

THE VOICE
OF



THE WORKING WOMAN

Vol. II No. 5

Sept.-Oct., 1982

50 P.

All India Women's Employment Day—August 18



Com. Jyoti Basu addressing the rally at Esplanade East, Calcutta

Pakistan Women

Debarred from Asiad

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PAKISTANI women have been left out of the training plans prepared by the Pakistan Sports Board for the country's participation in the coming Asian Games.

President General Zia-ul-Haq has declared that while women can play at home behind high walls away from the gaze of males, they would not be allowed to compete abroad, where men could watch them.

Although General Zia has not issued a martial law decree or any published directive, word has apparently gone around to keep women on the sidelines, as was the case during the national games at Peshawar last April.

The Women's Action Forum, made up of several women's organisations, has protested against this discrimination against women in sport in the name of Islam. Their telegram asking the Pakistan Olympic Association to spell out the legal grounds on which women have been kept out of the games, has so far met with silence.

Meanwhile the Government is extending every possible support to the all-male Pakistani team, bringing in coaches from abroad and sending athletes to other countries to gain international experience. It has reportedly spent more than a crore of Pakistani rupees on this year's games.

Women athletes, with the backing of women's groups, are now demanding not only their share of this support, but more important, their right to participate fully in sports and culture movements.

WOMEN DEMAND EMPLOYMENT

ON a call of the All-India Democratic Women's Association, supported by the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, August 18, 1982 was observed as Women's Employment Day in many parts of the country.

West Bengal

Two huge processions, one from Howrah Station comprising the districts of Howrah and Hooghly, and the other from Sealdah Station, covering the district of 24 Parganas, marched through the different areas of Calcutta, and converged at Subodh Mallick Square. Many other big and small processions also assembled from different parts of the city. From there the three thousand-strong central procession marched through Lenin Sarani and culminated at Esplanade East for the rally.

At Esplanade the massive rally of women chaired by Manjuri Gupta, President, AIDWA, was addressed by the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, who extended the full support of the Left Front Government to their demand for employment. Within the limits under which it had to function, the Left Front Government, in its first five-year term had made whatever efforts it could for expanding women's employment opportunities and solving some of the problems of working women.

Among others who spoke at the rally were Shanti Ghatak, Minister of State for Finance, W. Bengal Government, and Kanak Mukherjee, M.P. An 19-point charter of demands was adopted to be sent to the Prime Minister and an 11-point memorandum to the West Bengal Chief Minister.

Tamilnadu

Rallies, meetings and processions were held in 22 centres in the State. In Madras, some 10,000 leaflets and 10,000 copies of a 4-page pamphlet were distributed among the employees working in banks, railways, Government offices, and on the suburban electric

trains. Some 200 big and 500 small wall-posters were put up all over the city. Forty women activists worked whole time to prepare for the day. The central rally was held before the Secretariat.

Similarly preparatory meetings and rallies were held in North and South Arcot Districts, Salem, Madurai, Ramnad, Trichy, Tirunelveli, Kanya Kumari, Coimbatore, Tanjore, Pudukottai, Periyar and Dharmapuri Districts.

Gujarat

In Bhavnagar, more than 200 women staged a demonstration outside the District Collector's Office. A memorandum listing the demands for opening of more avenues for women's employment, and improvement of the working condition for women, was submitted to the District Collector.

In Ahmedabad, 40 women sat in dharna from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. before the Ahmedabad Collectorate Office, and later submitted a memorandum to the Collector.

Bihar

A big demonstration was organised in the town of Hajipur. Starting from Gandhi Ashram and passing through the different areas the procession reached the District Collector's Office. The demonstration of over 500 women from different panchayats, was led by Sudha Bindu Moitra, Vice-President of the Bihar State Committee of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti. The demonstrators gave full voice to their slogans; Stop the Price-Rise, Double Pensions for the Old and Widows, Equal pay for Equal work, End Police oppression, end the oppression and Atrocities against Women, Withdraw the Bihar Press Bill, Down with Authoritarianism".

A delegation consisting of Sudha Bindu Moitra, Usha Varma, Savitri Patel, Sugiya Devi, Rukmini Devi, Gita Sucha and Rajivati Devi, submitted the memorandum to the District Collector.

Madhya Pradesh

Over 100 women participated in the demonstration at Surakarcha, a colliery town in Bishrampur district, particularly protesting against the declining employment of women in the industry, demanding an increase in employment avenues and equal pay and rights. The rally was addressed by Sarla Sudevan, a member of the State Coordination Committee of the AIDWA.

In Bhilainagar, Durg district, the women's organisation observed the day jointly with the Democratic Youth Federation of India and the Student's Federation of India. A day-long dharna was organised before the Regional Employment Exchange.

Rukmini Singh and Bakil Bharote addressed the dharna on behalf of the women and students respectively. They called upon women and youth to come forward and wage a united struggle against unemployment, for unemployment allowance, for the recognition of the right to work as a fundamental right, as well as to struggle for peace against the forces trying to push the world into nuclear war.

Kerala

Women staged demonstrations and dharnas

in all the district centres on August 18, in observance of the Day for the Defence of Working Women's Rights. Their demands included strict implementation of the laws relating to women, equal wage for equal work, implementation of the recommendations of the statutory commission on the status of women, ensuring employment opportunities, etc.

The dharna in front of the Government Secretariat in Trivandrum was inaugurated by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, K.R. Gowri. Susheela Gopalan, General Secretary of the AIDWA and P. Devooty, Secretary of the State unit of the AIDWA, addressed the demonstrators.

After the dharna, a delegation led by K.R. Gowri, Susheela Gopalan and Devooty met the Chief Minister and presented a memorandum containing 26 demands.

Demonstrations were also held in all the other district centres.

In the Assembly a call attention motion was moved by Devooty on the difficulties experienced by women due to non-implementation of certain laws relating to them. Responding to the motion, the Chief Minister announced in the Assembly that a commission will be appointed to go into the problems of women and make recommendations for their welfare.

Threatened Unemployment for Thousands

THE coir industry of Kerala, is faced with a very serious threat.

More than 4,000 small-scale handloom coir factories function in the Ambalpuzha, Shertalai and vycome taluks. They employ over 20,000 workers, of whom a large number are women. Over 200 exporters are engaged in sending out the produce of these factories, worth about Rs. 7 to 8 crores a year. The future of these 20,000 workers is now in grave danger. The majority of exporters face being thrown out of their trade and reduced to pauperism.

This situation has been brought about by the granting of permission to an industrialist to produce mats on mechanised looms in his factory, Floorco, at Ammanduville in Tamilnadu. It should be particularly noted that it was through fraudulent methods and back-door dealings, that the licence was in fact procured. This was fully proved by an enquiry subsequently conducted by the Government

Coir Board.

Meeting on February 8, 1982, the Coir Board unanimously requested the government of India *not* to allow production of coir mats on mechanised looms as it will throw thousands of workers out of employment.

Ten unions of Coir workers affiliated to the CITU, AITUC, UTUC, and the INTUC (I), have jointly submitted a memorandum to the Industries Minister, Government of India to.

- (1) order a judicial enquiry into how the licence for mechanised production of coir mats came to be given, contrary to Government's accepted policy,
- (2) prohibit the production of Coir mats on mechanised looms wherever they can be produced by handlooms, and
- (3) accept the recommendation of the Coir Board not to renew the licence given to Floorco, and review the Government directive giving the licence.

Dharna at Directorate of Social Welfare

OVER 500 women workers of the 18 centres under the Directorate of Social Welfare, Delhi Administration, observed a dharna from September 1 to 8, 1982, at the office of its Chief Secretary, to press the authorities to accept their long-standing demands.

These extremely poor and old women, numbering nearly 600, mostly in their late 60s and emigres from Pakistan, formed a union and decided to agitate for their demands. Finding from a number of years' experience, that the authorities would pay no attention to their grievances in any other way, they formed a union. On April 28, 1982, they went on their first indefinite dharna in protest against the vindictive decision of the authorities to shift the only selling centre from Connaught Place to Shankar Market. In the Shankar Market Centre other piece-rate workers are already working, there is little space to accommodate the shop, and many of the women would thereby face retrenchment. In this way too the authorities hoped to disrupt the functioning of the union. By their dharna the women forced the authorities to defer the shifting.

Meeting with the Minister

The union representatives, along with Susheela Gopalan, M.P., had met the Union Minister for Works and Housing, Sri Bhism Narayan Singh and persuaded him to also advise the authorities against shifting the centre. On May 12, whilst still on dharna, the Union presented a Charter of Demands.

After lifting of the dharna the union has been trying to obtain an appointment with the Chief Secretary to discuss the Charter. When all their efforts proved unsuccessful, the workers unanimously endorsed the proposal for a week's dharna from September 1 to 8. On the very first day of the dharna the authorities called the union representatives to inform them that the meeting between the Union and the authorities would take place on the 7th, to discuss their demands.

Since no word had come till the 7th evening, the women gheraoed the cars of the authorities. On the 8th evening the Chief Secretary

conceded two of their major demands, one, that the Handicraft shop at Connaught Place would not be shifted, and two, that the cost of the thread, buttons, padding for the coats, buckles, machine-oil and machine-repair would be borne by the Administration. But he refused to give this in writing until the approval of the higher authorities was received. He advised the union representatives to meet him again on October 1.

The women workers have now decided to take a mass deputation to the Lieutenant-Governor to gain acceptance of their remaining demands, and protest the attitude of the Administration officials. If these are not conceded, the struggle will be intensified.

Women Coalmine Workers— 20,000 Lose Jobs in 3 Years

THE All India Coal Workers Convention was held in Dhanbad on August 21 and 22. One of the major concerns of the convention was the large-scale retrenchment of women workers in coal mines throughout the country.

The Baveja Committee, appointed by the Government during the Emergency, had recommended that women should be eased out of coal mines on the plea that they cannot be easily transferred to other coal mines or sent underground. The Ministry of Energy accepted this recommendation, and women began to be retrenched through various dubious means. These means have included the trick of a "voluntary retirement scheme", with the provision that one male member of her family will be given a job if a woman worker retires. Many a woman worker retired, but no male family member got a job in her place.

As a result of these measures adopted by the CIL management, the employment of women in mines in three years has come down from 50,000 to 30,000.

The Coal Workers Convention strongly condemned this anti-woman policy of the government, and called upon trade unions to struggle for job security of women in coal mines.

For a Common Civil Code — In Marriage and Divorce

A wind of change is blowing among Indian Muslim women. This is reflected in the different protests taking place in Tamilnadu, Andhra, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, etc. These women have not only successfully defied the ban imposed by the *Qazis* and orthodox religionists on women watching films, they have also resisted all violent threats and social pressures.

The plight of Muslim women remains terribly oppressive. Their religious community leadership deliberately prevents them from taking any step forward. The majority are kept behind the burkha, not allowed to move about freely, to work in offices, etc., though they are 'allowed' to work in cottage industries, like bidi, bangle and lace-making, where the most horrible, unhealthy and exploitative conditions prevail. Such attitudes deprive them of all opportunities of cultural and educational development. Thus the Muslim women are the worst victims of religious orthodoxy and a backward social outlook.

Exploitation in Marriage

Recently in Parliament, Mrs. Noorjehan Razak, M.P. (AIDMK), tried to draw attention to the semiservile status of Muslim women, while speaking on the question of dowry, marriage, etc. She demanded reforms in the Muslim Personal Law, first of all to do away with polygamy, and enactment of a common civil code, applicable to all communities.

The Muslim law of divorce gives the husband an absolute and unlimited right to repudiate the marriage at his will, with a simple *Talaq*. The amount of money, known as *Mahar*, which a divorced wife is supposed to receive is so ridiculously low as to make divorce even easier and more attractive. The Muslim wife has no such comparable right. Men of other faiths convert to Islam in order to marry again, get a separation or divorce without extending any financial protection to the first wife, who would have to go through a long litigation process to obtain maintenance. "Only the uneducated would argue

that since the *Shariat* has come directly from God, any change in it would be to question God", as Mrs. Razak rightly says.

Altogether in 1971, there were nearly nine lakhs divorced or separated Muslim women in India, the vast majority in the rural areas. In some other Muslim-majority countries, changes in the *Shariat* have been made. For example Turkey and Cyprus where unilateral divorce is prohibited, or Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq and Iran where the husband has to apply to a court of law for divorce. In Pakistan, the husband must notify the "Arbitration Council" which will try to bring about a reconciliation. In India the *Status of Women Committee* had recommended legislation to eliminate the right of unilateral divorce and to ensure parity of rights for both parties regarding grounds for seeking dissolution of a marriage.

Need for United Struggle

Both Muslim as well as non-Muslim women suffer social oppression. If legal changes are to be made this must necessarily be backed by a strong and united democratic movement of women aimed at changing the very social attitudes towards women. It is a very significant development that the progressive sections and individuals amongst Muslims are demanding changes.

Like the women of Iran and the women of Palestine, we must be ready to fight to end social oppression. We must be vigilant to maintain the unity of our peoples, the unity of our country, unity in our action.

'Equal Right' to a Second Wife

So advantageous to the Muslim man is the present position regarding marriage and divorce, that we have today the spectacle of a man of the Hindu faith petitioning the Supreme Court for the 'equal right', for a Hindu, with his Muslim brother, of divorce and more than one wife.

BRIDES FOR SALE!

IN a backward society, traditions keep women backward and oppressed. we see this in the horifying increase in bride-burning for dowry. We see it also in another crime which is gradually getting more publicity, though it has been going on for a long time — the sale of brides. The shameful sale of young Muslim girls in marriage in Hyderabad to unknown and elderly men has become well-enough known. But in Indore, things are much worse for the hapless young girls, picked up mainly from the very poor families of slum dwellers. Here the women, and even girl-children are sold not just once, but over and over again.

Recently a burqa-clad woman marrying a Muslim in a court marriage, gave her name at the time of signing the affidavit as Kamala Rajput. Court officials became suspicious and stopped the marriage proceedings to investigate. They thereby stumbled upon one of the biggest rackets in the area.

Investigations revealed that Kamla was being sold for the third time. Now thirty years of age, hailing from Pipalya village in neighbouring Ratlam district, Kamla was first sold by her brother, for Rs. 5000! The 'buyer' again sold her for a price to one Laxman working in a hotel at Indore. After some time Kamla ran away but fell again into the hands of her brother Dasrath, who was again selling her to one Rafiq, when the racket was exposed. Kamla was sent to the rescue home and Rafiq and Dasrath taken for interrogation.

In the same rescue home is another 19-year old girl whose father had sold her six times. Still another Punjabi girl, just 11 years of age, married against her wishes to a Delhi boy, ran away from home, only to fall into the hands of a gang trading in women. Ultimately she was rescued by the police and placed in the home. She has refused to go back to her parents or her 'husband' and is courageously learning a trade to earn her livelihood.

A more harrowing case is of a 16-year old Gashwali girl who was sold 15 times and re-

scued by the police only when she was being sold for the 16th time.

Since the setting up of the Rescue Home in 1960, 2,692 girls have been admitted, most of them between the ages of 16 to 25 — and most of them by then suffering from venereal diseases. They are all poor girls. For middle class girls, the danger is bride-burning for poor girls, sale into the worst kind of bondage.

Both these practices must be brought to an end by the united action of progressive-minded men and women, and their democratic mass organisations.

Crimes Against Women

Dowry Deaths, Murders, Eve-Teasing

- 19 Dowry Deaths in Delhi — till the end of June 1982, 44 cases of Murder in Delhi — till the end of June 1982.
- Cases of Eve-Teasing increased from 644 — 1980 to 2041 — 1981.

During first six months of 1982-1983

- Crimes against Harijans — 31500 since 1980.
- Cases of 1970 still pending — 70.
- Convicted, only 3%, of those charge sheeted in 1980.

Total number of crimes against women all over India

3375 in 1975

3680 in 1976

3922 in 1977

3899 in 1978

U.P. and M.P. together account for 42.2 per cent of all rape cases and top all lists for all other crimes.

Around the States

Maharashtra

*Women Textile Workers on the March

*Policemen's Wives Fight Back

Women textile workers were in the forefront of the "Jail Bharo Andolan" of the Bombay Textile workers now in the eighth month of their strike. On the morning of August 16, in Worli, 300 women joined 1,500 male workers to offer satyagraha. In different parts of the city women joined marches and shouted slogans such as "Chalo, Chalo, Mazdoor Chalo, Jail Bharo, Jail Bharo". Many women were taken to the police stations, and released later in the evening.

The RMMS (INTUC) leaders were denounced by the protesting women who also criticised Indira Gandhi for finding time to visit film star Amitabh Bachhan, but continuing to be callous about the striking textile workers.

Representatives of the AIDWA, Coordination Committee and the NFIW joined the jail bhara campaign and Ahilya Rangnekar, Prabha Samant, Subashini Ali, Mangala Guljar and Savita Charan courted arrest.

* * *

*Immediately after the arrest of policemen in Bombay, on August 19, as many as 500 wives of police organisation leaders demonstrated in front of the Naigaum police station to demand the release of their leaders.

On the 19th, the CRP searched the houses in some of the buildings in the Worli area. In the course of their search they attacked some women and later lathi-charged them when they protested.

Women in working class areas in Bombay, whether textile workers or otherwise, are determined to organise themselves and fight, shoulder to shoulder with men workers.

Kerala

The second week of August, 1982, witnessed a rising tide of mass struggles of various sections of the people — kisans, agricultural workers, students, factory workers, middle class employees, and youth. In all of them women played a prominent part.

On August 16, volunteers of the Kerala Karshaka Sangham picketed the gates of the Government Secretariat in Trivandrum and the District Collectorates, to press their demand for subsidy for purchase of fertilisers in all the paddy-producing areas of the State. Earlier campaign jathas were conducted in all the districts, receiving enthusiastic response from the peasantry.

On August 17 under the auspices of the Joint Action Council of various unions of agricultural workers in the State, thousands of agricultural workers picketed taluk offices all over the State, to press their demands for payment of agricultural workers pension, including arrears, before the Onam (harvest) festival; implementation of the Agricultural Workers' Act amending the anti-worker provisions, formulations for solving the unemployment problem, expeditious distribution of surplus lands, constitution of an Agricultural Workers' Welfare Board, etc. Thousands of workers, men and women, participated in various centres in all districts. Picketing continued on the 19th, 20th and the following days.

On August 18, two thousand cashew factory workers picketed the Secretariat, demanding the immediate reopening of all closed cashew factories, payment of Rs 250 as bonus, issue of free rations for two weeks. The picketing was under the joint Action Council of Trade Unions. Mothers carrying babies in their arms, the men and women who have been undergoing miseries due to unemployment and starvations, participated.

On August 17, Government employees and teachers observed Bonus Demand Day in response to the call of the Federation of State Employees and the Teachers' Organisation. There were demonstrations all over the State, and in Palghat the police arrested 30 demonstrating employees.

The four-month old strike of the tile workers of Feroke and Cheruvannur of Calicut, and the satyagraha in front of the residence of the tile factory owners, still continues. The Kisan Sabha has collected money for the striking workers who are being daily arrested by the police.

On August 16, again under the Joint Action Council of the Trade Union, thousands of fisherfolk, including fisherwomen, picketed the Secretariat to press their demands for suspension of the operation of mechanised trawlers during the months of June, July and August; grant of pension to fishermen over 60 years of age, grant of concessions to the children of fishermen for their education, issue of free rations to those who have lost their homes due to sea erosion.

Andhra Pradesh

*Nurses on strike.

The Working Women's Coordination Committee members in Andhra have been in touch with striking nurses, and have tried to have introduced demands such as a shift system that will limit working hours to eight, an increase in job opportunities for student nurses and an increase in the health quota which is at present 2.8%.

Tamil Nadu

*Shastri Bhavan Creche Facility in Danger.

The creche in Shastri Bhavan, Madras, was first set up in 1981 in response to repeated requests from the Women's welfare Association of the Central Government Employees.

To reduce expenses, the Association wanted to take over the responsibility of running the creche from the Griha Kalyan Kendra. The Director of Estates, and later the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Works and Housing has decided however, that the Association is not eligible for accommodation. For the premises to be transferred to the Association, the approval of the Cabinet Committee on Accommodation is necessary. The Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms has been requested to place the matter before the CCA for a decision. While this unneces-

sary red tape is being sorted out, the Griha Kalyan Kendra is being allowed to run the creche in the present accommodation.

Madhya Pradesh

The molestation of a female peon compelled to be on duty at night in a school was taken up by the Gwalior branch of JMS and condemned by a demonstration held in front of the educational headquarters of the government. The question was also raised in the MP assembly, and a letter was as a result, issued by the Department to discontinue night duty for women.

The other issues the JMS plans to take up in this area are the lack of transport facilities for women employees from schools, Income Tax, Food Corporation, P&T and other (offices) in Gwalior, and the urgent need for a creche in places such as the Income Tax office where there are more than 50 women working.

Three demonstrations have been held for the provision of drinking water.

In addition to this action, active members of the JMS in Gwalior held a class for women to learn about their role in mass organisations. The class was held on August 22, and was attended by 42 women, including 12 beedi workers. Vimala Ranadive Secretary at the All India Working Women's Coordination Committee spoke about the necessity of women's organisations and the programme and policies of the AIDWA, and Coordination Committee. After some initial hesitation, the women participants asked a number of questions about the functioning of mass organisations and the specific difficulties of women organisers. Their desire to learn about the problems of women and mass organisations was an indication of their militancy and background of struggle.

Uttar Pradesh

*Follow-up on the Siswa Rape Case.

The Chief Minister Shripat Misra has accepted the opposition demand for a judicial enquiry into the mass rape which took place at Siswa on April 23. He also announced the constitution of a Standing Committee to
(on page 12)

Maternity Benefit Act: Implementation in India

THE Maternity Benefit Act and the Employees State Insurance Act provide for Maternity Leave with cash benefit, in factories, mines, plantations and other industries as well as in offices and establishments. It is applicable wherever more than 10 workers (with power) or 20 workers (without power) are employed. The maximum period of leave is 12 weeks with full pay. The cash benefit in addition is payable only if the woman has been working in the establishment for a period of at least 12 months preceding the date of delivery.

In fact however, as the Government's own records show, the majority of women workers are not getting the benefit of this legislation, particularly the thousands who work in small factories, or as contract and casual labour. Even working women covered by the Employees State Insurance Act, while entitled to maternity benefit, are not getting full reimbursement for medical expenses for delivery and the post-delivery period.

Quantum of Cash Benefit

The cash benefit due under the Act, is the daily wage or *one rupee per day*, whichever is higher. This in any case is a miserably low rate of payment, and only highlights the extremely low wage rates of women in this country. The average amounts actually paid per accepted claim in the factory sector in 1975, ranged from Rs. 112 in Pondicherry to Rs. 1465 in Punjab, for plantations for the year 1977-78, the picture was the following:-

in Tea	— Rs. 362
in Coffee	— Rs. 322
in Rubber	— Rs. 456
in her plantations	— Rs. 462

In mines, the average cash benefit per woman worker in 1978 was:

Coal	— Rs. 630
Manganese	— Rs. 458
Iron Ore	— Rs. 319
Others	— Rs. 200

All claims for maternity benefit of course are not accepted. The best record is that of West Bengal where the figure was 8,144 in 1975. Kerala, which has a large number of women workers in plantations, coir, cashew and beedi industries, all privately owned, the number of women receiving maternity benefit was only 2,711.

Because of better union organisation generally, and the largeness of the establishments, most women claimants in the plantations and mines received payment — 29,000 out of 30,000 in plantations (1974) and 5,200 out of 5,300 in mines. All the same time it should be noted, contrary to the noise which employers make about the "burden" of maternity payments, that this 29,000 in plantations was out of 242,000 total women employed and 5,000 out of 31,000 women employed in mines — that is to say, only a small fraction of women workers claim maternity benefit and the expense to the employer makes a negligible proportion of his total expenses.

Of course the expenses for the large numbers of mis-carriages, abortions, premature deliveries, are not in any way compensated for by the employers.

Methods of Evading Payment

Since 160 days of continued working is required to qualify for maternity payment, employers often make a break in service. While he is forbidden by law to terminate the services of pregnant women, and can be prosecuted for doing so, very rarely is an employer punished or fined, since Government does not intervene on behalf of the woman and take prompt action.

If delivery takes place at home, instead of a hospital — which will be the case on a very large-scale given the lack of hospital facilities — the maternity benefit is denied to her. For the same reason, thousands of women are denied jobs, or are dismissed on getting married, as used to be the case till recently with Air Hostesses.

Just the sheer ignorance of working women regarding their entitlement under the Act, for example, the medical bonus of Rs. 25, pre-natal and post-natal care arrangements, is exploited to deprive them of these benefits. Being illiterate and not knowing the exact date of delivery, many lose the maternity leave of 12 weeks.

Temporary workers women employed in agriculture, women domestic servants and houseworkers are other categories not covered by maternity protection. Nearly 90 per cent of our women work in the agricultural sector. These are the women too, who, due to poverty and fear of losing their jobs, continue to work right up to the day of their delivery.

Ineffective Government Machinery

The Government enforcement machinery by and large is defunct; where it operates it is known for its corrupt practices, being totally subservient to managements, never acting in

favour of the women workers. That is why so few complaints are entertained, and why are faulting employers are not prosecuted. Trade Unions have repeatedly demanded the setting up of Womens' Wings to monitor and ensure enforcement of the rules of maternity benefit. But no attention is paid and the situation continues to worsen.

Thus the CITU and All-India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women have put forward the following demands:

Amendment of existing laws to include

- (a) Four months maternity leave, with full pay, to all working women, whenever they are working, regardless of the size of the establishment.
- (b) Payment of all medical expenses for pre-and post-delivery period, with a minimum of Rs. 500.
- (c) More effective enforcement machinery and stringent punishment for violation of laws.
- (d) Vigilance Committees for monitoring enforcement with women trade union resented on the Committees.

Maternity and Family Protection in the USSR

According to a recent decision taken at the relevant State and Trade Union levels to improve State aid to families with children, working mothers who have been in employment for at least one year, or women attending full-time training courses, will get partially paid leave to help them care for children till they reach the age of one year. Additional unpaid leave will be introduced to care for children up to the age of 18 months. Remuneration during this leave is fixed at 50 roubles (approx. Rs. 625) per month in the Far East, Siberia and the country's northern regions, and at 35 roubles (approx Rs. 435) per month in the remaining regions. These measures are to be phased in between November 1, 1981 and November 1, 1983, according to the region concerned.

At the same time, as from 1981, working women with two or more children under 12 years, will get three days' additional paid leave.

There will be a lump-sum allowance of 50 roubles upon the birth of the first child, and 100 roubles for the second and third, for working mothers and those

attending full time training. Single mothers will be entitled to higher family allowance — 20 roubles (approx. Rs. 250) per month for each child until age 16 (or 18 for pupils not receiving stipends).

Also with retrospective effect from November 1, 1981, disability pensions will also be increased as will allowance to families having lost their breadwinner — varying from 26-75 roubles (approx. Rs. 325-Rs 935) according to circumstances.

Women with five or more children and mothers of disabled children will be entitled to a retirement pension from age-55, as long as they have a 5-year work record and have raised their children to the age of 8. They will be exempted from the requirement that they work till pensionable age and that they must have a 3-year continuous work record when they apply for pension.

As a result of these measures, over 4.5 million families with children and some 14 million pensioners will improve their living standards. Close on 2.5 roubles (approx Rs. 27 crore) will be spent for this purpose,

Anti-dowry March to Parliament

IN protest against the unending series of dowry deaths in the country, a number of women's organisations, youth organisations, voluntary organisations and trade unions, joined hands under the banner of the *Dahej Virodh Chetana Manch*, to march to Parliament on August 3, 1982.

Among the participating organisations were the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, the Coordination Committee of Working Women, the National Federation of Indian Women, the Mahila Dakshata Samiti, the SFI, the DYFI and various CITU unions, girls' college unions, and so on.

The Manch drafted a list of demands aimed at preventing as well as coping with the dowry evil. The Dahej Virodh Chetana Manch was formed to create public opinion against the 'shameful practice' of dowry in Indian society. The Manch will not only organise meetings, processions to achieve its objectives, but will also contact potential brides and bridegrooms in its fight against the social evil. It will support women or families stricken by the dowry system and actively prevent the giving or taking of dowry and the victimisation of women because of dowry demands.

In a memorandum to President Zail Singh the Manch demanded that the Anti-Dowry Law be implemented with greater effectiveness. It also wanted women's organisations to be given the legal right for prosecution on behalf of a dowry victim.

The dowry problem, however, should not be seen as a problem on its own. It is part of a bigger system of attitudes, privileges and property ownership, that ill-treats not only women, but men and women of the underprivileged, down-trodden sections. Among these oppressed sections women become the worst oppressed.

* * *

Parliamentary Joint Committee

The Joint Committee set up by Parliament to recommend amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, has recommended that persons who demand, take and abet the taking of dowry should be punished, and not the giver. The Committee which held 41

sittings and visited different centres has not only made specific amendments to the Act, but has also given general recommendations for consideration by the Government. The Committee held that the Act lacks enforcement because it envisages a complaint from the parents of the girl who had given the dowry. It is unrealistic to expect that parents will set in motion enforcement of the law which may affect their daughter.

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enquire into all such criminal events in the future.

The atrocity came to light on June 13, six weeks after it had occurred. When it was discussed in the U.P. Assembly, it was alleged that the Superintendent of Police of Basti sought to protect a sub-inspector accused of being involved in the episode, and who is apparently related to a Union Deputy Minister. The same police officer, who had been transferred to the state CID, has now been given the task of enquiring into the incident.

Rajasthan

***Woman President of Rajasthan Textile Mazdoor Union.**

Banoo Bahen, a working woman in the Birla-owned mill at Bhawanimandi, has been elected president of the local chapter of the Rajasthan Textile Mazdoor Union.

Banoo was elected to the State Committee of CITU Rajasthan, in its Third State Conference held at Bharatpur. Her influence over her fellow-mill workers has been impressive, and despite obstacles, she was unanimously elected President in the elections held by the State General Secretary of CITU. She now has the distinction of being the only woman president of a union in Rajasthan, as also, the only president from a minority community.

The management has already recognised the new committee presided over by her. In the recently reorganised Rajasthan State Committee of CITU, the Central Secretariat of CITU has included her name in the Central Committee.

Sex Determination Test—

Controversy Continues

A meeting on July 15 to discuss the misuse of sex determination tests, was organised by the All-India democratic Women's Association, on which a number of women's, youth students' and trade union organisations readily participated, and spoke.

In a society already hostile to women and their problems, sex determination tests are being used by money-making doctors to predict the sex of the foetus — leading in several cases to the abortion of female foetuses. Two doctors in Amritsar were found to be openly advertising these tests as "a way out" for families that did not want female children. They charge Rs. 500 for this "helpful service". But this has become a common practice in a number of big and small cities.

The July 15 meeting brought social scientists, doctors and concerned women and men together to pass a joint resolution condemning the *abuse* of these tests, virtually amounting to female infanticide.

Susheela Gopalan Secretary of the AIDWA, called attention in her welcoming speech to the declining sex ratio — about 847 women for every 1000 men. Dr. Vina Mazumdar, Director of the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) chaired the meeting. She stressed that only pseudo-social scientists would declare that reducing the number of female children in the population would improve the status of women. Vimala Ranadive, Secretary of the Working Women's Coordination Committee, tabled the resolution against the tests.

Several doctors present helped others to understand the difference between amniocentesis, a procedure made up of different tests, and the sex-determination test, which is only one of these. In many women who are pregnant after the age of 35, or who have a history of abnormalities in the family, amniocentesis is necessary and is done. A small

amount of fluid, called amniotic fluid, is taken from the woman's uterus and this fluid is subjected to several tests. An incidental offshoot of the tests is an indication of the probable sex of the child.

Dr. Imrana Qadir of the Development of Community Health and Medicine, JNU pointed out that while amniocentesis is useful to predict whether a foetus is abnormal, the sex determination test is useless, and even dangerous. If as has unfortunately been the case, the woman wants an abortion because it is a female foetus, the woman's health is exposed to the risk of repeated abortions in search of a male child. Dr. Banoo Coyaji of KEM Hospital, joined Dr. Qadir is suggesting that the tests that enable parents to know the sex of the child must be banned, because they serve no medical purpose; they serve only to kill babies simply because they are female.

A lively discussion ensued on whether amniocentesis tests should be completely abolished, or whether its abuse to discover whether the foetus is female in order to abort it, should be banned. Instances were quoted of wrong sex-diagnosis, and the resultant deep physical and mental impact on the women concerned.

All were unanimous in condemning the abuse of these tests, and speakers from the various organisation present, including from the Drugs and pharmaceutical workers' unions, pledged their full support to any campaign mapped out for ensuring an end to this practice.

The meeting formulated a resolution asking for a ban on the use of amniocentesis, *to detect the sex of the foetus*; severe penalties up to and including derecognition by the Indian Medical Association, be imposed on Doctors found to be misusing these tests, as a money-making racket; and the setting up of a sub-committee to decide on further action.

AROUND THE WORLD

First Woman Chairman of ILO

IN its meeting held immediately following the 1982 International Labour Conference, the International Labour Office Governing Body elected as its chairman *Aida Gonzalez Martinez* of Mexico, *the first woman to hold the post.*

A career diplomat since 1957, Miss Gonzalez has been Ambassador of Mexico responsible for International Labour Affairs since 1978. She has held senior positions in her home Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and represented Mexico in numerous international meetings.

Miss Gonzalez has played a prominent part in ILO affairs. Since 1977 she has been Government representative of Mexico on the Governing Body, being chairman of the Governing Body Government Group for the past three years. She has been a government delegate or head of delegation to recent sessions of the International Labour Conference.

U.S. Women Lose Equal Rights Battle

THE Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) designed to give American women a constitutional guarantee against discrimination because of their sex is today a piece of dead legislation.

A vote against the legislation by the Florida State Senate on June 1, 1982 effectively put the last nail in ERA's coffin. Over a 10-year period the cry of ERA spread across the United States, rallying millions of women who believed they were getting a raw deal from employers, educators, lawyers, insurance salesmen and men in general.

To become a part of the Constitution, however, the amendment had to be ratified by at least 38 states, three-quarters of the total 50, by 30 June this year. Thirty-five states had ratified it by 1977. None has done so since and five state legislatures have changed their minds, rescinding their ratification in moves whose

legality is being considered by the US Supreme Court. Four states thought about putting ERA to the vote again this year. The deadline is now passed, and the Amendment cannot now be made.

Nurses Strike in the U.K. — Growing Support

FOR five days in the second week of August, one million nurses, technicians and other medical workers of the National Health Scheme, paralysed the country's public hospitals and clinics in a nation-wide strike for higher wages, against the policy of wage-freeze of the British Government headed by Mrs. Thatcher. This action, unprecedented in the history of the National Health Services in Britain, was preceded by intermittent actions over the past three months. The nurses and other medical workers have threatened further stoppages till their demands are won.

During these five days, outside the hospital gates, strike committee members screened arriving ambulances, turning away cases not in dire need of medical attention, "it's not a nice thing to do", a nurse said. "but It's the only way to get the government to listen.

The hospital strike has been supported by sympathetic, strikes all over the country, including coalminers and steelworkers. Prominent physicians have come out in support of the strike. When the Fleet street electricians went on a one-day sympathetic strike that stopped publication of all nine London major daily newspapers, their union leaders were convicted for contempt and fined. This was because they defied a court injunction issued under the 1980 Employment Act which forbids "Secondary Strikes".

The nurses and medical workers have now received the powerful support of the entire organised working class with the decision by the 11-million strong Trade Union Congress to hold a one-day strike on September 22. The TUC President, Alan Sapper, warned the Thatcher Government that the British workers are not going to accept legislation by the Government that curtails union powers. Every day more and more unions are registering their support to the hospitals' strike.

What Chemical Warfare Really Means

IN May this year, the U.S. resumed production of chemical weapons.

Chemical war was waged by the U.S.A. in Vietnam between 1961 and 1971, directly affecting one-and-a-half million Vietnamese. Ten years later, in 1982, the effects are still being felt. Till today—like the atomic bomb victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the people carry the living effects of the chemical warfare. A very large and growing number of Vietnamese suffer from nerve disturbances, skin diseases, cancer and disorders of the genetic apparatus which affect future generations of children. About half-a-million south Vietnamese women can no longer conceive and have children; others have painful pregnancies which result in deformed births.

These same poisonous agents have completely destroyed nearly half the cultivable land, jungles and forests of South Vietnam,

severely affecting food supplies and other crops. Nearly one half of the cultivated land, jungles and tropical woods of South Vietnam are a total barren desert as a result of the use of various poisonous chemical agents. *These damaged woods and land can never again become fertile by their own natural powers.* To make them of use again will need enormous human efforts and huge financial outlays. The poisonous mixtures are still being found on the surface as well as deep in the soil, up to this day.

If the USA is allowed to continue in this horrible death-producing production, it will spell equal-horror and agony for people else-where. This is of particular significance for people of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which run the danger of again being the testing ground for the new nuclear weapons.

The Ugly Face of Apartheid

WOMEN obliged to have abortions, children burnt by bombs and towns lying in ruins—this is the scene in the Southern Angolan province of Cunene, occupied for more than a year by South African soldiers.

Men and women who have managed to escape the South African soldiers and reach other Angolan provinces, have grim-tales to tell:

“They are the devil in person. They found a pregnant woman and wanted her to lose the baby. They hit her and when that did not succeed, they cut open her stomach and left her to die in the middle of the road”.

Mrs. Edite Mwalinwassi, mother of eight children, was living in the Mongua commune when South African soldiers arrived. She said: “I saw them kill my parents and friends. The children died, poisoned by the effect of the bombs. And I saw how the South African soldiers stole everything from the houses.” Two of her children disappeared after the

entry of the racist army.

Antonio Capunde was detained by the South African troops in Cunene province in August 1981. He said: “They covered my head with a sack, they took me to Eshakati prison in Namibia (in South-West Africa, still under South African Occupation), a real hell, a concentration camp, and tortured and interrogated me for 40 days”.

The occupation of a portion of Cunene began on August 23, 1981, more than a year ago. The South African invaders are now trying to extend the occupied territory. They have spread only suffering and devastation. The Angolan people want only to live in peace, dignity and freedom. But the cruel and ruthless racist regime of South Africa, which thinks nothing of gunning down Black school children in its own land, wants to punish the Angolans for throwing off Portuguese rule, and to force them to bow their heads before, and accept South African white imperialism. And that the Angolans will never do.

OUT OF THIS WORLD . . .

NINETEEN years and two months since, for the first time in the history of cosmonautics, Valentina Tershkova's voice called out from space, "I am Chaika (Seagull)", mankind has again heard a woman's voice from outer space — the voice of 34 year-old Svetlana Savitskaya, crew member of spaceship "Soyuz T-7". The spaceship piloted by Commander Leonid Popov, one of the most seasoned Soviet cosmonauts, with Flight Engineer Alexander Serebrov, and Research Cosmonaut Svetlana, was launched on August 19, 1982. They docked with the permanent orbiting station in space, the "Salyut — 7", and remained on the station for 8 days, till their return to earth on August 27.

It was after nearly twenty years of untiring training and complete dedication that Svetlana made her orbits round the earth on August 20. Born in Moscow on August 8, 1948 into the family of a renowned Soviet pilot, Svetlana tried to join an amateur flying club as a ninth-form pupil — but 16 is too early to fly in the USSR. But she was allowed to go in for parachute-jumping. In eighteen months she mastered this art and established three world records. The most impressive of these was dropping 14 kms. from the plane without opening her parachute. Altogether she has now made 500 parachute jumps. But sky-diving was just a first step. At 18 she was finally admitted to the aeroplane section of the flying club.

At 19, she was awarded the Soviet 'Master of Sports' title for her successes as a pilot. Soon she came to be known as "Miss Sensational", for her feats in the field of flying supersonic planes, where in quick succession, she broke as many as 8 world records. One of these one was for the rate of climb, flying a supersonic plane.

At 21, Svetlana made her first appearance in a world aerobatic championship in Britain. By then she had just 300 hours flying time, as against other competitors, e.g., the U.S. champion, Mary Gaffney, generally expected to win, who had 15,000 flying hours. Yet Svetlana, student of the aircraft building

department of the Moscow Aviation Institute, won. A year later, at the age of just 22, she created another sensation in executing another sports exploit. Flying a serial E-133 plane, on a distance of not less than 15 and not more than 25 kilometres, she picked up an average speed of over 2,683 kms. an hour. As a result Svetlana won the world record for speed so far held for over ten years by the prominent American woman-pilot Jacqueline Cochran. Altogether Svetlana has established 18 world records in aviation.

Mastering more than 20 types of aircraft, she has 2,000 flight hours to her credit and is a qualified "test pilot — second class". For her flight mission and work aboard the Salyut stations and Soyuz T-7 spacecraft, Svetlana underwent a complete course of training. With her background and achievements, she was an obvious choice for the prestigious venture of the cosmonautic training centre at the 'Star City' in the USSR.

A question was put to the Chief of the cosmonaut training centre about the quality and impact of introducing women into the space programme, and having mixed crews. He replied:

"Women are better at the more intricate experiments which demand a great deal of accuracy and attention to detail. I am sure that the performance of mixed crews will be better than that of all-men crews".

Not only has this centre orbited Svetlana, they are all set to launch another three women into orbit shortly. These future women cosmonauts have already completed the meticulous, arduous, but, nevertheless, exciting training requirements.

Valentina Tereshkova, Svetlana Savitskaya, and their three fellow-women cosmonauts in themselves portray the women of the future. In their lives and their achievements they show the great potentiality that lies in women, as well as the vibrancy of the system which looks upon them as equal human beings, capable literally of soaring to the same heights as their brother-men.