Total	93,76,371	22,10,256	1,15,86,627

(Though there was a slight decline during 1999-00, the figures have again increased to 1998-99 levels during 2001-01.)

Cement Workers on struggle path

National Convention Decides Indefinite Strike from 19 Nov.

National Convention of cement workers held at Delhi on 19 Sept has decided that unless the Cement Manufacturers Association (CMA) starts negotiation on the basis of Charter of Demands submitted by the trade unions, and concede the demand for interim relief of Rs 1500 pm, the workers in cement industry will cease work on and from 19 Nov 2004. The convention was organized jointly by INTUC, CITU, AITUC, HMS, BMS and federations.

The last four-year wage agreement expired on 31st March 2004, a new wage agreement was to come in force from 1st April 2004. Notice for termination of the last agreement and a charter of demand for negotiation on new wage structure and other matters was submitted jointly by the above five central trade unions and the federations in good time. After some dilly-dallying as the trade unions had been closely pursuing the matter, the CMA came out with a proposal for one year extension of the last agreement. The trade unions had rejected the proposal outright and reiterated the demand for immediately starting the negotiation and also for interim relief to the tune of Rs 1500 per month pending finalisation of the new wage structure to be in force with effect from 1st April, 2004. As there was no response from the CMA the coordination committee of the cement trade unions decided to organize a national convention to voice protest against the cynical attitude of the CMA and to decide on future course of action.

The Convention

The convention was held in the auditorium of the Uttariya Railway Majdoor Union, which was packed and overflowing. Several hundreds of workers from all over the country, representing all the five central trade unions and federations, attended the conference. The proceedings of the convention was conducted by a presidium comprising Kanai Banerjee, and Dilip Majumdar from CITU, besides N Nanjappan (INTUC), H Mahadevan (AITUC), R A Mittal (HMS) and Ratanji (BMS) and others. A draft declaration presented

by H Mahadevan and supported by several members of the presidium on behalf of their respective organisation proposing indefinite strike was greeted with tumultuous applause.

Among the guests who addressed the convention was Sanjiva Reddy, President, INTUC.

All speakers sharply criticised the CMA for its recalcitrant attitude and exuded confidence in the ultimate success of the struggle of the cement workers as they have forged unprecedented unity. They all expressed determination never to allow the unity to be disrupted.

The Declaration

The declaration adopted by the convention gave a call for massive protest programmes which include:

- ◆ Issuance of as strike notice centrally to CMA on 20th Sept 2004 indicating intention to go on indefinite strike

- ◆ Signature campaign by all cement workers all over the country, urging for an early settlement of the COD, addressed to CMA, Labour Minister and Minister for Heavy Industries and Public Sector Enterprises, between 10th and 20th October 2004; post the signatures to the above, on the 25th October 2004.

- ◆ The unions would also give letter to the respective managements, enclosing this declaration of the All India Convention on 25th October 2004 (wherever there are more than one union, jointly by all registered unions).

- ◆ Dharna by cement workers and their families on 14th or 15th November 2004 nearer to the respective factories.

- ◆ Commencement of all India strike on the 19th November 2004.

A joint-deputation met the Labour Minister at his residence in the evening after the convention and handed over the declaration to him. He asked for further details to enable him take appropriate decision.

The strike notice signed by representatives of all five central trade unions has since been served on the Cement Manufacturers Association.

TRADE UNIONS JOINTLY DEMAND RETENTION OF GOVT EQUITY IN BALCO

On 14th September 2004, four major central trade unions of the country, viz., CITU, AITUC, HMS and BMS have jointly written to prime Minister of India to refrain from the move of handing over the Govt's residual 49 per cent share in Balco to M/s Sterlite. The letter was signed by Hasubhai Dave, President BMS, D L Sachdeva, Secretary AITUC, Umraomal Purohit, General Secretary hms AND Tapan Sen, Secretary CITU. The text of the letter says, "We request your urgent intervention not to allow the sale of residual equity of the Govt in Balco to M/s Sterlite..."

"It is learnt that the Shareholders Agreement between the Govt and Sterlite on Balco contains provision for sale residual Govt equity to the strategic partner. But the obligations under the "Shareholders Agreement" cannot be an one-sided affair, particularly when the M/s Sterlite have made gross violation of the said agreement on many counts including on labour related matters. The situation has so

arisen that the Govt should seriously review the whole deal and take appropriate corrective measures, before taking any decision to further reduce its equity in Balco.

"Kindly note that there have been several complaints on flagrant violations of the Shareholders' Agreement by the Sterlite in Balco on labour related matters from all the unions irrespective of affiliations. The Central Trade Unions also, on various occasions during the post privatization period, have drawn the attention of the Govt in various forum regarding gross violation of Shareholder's agreement by Sterlite in Balco.

"In view of the above, we request you to please personally intervene in the matter to kindly see that the complaints on irregularities and violation of agreement by Sterlite in Balco are thoroughly enquired by appropriate agency/forum and the move to offload the residual Govt equity in Balco to Sterlite is stalled forthwith.

It may be noted that the Fact finding Committee on violation of shareholders' agreement by M/s Sterlite in Balco, constituted by the Prime Minister of the NDA Govt in October 2002 have not yet submitted the report as per version of the labour ministry made in the floor of parliament (Rajya sabha) on 19th August 2004... And now one member of the said Fact Finding Committee, Shri Hasubhai Dave of BMS have gone on record saying that "M/s Sterlite have made gross violation of the said agreement on many counts including on labour related matters (joint letter of the trade unions to Prime Minister dated 14th September 2004.)

Dipankar Mukherjee, MP(RS) in his letter dated 18th September 2004 to Union Labour Minister Sisram Ola cited above joint letter of the trade unions and demanded a thorough enquiry on the entire issue while putting on hold the move to sell residual Govt. equity in BALCO.

(Cont. from page 55)

than eight thousand workers in two Hydel projects in the state, at Dul Hasti and Baghliar went on complete strike. And the Jammu Srinagar Highway was blockaded by huge demonstration by the workers and local people. In Himachal Pradesh, massive protest demonstrations took place in Shimla, and all the hydel project sites in Coal-dam, Parvati, Lurgi and other places at the initiative of HP State CITU in solidarity with the striking workers in Jammu. The strike in the project is continuing. Workers are determined to fight to the last. On 12th September, in a statement issued to press the CITU Secretariat urged upon the J&K State Govt not to let their police force act as armed henchmen of the infamous construction company, the HCC, rather take punitive action against the contractor for desperate violation of the labour laws. The CITU also demanded adequate compensation for the family of Mohd Hanif and those injured by police atrocities. On 14th September, The CITU leader and CPI(m) leader in Lok Sabha, Basudev Acharya visited Banihal and addressed the striking workers.

ILO on Global Youth Unemployment

Swadesh Dev Roye

The menacing increase of unemployment among the youth all over the world has rather sounded the alarm bell and attracted the attention of world institutions including the United Nations and the ILO. The ILO report titled: Global Employment Trends for Youth - 2004 prepared by the ILO Employment Strategy Department has come out with revealing facts pertaining to the world youth unemployment situation.

As per the UN definition, persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years are defined as youth. While the youth made up only 25 per cent of the working-age population, between 1993 and 2003 the figure of unemployed youth has reached to 88 million, which is 47 per cent of the total world unemployment in 2003. The total unemployment in the year 2003 was 186 million. The global youth unemployment rate in 2003 was 3.5 times that of the global adult unemployment rate and has remained more than three times higher throughout the decade of 1993 - 2003. Youth unemployment in the world has increased since 1993 when the unemployment rate for young people was 11.7 per cent. In 2003 it had reached its historical height

of 14.4 per cent, leaving 88 million people without work. This was 26.8 per cent more than in 1993. How the gap between youth population growth and youth employment growth has been seriously widening is evident from the report under. While the youth population has grown by 10.5 per cent over the past ten years, the youth employment has grown merely by 0.2 per cent. However in some regions the situation is really shocking. In the so-called transition economies, "the youth population grew by 10.1 per cent, whereas youth employment dropped by 11.7 per cent. In East Asia the youth population fell by 11.3 per cent but at the same time youth employment fell by 18 per cent. In South Asia, the youth population grew by 21.9 per cent whereas employment only grew by 11.6 per cent. Finally in Latin America and the Caribbean there were 11.1 per cent more young people in 2003 than in 1993 but only 2.8 per cent more young people working."

Amongst the most significant observations of the report, one is that, "regardless of the reason, it is clear that a less regulated labour market such as that of the United States does not automatically

WITHOUT COMMENT

PRIVATE SECTOR ACCOUNTED FOR MAXIMUM CLOSURES

Maximum number of closures, retrenchments and lay-offs in industries in the country took place in private sector during 2002. An analysis of the statistics in this regard has revealed that out of 213 closures, 211 were in private sector and two were in central sphere. As many as 10,025 workers were affected by these closures of whom 9991 workers belonged to the private sector and 32 workers to the central sphere. The largest number of closures were reported from Uttar Pradesh. Maximum closures took place in industries manufacturing basic metals.

Of the total retrenchment, 80 per cent were in private sector. The remaining were in public and cooperative sector. 35 per cent retrenchment were reportedly caused by lack of demand for products and the remaining retrenchments were due to financial stringency, breakdown of machinery and other factors.....Maximum number of retrenchments were in Gujarat.

More than 27.84 lakh mandays were lost due to 249 cases of lay-offs affecting 30030 workers. 80 per cent lay-off cases took place in the private sector....Most prominent cause of lay-offs was financial stringency. Maximum number of lay-offs took place in industries manufacturing textiles resulting in lay-off of 18685 workers.

(Source: Press Information Bureau, Govt of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment-2nd September 2004)

solve the challenge of youth unemployment.", and the other is that, "Not only do young people suffer from lower chances of finding employment but there are also significant differences in unemployment rates based on age, sex and socio-economic background within the youth labour force."

The fall out of such huge youth unemployed in the world, as observed by the Director General of ILO, "It perpetuated the inter generational cycle of poverty and is associated with high levels of crime, violence, substance abuse and the rise of political extremism. In some countries virtually the only paid occupation open to many young men is to join the various armed groups involved in civil

conflict." This explosive aspect of youth unemployment must be comprehended from economic and social points of view concurrently. Unemployment to an educated youth is 'exclusion' from the society, deprived to participate in and contribute to the nation building productive activities. The youth are also temperamentally and psychologically more vulnerable. Keeping the youth reasonably occupied and interested in social progress is a big challenge that confronts societies everywhere in the world (Higgins, 1997). The report also points out the wider dangers of youth unemployment, stressing that youth joblessness can often lead to vandalism, crime, drug abuse, alienation, social unrest and conflict.

MUMBAI

UNORGANISED SECTOR WORKERS' RALLY

On 26th August 2004, around 10000 workers from the unorganized sector thundered the streets of Mumbai in a huge rally, demanding jobs, living wages and social security for all. Despite heavy rains throughout the day, several thousands of workers poured on the Mumbai streets to assert their just demands. The rally was jointly called by CITU, AITUC, HMS, HMKP, Kamgar Aghadi and several independent unions. The major demands pertain to guaranteed minimum wage, social security measures and employment insurance for the unorganized sector workers and also social security measures for the self employed workers as well. Participation of huge contingent of women workers particularly from Beedi industry, Anganwadi and home-based workers was notable. Also notable was the participation of a good contingent of teachers and professors from various schools and colleges in the rally in protest against contract system deployment they are being subjected to.

A presidium comprising K L Bjj (CITU), Sukumar Damble (AITUC) Dada Samant (Kamgar Aghadi) and P R Menon (NRMU) and Suresh Gauli (Sarva Shramik Sangh) conducted the proceeding of the mass meeting. The meeting was addressed by the members of the presidium and also Ahilya Rangnekar (AIDWA), Gagan Shetye (State Govt Employees), K K Theckedeth (BUCTU), A D Gollandaz (AITUC), Sanjay Singhvi (TUCI), Abhayankar (Trade Union Solidarity Committee), G M V Nayak (BEFI), P R Krishnan (CITU) and Jayant Chawan (SSS).

WOMEN EMPLOYEES CONFERENCE IN INSURANCE SECTOR

At the initiative of Raipur Division Insurance Employees Association, a conference of women employees was held at Raipur on 22nd August 2004. 107 women employees participated in the inaugural gathering, which was addressed by M Girija, Joint Secretary, South Zone Insurance Employees Association. The inaugural session was also addressed by B Sanyal, General Secretary, CZIEA, r Rajinran and Usha Paragniha, Convenor, Women Employees Coordination committee, Central Zone. Ganga Sahu, Secretary, Women's Subcommittee of RDIEA placed the report of activities in the conference which was deliberated upon by the participating delegates. The conference decided to step up the activities among the women employees in the sector. The Women subcommittee was reconstituted by the conference by forming a 22 member committee with Ganga Sahu as Secretary and Shalini Toppo as President.

TRAGIC ACCIDENT AT TEHRI-DAM: CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE OF THE CONTRACTOR TOWARDS SAFETY AT WORK

On 2nd August 2004, Monday night at 10-15 pm, 29 workers were buried alive owing to collapse of shafts in the underground tunnel at Tehri Hydro-Electric project in Uttaranchal. CITU expressed shock and concern over the tragic incident and in a statement issued on 3rd August 2004 denounced the criminal negligence by the main Contractor J P Associates and the Principal Employer, the THDC towards basic safety requirements in such highly hazardous construction work which led to such tragic accident. CITU also demanded thorough enquiry in the matter so that persons and agencies responsible for such criminal negligence receive exemplary punishment and the victims get adequate compensation.

Subsequently, on 7th August 2004, a Fact-Finding team consisting of the representatives from CITU, AITUC, HMS and INTUC and Centre for Education & Communication (CEC) visited the Tehri Dam site to have an first hand account of the situation. The team talked to the workers and the officials of both the Govt and contractors there and also interviewed the injured workers in the hospital. This fact finding exercise substantiated the CITU position that the criminal negligence towards safety and flagrant violation of basic labour related statutes by the main contractor with active indulgence of THDC and the Govt officials have led to such tragedy, which could have otherwise been avoided by proper preventive and precautionary measures.

The report of the Fact finding Team revealed that the Accident occurred at the T3 tunnel of the Tehri Dam which is being built to carry the spill over water in the event of the dam storage level exceeding the limit. 190 meter of the tunnel out of the proposed 220 meter length has already been completed. On the spot enquiry by the Fact Finding Team and the information gathered revealed that serious technical fault together with gross negligence towards preventive and precautionary vigilance on the state of

accumulation of mud and debris at the head of the vertical tunnel site (which is crucially important in the view of the rainy season causing frequent heavy rains creating downward pressure on such accumulation) caused the accident. The unlined portion of the Intermediate Level Outlet (ILO) had caved in under the debris of a mudslide and fell on the first platform built within the vertical tunnel. The platforms made up of iron blocks were not well supported from below to hold on the weight of 40-45 workers usually working on each platform while the huge mudslide took place. While the mudslide took place, the first platform could not bear the load and fell on the second platform and then on the third platform, fall when the debris with mud fell on it causing subsequent fall of the second and third platform along with the workers getting buried under the huge falling pile of debris. 29 workers were reported killed by the accident till the date of the visit of the Fact Finding Team. Actual number may be much more and difficult to be finally known since none of the contractors and sub-contractors maintain the register and records of shift-wise deployment of workers in the tunnel and actual number of workers working in the tunnel at the time of accident could not be ascertained by any records either with the contractor or with the Principal Employer. What else can be the example of gross violation of statutes by the Contractor-THDC combine? Information gathered from the workers, particularly those injured in the accident revealed that total number of workers working in the tunnel could be in the range of 60 to 130. Workers injured and admitted in the THDC hospital told that around 40-45 workers were working in the third platform at that material time while those working in other two platform each may be around the same figure. Hence there remains a possibility that the death toll may be more.

The Rescue operation following the accident got delayed owing to lack of proper communication equipment. Only the supervisor was having a

wireless set for communication. More lives could be saved if rescue operation started in time. The Police Superintendent and the District Magistrate reached the accident site much before the rescue team arrived at the site.

The main contractor in the construction of dam, the Jaiparakash Associate has announced a compensation of Rs one million (Ten lakh) for the next of kin of the deceased workers and Rupees two million for the Senior Project Engineer who also lost his life in the accident. The contractor company said that each worker was insured for Rupees One million. Till the time of the Fact Finding Exercise, no compensation was announced for those injured. But the question arises as to how many of around 10000 workers working in the dam sites under contractors and sub-contractors could find their names officially recorded in the employment register with respective contractors and sub-contractors.

Although it is a statutory obligation for all employers to maintain employment register, fact remains that most of the subcontractors do not maintain them, and whosoever maintain such registers, required details on their family members, permanent address etc are not recorded properly, which is a serious lapse on the part of the contractor since the majority of the workers are migrant workers who left their family in their native villages. The contractor commits the lapse deliberately, mostly in connivance with the Principal Employer.

It has been the apprehension of most of the workers who have been interviewed by the fact-finding team that many of the deceased workers' family would not finally get the compensation as the contractor would plead that they do not have the addresses and details of the next of kin of the deceased workers. In general the workers at the site do not have any proof or identity cards on their employment under a particular contractor. The workers at the site also cited the example of a previous accident in which 17 Nepalese workers had lost their lives in the dam construction work in the year 2000. The contractor promised Rs 5 lakh compensation for each deceased worker's family. But many of them might not have actually received them.

The working condition of the workers at the

construction site speaks volume about the kind of severe exploitation they are being subjected to by the contractor and hosts of petty sub-contractors down the line each seeking to carve out its own profit-margin, thus targeting the labour cost including those relating to basic preventive safety requirements to be minimized, if possible, altogether eliminated. This prompted most of the contractors not to record at least a part of their workforce, mostly migrants, in their respective registers to avoid prospective social-security and other terminal liabilities. Workers are mostly daily-rated, and not having any clearly defined employment terms and any social security coverage. They are not given any kind of pre-employment or orientation training before taking up hazardous work like underground tunnel construction. They usually work for 12 hours a day, mostly without appropriate compensation for the extra hours. Trade Unions are practically non-existent in the major part of the THDC project.

Preventive Safety is not at all in the agenda of the contractors there. Nor there has been arrangements to meet emergency requirements in respect of safety at workplace which is of crucial necessity in any hazardous work like the dam-construction. The monitoring authority of THDC never pointed out the safety lapse of the contractors although there had been several accidents in earlier years as well. The workers are not provided with safety gears except helmets and gumboots. The workers are being carried inside the tunnel by mechanical trolleys meant for only carrying the materials and equipments. In 2000, 17 workers died in an accident owing falling of the trolley carrying human beings. But still now, the same practice is going on. The Fact Finding Team was shocked to see the arrangement of temporary stairs constructed for the workers to go inside the Intermediate Level Outlet (ILO) in case of power failure. The ladder is made with iron rods without any protective barriers.

Both the Centre and the State Govt have ordered inquiry into the accident. The Central Govt ordered a probe by a Committee with M S Reddy former Chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC) as Chairman and two other members one each from CWC and Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

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EASTERN REGION CENTRAL TU EDUCATION CAMP

The Eastern Region Central TU Education camp was held on 8-10 September 2004 at Kolkata. 37 state level leaders of CITU from West Bengal, Tripura, Assam and Orissa participated in the three day Education camp. Venue of the camp was the West Bengal Electricity Employees Union's Bhavan at Salt Lake.

The education camp was hosted by the West Bengal State Committee of CITU. Kali Ghosh, General Secretary of West Bengal

State CITU welcomed the participants in the education camp from different states. M k Pandhe, President CITU delivered the inaugural address. Subjects dealt in the TU school were 1) World Capitalism today and Globalisation, 2) Revolutionary Trade Unionism in today's context, 3) Casteism and Communalism, 4) Organisation, 5) Present situation and our task. The presentation on the subjects were made on the above subjects by Chittabrata Majumdar, Sukomal

Sen, Shyamal Chakraborty, Kanai Banerjee and M K Pandhe respectively. All the participants took active part in the interaction and question answer session on each subject. The last session was on critical evaluation of the entire three day education programme in all its aspects. In this session also comrades from all the states put forward their critical observations regarding usefulness, shortcomings of the programme and suggestions about improvements to be made.

CONFERENCE OF KOLAKATA DISTRICT CITU

The 7th Conference of Kolkata District CITU was held on 27-29 August 2004 at Kankurganchhi Shramik Mangal Kendra. The Conference venue and the conference dais were named after Com Jaygopal Roy and Com Jayanta Dasgupta, the veteran trade union leaders of CITU, who passed away few months back.

The conference was inaugurated by Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary CITU. The conference was conducted by a presidium comprising Haridas Mlakar, Raghunath Kushari, Mohd Nizamuddin, Bimal Chatterjee, Bejoy Tewari, Dilip Sen and Gobinda Guha.

The inaugural session was also addressed by Shyamal

Chakraborty and Kali Ghosh, President and General Secretary of West Bengal State CITU.

On the Second day, the conference was addressed by M K Pandhe, President CITU. Md Amin, the Labour Minister of the Left Govt in the State and a veteran trade unionist himself also greeted the conference while stressing upon the urgent need for united struggle of the trade union movement in the present day context.

660 delegates, representing 1,60,000 membership from various industries and services in the district attended the conference along with 30 observers and 30 representatives of fraternal organisations. Lively discussion on

general secretary's report by 60 delegates reflected the firm resolve to carry forward the banner of united struggle against exploitation, against the machinations of neoliberal globalisation and communal and disruptive forces.

The conference also held discussion in two separate Commissions on:

- 1) Unorganised Sector and
- 2) On Social Security in which 64 delegates took part in discussion.

The Conference elected a 104 member strong working committee with Rajdeo Goala as President, Asim Banerjee as General Secretary.

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MASSIVE WORKERS' RALLY IN LUCKNOW

Lucknow, 27th August 2004, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh witnessed biggest ever workers' demonstration. Around twenty five thousand workers from different parts of the State assembled at Lucknow to demanding upon the Govt to enforce the labour laws, to arrange for revival and opening of closed factories, enhancement of statutory minimum wages etc carried out militant demonstration before the state assembly. The procession started at 11 am from the Charbag railway station and passed through main roads of the city and converged into a mass rally before the State Assembly.

M K Pandhe, President, CITU

addressed the rally and stated that both the state and the central govt must take lesson from the humiliating ouster of the BJP combine from both the state and the center and must make a clear departure from the policies pursued during earlier regime. The working class will not tolerate the anti-people and anti-worker rule and resist the onslaught on their rights and livelihood through countrywide militant struggle, Pandhe asserted.

The meeting was presided over by Kamalapaty Tripathy, State CITU President and was also addressed by Daulat Ram, General Secretary of UP State CITU, K N Bhat, Arvind Kumar, R S. Bajpai, and

other leaders of the State CITU. Despite seeking appointment with the Chief Minister by CITU prior to the rally, the Chief Minister's office did not respond. But while the demonstration was going on before the Assembly, the Chief Minister's office invited the CITU delegation for a meeting. The State CITU leadership met the Chief Minister and submitted detail memorandum to him and there had been some discussion on the issues. The Chief Minister assured the delegation that all the issues will be discussed with the CITU leadership in a formal meeting immediately after 6th September 2004 for amicable solution of the problems.

THREE-DAY TU EDUCATION CAMP AT HARYANA

Three day long State level Trade Union Education camp was held at Panipat on 27-29 August 2004 at the initiative of Haryana State Committee of CITU.

The inaugural session of the Trade Union school began on 27th with a five hundred strong mobilization of workers from various industries at Panipat, predominantly from textile, foundries, construction and Anganwadi workers. The mass meeting was addressed by Jibon Roy, MP and K Hemalata, both Secretaries of CITU, Prabhat Singh and Satvir Singh, President and General Secretary of Haryana

State CITU and Anand Jawhara, Secretary of Panipat District CITU. The speakers, while congratulating the workers of Panipat for their valiant struggles including strike action braving the onslaught of the employers and administration, stressed upon the urgent need for consolidating the CITU organization throughout the district and across the industries and the sectors.

The Education camp which started on 27th afternoon and continued till 29th was attended by 35 State level leaders comprising the State Committee members,

Secretaries of district committees, and main office bearers of the State level unions. The subjects dealt in the classes are:

1) World Capitalism today and neoliberal globalisation, 2) History of TU movement, 3) Social and Political perspective of the TU movement in particular context of Haryana, and 4) Organisation, which were addressed by Tapan Sen, Balvir Singh Dahya, Inderjit Singh and K Hemalata respectively. It was further decided to hold district level trade union schools in all the districts.

Maharashtra

ANTI-PRIVATISATION CONVENTION ON AUGUST 21

The Public Sector Employees Coordination Committee at Mumbai organized a Trade Union Convention on 21st August 2004 at the Mumbai University Convocation Hall. The convention was organized in the face of move of Govt of India to privatize the Airports, Seaports and enhance FDI cap in telecom, insurance and civil aviation sector. The Convocation hall was overflowed with participants from the trade unions and activists from banks, insurance, telecom, shipping, port & docks, airlines, airport authority, defence establishments and workers from many other industries.

The Convention was conducted by a presidium comprising P R Menon (Railways), Naresh Virwarkar (Shipping) and R Ramanathan (Civil Aviation). The Convention was inaugurated by

M K Pandhe, President CITU. In his inaugural address, Pandhe called upon the working class to build up organised united resistance against the privatization move in all the sectors. Privatisation cannot be in the interest of the nations and every case of privatization, that has taken place so far including the latest one of Juhu Centaur Hotel is a case of nauteating corruption frittering away the public assets for narrow personal gains of those in government and the private business, Pandhe asserted.

G M V Nayak, Convenor, Public Sector Coordination Committee welcomed the participants in the convention. Eight papers were placed in the Convention highlighting the issues relating to privatization in various public sector units. Convention was greeted by K L Bajaj, General Secretary, Maharashtra State CITU,

Sukumar Damle (AITUC) and Dada Samant (Kamgarh Aghadi). P R Krishnan and Bhoosan Patil moved resolutions on demanding immediate Govt intervention to resolve the ongoing Truckers Strike and on extending support to Bank employees united strike action on 24th August.

The Convention was also addressed by S K Basu (NRMU), George Abraham (Airlines), P N Subramaniam (Banks) S C Bhagat (Seamen), Dilip Gujar and Nitin Jadhav (Airports) Kiran Palekar (Shipping), Bhusan Patil (port & dock), Ashwini Kalamkar (Juhu Centaur). Vivek Monterio presented a paper in the convention on contract workers. The Convention adopted a unanimous declaration which called upon the trade unions and workers across the sectors to intensify the resistance struggle.

NPCC WORKERS' UNION CONFERENCE

The 21st biennial conference of NPCC Workers' Union of India was held on 22nd August 2004 at DTPS community Centre, Durgapur. The conference was attended by the delegates coming from the NPCC units and construction sites spread all over the country. A presidium comprising Benoy Mukherjee,

Bisheswar Paswan, Md Naim and Prabir Majmdar conducted the proceedings of the conference. Dilip Das, General Council member of West Bengal CITU inaugurated the conference.

Anup Kumar Roy, General Secretary of the union placed the report of activities in the conference. The Report dealt on

the problems being faced by NPCC, a premier construction company in public sector owing to discriminatory and anti-PSU policies being pursued by the Govt of India and acute sufferings being undergone by the workers, non-payment of salaries for months together (for 7 to 18 months), non-payment of statutory dues,

REPORTS & EVENTS

pendency of wage revision which has fallen long overdue etc. The Report called for united struggle for defence of NPCC as well as for advancing the rights of the

workers. 16 delegates took part in discussion on General Secretary's report. From the Conference the central committee of the union is elected with Basudeb Acharya,

MP as President, Benoy Mukherjee as Working President, Anup Kumar Roy and Gurupada Das as General Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

A.P: STATE CONFERENCE OF JUTE WORKERS

The State Conference of the Jute Workers' Union in Andhra Pradesh was held on 15th and 16th August 2004 at Guntur. 230 delegates representing workers of 19 Jute Mills attended the conference.

M Krishnamurthy, Convener of the Conference Committee placed the Report in the conference for deliberation by the delegates. The report dealt on the situation in the Jute industry in the state and the problems being faced by the workers. The report revealed that in the recent past the Jute industry has doubled its growth in the state and the number of jute mills increased from 13 to 26 during last five years. The workforce has increased from 25000 to 42000. The production and sales have also grown almost in the same rate. But the workers and the jute growers are getting a raw deal. Despite growth in the industry and in the profit, the mill owners on the plea of crisis in the industry are exploiting the workers in the most

heinous way. Wage level is kept very low and over above mass scale contract system in various forms is being operated. In the name of trainees the workers engaged in full-fledged production work are being paid Rs 20 /25 per day. Besides, under threat of downsizing and various repressive measures, workers are being forced to forego their existing benefits.

Labour laws are being desperately violated and trade unions are being ignored arrogantly by the mill-owners with active patronage of the state administration and with the help of gangsters and hired musclemen. So called agreements signed between some stooge union leaders and the mill owners keeping the workers in the dark are being forced upon the workers to curtail their rights and benefits and increase the workload. The Report called upon the workers to build wider unity of the workers to fight against such menacing onslaught on the jute workers by

the mill-owners in the state.

The Report has been discussed thoroughly by the delegates and it was decided by the conference to hold a state level seminar/convention on 2nd October 2004 at Chittivalsa to decide statewide action programme and Assembly-March by the jute workers.

The Conference was also addressed by Ajit Kundu, Joint Secretary, Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Union. C H Narasingha Rao, President, AP state CITU, while addressing the conference, explained the political developments in the country and called upon the workers to prepare for statewide united struggle against the onslaught of the employers in the background of anti-worker economic policies of the state and the central govt. The conference unanimously elected the leadership of the federation of the Jute workers with B Srinivasa as President and S Ramesh as General Secretary.

MEDICAL AND SALES REPRESENTATIVE CONFERENCE

The conference of Tamilnadu Medical & Sales

Representatives' Association (TNMSRA) was held on 13-15

August 2004 at Erode. The Conference was preceded by

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week-long state level procession/rallies etc.

The conference commenced on 13th August with the inaugural address of A Soundarrajan, General Secretary of Tamilnadu State CITU. Com K Natarajan delivered the Presidential address. In the evening of 13th, a huge rally of 1200 strong workers from TNMSRA and other fraternal organizations moved round the

important junctions of the town and culminated in a mass meeting. The mass meeting was presided over by P Marimuthu, Assistant General Secretary of TN State CITU and addressed by A Soundarrajan, R Muthusundaram among others.

Conference continued till 15th August. 452 delegates participated in the conference. 41 delegates took part in discussion on General

Secretary's Report and 17 delegated deliberated on organization. The conference was also addressed by A K Padmanabhan, Secretary CITU, D P Dubey, General Secretary, FMRAI among others.

At the end, the conference elected the new leadership with K Natarajan as President, G Gopinath as General Secretary and S Sridhar as Treasurer.

TAMILNADU: PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS' JOINT CAMPAIGN

The joint meeting of the CITU and associated unions in the state public sector units in Tamilnadu held on 20th August 2004 at Coimbatore decided various campaign programmes throughout the state in defence of the PSUs and workers rights. The meeting was attended by 52 representatives from the unions of State Transport, Electricity, Water and Drainage Board, Shipping, Civil Supplies Corporation,

Cement, Sugar, Minerals, Rubber Plantation, Small Industries Corporation etc.

The meeting was addressed by A Soundarrajan, T K Rangarajan, S Pancharatnam, the General Secretary and Vice Presidents of the State CITU besides other leaders from various sectors.

The meeting decided to observe a statewide campaign week from 15th to 22nd September 2004 on the pressing demands of the

employees including amendment of Bonus Act, repealing of the Electricity Act, restoration of 12% interest rate on EPF and revival of PSUs and Cooperatives, upholding of Right to Strike etc, through gate meetings, demonstrations, rallies etc. It was also decided to hold massive demonstration before the district collectorates throughout the state on 28th September.

NEW STATE COMMITTEE FORMED IN SIKKIM

The state level trade union convention was held in Singtam Bihari Dharamshala at Sikkim on 29th August 2004. Around 300 delegates from 8 unions representing 8000 workers attended the preparatory convention for constituting the state committee of CITU at Sikkim. The convention was conducted by

a presidium comprising P P Kairala, Moni Kumar Thapa, Pradip Subba and Anjan Upadhyay. Manoj Gupta, Convenor of the Organising Committee placed the Report before the convention. The Report dealt on the problems being faced by the workers in Sikkim owing to non-enforcement of the basic labour related laws like Trade

Unions Act, Factories Act, Industrial Disputes Act etc in the state resulting in workers being deprived of the formal rights being envisaged in those statutes. The employers are taking full advantage of that situation in exploiting the workers. The report also dealt on the political and economic situation in the country with particular reference to Sikkim

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and the challenges before the trade union movement.

The Convention was addressed by Ashoke Bhattacharya, the Minister for Urban Development, Govt of West Bengal and Kali Ghosh,

General Secretary of West Bengal State CITU and All India Secretary of CITU. There have been lively discussion on the Report placed by the convenor reflecting many suggestions for

advancing the trade union movement in the State.

The Convention elected 19 member State Committee with Moni Kumar Thapa as President, Manoj Gupta as General Secretary

AISGEF DEMANDS RISE IN GPF INTEREST RATE

The All India State Government Employees' Federation's (AISGEF) general secretary Sukomal Sen has written the following letter to P Chidambaram, union finance minister regarding 'Raising of interest rate of GPF along with EPF and interest rate of Small savings'.

"You are surely aware that along with the drastic reduction of interest rate of EPF, the rate of interest of general provident fund of the central and state government employees (numbering more than one crore) was also reduced from earlier 12 per cent to 8 per cent presently. All these reductions took place during the last several years against which we have always protested..... During the Lok

Sabha elections the senior citizens all over the country voted against the BJP-led NDA in a big way as a protest against the drastic reduction of interest rate of small savings....

Now everybody expected that the UPA government would raise the interest rate to a certain extent. And the UPA government has announced 9 per cent interest rate for the savings of senior citizens according to our information, as appeared in the media. But we would like to point out that the existing 8 per cent interest rate of postal savings carries a bonus of 10 per cent after maturity of the deposit. But now if senior citizens deposit money at 9 per cent, no bonus will be added to their savings after maturity. This means at 8

per cent interest, the depositors will actually be benefited with 9.25 per cent interest rate taking into account the 10 per cent bonus. And while depositing at 9 per cent they will get just 9 per cent only without 10 per cent bonus. Senior citizens are feeling badly at this reported decision by the UPA government. Hope you would appreciate our position and take appropriate steps to raise the interest rate of GPF to earlier rate of 12 per cent and also interest rate of Small Savings at least to 12 per cent and issue order accordingly."

In a statement issued subsequently, the CITU secretariat extended support to the demand of the Govt employees for increase in the interest rate on GPF/PPF and small savings

CITU ENDORSED NEWSPAPER EMPLOYEES DEMANDS

MK Pandhe, president, CITU, in a letter addressed to the union labour minister, demanded early settlement of charter of demands submitted by the All India Newspaper Employees Federation. Pandhe pointed out that the issue of wage revision to

the newspaper employees has been pending for a long time. The Manisana Wage Boards were set up on September 3, 1994 and they had submitted the report to the labour ministry on July 27, 2002. A notification in this regard was also issued on December 5, 2002.

Ten years have elapsed since then and the government is yet to make a decision on the wage boards report. The inordinate delay has created serious resentment among the employees. The wage boards were set up after considerable agitation by the newspaper and

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news agency employees.

In the meantime, charter of demands was submitted to the Indian Newspaper Society and the Indian Language Newspaper Association, the employers' organisations on December 31, 2002. The employees also submitted another charter of

demands to the government but no action has been taken on the demands of the employees. Considerable hope and anxiety has been generated among the newspaper employees after the UPA government came to power. The All India Newspaper Employees Federation has already

approached the Union Labour Minister seeking his intervention in the matter. Pandhe urged upon the Labour Minister to take expeditious decision on the wage boards report and redress the grievances of the newspaper employees, which have been lingering near about a decade.

UNIONS DISCUSSES POWER POLICY WITH THE PM

An eight member delegation comprising of leaders of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyut Mazdoor Sangh, All India Federation of Electricity Employees, All India Federation of Power Diploma Engineers, All India Power Engineers Federation, National Working Group on Power Sector, All India Federation of Electricity Employees and Electricity Employees Federation of India - representing the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOE) held a discussion with the prime minister on the power policy on September 7.

In the background of the commitment by the UPA Govt to review the Electricity Act 2003, as mentioned in the Common Minimum Programme of the UPA government, the delegation brought to the notice of the prime minister the experience of the privatisation in electricity industry during last decade. The privatisation has only brought disastrous consequences for the nation. The power tariff which was an average of one

rupee per unit has today risen to more than three rupees and the rate for industrial consumers in the country is highest in the world, barring Japan. The employees delegation also pointed out to the dangerous effect the Electricity Act 2003 on the rural sector. They have cited the examples of free power supply being given by many state governments and impressed upon the prime minister the necessity of continuing the subsidy on electricity in order to develop and maintain the agricultural sector and also to ensure the food security of the country.

A memorandum submitted to the prime minister on this occasion, requested the government to stop unbundling of the state electricity boards and to keep the power sector firmly in the public sector domain till the Electricity Act 2003 is reviewed by the government. The experiences of entrusting distribution to the private sector in Orissa and Delhi have been highlighted by the delegation to prove how such a course would be a complete failure.

The delegation requested Dr Manmohan Singh to appoint a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to review the Electricity Act 2003. They stressed the JPC should have a short time-frame and till the JPC report is finalised for amending the Act, further unbundling of SEBs and corporatisation be held in abeyance.

The prime minister stated that the government has no immediate plans to privatise the power sector. He asked the delegation to meet the union power minister and discuss the issue in details.

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REPORTS & EVENTS

ASIA PACIFIC SEMINAR ON CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

The Second Asia Pacific Seminar on Construction Workers was held in Haldia, West Bengal on 16th and 17th August 2004. The Seminar started with a huge mobilization of construction workers in B B Ghosh Meeting Hall of the Port Trust. The meeting was addressed by M K Pandhe, President CITU and John Sutton from Australia among others. Shyamal Chakraborty, Kali Ghosh, President and General Secretary of WB State CITU, R Singaravelu, President CWFI, Laxman Seth, MP and S N Thakur of AITUC also addressed the gathering.

The Seminar was attended by 62 delegates from the construction unions from India, Australia, Japan, Vietnam and Bangladesh. John

Sutton (Australia), Shigeyasu Fujuyoshi (Japan), Rabindranath Roy (Bangladesh), Nguyen Huu Chien (Vietnam) led the delegation from respective countries. Topics of discussion were 1) Problems of construction workers in Asia-Pacific region, 2) effect of globalisation and role of the respective governments in the region, 3) Migrant workers problems, 3) problems arising out of mechanization, 4) Health and safety issues.

The deliberation in the seminar reflected serious deterioration of workers conditions in the entire region owing to pursuit of the policy of neoliberal globalisation, and the migrant workers are facing severest exploitation. The health and safety of the workers are

becoming the casualty owing to desperate profit-hunt by the employers. And most of the countries in the region are not having proper statutory set up to provide minimum protection to workers from job losses, loss of earning, workplace accidents, occupational hazards etc. The delegates from all the countries also stressed upon the urgent need for united struggle against imperialist machinations.

The seminar has drawn conclusions outlining the urgent task on having more organized coordination between the movements in the countries of Asia Pacific Regions, bring out information bulletins periodically and organizing more solidarity actions in the region.

DEMONSTRATION BEFORE ASSEMBLY IN BANGALORE

On 2nd September 2004 more than 20,000 workers including about 12 thousand women workers from all over the State of Karnataka participated in "Vidhana Soudha Chalo", a call given by CITU Karnataka State Committee. Thousands of workers poured into Bangalore from every nook and corners of the State.

The main demands highlighted by the demonstration before the State Assembly were reversal of the anti labour policy of State Government,

stoppage of police atrocities and interference in TU movement, withdrawal of the Government Circular on Handing over "Anganwadies to Village anchayath" enactment of "Unorganised Workers Regulation of Service conditions and Welfare Bill" in lines of "Alternative Bill" submitted by CITU, amendment of APMC Act to allow two representatives of Hamali Workers in Administrative Committee, expeditious revision of Sugar

workers wages by the tripartite forum, etc. Anganawadi Workers and Helpers, Village Panchayath Workers, Hamali Workers (Head load), Midday Meal Workers were in large numbers participated in public rally. Public Rally was presided by CITU State Secretary and Bangalore District President E.K.N.Rajan and addressed by V.J.K.Nair General Secretary, state CITU, Com.S.Varalakshmi, G.S.Prasannkumar and other CITU leaders.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX NUMBERS FOR INDUSTRIAL WORKERS ON BASE 1982=100

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month		State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month	
			Jun.' 04	July.' 04				Jun.' 04	July.' 04
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	484	489	Maharashtra	38	Mumbai	601	606
	2	Guntur	513	512		39	Nagpur	515	531
	3	Hyderabad	511	514		40	Nasik	547	558
	4	Visakhapatnam	502	502		41	Pune	575	577
	5	Warangal	539	541		42	Solapur	526	527
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	423	428	Orissa	43	Barbil	454	453
	7	Guwahati	515	526		44	Rourkela	453	455
	8	Labac-Silchar	412	417	Punjab	45	Amritsar	444	455
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	436	438		46	Ludhiana	467	473
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	430	435	Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	504	516
Bihar	11	Monghyr	467	484		48	Jaipur	458	468
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	462	466	Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	548	555
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	505	507		50	Coimbatore	501	496
	14	Bhavnagar	520	528		51	Coonoor	508	499
	15	Rajkot	461	470		52	Madurai	502	502
	16	Surat	489	493		53	Salem	485	487
	17	Vadodra	485	484		54	Tiruchirapally	542	554
Haryana	18	Faridabad	525	536	Uttar Pradesh	55	Agra	469	486
	19	Yamunanagar	479	490		56	Ghaziabad	513	526
J & K	20	Srinagar	592	601		57	Kanpur	481	490
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	478	485		58	Saharanpur	457	466
	22	Jharia	410	415		59	Varanasi	522	544
	23	Kodarma	414	419	West Bengal	60	Asansol	489	493
	24	Noamundi	458	456		61	Darjeeling	430	433
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	464	474		62	Durgapur	588	583
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	499	501		63	Haldia	602	610
	27	Belgaum	562	572		64	Howrah	579	597
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	521	529		65	Jalpaiguri	432	442
	29	Mercara	497	494		66	Kolkata	562	562
Kerala	30	Alwaye	520	520		67	Raniganj	449	451
	31	Mundakayam	504	502	Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	548	568
	32	Quilon	535	529	Delhi	69	Delhi	583	609
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	577	579	Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	555	558
Madhya Pradesh	34	Balaghat	456	465					
	35	Bhopal	528	535					
	36	Indore	516	525					
	37	Jabalpur	504	519					
								ALL-INDIA	512 517

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State	Centre	June 2004	July 2004
Andhra Pradesh	1 Kethgudem	513	518
Himachal Pradesh	2 Himachal Pradesh	485	491
Rajasthan	3 Bhilwara	502	508
Madhya Pradesh	4 Chhindwara	453	462
Tripura	5 Tripura	461	459
Goa	6 Goa	612	618

POLICE FIRED & BRUTAL LATHI CHARGE ON STRIKING CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

On 10th September 2004, the police of Jammu Administration opened fire and brutal lathi-charge on the peaceful dharna of the striking construction workers at Banihal. 62 workers were injured of which three were in critical condition. On 11th September, 2004, one worker activist, Mohd Hanif, succumbed to death in the hospital. The workers of the railway construction project in the Udhampur - Baramullah belt had long been agitating for payment of proper wages, social security benefits, proper safety arrangements as per the law of the land. They were deployed in construction of railway track, including tunnels and bridges in the hilly region spreading from Udhampur to Baramullah in J&K state. The project was under IRCON (Indian Railways) and the construction work was awarded to M/s Hindustan Construction Corporation (HCC). The USB Railway Project Workers Union affiliated to CITU submitted their charter of demands in February 2004 which basically contains the demands for proper implementation of the labour related statutes in respect of wages. Social security benefits, safety measures, and adequate compensation for those ousted from their lands owing to the project construction. In March 2004, the main contractor, HCC assured the workers in writing to take care of all the demands of the workers in presence of the labour deptt officials and local administration. But they did nothing so far as the workers' issues are concerned. The union consistently pursued the management and all concerned for more than six months for a negotiated settlement but all efforts failed owing to dubious arrogance of the contractor, the HCC. Rather, the HCC management tried to break the union through local miscreants with the tacit support of the local administration. The workers enmasse decided to go for continuous strike from 2nd August after failure of all their effort to sort out the demands through bilateral talks. The striking workers were on continuous dharna in the construction site at Banihal. Even during the strike period, several

attempts were made by the HCC management to terrorise the workers through armed henchmen and also through local administration and break the strike. But total strike continued peacefully under the leadership of the CITU union. The HCC management managed to get the leadership of the union arrested by local police under false cases but still failed to get the strike fizzled out. In this background, on 6th September, at the initiative of M Y Tarigami, M L A (CPI-M) a meeting was arranged to sort out the stalemate through discussion with the involvement of DIG, DC, SP, Tehshildar, management of IRCON and HCC. But the HCC management did not respond to the initiative and walked out from the meeting challenging the authority of the union leaders present in the meeting to represent the workers. The IRCON management who were present in the meeting had to admit the justness of the demands of the workers which involve nothing more than the proper implementation of the labour laws for the workers. Thereafter, under the supervision of the Tehshildar, the election of the representatives of the workers took place on 9th September, in which workers cooperated wholeheartedly and the entire leadership of the USB Railway Projects Workers' Union (CITU) was elected unanimously. But the HCC management, represented by one H I Dhar refused to recognize union leadership elected by the workers under direct supervision of the local administration and negotiate with them. Rather, the management terminated the service of 30 workers.

Then on 10th September 2004, without any provocation, police opened fire on the peaceful dharna of the striking workers preceded by brutal lathicharge in which Com Mohd Hanif had to embrace martyrdom.

At the initiative of J&K State CITU, the working people of the state spontaneously responded to solidarity action in support of the striking workers and against police barbarism. On 11th September, complete Bandh was observed in Banihal. More

(Cont. on page 41)

B T R CENTENARY

Fight Unitedly For The Cause of Indian Working Women

B T Ranadive

...it was found that the grievances of working women were unattended: the government was indifferent; the employers were hostile; and even the trade unions were not very enthusiastic about their demands. In the many strikes that the working class fought there were very few instances when special demands of the working women were given prominence. It was also found that women, even in industries and occupations where they formed a sizeable section were hardly represented in the leading bodies of the union.

This state of affairs was partly due to the disabilities which women suffer from in a society like the Indian society. The inferior status assigned to women in both Hindu and Muslim communities is known to all. The discrimination doggedly pursues the working women and it is the elementary duty of the trade unions to fight against it...

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

Regarding the question of equal wages for equal work also there is discrimination. The tea planters, the bidi employers find diverse means to cheat the women workers and the trade unions have not always shown the same zeal that they would have if men were affected. The plantation women, the bidi and coir women and the sweeper women have been the worst sufferers of this unequal treatment. Nor are the conditions easy for women employees in private and government services. Apart from sharing the denial of creches and other facilities with the women in factories, they are discriminated in matters of promotion and transfers under a male administration and are often the objects of lust of superior officers. In a few occupations, wage rates of women workers for identical work were found to be significantly lower than those of their male counterparts, even after the promulgation of the Equal Remuneration Act.

...a survey dealing with the socio economic conditions of women workers in mines says that no women worker engaged in production process in any sampled mine was found to be skilled... The proportion of women engaged in supervisory work was negligible. No woman was holding administrative, executive or managerial post... A large number of women continued to be temporary hands even after putting in five years of service. ... prospects of women graduating from unskilled to semi-skilled and supervisory jobs were practically non existent. In none of the mines was there a regular channel for their promotion. The cost of providing extra welfare amenities like creche, maternity benefits, toilets and other facilities to women workers was found to be very low - 0.20 to 1.80 per cent of the total wage bill.

In all capitalist countries, there is discrimination against women. Women have to fight for equal pay for equal work in many of the advanced countries. It is no wonder that India with one foot in the capitalist age and another in the preceding age should deny equal treatment to women at every stage. The trade union movement has to fight it as part of the working class struggle. Our leaders and cadres must see that the union leadership does not become a male preserve, that women are trained and quickly promoted to leading positions. The trade union movement cannot attain its full stature unless the women's contingent plays its role in organizing and leading the unions. Thousands of women participate in strike struggle, face jail and repressions, go through privations along with men workers and employees. But they are far from occupying the position in the unions that is their due. All women's organisations should lead their support and actively help the trade union movement in this struggle. The CITU calls upon all affiliated trade unions to strengthen the working women's movement. Let our trade unions and Coordination Committees get ready to organize in cooperation with other central trade unions and women's organizations a mighty all India movement of working women.

("Foreword" to 'Report of the National Convention of Working Women', Madras, April 9-10, 1979)