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THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

LONG LIVE MAY DAY !



ON NIGHT WORK FOR WOMEN

The cabinet has decided to amend the Factories Act 1948 allowing women to work in night shifts. Some sections have welcomed this as a measure, which would promote women's employment. Those who oppose the unilateral decision of the government, just two days prior to the scheduled meeting of the Labour Minister with the trade union leaders, are accused of discouraging women's employment. Nothing can be farther than the truth.

CITU has opposed the decision of the cabinet in consistence of its long standing position that protective measures in the legislations, which were won after long struggles should not be removed. It is opposed to the blanket removal of the ban on night shift work making it mandatory for women to work in night. The Cabinet decision is also in violation of the ILO Convention No. 89 on night work for women, which has been ratified by the Government of India.

The mass convention of working women organised by the All India Convention of Working Women (CITU) in November 2004, after a thorough discussion, had reiterated the same stand. The memorandum submitted to the Labour Minister by CITU, based on the discussion in the Convention made the CITU's stand on the issue clear. It said:

- "There should be no blanket lifting of the ban on night work for women".
- "Night work for women should be allowed only after discussion with and consensus of the women workers and their trade unions. Wherever it is absolutely necessary, the employers should provide proper transport facilities up to the residence of the concerned women workers, and child care facilities at the place of work.... etc"
- "In no case should pregnant women be asked to work in night shifts".

Major women's organisations like AIDWA have also taken a similar stand on the issue opposed in clear terms any mandatory provision on the night shift work by women and stressed on providing for workers' choice, besides other facilities like night crèche, security and transport etc.

This unilateral decision of the government is only to placate the employers, particularly in the SEZ/ EPZ, garment etc. sectors. It is a step towards removing the little legal protection enjoyed by the workers in the name of 'labour law reforms.

The policies of liberalisation have led to the degeneration of employment situation and women are worst victims of this phenomenon. In this background the problem of women-employment can no way be addressed just by mandatory night shift work for women. Most of the workplaces in newly emerging IT sector, which are being looked upon as prospective sources of women employment and require night work, do not fall under the purview of Factories Act. The main concern of the employers' class and thus of the governments is to make night work for women mandatory in the factories of Special Economic Zones.

All talks of safeguards will remain an empty phrase unless the right to negotiate by the unions and workers and decision by consensus on both 'night work' and 'safeguards' are ensured by law. And from a government wedded to the idea of so called labour-flexibility, such arrangements can no way be conceived, unless they are compelled by our movement. Lifting of ban on night-work by women will not help addressing the concern of women workers. The areas slated for exemption can be expanded, if necessary, provided such exemption is granted in agreement with the trade unions.

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THE WORKING CLASS

CITU MONTHLY

MAY 2005

BUSINESS AS USUAL

by UNNY



The age debate continues — after Stone Age, comes Iron Age!

Courtesy: The Indian Express

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EDITORIAL

RESIST THE DRIFT TOWARDS CONTEMPT

While we celebrate May Day this year, the concerns and challenges to the working class movement are aplenty. With the international oil prices hitting the roof, as a result of the insatiable greed of the multinational oil cartels for more and quicker profits, the world economic situation is heading towards destabilisation. The imperialist globalisation seeks to impose unbearable burdens on the impoverished and hapless people. The struggle against the militarist and economic offensives of imperialism have to be fought on the streets, with more vigour and ever-broadening mobilisation of the people. That is the call of the CITU Manifesto for this year !

In India, the battle lines which have been drawn between the ever zealous 'reformers' and those who seek to defend people's interests is becoming distinctly clear and the situation is heading towards an inevitable showdown.

The Petroleum Minister throws hints for a hefty hike in oil prices.

The Labour Minister sets in motion so-called 'consultations' on 'labour law reforms', reviving the cry for 'hire and fire'.

The Finance Minister is a man in great hurry. He has set in motion the process to privatise social security and throw the hard-earned social security savings of the working people to the wolves in the share market. Deadlines are sought to be prescribed for the Parliamentary Standing Committee, to hasten submission of its report.

The Union Cabinet decides unilaterally to amend the Factories Act, permitting hassle free deployment of women during night shifts. Another move is to empower the state and central governments to disband the State and Central Administrative Tribunals, without putting in place alternative grievance redressal mechanism.

Three years have passed by and yet the statutory notifications on the rate of interest on Employees Provident Fund have not been issued. The announcement made after Prime Minister level consultations on restoring the interest rate to 9.5 per cent remains an empty shell. But, the Secretary, Labour, convenes a meeting to moot out adverse changes even in the present unsatisfactory Employees' Pension Scheme.

Promised legislations on Employment Guarantee, Agricultural Workers and Social Security for the Unorganised Sector Workers are just lingering.

The Indian Labour Conference is not convened even once under the UPA regime.

These are signs that the UPA government is drifting from indifference to utter contempt towards labour. The working class movement must resist through sustained and powerful actions! Let May Day, 2005 herald this assertion!

MAY DAY MANIFESTO OF CITU 2005

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) extends revolutionary greetings to the working class fraternity all over the world, on the historic May Day - the day of the international solidarity of the working people!

The CITU greets the working class and the people of the socialist countries for steadfastly holding aloft the banner of socialism!

The CITU greets the working class and the people of the advanced capitalist countries, who have raised the banner of resistance to the policies of imperialist globalisation, putting up inspiring and militant struggles against capitalism.

The CITU warmly greets and pledges solidarity with the working people of the developing countries, engaged in fighting back the offensives of imperialism on the one hand and the onslaughts of the ruling classes on the other.

II

The US imperialists, aided and abetted by the Tony Blair regime of the UK, continue their occupation of Iraq, defying overwhelming worldwide public opinion and growing dissent even from within their own countries. The aggression against and occupation of Iraq has not only devastated that country but also resulted in the killing of more than 150, 000 Iraqis. The growing resistance to the occupation armies, put up by all sections of the people in Iraq, has already inflicted immense casualties for the US troops and exposed the illegitimacy of its occupation. The US led war-coalition has also suffered a setback with several countries withdrawing their troops from Iraq. The puppet regime propped up by the imperialists and the new coalition forged after the farcical elections there have no popular support from the people of Iraq. This brazen act of aggression is utilised by the US administration to corner the oil wealth of Iraq and to consolidate the global hegemony of U.S. imperialism. The CITU demands immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the US led occupying forces from Iraq and release of all Iraqi prisoners. The CITU pledges its solidarity with the Iraqi people.

In West Asia, the U.S. imperialism has acquiesced in the Israeli onslaughts against the Palestinians, where the Ariel Sharon regime persists with its illegal settlements on Palestinian soil and the Apartheid Wall cutting off the Palestinian people from each other. Together, they seek to impose an unjust settlement of the Palestinian question against the will of its people. The CITU demands an immediate end to the illegal Israeli occupation in Palestine and pledges its solidarity with the people of Palestine in their struggle to establish a sovereign Palestine state.

The USA has also targeted countries like Syria, Iran, North Korea etc. for its further offensives, which it seeks to further step up in the coming period.

The CITU calls upon the working people of the country to carry on a sustained anti-war campaign within India and also join forces fighting against imperialist war machinations across the globe.

III

The imperialist dominated international financial and trade institutions viz. the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation have concertedly moved to impose on the countries of the third world the agenda of liberalisation and globalisation, the disastrous effects of which are being increasingly witnessed by the people. This imperialist onslaught on the economic front is taking place alongside its aggressive militarist interventions throughout the globe. Though resistance to these imperialist offensives are gathering strength in all parts of the world, there are attempts to blunt the edge of this growing resistance by promoting the concept of TINA (There Is No Alternative to this imperialist globalisation.) This is nothing but a plea to reconcile with the neoliberal policy regime. Carrying on a sustained struggle against these imperialist offensives, by mobilising broadest possible sections of the masses is a primary task before the working class in India.

But, much as the pro-reforms lobby would like the world to believe that 'There Is No Alternative' to the imperialist driven neo-liberal globalisation, people across the globe are rallying en-masse in

resistance struggles. Militant protests, participated in huge numbers, had refuted the inevitability of the so-called economic reforms, dictated by the Brettonwood institutions.

The successive editions of the 'World Social Forum' in India during 2004 and latest in Porto Alegre this year, as also its European and Asian editions, held every year, had emphatically declared that 'Another World is Possible' and that 'Socialism Is The Alternative'.

Internationally, the movement against the neo-liberal globalisation is increasingly coming out vehemently against the move to impose further adverse terms on the developing countries commencing from the Doha round of the WTO Ministerial meeting.

Multinational corporations use the World Trade Organisation (WTO), together with a proliferation of regional and bilateral trade agreements, to promote their interests. They dominate and control our economies and impose a development model, which impoverishes our societies. In the name of trade liberalisation, every aspect of life and nature is thrown for sale and people are denied their basic rights. The developing countries, including ours, are trapped in a never-ending cycle of debt that forces them to open up their markets and export their wealth.

Worldwide campaign to stop and reverse liberalization of agriculture, water, energy, public services and investment, and to reassert peoples sovereignty over their societies, their resources, their cultures and knowledge and their economies are growing in strength.

The CITU calls upon the working class to intensify the struggle against all aspects of the pursuit of the neoliberal economic policies in the country and its disastrous impact on the people in the form of deepening poverty, aggravating unemployment, growing joblosses etc. It calls upon the trade union movement to mobilise and rally the people in building up a countrywide movement for right to work to be enshrined as fundamental right.

The CITU exhorts the working class and other sections of the toiling people to rally together to further heighten the struggle against the global economic domination of imperialism being carried out through the WTO, World Bank the IMF and build up a global unity against globalisation!

IV

In India, the UPA government is now in office at the centre, after the defeat of the BJP led NDA government in the general elections held last year. This UPA regime, which is dependant on the left parties for its continuance in office had to adopt a "National Common Minimum Programme", incorporating some positive measures for the benefit of the people.

But, we have witnessed during the past eleven months of the UPA governance that it has been exhibiting a lukewarm attitude on implementation of the pro-people measures contained in the NCMP. It also seeks to pursue the disastrous policies of economic reforms, which had during the earlier NDA regime derailed the entire economy. The same policies of levying users' charges, of withdrawing subsidies, of resorting to backdoor privatisation through disinvestments, which were decisively rejected by the people are being pushed through. The same attempts to follow the mirage of development through foreign investment and to bend backwards to appease the Multi National Corporations continue. It is by now well established that this paradigm of job-less growth has only led to widening disparities and increasing destitution to larger and larger sections of the people. The third amendment to the Patents Act through the ordinance route ignoring the interests of our own industry, agriculture and the people, had to some extent been checkmated as the government had to incorporate several significant amendments before passage of the bill in Parliament. The decision to increase FDI in banks, insurance, telecom and civil aviation, green signal to the private airliners to operate international flights, privatise airports etc. testify to the persisting tendency of the Congress led UPA government to succumb to the pressures of the big business lobby, both domestic and foreign.

The government has yet not initiated any move to annul the pernicious impact of the Supreme Court order against the right to strike of the workers and government employees, despite repeated demands from the entire spectrum of trade union movement. On the other hand, the Economic Survey has talked of removing 'labour

market rigidities', 'entry and exit barriers' etc. reviving the cry for labour law changes to the detriment of workers' interests.

In the current budget, FDI in mining, trade and pension sectors have been indicated, which again has serious implications for the economy and the people of the country. Despite the announcement to restore the interest rate on Employees' Provident Fund to 9.5 per cent, it is yet to be translated into tangible action. Besides, the government has also introduced the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Bill in the Lok Sabha, to validate the ordinance that was promulgated earlier. Though the Bill now stands referred to the Standing Committee, moves are afoot to push the same through in haste. Thus, the threat of privatisation of pension and diversion of the fund to stock market still looms large.

In the face of all these nefarious moves and deceptive designs, the country has witnessed a series of actions by the working class. The CITU calls upon the trade union movement to surge ahead in a united manner to build up a powerful popular resistance to reverse the anti-people economic policies.

V

In India, the working class encounters yet another stiff challenge - that of fighting the growing offensives of communal forces. At a time when the working class is mandated to intensify its struggles against the imperialist spearheaded disastrous economic policies of successive governments at the centre, the working class has to fight hard the systematic build up of communal war hysteria and root out the communal venom, which poses the gravest threat to communal harmony and national unity. The working class can ill afford to forget the horrendous communal orgy that had shocked the country, first in the Godhra killings and next by the genocide inflicted on the minorities in Gujarat, by the barbaric Narendra Modi regime, which has been a high point of the criminal offensive of the right-wing hindutva forces. After six years of leading the government at the centre, the political party of the 'sangh parivar' and their allies were decisively trounced in the general elections last year. Yet, the working class should not lose sight of the immense potential of the hindutva forces to revive their agenda and damage the secular fabric of the Indian society. The working class has to be ever vigilant over the overt and covert moves of the communal forces; it must constantly struggle to isolate these forces and preserve people's unity.

The workers belonging to religious minority communities are under a twin attack. They face the communal violence let loose against them by the fanatic majoritarian outfits of the sangh parivar; they also fall a prey to the divisive appeals by minority fundamentalist groups, which try to keep them away from the general democratic movement. The working class must win over these sections, by fully defending their interests and drawing them into the mainstream struggles.

Yet another threat that looms large before the working class of India is the ever-increasing attempts by the casteist forces to divide the working people on caste lines, seeking to achieve political clout through caste appeals. The working class must take note of the peculiarity of the Indian society where unmitigated social oppression continues along with class exploitation. The most impoverished and highly oppressed sections of the caste divided Indian society are the rural poor, whose fight against landlord domination and feudal oppression must be joined by the working class. It must, in all seriousness, take up the fight to end caste oppression and eradicate untouchablity.

Women in India have been the worst victims of both the communal and economic offensives. Atrocities and discrimination against women have increased alarmingly. Sexual abuse and vulgar commercialisation of women as part of fast spreading consumerist culture have all added to their agonies. The women workers face job losses, suffer inequality in wages and service conditions and work in most unsafe environments. The working class must take up the issues of women's empowerment and fight against the manifold oppression and atrocities they are subjected to.

The building up of class unity to take on these immense challenges is a formidable task before the working class movement in the country. The reformist trends within the trade union movement constantly strives to keep the working class struggles within the confines of economic

demands and on several occasions advocates unprincipled compromises. They also create illusions among sections of the workers that economic reforms with a 'human face' are achievable and that is what must be sought for. While attempting to forge broadest unity of the class and mass organisations for unleashing powerful struggles against the multi pronged offensives being faced today, the working class movement must also carry on the ideological struggle against all types of vacillations and class collaboration.

V

On this May Day, the CITU exhorts the working people of the country to further strengthen and consolidate the unity of all the toiling masses and unleash further powerful struggles against the imperialist offensives, onslaughts of the ruling classes, the ruinous economic policies and against the divisive and disruptive forces of communalism and casteism.

Let us march forward to defend the interests of our great country and its people!
Long live working class unity!
Long live international solidarity of the working class!
Down with imperialism!
Long live socialism!

COAL UNIONS PRESS FOR IMMEDIATE SETTLEMENT OF DEMANDS

The five federations working in coal industries met the Group of Ministers on 13th April, 2005 to discuss issues arising out of non-settlement of NCWA-VII. On behalf of the Governmenbt of India, Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of Defence (Chairman, Shivraj Patil, Home Minister, Shisram Ola, Mines Minister and Dasri Narayan Rao, Coal Minister attended the meeting.

On behalf of the trade unions, Rajendra Prasad Singh, S Q Zama (INTUC), Ramendra Kumar (AITUC), Jayanta Poddar (HMS), Basant Kumar Rai (BMS), M K Pandhe (CITU) attended the meeting.

The trade union representatives pointed out the inordinate delay in settling the NCWA-VII which is causing acute discontent among the workers. They also noted that payment of full neutralization of DA is of utmost importance and the workers' representatives will not be able to sign a settlement without acceptance of this demand. They insisted that the agreement should be made applicable to all coal companies including BCCL and ECL. The five federations stated that the NCWA VII should be applicable to all public and private sector coal industries as promised by the government earlier.

The trade unions observed that the issues raised by the managements relating to increase in productivity by 20%, Sunday working of mines without overtime payment, linking of quarterly bonus with attendance and employment to dependants to be given only in case of accident - that discussion on these issues should not be linked with the they will have no other alternative but to take up the programme of strike action. A meeting of the trade unions in coal industries will be held at Ranchi on 4th May, 2005 which will review the situation and finalise the date of strike if the issues are not settled by that time. NCWA-VII. The representatives of trade unions further demanded 9.5 per cent of interest on CMPF, increase in the pension quantum and remedy of non-implementation of some of the clauses of NCWA-VI by the coal companies. The trade unions demanded formation of unitary company in coal by merging all companies into a single unit so that the performance of coal companies can be improved.

Sri Pranab Mukherjee stated that the group of ministers have been appointed by the Cabinet and the issues will have to be considered shortly to settle all the issues.

The representatives of trade unions met after the meeting and decided to give time to the government for the end of April. However if the issues are not settled by that time, they will have no other alternative but to take up the programme of strike action.

A meeting of the trade unions in coal industries will be held at Ranchi on 4th May, 2005 which will review the situation and finalise the date of strike if the issues are not settled by that time.

(The Labour Minister called a meeting of the central trade unions to discuss on labour reform on 31st March 2005 at New Delhi. From CITU, M K Pandhe, President and Tapan Sen, Secretary attended the meeting. Reproduced below the content of CITU memorandum on the subject presented in the meeting with the Labour Minister - Editor)

CITU VIEWPOINTS ON LABOUR-LAW-REFORM

♦ Any move to process issues relating to amendment of labour laws had to be within the parameters of "no automatic hire & fire" and "fully protecting the interests of labour" as stated in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP). The NCMP also specifically excludes Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 from the purview of consideration for any amendments.

♦ NCMP "Commitment to welfare and well-being of all workers, particularly those in the unorganised sector" has to be translated into concrete action by enacting comprehensive legislation on unorganized sector workers, ensuring employment protection, guaranteed minimum wages and social security benefits fully tied up with allocation of resources by Central Govt

♦ Immediate step for enacting comprehensive central legislation for agricultural workers, again keeping in view the NCMP commitment of fullest implementation of minimum wages laws for farm-labour, protective legislation for all agricultural workers

♦ Institute appropriate legislative measures to negate the pernicious impact of the Supreme Court judgments against 'Right to strike' to honour the NCMP commitment saying: "Rights and benefits earned by workers including right to strike according to law will not be taken away or curtailed"

♦ Enactment of central legislation to prevent sexual harassment of women at workplaces as per the recommendation and guidelines issued by Supreme Court as far back as August 1997

♦ The employers' clamour for flexibility in labour laws citing that only this move will result in increased employment generation and enhanced FDI inflows, on which the present consultation process has been initiated, is neither justified nor evidenced by any positive empirical experience, either at home or abroad. Hence this argument cannot be accepted as the basis for considering amendment in labour laws.

♦ On the Government side, legislation on National Employment Guarantee in line with the NCMP commitment "to provide at least 100 days of employment every year at minimum wages to at least one person in every rural, urban poor and lower middle class household" must be enacted. The severe drawbacks and deficiencies in the Bill introduced in parliament on this subject must be addressed in the light of concerns expressed and inputs furnished by the trade unions and other organisations.

♦ Strengthening of labour law enforcement machinery at all levels including the tribunals and inspectorates to make a marked improvement from existing tardy situation in labour law implementation all over the country.

♦ Complete ban on deployment of contract workers (including outsourcing, job-contracts etc) in all permanent/ perennial nature of work. Punitive measures for violation of Contract Labour (R&A) Act should be made more stringent; contract workers deployed in permanent/perennial nature of work should be made permanent. The adverse impact of the Supreme Court judgment in the SAIL case should be annulled through appropriate legislation.

♦ The unreasonable plea to free the Special Economic Zones/Export Processing Zones from the application of all labour laws should be rejected. Rather, tripartite supervisory mechanism for monitoring implementation of labour laws in

the SEZ/EPZ/SERs should be instituted. For the SEZ/EPZs, the work of Development Commissioners and the Grievance Redressal Officer should be vested with two separate independent agencies/ persons in line with the categorical recommendation of ILO Governing Body.

- Streamline functioning of the Labour Ministry; activate the tripartite mechanism including Tripartite Committees, the Indian Labour Conference and Standing Labour Committee.
- Evolve a national social security policy to provide for a comprehensive scheme, covering all sections of workers and extending relief to those who are involuntarily unemployed, for early implementation.
- Amend all labour legislations, in consultation with the CTUOs, providing for a uniform definition of 'workman' and 'industry'; make them applicable to all workmen doing away with income parameters/ ceilings of any kind.
- Protect the interests of Inter-State Migrant workers and amend the Inter-State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1979 for extending its coverage.
- In line with the commitment made in the NCMP, ♦affirmative action" for introducing 'reservation in private sector' should be initiated; meantime, immediate notification should be issued to continue 'reservation' in the erstwhile PSUs already privatized.
- Take immediate steps to enact the Workers Participation in Management Bill
- Appoint a new review committee to devise a truly transparent mechanism of compiling the consumer price indices, with monitoring role for the CTUOs.

CITU expressed serious concern and disapproval over the pre-emptive decision of the Union Cabinet on amendment of Factories Act to allow "Night work for women workers" or increase the weekly working hours as reported in the press, that too just on the eve of meeting with the Central Trade Unions. CITU strongly opposed the blanket clearance of mandatory 'night work' for women workers and also the proposal for increase in working hours.

In the meeting with the Labour minister, the representatives of almost all the central trade unions demanded pro-worker commitments made in the NCMP and opposed the idea of introducing 'hire and fire' and legitimization of whole sale contractorisation in the name of labor reform. Almost towards the end of the meeting, Mr K M Sahni, Labour Secretary, stood up to propose vote of thanks. And in his thank giving speech, the Labour Secretary, violating all norms and conventions, suddenly proposed to increase the threshold limit of employment in the establishments from existing level of 100 to 300 who will not be required to take prior permission from the Govt for retrenchment and closure under Industrial Disputes Act. This proposal, if put into effect would bring 80 per cent of the industrial establishments of the country under ' hire & fire' regime. The Labour Secretary, himself declared the end of the meeting immediately after his speech. CITU representatives immediately chased the Labour Secretary and lodged protest against his raising this controversial issue in the thanks giving speech without keeping any scope for further discussion. On the next day itself on 1-04-2005, M K Pandhe sent his protest in writing against such action by the Labour Secretary. In his letter, Pandhe reminded the Labour Secretary that the National Common Minimum Programme of the UPA Govt has laid down in clear terms that "UPA rejects the idea of automatic hire and fire" and the Industrial Disputes Act will be outside the purview of any change. And hence the Labour Secretary has got no authority to make such proposal in the meeting, that too in the thanks-giving speech.

The Gabriel Peri Foundation initiated by the Communist Party of France (CPF) organized an international symposium on Globalisation and Social Change at Paris on 16th April, 2005. Comrade Robert Hue former General Secretary of the CPF and Chairman of the Foundation delivered a key note address. M K Pandhe, President, CITU participated in the symposium and presented a paper, part of which is being published hereunder. - Editor)

GLOBALISATION

SUCKING OUT MUCH MORE THAN PUMPING IN

M K Pandhe

The era of globalisation is essentially characterised as a regime of open market based on free trade and free capital markets. This deals with only financial and trading aspects of globalisation. This globalization has benefited only the multinational corporations who could get easy access to the markets and natural resources of the developing countries through this process. It also hit hard the interests of the working class and the toiling people whose working and living conditions were subjected to serious deterioration in every country accepting the path of globalisation.

As noted by the Report "Economic Security for a Better World" of the International Labour Organisation, "...Historically, capitalism was built on an uneasy trade off in which the relatively affluent owners of assets, capital, bore the insecurity of entrepreneurial risk taking, ... However in recent decades, and apparently stretching into the future, it seems that ordinary workers and working communities - and societies on the edge of capitalist economy - are being obliged to bear most of the worst forms of insecurity, whereas large scale asset holders are well shielded from insecurity". (Page 3)

The dismantling of Socialism in Soviet Union and East European countries has considerably weakened the socialist block and enabled world capitalism to strengthen its grip over the world economy. This facilitated the forcing upon the developing countries the package of policy measurers to suit the requirements of big capitalists and the rich countries.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (?)

During 1980 the flow of developmental assistance all over the world was above $80 billion but in 1902 it came down to $50 billion. This aid also is linked to the conditionalities relating to the trade policies of the donor countries.

By the end of 2000 the debt owed by the developing countries to the IMF, World Bank regional development banks and other financial institutions had increased to about $2.6 trillion, which is more than combined reserves of all the central banks in the world. Many developing countries had to undergo the exercise of rescheduling of these loans with more stringent conditionalities to the detriment of their economic sovereignty.

The ILO has observed, "... the international financial agencies are undemocratic and unaccountable. They are dominated by the G8 nations, which hold 49% of the votes. All major decisions require an 85% majority. So as the United States has 17%, it can veto any resolution even if every other country supports it. In practice, United States voting strength ensures that IMF and World Bank support is given on terms acceptable to Washington".

The process of financial globalisation is thus imposing a policy framework on the developing countries through these international financial agencies to serve the interests of the rich creditor countries.

POOR BECOMING POORER

The international trade under the regime of globalisation has not helped in any manner the developing countries all over the world. Even the official data trotted out by the World Bank outfits have clearly underlined this phenomenon.

It is admitted that 85 per cent of the world

population is residing in the poor countries but they account for only 25 per cent of the international trade. The external debt of these countries stood at $50 billion in 1964, which has now gone up to a staggering figure of $2.6 trillion. ($1 billion = Rs 4500 crores, $1 trillion = Rs 45 lakh crores) The data available for the last 2 decades clearly indicates that the developing countries have paid $5.4 trillion in debt service. Thus the developing countries have paid more than twice the existing debt to the developed capitalist countries. One African delegate speaking in UNCTAD conference pointed out this phenomenon by stating that it was "blood transfusion in reverse".

The indebtedness of the developing countries continues to rise year by year due to the policies of globalisation. The total external debt of developing countries stood at $1,990.3 billion during 1995, which rose to $2,433.3 billion in 2003. As a result of the World Bank policies, the state to state debt remained almost stagnant (rise from $867.3 billion to $872.1 billion in 2002) and the debt from private commercial agencies rose from $1123.0 billion in 1995 to $1519.1 billion in 2003. Major indebted developing countries during 2002 were Brazil ($227.9 billion), Argentina ($132.3 billion), Indonesia ($132.3 billion), Russian Federation ($147.5 billion), Turkey ($131.6 billion), Mexico ($141.3 billion), India ($104.4 billion). In some of the developing countries the external debt is more than their GDP viz. Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissan and Guyana.

World Development summit held in Copenhagen promised that the developed countries would help the poor countries with 0.7 per cent of their GDP. This means follow of $175 billion assistance to developing countries every year. The so-called development assistance received by the developing countries amounted to only $54 billion during 2003 that too with many damaging strings which ultimately lead to more outgo of resources than received by the developing countries, besides damaging severely the self-reliance and capacity of the domestic economies. Thus, during the same year the developing countries have paid to the advanced capitalist countries $436 billon in debt service.

There is no wonder that 25 years ago 500 million people in the world were starving whose ranks have swelled to 800 million today. 325 million children all over the world have no chance of going to school while many of them are forced to work as child labourers. 33 thousand children die every day in developing countries due to curable illnesses (WHO) while the profit hungry pharmaceutical MNCs are minting money by increasing the cost of medicines!

STRUGGLES GALORE

Fidel Castro, in his message to UNCTAD conference had stated, "The imperialist system that prevails today, towards which the developed capitalist society unavoidably evolved, has already come to such a ruthlessly irrational and unfair world economic and neo-liberal order that it is unsustainable. Many people will rebel against it. In fact, they have already began to rebel."

Castro, therefore, expressed his confidence about the future of humanity, "The people will become ungovernable, and no repression, torture, disappearances or massive murders will stop them. Not only will the hungry of the Third World be in the struggle for their own survival and that of their children, but also the conscious people from the rich world, both manual and intellectual workers".

The massive demonstration at Seattle in 2002 gave fillip to a new wave of worldwide campaign to oppose the policies of globalisation. Similar demonstrations chased the successive meetings of G7, WTO, IMF, WEF and the World Bank in several major cities. These demonstrations with increasing participation of anti-globalisation forces have generated confidence among the people that the globalisation can be fought and defeated. The world is witnessing a powerful resistance movement in several developing countries as well as in the developed ones against this process. A remarkable unity is being built among various sections of people to join struggles to protect their living standards from the onslaughts of global finance capital.

Working Class Has To Continue The Struggle To Protect Itself

Chittabrata Majumdar

It was a long drawn determined struggle through the path of boundless sacrifice of the working class including the innumerable lives of the wage labours that could establish the right of eight hours work a day. During the initial days of the capitalist development, there was hardly any sort of legislation or rule to protect the working class from the mounting exploitation by the capital. But the proletariat being the special and essential product of the modern society as described in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, armed with the element of political and general education supplied by the bourgeoisie, could not only succeed in securing statutory working hours and numerous basic rights for the entire working class, but also historically established itself as the most revolutionary class of the society.

The development of capitalism could not be possible without constant revolution of the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production. Thus the entire era of development of capitalism has been marked with the improvement of means of productions through constant inventions as well as scientific research and development. At the same time the bourgeoisie by all means are determined to retain the production relations unchanged. While from the natural justice and logical point of view the benefits of such technological and scientific developments are to be utilised for and shared by the entire global population, the reality in the class divided capitalist society have been always opposite. The bourgeoisie for their own benefit and further growth of capital has grabbed the full benefits of the research and development and technological innovation deceiving the common people including working-class. It is not at all an unjustified expectation on the part of the working class that the development and modernisation of the production process would result in some benefits for them in terms of improvement of the working condition including reduced working hours. But in reality the capitalist being the master of the means of production ceaselessly have targeted modern labourer to ripe more and more profit only dragging the latter to sink deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. 'He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth'1.

Since the end of the Second World War, there was an unprecedented addition of the global productive capacity with the spurt of research and development and progress of science and technology, without creation of matching effective demand to off-take the production in the long term. The world experience of neo-liberal reform tactics taken by the global capital to override the deepened crises during last one and a half decades in particular has been in fact the cause of unbounded anxiety and concern. During this era of neo-liberal reform the industries armed with the technological power, while enhanced the productive capacity, have not only sought the path of downsizing its workforce, but at the same time burdened heavily the retained workforce with increased workload. The manufacturing units coming up in the present time engage more and more contractual labourers on casual basis. Such casual workers not entitled to any sorts of benefits as per the existing labour laws of the country, are forced to work for a period more than the limit specified as per the factories act. Reports of normal working hours up to twelve to fourteen hours a day are quite frequent and common. The law enforcing agencies are mere salient spectators, while the promoters and management of those companies are in upbeat mood to exploit the situation to a full extent. They even do not hesitate to blackmail the entire society threatening to close down the organisations, if insisted to concede the legitimate demands of the workers. The new generation industries, the neo-liberals' favourites as 'sunrise industries', powerful with the

new technologies with their distinct track records of workers exploitation deserve discussion. There has been hardly any adherence of the labour laws in these organisations including the working hours. Stretched working hours in almost all the organisations operating in booming IT sector is a most common feature. The mushrooming BPOs, operating with the contingent of the casual employees don't bother to even look at the statutory frame works of the country so far the workers welfare is concerned. Needless to say the usual working hours in those units run to twelve hours or more a day. The continuous overworking and unbearable strain and stretch in turn force the workers to leave the job very soon.

Thus as the world capitalism getting older, not only the exploitation of labour by capital is being continued, the working class has started facing again the threat of loosing their rights acquired through the relentless struggle. 'Modern bourgeoisie society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with the class antagonism. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.' 1 It is rather daydream to expect that the working class would prosper under capitalism, since 'the essential condition for the existence of the bourgeois class, and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour.' 1

Thus it is utmost essential on the part of the working class to scan the illusive propaganda constantly projecting the neo-liberal reform sought by the capitalism as panacea of poverty and sufferings of the toiling mass. At the same time class outlook is foremost essential for analysing the developments taking place every day. With the firm class-consciousness, the working class has to move forward to face the challenge of the present day, to resist the attack on it and to become victorious in the days to come.

We must always remember the observations and pronouncement embedded in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, 'society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.' 'What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.'

(1 Manifesto of the Communist Party)

MASSIVE RALLY OF ANGANWADI EMPLOYEES IN ASSAM

The Assam Rajyik Anganwadi Karmi Aru Sahayika Santha affiliated to CITU and the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers held a massive rally at the Sonaram High School Play Ground in Guwahati on the 19th March 2005. Around 5, 000 anganwadi workers and helpers from 17 districts in the state including Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Cachar and Sibsagar participated in the rally. Neelima Maitra, President of AIFAWH was the chief guest and addressed the rally.

The rally was presided over by Madhuri Devi, President of the Assam Rajyik Santha. Kunja Deka, General Secretary of the Union, Pushpa Lata Das, Vice President of AIFAWH, Tapan Sharma, Working President of the Union and other speakers elaborated on the problems faced by the anganwadi employees in the state. They demanded that Rs. 500/- per month should be paid to the workers and Rs. 300/- for helpers for the additional work they were already doing for the state government. They also demanded 100% reservation in Supervisors posts, for the anganwadi workers, appointment of eligible helpers as workers and provision of adequate supplementary nutrition of good quality regularly.

Deben Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the Assam state committee of CITU called upon the workers and employees in the state to support the genuine demands of the anganwadi employees. The union declared that if the state government did not respond to their demands positively by September 2005, picketing programmes would be organised in front of the offices of the CDPOs throughout the state. The date would be decided by the state committee.

Stock Market: Barometer of Economy?

R. Vaidyanathan

Many assume that the stock market represents the state of the economy. That is the primary reason for this distorted obsession about the market.

This year the market is already in an upswing. Many assume that the stock market represents the state of the economy.

According to most experts on the Indian economy, what applies to the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) or the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) and its relation to the US economy automatically applies to our stock market and its relationship to the economy.

The Finance Ministry mandarins too seem to be caught up in this web of confusion. That is the primary reason for this distorted obsession about the market, and there are several factually incorrect assumptions about the market's role.

Stock market: Whom does it represent?

Let us look at some of the assumptions regarding our market.

Proposition 1: **Indian corporate sector is critical and has a dominant role in the economy.**

The major characteristic of Corporate India is that it accounts for 14 per cent of the national income.

Table1

Share of non-corporate sector in the economy (in %)

Category	1980-81	1990-91	1995-96	2002-03
Government	17.5	23.9	23	23.6
Private corporate	9.5	9.3	13.6	14.9
Non-corporate				
of which	73	66.8	63.4	61.5
Agriculture	38.1	31.5	28.9	23.8
Others	34.9	35.3	34.5	37.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Note:1) Agriculture does not include government and corporate agriculture. They are included under respective shares as part of organised. These are based on NDP at factor cost and current prices.

2) Nearly 3 percent of the private organised (in manufacturing) is due to non-corporate sector. Hence the share of non-corporate iin the economy is nearly 38% and corporate is around 14%

Source: NAS, 1997, 2002, 2004; CSO-New Delhi

In fact, it is the non-corporate sector (Table 1) which has the largest share in our national income, (nearly 38 per cent) followed by agriculture (24 per cent) and government (24 per cent).

Incidentally, in activities like trade (wholesale and retail), transport (other than railways), construction, and hotels and restaurants, the share of non-corporate sector in national income is more than 70 per cent.....The share of the corporate sector in our domestic savings is less than 5 per cent. In contrast, in developed countries it is more than 50 per cent.

The largest component of our savings (more than 90 per cent) comes from the household sector, which includes all partnership/proprietorship firms even if they are in manufacturing or trade or transport, construction or hotels. Hence the proposition that the corporate sector is critical to our economy is not borne out by facts.

So proposition 1 is neither true nor valid.

Proposition 2: **The stock market is the barometer for performance (past and future) of the corporate sector.** There are nearly seven lakh companies in India, of which some 6,000 or so are listed on our exchanges.

Though nearly 9,000 scrips are listed on our exchanges, more than half were not quoted or traded last year. Another 25 per cent were quoted only a couple of times last year. The shares of just the top 10 companies commanded nearly 45 per cent of the trade turnover last year.

Contrast this with the NYSE, where no single scrip normally enjoys more than one per cent of the turnover.

Though market players and exchanges brag about India having the largest number of listed scrips (like having the largest cattle population in the world), only about a hundred are active.

More than 70 per cent of trading, even in these hundred or so scrips, is not for delivering these shares. It is for squaring-off purposes. In other words, the participants do not even see these scrips, and a true "scripless trading" is in place.

A substantial portion of the transaction is for gains or losses at the margin and it is the day-traders (who square-off within the day) who are active in

the market. Hence, the stock market is no barometer, either for India's corporates or its economy.

Proposition 3: **The stock market helps channel savings in our economy.** This is the most amusing assumption of the lot. At the best of times, the primary market did generate some savings from the public.

Table 2
Composition of household savings 1980 to 2003 (in %)

Item	1980-81	1990-91	2002-03
Household savings (HS) to GDS	73	84	94
Physical savings (PS) to HS	57	55	55
Financial savings (FS) to HS	43	45	45
Currency to FS	19	13	12
Net deposits to FS	34	22	25
Shares and bonds to FS	5	17	5
Net claims on Govt. to FS	7	15	23
Life insurance to FS	10	11	16
PF and pensions to FS	25	22	19
Total	100	100	100

Source: National Accounts Statistics (NAS), CSO

The savings data suggests that at the best of times (not for the investors), the proportion of "shares and debentures" as a percentage of financial savings of households was 17 per cent in the early 1990s. As of 2003, it was less than 5 per cent.

A large chunk of our investors are in postal savings, provident funds and life insurance funds. Hence we find that the corporate sector plays a small role in our economy while the share of the non-corporates is significant.

The latter are not listed in the market; they are not even companies. Rather, they are proprietorship and partnership firms. They dominate the fastest growing activities of the service sector, namely trade, transport, restaurants and construction.

The share of households in the national economy is very significant (more than 90 per cent). Of this, only around five per cent is invested in bonds and shares.

The largest saving avenues are banking deposits, small savings, insurance and provident fund. The stock market is important to 10 per cent of the economy and it cannot be categorised as the barometer of the economy.

Courtesy: The Hindu Business Line, Thursday, March 24, 2005

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE UP AT 9.1 PC: FEWER JOBS IN ORGANISED SECTOR

The Planning Commission has estimated that the unemployment rate for the economy as a whole has shot up significantly in the last two years - up from 8.87 per cent in 2001-02 to 9.11 per cent in 2004-05. An even more disturbing picture that has emerged is that employment in the organised sector has declined between 2001 and 2003 in both the public and the private sectors.

In other words, while employment may be increasing in the unorganised sector in response to the overall growth in the economy, there is actually a contraction in employment in the organised sector. This means fewer jobs for the youth who are the new entrants to the labour force since the organised sector is their preferred sector for employment.

Alongside the increasing unemployment rate is the rising trend in income inequality. While there are no measures of income inequality based on reliable income surveys, the Commission found the per capita agricultural GDP (gross domestic product) had declined although the overall per capita GDP had increased at the rate of five per cent per annum. Another feature of recent developments having a bearing on inequality was that the organised sector had reported large increases in profits (operating surpluses) and increased wages and salaries for those employed here. At the same time, the per capita income growth was much less than the average among the self-employed in the unorganised sector and negative among employees in agriculture. "This would not be a problem if the size of the organised sector was expanding but that does not seem to be the case, given the employment trends," the Commission has said in a report to be presented to the Government soon.

The report also confirms the apprehensions about apparent regional imbalances. Several studies are available which show that inter-State inequality increased in the 1990s as only some States were able to benefit from the economic reforms and increase their growth rates significantly. While it is not true that only the richest States benefited the most, it is also correct that some of the poorest and most populous States did experience decelerating growth. *(Alok Mukherjee in The Hindu Business Line, Apr 04, 2005)*

CONTRACT LABOUR ACT:

URGENT AMENDMENTS REQUIRED

Vivek C. Monteiro

"The Chairman observed that the moment workers approach the Government/Board for abolition of contract labour system, the services of contract workers are invariably terminated and in such a situation the Board is helpless, in absence of any powers under the Act to protect their services. The Contract Labour Act, he was therefore of the view, needs amendment to improve the cause of contract workers and that the Board should be given adequate powers to give relief to the workers. He hoped that the Hon'ble Minister for Labour and Employment who has assumed charge recently would take steps in the right direction in the interests of the contract workers," The above paragraph has been recorded in the minutes of the 56th meeting of the Central Advisory Contract Labour Board (CACLB). It reflects the consensus of the Board that under the present circumstances it is almost impossible for the contract workers to obtain justice. The moment the workers approach the Board, they are more often than not, removed from service by the contractor and the principal employer.

If the Board recommends abolition of the contract system, the principal employer again gets rid of the workers. Since in many public sector undertakings there are surplus regular staff, the work is then performed by the regular workers. Sometimes the work itself is discontinued, as in the case of gardening work. In other cases, it is "outsourced". In all these three cases the poor contract workers who approached the Board seeking justice are rendered unemployed and jobless. In these circumstances, the Board itself has to be extremely cautious in recommending abolition even if all the conditions of Section 10(2) of the Act are satisfied.

This anomalous and absurd situation has been the consequence of the August 2001Supreme Court judgement in the SAIL case. In this retrograde decision, a five judge bench decided that after abolition of the contract system, the erstwhile contract workers had no intrinsic right of absorption This judgement set aside the earlier 1996 judgement in the Air India case, which had decided that the contract workers did have a right to be absorbed after the contract system was abolished. Following the SAIL judgement, many stay orders by several High Courts, protecting the contract workers, were revoked and large scale retrenchment of contract workers had taken place all over the country with their replacement by fresh workers.

The list of contract workers who have been thrown out of work soon after approaching the Board is long. It includes trolley workers at Delhi and Chennai Airports. It includes contract workers working in the oil sector, banks, railways, customs etc. In case after case, with almost no exception, the workers who approached the CACLB are no longer working at their job when their matter comes up for consideration by the Board.

Leave alone abolition; after the SAIL judgement it has become almost impossible for the contract workers to obtain any of their rights under the Contract Labour Act. Take the issue of minimum wages and other statutory rights. If the contract workers raise the issue before any authority, they are removed from service and replaced by other workers. In such circumstances, the workers often prefer to remain silent and endure the systematic violation of their basic rights.

Employers are increasingly finding new stratagems to avoid their liabilities under the Contract Labour Act. In the case of the trolley workers working with the Airport Authority of India, the management is now claiming that this is not contract working as no payment is being made to a contractor. On the contrary, the agent is paying the AAI fees for being allowed to provide trolley service and carry advertising on the trolleys!

In the case of Railways, the work of loading and unloading parcels from the trains is outsourced to agents who pay fees to the railways for licences to operate. The Railways then claim that this does not come under the purview of the Contract Labour

Act as the Railways is not making any payment to the agent but on the contrary receiving fees. The agent is not a contractor but a licensee.

With information technology being increasingly employed by banks and offices for data processing and making or receiving payments, this work on computers is then outsourced to data processing agencies. Often this work is further sub-contracted. In many cases before the CACLB, such as in Citibank, Customs etc. the management representatives then claim that this outsourced work does not come under the purview of the Contract Labour Act.

Another important issue arises in the context of privatisation. In the key area of petroleum refining, there are several applications by contract workers working in public sector companies like BPCL, HPCL, ONGC, Oil India, Indian Oil etc. pending with the CACLB. But the private sector Reliance Group operates in exploration, refining and petrochemicals almost entirely with contract labour with no challenge to this wholesale employment of contract system in core and perennial operations. A similar situation exists in the case of private airlines.

After the SAIL judgement, the Contract Labour Act has become enfeebled as an instrument for obtaining the basic rights of the contract workers. With increasing contractualisation under the LPG policies, it is evident that the situation requires remedial action in the form of suitable amendments to the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970. This is a matter, which the trade union movement must take up with all urgency in the coming days.

MOVE TO ABOLISH ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNALS

Yet another unilateral and atrocious move by the Central Govt to abolish the Central Administrative Tribunals and State Administrative Tribunals thus snatching away the most important avenue from the Govt employees for their grievance redressal. The Govt employees in our country are being deprived of many constitutional rights. Their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining are not recognized by the Govt and the concerned core ILO Conventions have not been ratified by the Govt of India just to keep the Govt employees on the tenterhook. Whatever rights now being exercised by the Govt employees in the country in the matter of their organizational activities are the result of organized assertion by this section of employees and not a gift by the administration.

The forum of Central and State Administrative Tribunals were the constitutionally recognized fora for sorting out the service related grievances of the employees, in the absence of any formal right to collective bargaining. And now these forums are being targeted for liquidation. The process started long back, when the Govt or govts under the neoliberal inspiration started working overtime to weaken these forums by reducing supporting manpower attached to these tribunals, by not filling up or delaying filling up of vacancies of judges and other supporting staff, thereby delaying the process of justice to the aggrieved employees. In the second stage, now, the Union Cabinet has decided to amend the Administrative Tribunals Act (1985) to empower the Central Govt and the State Govts to abolish the central and state tribunals. While conveying this decision, the Govt spokesman Jaipal Reddy stated on 20th April that already many state governments in Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu have demanded abolition of state administrative tribunals. Reddy further stated that "There is no provision either in Article 323A of the Constitution or in the Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985 which allows an Administrative Tribunal to be abolished. This is anomalous, as any institution, however important, may outlive its usefulness over time. A reasonable exit route is thus called for." What can be more atrocious than this. The Govt of India has been working for not merely for "exit route" for the workers in employment "through hire and fire mechanism" it is also seized with finding out the exit route for the employees rights and access to available grievance redressal machinery. In the absence of the central and state administrative tribunals, the concerned govt employees have to knock the doors of general judiciary leading to inordinate delay in getting justice, if at all available there.

Chittabrata Majumdar MP, General Secretary CITU strongly denounced such atrocious anti-worker move of the Central Govt and stated that any such legislative move of the Govt will be opposed tooth and nail. Sukomal Sen, General Secretary of All India State Govt Emloyees Federation also condemned such unilateral move of the Central Govt.

ANTI-UNEMPLOYMENT DAY OBSERVED ON 28TH MARCH

As per decision of the National Convention on Right to Work held on 12-13 March 2005 at Kolkata, Anti-Unemployment Day was observed on 28th March 2005 throughout the country at the initiative of CITU and with the involvement of other mass organisations.

WEST BENGAL

Joint conventions by all mass organisations demanding "employment for all" was organized throughout the state where trade unions and the organisations of peasants, students, youth and women have joined in preparation to the observance of 'anti-unemployment day' on 28th March.

On 28th March anti-unemployment day was observed throughout the state through rallies, processions etc. At Kolkata, a mass convention was held on 28th March at the call of National Platform of Mass Organisations at Netaji Subhash Institute Hall. While addressing the convention, Shyamal Chakraborty, President West Bengal State CITU conveyed that intensive joint campaign was held all over the state against unemployment during last four months. The main resolution was moved by Kali Ghosh, General Secretary of State CITU. The convention was also addressed by Chunilal Dasgupta (12th July Committee), Harishankar Basu (AITUC), Sanat Dutta(UTUC-LS), Mihir Chanda (UTUC), Subhashis Pradhan (SFI), Mousumi Ghosh (AIYF) and K D Ghosh (Mercantile Federation). The convention decided to hold a state level joint rally against unemployment on 17th April 2005. Reports on observance of anti-unemployment Day through massive demonstration rallies etc were also received from NBADWIP, Howrah, Chakdah, Kona, Shibpur, Purulia, Bankura Coochbihar, Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri and other places.

PUNJAB

As per reports received more than 2000 people held procession and demonstration at Sangrur district in front of the office of District Collector. At Amritsar 400 workers joined in procession. The industrial center of Ludhiana witnessed a militant rally by 4000 workers from cycle industry, brick-kilns and transport. In the demonstration and procession at Bhatinda, around 200 workers joined. At Hoshierpur, At Patiala around 300 workers took out a procession in the town. Reports of rallies were also received from Chandigarh, Batala, Derabasi and other places.

The rallies held at different places in the state were addressed by Raghunath Singh, and Bijoy Mishra, General Secretary and Working President of State CITU respectively besides other CITU leaders. In most of industrial areas, gate meetings were held demanding concrete steps by the Govt to address the problems of unemployment.

TRIPURA

Demonstration and rallies were held at 41 places in 15 subdivisions of the state of Tripura. At the state capital at Agartala, a mass meeting was held. Participation was around 10000. Processions from different spots of the town converged in a rally. The rally was addressed by Manik Dey, and Pijush Nag, President and General Secretary of the State CITU besides Rtan Das from DYFI, Krishna Rakhshit of AIDWA, Ashesh Dev Roy from TECC, Nikhil Das from BEFI, Kalipada Bhattacharya from UTUC, and Satish Saha from TUCC.

RAJASTHAN

A massive demonstration of workers and youth was held at Sikar before the office of the District Collector. The demonstration while demanding 'right to work' to be enshrined in constitution also raised the demand for drastic change in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill to bring it in tune with the commitment made in NCMP. The rally was addressed among others, by Hazarilal Sharma, Secretary, Rajasthan State CITU who explained before the demonstrators the outcome of the National Convention on Right to

Work held at Kolkata on 12-13 March and stressed upon the urgent need for mobilizing the people in the struggle against the problem of unemployment as a central and integral part of our struggle against neoliberal economic policies.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

HOTEL WORKERS' STRUGGLE

The Hotel workers of Simla have been struggling against closure and retrenchment at Hotel Toushali Resort located 28 km away from proper Simla. In September 2004, the management of Toushali Resort closed down the kitchen, restaurant and the horticulture deptt and retrenched 32 workers without giving any notice. The management had given the kitchen and restaurant on contract and contract workers were brought from outside. Owing to resistance by the workers, the contractor could not start work as the workers coming from outside went back. The entire workers had been carrying on dharna and demonstration since then. Police tried to break the dharna by unleashing terror but could not succeed. The entire hotel workers of Simla under the ladership of Himachal Hotel Mazdoor Laljhanda Union (CITU) stood in firm solidarity with the struggling workers of Hotel Tousahali Resort.

Meantime, the union has lodged number of complaints against the management for violation of the Contract Labour (R&A) Act with the labour deptt. In order to break the workers' resistance struggle, the management brought some workers from outside to confined them inside the hotel forcibly. The local administration has shamelessly sided with the management. The workers confined inside are being tortured and their payments have been withheld not to let them go away. In this situation one worker, Chandrapal was found dead inside the hotel on 25th March night. And the dead body was not sent for post mortem till 6 pm next day exposing the management's role behind the mysterious death. Entire leadership of the Himachal Hotel Mazdoor Laljhanda Union rushed to the spot under the leadership of Rakesh Singha but they were not allowed inside the Hotel by Police. On 28th March, hotel workers of Simla went on strike spontaneously for half-day in protest of the incident and demonstrated before the office of the District Collector demanding Rs 2 lakh compensation for the deceased worker and stringent action against the management for violation of Contract labour Act. Only on getting concete assurance from the District Collector, the blockade on the Colector office was lifted and the workers took our procession in the town to converge into a mass rally. From the rally, announcement was made for strike action on 9th April to press the Govt for strong punitive action on the management and also the colliding police administration.

On 9th April all the hotels in Simla got paralysed by the strike action. The striking workers staged dharna before the District collector's office and thereafter held mass rally which has drawn thousands of people besides the hotel workers. Under pressure of the workers' struggle, the administration was forced to order for judicial enquiry into the whole incident and also to involve the union in the same.

ALL INDIA CONFERENCE OF FCI UNIONS

The meeting of the working committee of the All India FCI Mazdoor Federation held in New Delhi on February 15, 2005 decided to hold an All India Conference of the FCI Unions and workers at Chandigarh on May 29 - 30, 2005. All State Committees of CITU should take appropriate initiative to contact different unions in the Food Corporation of India and ensure a sizable delegation is sent to the Chandigarh conference.

CHHATTISGARH

BALCO WORKERS' UNITED STRUGGLE

After privatization of Balco, the attack on workers' rights by the Sterlite management has increased manifold. CITU along with other unios affiliated to AITUC, HMS, BMS, NORMS etc under the banner of Balco Bachao Aviyan Samity have been carrying on struggle in defence of the workers and their rights.

Recently the INTUC union in Balco has entered into an agreement with the management on the wages and service conditions of the workers which severely damaged workers' interests. The workers enmasse rejected the settlement through agitational programmes. The management tried to terrorise the workers through vindictive actions. On 15th April Sukhendu Ghosh (CITU) and S S Parihar (HMS) have been served charge sheet by the management on false and fabricated grounds. On 16th April 2005, B L Netam, President of the CITU union and Secretary of the Balco Bachao Avijan Samity has been suspended by the management. This has led to spontaneous strike action in the foundry shop. Cast house, sheet rolling shop, and cell house paralyzing the entire plant. The striking workers assembled before the administrative office demanding immediate withdrawal of suspension and chargesheets. Ultimately the management had to come down and withdraw the suspension and chargesheets after two days' strike action. The strike action was also joined by the members of INTUC.

CITU HOLDS A&N STATE COMMITTEE 6TH CONFERENCE

The two-day 6th State Conference of Centre of Indian Trade Unions, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, began at Kerala Samajam Hall, Port Blair on 02.04.2005 with the hoisting of the CITU flag by Shri R. Pious D'silva, President, CITU A&N State Committee, amidst chanting of slogans by delegates and others. Shri Chittabrata Majumdar, CITU All India General Secretary and Member of Parliament and Shri AK Padmanabhan, CITU All India Secretary and other leaders and delegates/observers paid floral tributes to the martyrs at a specially-erected Martyrs Memorial Column at the Kerala Samajam premises.

A presidium comprising of Shri R. Pious D'silva, Shri Chandrachoodan and Shri H.N. Parial was constituted for the conduct of the proceedings.

Inaugurating the Conference, Shri Chittabrata Majumdar said that anti-working class forces in the country are very active, overtly or covertly, to suppress the labour movements by banning strike, curtailing trade union rights, etc. He cautioned the working class against the evil designs of such forces. He said that on the one hand unemployment is increasing in the country and on the other industries are being closed down, retrenchment is increasing and employment generation is being stalled on one pretext or other, after the introduction of new economic and industrial policies since early 1990s. Shri Mazumdar, said that during the NDA regime, secularism in the country was under grave threat. People belonging to minority communities were subjected to subjugation in various parts of the country. Communal forces were inducted into every sphere of the administration, education and culture. The Left parties wanted the NDA to be kept away from power at the Centre and continued to pressurize the UPA government to follow pro-people policies. Shri Majumdar said that in the last Union Budget, the industrialists and multi-national companies were given concessions amounting to hundreds of crores of rupees. Shri

Majumdar called upon the working class in the islands to participate in large number in the agitational programmes being conducted by the CITU and other central trade unions in the country. Shri A.K. Padmanabhan, Shri KG Das and Shri Gouranga Majhi addressed the gathering. Earlier, Shri SB Chatterjee, Chairman, Reception Committee welcomed the delegates and others.

In the evening a huge procession was taken out from Kerala Samajam premises which went round the town and culminated in a public meeting at Tiranga Park. Shri Chittabrata Majumdar, AK Padmanabhan and P. Abdul Samad addressed the public meeting which was presided over by Shri B. Chandrachoodan.

The delegate session of the Conference was held on 3rd April, 2005. Shri R. Pious D'silva, delivered the Presidential Address. Shri Chittabrata Majumdar, General Secretary of CITU and Shri AK Padmanabhan, Secretary CITU addressed the delegates and observers. Thereafter, Shri P. Abdul Samad, General Secretary presented the Working Report and Accounts. Delegates participated in the discussion on the Report which was adopted unanimously. 80 delegates and observers from various CITU affiliated trade unions throughout the island territory attended the Conference.

The Conference through a resolution expressed dissatisfaction over the relief and rehabilitation work being undertaken by the A&N Administration and Central Government, as there is wide-spread corruption, mishandling and inefficiency on the part of bureaucracy. Other resolutions adopted in the Conference include (I) regularization of services of casual/contract employees in various government departments, (ii) check on corruption and inquiry against corrupt politicians and officials (iii) development of tourism (iv) against economic policies of the Central Government (v) abolition of contract system.

PUNJAB

STRIKE IN PUNJAB ELECTRICITY BOARD ON 19-20 APRIL

More than 8000 workers in Punjab State Electricity Board observed two days' strike in protest against the corporatisation and privatization move by the Punjab Govt On 19-20 April 2005. TSU Vigyanik Kendar and some other unions in PSEB took initiative for the strike action.

The Punjab State CITU extended support to the strike action gainst privatization of electricity board. In the preparatory stage itself, CITU organized several meeting of workers and common people in support of the denmands of the electricity workers. On the strike days massive gate meetings and demonstration were held in the electricity board offices and power stations throughout the state. In solidarity with the striking employees, CITU also organized procession and rallies in Sangrur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Rajpura, Hoshierpur, Patiala, Bhatinda, Raikot, Malout, Malerkoltla and other places in which more than 5000 workers from other sectors participated. The rallies were addressed by Balwant Singh, Vijay Mishra and Raghunath Singh, President, Working President and General Secretary of Punjab State CITU besides other state and district level leaders.

WEST BENGAL

MASSIVE RALLY OF NPMO ON 10 POINT DEMNDS

Kolkata, 17th April 2005, massive rally of trade unions and mass organization under the banner of National Plat Form of Mass Organisation held in the Saheed Minar Maidan, called

upon the toiling people to mobilize and struggle for attainment of 10 point demands covering all section of the populace. The 10 point demands include, inter alia, the demands for strengthening and widening the public distribution system, equal rights for women, guaranteeing the right to strike for all workers and employees, employment guarantee for the rural and urban unemployed at least for 100 days in the year as committed in NCMP, revival of the sick industrial units, comprehensive legislation for unorganized sector and agricultural workers etc among others.

The rally was addressed by Jyoti Basu, Vice President, CITU, who demanded upon the central govt to implement with priority the pro-people commitments made in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) and called upon the toiling people to build powerful mass movement to mount pressure on the govt in that direction.

The rally was presided over by Shyamal Chakraborty, President, West Bengal CITU. The main resolution was moved by Kali Ghosh, General Secretary, West Bengal CITU and was addressed by Sankar Saha (UTUC-LS), Ranajit Guha (AITUC), Ashok Ghosh (UTUC), Shibshankar Roy (12th July Committee), Sudip Sengupta (SFI), Anjanava Chakraborty(DSO), Rekha Goswami (AIDWA), Abdul Hai (DYFI) and Tapan Ganguly (AIYF).

DURGAPUR

WORKERS IN THE NEW INDUSTRIAL UNITS TO STRIKE

CITU gave a call for strike on 10th May 2005 in the new industrial units in Durgapur against the desperate violation of labour laws and tyranny of management. Around 20 new industrial units have been set up in Durgapur industrial area. The workers in these units are being subjected to inhuman exploitation by the tyrannical approach of the management. The normal working hours extend up to 12 to 14 hours a day. Almost slave like condition was imposed on a section of workers termed as "personal worker". Factories Act has been violated desperately. There has been no canteen, drinking water facilities even toilets in these new factories. Basic safety rules are being trampled underfoot. During last three years, 14 workers died owing to violation of safety provisions in the Angadpur industrial division only. The factory owners are defying the pollution control norms with impunity leading to tremendous spread of pollution in the Durgapur industrial area.

CITU has long been agitating with the basic demands of the workers in these new factories but situation did not improve. Now at the initiative of CITU, nine point demands have been formulated which include 8 hour working day, paid weekly off, provident fund, pension scheme, issuance of appointment letter and identity cards and pay-slips to workers, supply of safety appliances, pollution-control measures etc. It was decided to jointly submit charter of demands in all the units on 20th April, badge wearing on 23rd April, dharna on 27th April and demonstration before all the gates from 7th to 9th May and strike on 10th May. With this programme rallies and meetings were held in the two industrial divisions of Ratulia-Angadpur and Lenin Sarani areas of Durgapur on 18th and 19th April which waere addressed by Biprendu Chakraborty, Raktim Chaowdhury, Rakesh Sharma, Sandeep Roy and other CITU leaders.

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Against handing over oil fields to foreign companies

STATEWIDE BANDH IN ASSAM

On 21st April, the entire state of Assam witnessed a complete bandh. Assam Telkhetra Suraksha Samity comprising the Left parties, trade unions and mass organisations have given the call for 12 hour Bandh in protest against the move of the central govt to hand over discovered oilfields to foreign companies for exploration and commercial exploitation. These oil fields were discovered by the public sector oil companies through yearlong search spending lakhs of rupees but for revenue earning, these oilfilelds are being gifted to private sector foreign companies.

The Bandh call received spontaneous response from the mass of the people in the state. Schools and colleges, offices and industrial areas and Govt departments were almost closed. The Bandh has also affected the road transport in a big way and most of the Bus terminuses wore a vacant look.

The Left Parties and the trade unions congratulated the people of Assam for observance of successful bandh in defence of the country's oil reserves.

KARNATAKA:

ANGANWADI NOUKARARA SANGHA CONFERENCE

The third conference of Karnataka Rajya Anganwadi Noukarara Sangha was held on 16-18 April 2005 in the city of Gulbarga. A colourful procession of anganwadi workers and helpers marched in the city on 16th April 2005. The procession was converted into a mass meeting in the market square.

Inaugurating the conference, Hemalata, General Secretary of the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers congratulated the members of the union for pushing back the attempts of the state government to hand over the management of the anganwadi centres to the Panchayats and in achieving some social security benefits. She demanded that ICDS should be strengthened and converted into a regular part of the Women and Child Welfare Department and anganwadi centres should be converted into day care cum crèche centres. She told that around 1 crore signatures were collected from the beneficiaries all over the country on this demand and the federation was organising a massive convention at Delhi on the 26th of April. The memorandum will be submitted to the HRD minister on the same day.

VJK Nair, General Secretary of the Karnataka state committee of CITU, Varalakshmi, General Secretary of the state committee of the Union and several other leaders of CITU also addressed the gathering. 233 delegates and observers from 15 districts participated in the delegates' session. Varalakshmi placed the general secretary's report. 39 delegates including three helpers participated in the discussion on the report after which it was unanimously adopted.

The conference welcomed with great enthusiasm the request of the federation for holding its fifth all India Conference in Bangalore on 12- 15 November 2005.

The conference elected a three-tier committee consisting of the council including the presidents and general secretaries of all the project committees, a state committee and office bearers. Shanta Ghante and Varalakshmi were re elected as President and General Secretary. Prasanna, Secretary of the state committee of CITU and Hemalata spoke in the concluding session and gave several suggestions for further strengthening the organisation.

REPORTS & EVENTS

Against Privatisation and for thorough review of Electricity Policy

WORKERS TO GO FOR NATIONAWIDE TWO-DAYS STRIKE

The National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers comprising the Employees Federations and Engineers' Organisations in the electricity sector across various affiliations met in New Delhi on 10th March 2005 and jointly decided to go in for two days countrywide strike in the electricity sector on 31st May and 1st June 2005 in protest against the privatisation move and demanding thorough review of the electricity policy of the Govt of India.

The meeting the Coordination Committee reviewed the outcome of the meeting with Prime Minister in December 2005 and the Union Power Minister in March 2005, where in the pressing demands pertaining to the industry like reversing and stalling of the process of unbundling of the electricity boards followed by privatization and urgent review of the Electricity Act and the Electricity Policy were highlighted. It was pointed out to the ministers that ongoing policy of the Govt is leading to privatization of profits and nationalization of loss in the electricity sector has failed to address the urgency of electricity supply in the rural areas of the country and hence such policy warrants total reversal. Both the Prime Minister and the Power Minister appeared not have seriously responded to just demands of the employees and engineers organisations.

In such a background, the National Coordination Committee has decided call for two days' countrywide strike in electricity sector on 31st May and 1st June to press for the following issues:

1.Scrap Electricity Act and Review the Electricity Policy

2.Stop restructuring State Electricity Boards and roll back restructured and privatized SEBs

3.Improve efficiency of SEBs and turn them around through internal reforms with Government, management and employees working together to achieve predetermined targets

4.Resolve problems of supply to rural areas, agriculture, small scale industry and urban weaker section

5.Protect the service conditions and terminal benefits of the employees.

The strike notice served on the Govt on 10th March 2005 was signed by B S Meel, General Secretary, Electricity Emplyees Federation of India, Chakradhar Singh, General Secretary, All India Federation of Electricity Employees, Akhtar Hussain, General Secretary, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyut Mazdoor Mahasangh, Shailendra Dubey, Secretary General, All India Power Engineers Federation, Subeder Singh, President All India Federation of Power Diploma Engineers and K Ashok Rao, Convenor, National Working Group on Power.

CITU has extended all support to the united strike action by the electricity employees.

TAMIL NADU

RETIREMENT BENEFITS FOR ANGANWADI EMPLOYEES

After a prolonged struggle the anganwadi workers and helpers in Tamil Nadu have won a few retirement benefits and an additional remuneration of Rs. 322 per month.

In this year's budget, the Tamil Nadu government has announced that the anganwadi workers will be paid a lump sum amount of Rs. 50, 000 and the helpers Rs. 25, 000 on retirement. The government will contribute Rs. 10, 000 towards Special Provident Fund. The budget initially proposed additional allowance of Rs. 322/- per month (Rs. 200/- and 61% DA that comes to Rs. 122/-) for anganwadi helpers only. The workers were not given any increase. The Tamil Nadu Anganwadi Employees'

Association held a demonstration before the office of the Social Welfare Department in Chennai demanding that this should be applied to the workers also. Around 3, 000 anganwadi workers from 7 districts participated in the demonstration. The government was forced to agree to this demand and announced that the workers would also be given the Rs. 322/- additional allowance from the state government funds.

The state government has been withholding the Rs. 500/- enhancement by the Govt. of India in 2002 and even now it has not agreed to pay that amount to the anganwadi employees. The Union has decided to continue to pressurise the Govt. for this also.

NATIONAL WAGE SETTLEMENT IN CEMENT INDUSTRY

At the final round of negotiations held between the Cement Manufacturers' Association and the five central trade unions viz. the AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS and INTUC, at Mumbai on April 12, 2005, a broad consensus on the parameters of the national level settlement on the common charter of demands had been arrived at. The actual settlement has been arrived at during the conciliation proceedings held before the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) at New Delhi on April 26, 2005. The settlement will result in a monthly wage increase of Rs. 1335 for all categories of workers covered by the Second Arbitration Award for the cement industry. Out of this Rs.1335, Rs. 400 will be included in pay and the balance Rs. 935 distributed among the various allowances. The amount of Rs. 215 decided as per interim settlement will also be available to the workers, the exact distribution of which was worked out in conciliation before the CLC (C). Besides, the rate of variable dearness allowance will be increased from Rs. 2.10 to Rs.2.25 per point beyond 2583 points of the All India Consumer Price Index (1960: 100). This settlement will take effect from 1.4.2005 and be in force up to 31.3.2010. The ACC group of companies will also join the industry level settlement. Details of the settlement have been communicated to the State Committees of the CITU.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY OBSERVED IN BIHAR

The Bihar Coordination Committee of Working Women and the Bihar unit of the All India Democratic Women's Association held a dharna in Cargil Chowk in Patna on the occasion of the International Women's Day on March 8. Women workers and employees from different industries participated in the dharna demanding strict implementation of equal wages, maternity benefit and crèches for all women workers including those in the unorganised sector, law against sexual harassment and legal protection for home based workers and domestic workers. They submitted a memorandum with hundreds of signatures to the Governor. Rampukari Devi, Convenor of the Bihar Coordination Committee of Working Women and other leaders, addressed the dharna.

Insurance Employees

The women's sub committee of the Patna division of Insurance Employees' Association observed International Women's Day near the Jeevan Prakash building. The convenor of the women's sub committee Manju Singh presided over the meeting. Dr Asma Ahmed, the chief guest and former Chairperson of the Psychology department in Patna University called upon the women employees to give a fitting reply to all those who propagated that women were inferior to men. Ram Pukari Devi referred to the inner strength of women giving several examples of women's struggles for their rights.

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

State	Sr. No.	Centre	Month Jan.' 05	Month Feb.' 05
Andhra Pradesh	1	Gudur	511	509
	2	Guntur	512	498
	3	Hyderabad	518	520
	4	Visakhapatnam	523	517
	5	Warangal	538	542
Assam	6	D.D.Tinsukia	435	435
	7	Guwahati	521	521
	8	Labac-Silchar	408	403
	9	Mariani-Jorhat	446	443
	10	Rangapara-Tezpur	433	418
Bihar	11	Monghyr	490	491
Chhattisgarh	12	Bhillai	461	463
Gujarat	13	Ahmedabad	516	505
	14	Bhavnagar	529	529
	15	Rajkot	476	477
	16	Surat	486	482
	17	Vadodra	488	485
Haryana	18	Faridabad	542	542
	19	Yamunanagar	507	503
J & K	20	Srinagar	617	625
Jharkhand	21	Jamshedpur	486	493
	22	Jharia	420	421
	23	Kodarma	453	455
	24	Noamundi	476	478
	25	Ranchi-Hatia	481	476
Karnataka	26	Bangalore	518	516
	27	Belgaum	577	573
	28	Hubli-Dharwar	536	528
	29	Mercara	498	491
Kerala	30	Alwaye	531	536
	31	Mundakayam	509	507
	32	Quilon	552	540
	33	Thiruvananthapuram	613	599
Madhya Pradesh	34	Balaghat	459	450
	35	Bhopal	546	546
	36	Indore	524	523
	37	Jabalpur	528	529
Maharastra	38	Mumbai	619	621
	39	Nagpur	547	545
	40	Nasik	583	577
	41	Pune	583	586
	42	Solapur	541	536
Orissa	43	Barbil	456	463
	44	Rourkela	457	457
Punjab	45	Amritsar	482	481
	46	Ludhiana	488	488
Rajasthan	47	Ajmer	530	531
	48	Jaipur	484	485
Tamil Nadu	49	Chennai	565	563
	50	Coimbatore	504	508
	51	Coonoor	505	501
	52	Madurai	500	501
	53	Salem	478	471
	54	Tiruchirapally	563	570
Uttar Pradesh	55	Agra	498	500
	56	Ghaziabad	551	551
	57	Kanpur	495	505
	58	Saharanpur	492	492
	59	Varanasi	553	553
West Bengal	60	Asansol	490	488
	61	Darjeeling	434	430
	62	Durgapur	581	577
	63	Haldia	609	609
	64	Howrah	598	597
	65	Jalpaiguri	435	435
	66	Kolkata	564	565
	67	Raniganj	456	455
Chandigarh	68	Chandigarh	599	599
Delhi	69	Delhi	632	633
Pondicherry	70	Pondicherry	576	569
ALL-INDIA			**526**	**525**

Additional Series of Labour Bureau

State		Centre	January 2005	February 2005
Andhra Pradesh	1	Kethgudem	534	537
Himachal Pradesh	2	Himachal Pradesh	497	498
Rajasthan	3	Bhilwara	522	524
Madhya Pradesh	4	Chhindwara	461	460
Tripura	5	Tripura	455	445
Goa	6	Goa	630	630

ON THE SEEDS BILL 2004

The last Winter session of Parliament witnessed circulation of the Seeds Bill and the events went virtually unnoticed, despite it being a complementary step of the Patents Amendment Ordinance. Bill has got ominous portents, still, most unfortunately, could not attract the attention of even those who will be worst affected by the enactment., the Farmers' community. The draft Bill, which awaits enactment in Parliament, is heavily loaded in favour of the private seed industry, predominantly MNCs.

The Bill is aimed at making our peasantry and country's agriculture totally dependent on the MNCs by way of stopping them from seed saving, seed-exchange and seed-reproduction indigenously. The Bill is also authored to alter and/ or sideline many of the provisions of earlier Protection of Plant Variety & Farmers' Rights Act 2001 (PPVFR) which itself had many shortcomings, to make the management of seeds-economy and production totally biased in favour of seed-industry and against the farmers.

A recent study reveals, "The Seed Bill requires mandatory registration of seeds and varieties which the PPVFR does not. In the PPVFR, the breeder applies for registration for a Plant Breeders' Right. This right is valid for a period of 15 years for crop varieties and 18 years for trees. The Seed Bill allows the period of protection to be doubled so that the seed variety can be monopolised by the seed producer for 30 years and 36 years, respectively.

The Seed Bill does not grant any recognition to the contribution of farmers as conservers of agricultural gene pools, or as breeder of successful new varieties. In fact, it enables their varieties to be poached by the industry, as it does not require industry to submit details of the parentage of the variety being registered. Seed companies could use farmer varieties and publicly-held genetic material without either seeking permission or paying anything. This violates the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the PPVFR according to which farmers are entitled to share in the profits through the benefit sharing mechanism.

As a result of the Seed Bill, we could have high cost of seeds fixed arbitrarily by the seed companies, leaving the government with no means to control the price.

Besides, the stringent punishment and large penalties in the PPVFR for supplying bad seeds by the industry have been reduced to a token affair. A major setback is in the dilution of the liability and compensation provisions. According to the PPVFR farmers who have suffered losses because of poor quality seed can get relief from the Plant Variety Authority. In other words, the national authority is responsible for ensuring that the industry pays compensation to farmers. In the Seed Bill, both government and industry have distanced themselves and placed the onus for seeking compensation on the farmers themselves. *(Suman Sahai, Times of India, 25-03-2005)*

While penalty for the private industrial supplier for bad quality seeds has been toned down to tokenism as per the new Act, the farmers will be subjected to administration's high-handedness in the name of seed-policing. In the objective of the draft Bill it is stated that it is aimed at replacing farmers-saved seeds with seeds from private industries. The repeated reference of "barter" in the draft Bill will prevent farmer's exchange, a necessary aspect of maintaining high quality seed supply at community level. Moreover, compulsory registration of seeds combined with the power of seed-Inspectors to enter and such premises (farmer's huts and fields), power to break open any container and any door tantamount to creating a 'Seed Police' to terrorise farmers who are conserving bio-diversity and practicing a sovereign self-reliant agriculture.

In totality, the new Seeds Bill is aimed at creating ground for stripping the farmers of all their rights on seeds created by themselves and make them dependent on the private seed-companies and traders and making Indian agriculture a looting ground for the multinational companies. The retrograde Bill must be opposed by the toiling peoples' movement.

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AP: LACE WORKERS IN NARSAPUR ORGANISED IN UNION

Lace industry in the Narsapur area of West Godavari district is more than hundred years old. Some Irish women taught lace making to the local women in a village near Narsapuram as a hobby as well as to help them earn something. Over the years, this past time developed into the only means of livelihood for many women, particularly widows and destitute women. The local women, mostly from upper caste families, who were under the 'purdah' system and were not allowed to go outside their homes, utilised this art to earn some money in addition to the earnings of the men. Today it has developed into a Rs. 500 crore home based industry on which around 2 lakhs women are dependent. It is mostly spread in Narsapuram and Palakol taluks of West Godavari district and Rajole Taluk in East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh.

The traders, contractors and employers subject the women engaged in lace making to severe exploitation. While the lace they make is sold at a premium in foreign countries and earns crores of rupees for the exporters and traders, the women remain in extreme poverty.

The extent of exploitation shocked the team of CITU and CCWW members who visited several villages - Doddipatla, Medapadu, Konteru and Varidhanam villages in Palakol and Narsapur taluks. The team comprising Hemalata, Secretary CITU, K Raja Rama Mohana Roy, General Secretary of the West Godavari district committee of CITU, Suhasini, convenor of the district coordination committee of working women and Sesha Ratnam, President of the West Godavari District Lace Workers and Employees' Union talked to many women in these villages who were engaged in lace making.

The women are usually provided with yarn in ½ Kg bundles of coarse thread or 150 gm bundles of fine thread. It generally takes around 10- 15 days for the women to weave 500 gms of coarse thread into lace, if they work for around 7- 8 hours a day. Similarly for the fine thread it takes around 5 - 6 days to complete 150 gms if one works around 6 hours a day. Wages are paid as per the thread used and through the last several years and until three months back remained something between Rs 30 - 40 per a bundle of 500 gms of coarse thread. But since the last three months there has been some increase. Presently they are paid wages that range between Rs. 60 and 120 per a bundle of 500 gms. Distribution of leaflets by the CITU demanding better wages, increased export orders etc might have resulted in the increase.

The district committee of CITU and the district coordination committee of working women have made some efforts to organise the lace workers of Narsapur a few years ago. But the women workers were afraid of adverse repercussions from the employers and losing the meagre income. They were also not confident of the benefits of organisation. They were not even ready to spare some time to hear the CITU activists, lest they might lose precious time.

But this time around things appeared to have changed to some extent. They not only gave a patient hearing to what the CITU activists had to say, but also agreed that organisation would give them strength. The CITU has registered a trade union in the name of 'West Godavari District Lace Workers' and Employees' Union and organised the first convention at Narsapur on 18th March 2005. Around 100 women engaged in lace making from different villages around the town participated in the convention. Sesha Ratnam, President of the Union presided. Hemalata, Secretary CITU, K Raja Rama Mohana Roy, General Secretary of the West Godavari district committee of CITU and Suhasini, General Secretary of the Union and Convenor of the West Godavari district coordination committee of working women and other leaders participated. Several lace workers also spoke on their problems. The convention elected a committee and decided to conduct a campaign on their issues. It gave a call to join the cooperative societies in big numbers and ensure effective functioning of the Lace Park. It also demanded implementation of minimum wages and other benefits to all the lace workers.

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