

CENTRE OF INDIAN TRADE UNIONS

5TH ALL INDIA CONFERENCE

Kanpur, 13-17 April, 1983



Report from West Bengal Committee

By
Monoranjan Roy
General Secretary

Report From West Bengal Committee Of C.I.T.U.

Growing Danger of Nuclear War

A cardinal issue before the working class to-day is the growing danger of nuclear war. The danger of a nuclear holocaust looms large over the horizon. The U. S. imperialist warmongers have embarked on an unprecedented nuclear arms race to gain supremacy over the Soviet Union. The main thrust of their war preparations is directed against the Soviet Union and Socialist Bloc. They are openly talking of a limited nuclear war. Hence the issue of war and peace has become a vital issue before the working class and all peace loving people.

Acting upon the call of the CITU Working Committee from its Bangalore meeting, the working class in West Bengal observed September 11, 1982 as the International Day for Peace. The CITU Unions observed the Day jointly with other Left Trade Unions and other T. U. Federations like the 12th July Committee (in which the State Govt., Central Govt. and Insurance Employees are also represented), Federation of Bank Employees, Federation of Mercantile Employees Unions etc. A central Rally was held before the USIS in Calcutta in which thousands of workers and employees participated. The day was also observed in all the industrial belts throughout the State through meetings and demonstrations. At the call of the Left Front and other mass democratic organisations, the biggest ever Peace Rally was held in Calcutta on 23rd September, 1982 in which thousands and thousands of workers participated with red flags and festoons along with other sections of the people.

The issue of war danger and peace are also being agitated generally in all meetings and rallies of workers held in any part of the State. But can we say that we have been able to convert this question of vital importance into a live issue among the workers in the State? Our weakness is that we have not been able to do so. In meetings and rallies we try to explain to the workers in a general way about the US war designs against the

Soviet Union and the peace initiative taken by the Soviet Union. But in order to make it a live issue before the working class, we have to formulate more concrete slogans, area-wise seminars, meetings and demonstrations so that the working class can realise the vital importance of this issue and the urgent need of fighting against imperialist war designs and for peace.

Working Class Struggles in Defence of Democracy.

The Left Front has been swept into power for the second time in 1932 by securing more than 53% of the votes cast. This is something unprecedented in the sense that, not only the overwhelming majority of seats in the Assembly were won, but the majority of the voters cast their votes in favour of the Left Front in which the CPI (M), the Party of the working class, is the unquestioned leader and has secured an absolute single party majority.

In the Assembly election in 1977 also, the CPI (M) had secured an absolute single party majority and the Left Front as a whole secured 232 seats in a house of 294. But the votes secured by the Left Front (minus CPI) were below 50%, to be precise 47%, when the anti-Indira wave was sweeping over North India. In 1977 it may be said that the Left Front votes were mostly anti-Indira negative vote. In the 1980 Lok Sabha poll also the Left Front (including the CPI, a partner by that time) won 38 out of 42 seats of which CPI (M) alone got 28 seats. The percentage of votes secured by the Left Front and CPI together was 53.9%.

In 1977, all the industrial seats were won by Left Front candidates. In the 1980 Lok Sabha poll, barring the Asansol seat all other industrial seats were won by L. F. candidates. But in 1982, all the Assembly seats in the Asansol area were won by L. F. candidates and, in the State as a whole, the Left Front won all the industrial seats excepting 2 seats. Of the elected Left Front candidates, 50 are organisers and workers of CITU.

Now, under what conditions prevailing in the industrial areas, conditions of the industries and the general situation did the last Assembly election take place and what attitude did the working class take in this situation ?

The Assembly election in 1982 was held at a time when the working class in the State was facing an intensive attack from the employers in almost all the industrial areas and the industrial situation was grim. The deepening crisis in the Indian economy, enhanced by the growing world capitalist crisis, has led to a severe crisis and recession in industries all over India. But the impact of the crisis is far more severe in West Bengal because of the peculiar structure of its industries. The industries in the State are mostly of the traditional type like Jute, Engineering, Plantation etc. Most of the units in Jute and Engineering industries barring one or two are burdened with age old and obsolete machines. The tea bushes in most of the gardens in Darjeeling in particular and Dooars and Terai in general are more than 100 years old. Moreover, in the last 35 years since independence no new and modern industry worth the name has been set up here. What is more, West Bengal—once a leading State in Engineering industry—has hardly seen renovation of machines or any new modern Engineering units set up in the last quarter of the century or more. With the growing crisis and recession, the employers have naturally resorted to all possible means to shift the entire burden of the crisis on the working class. Since 1980-81 attacks on the workers in the form of lay-off, lock-outs and closures have become intensified to such an extent that the working class has been gradually driven back on the defensive.

In spite of this grim industrial situation, what ensured the massive victory of the Left Front in 1977 and then in 1982 was the growing democratic and political consciousness of the working class and the people earned in course of democratic struggles over the last three decades or more. During this period, beginning in 1953 and particularly since the formation of the CITU, the working class in West Bengal has fought innumerable battles not only on economic issues but also on democratic and

political issues. They fought not only for their own demands but also for the demands of the peasants, both independently and in alliance with the peasants and other sections of the people. Between 1953 and 1982, the working class and the people of West Bengal have observed 45 General Strikes and Hartals in the State, at first partially and later more and more broader in sweep, on democratic and political issues. Even during the semi-fascist terror, on 27th July and 17th November, 1973, in 1974 and on 20th June, 1975 working class of our State observed General Strikes braving brutal murders and victimisation of hundreds of workers. From 1969 onwards, the General Strikes and Hartals were total, barring the semi-fascist period. These battles were conducted at heavy cost and sacrifices.

Defeat of Cong (I) and advent of Janata Govt. at the Centre in 1977 brought a change and it was in this background that they voted overwhelmingly for and installed a Left Front Govt. in 1977 and successfully defended it for 5 years with their might against all machinations of the authoritarian and reactionary forces. The massive support of the working class for Left Front in 1982 elections was based on their experience of the first 5 years of the Left Front rule, when they found in the L.F. Govt. a firm ally which stood by the working class through thick and thin and defended their interests in the fight against the employers' attacks. It is for this that they cast their positive votes in 1982 in favour of the Left Front and installed a L.F. Govt. for the second term.

However, there is no scope for complacency in this respect. So far what we have been able to achieve is to develop a broad democratic and political consciousness among the working class, but this has not been converted into a socialist consciousness ready to fight for fundamental social transformation and capable of moving forward in correct direction.

It will not be out of place here to stress that in West Bengal, the CITU has been making constant efforts to impress upon the working class about the changed situation in the State, because of the existence of a Left Front Government. The working class has no doubt fought many heroic battles on economic

issues. But we shall have to politicalise them and impress upon them the need to formulate their demands and programmes keeping in view the financial and constitutional limitations of the Left Front Government. Otherwise, the high expectations of the working class raised after the installation of the L. F. Government for a second time, would lead to frustration. Of course genuine issues of the working class must not be neglected, otherwise our enemies and disruptors will lead the backward workers astray and along wrong lines.

Struggle Against Authoritarian Attack on the Working Class.

Since coming back to power at the Centre in 1980, Mrs. Gandhi's Government has started mounting a series of authoritarian attacks on the democratic and T. U. rights of the working class. The NASA was enacted in 1980 and then in August '81 came the ESMO, the ordinance banning strikes in essential services. This was later passed into an Act of Parliament in the teeth of the opposition of the entire working class and T. U. movement. In the budget session of Parliament in 1982, the Central Government introduced three Bills seeking to amend the Trade Union Act, the I. D. Act and to enact a new legislation ostensibly for curtailing the T. U. rights of the employees of hospitals, educational institutions etc. Taken together, these bills constitute gravest threat to the T. U. and democratic rights of the working class.

The working class in West Bengal valiantly fought against these authoritarian attacks. Immediately after the promulgation of ESMO, the entire working class and other sections of the people protested against it through meetings, conventions and demonstrations throughout the State. A special feature of this struggle was that, not only the working class but also the agricultural workers, women, students and youth came out in thousands to protest against ESMO. The Left students' organisations held meetings and conventions and independently observed a one-day strike to protest against ESMO.

A General Strike and Bundh was observed in the State on 11th September, 1981 in protest against ESMA, high prices and anti-people, anti-working class policies of the Centre. The strike and bundh were complete and even many INTUC-led Unions did join the strike. In the historic rally held before Parliament in Delhi on 23rd November, 1981 at the call of the National Campaign Committee, a fairly large number of workers and employees from West Bengal participated. The call for an All India Industrial Strike on 19th January, 1982 given from the Delhi Rally, was observed in West Bengal not only as an industrial strike but also a call for Bundh was given by the Left Trade Unions and Federations and the Left Front. In spite of armed attacks on workers by the INTUC and Congress (I) hoodlums the strike and bundh received tremendous response from the working class and all sections of the people and was a near complete success.

On 23rd February '82 Anti-Victimisation Day was observed in different industrial areas to protest against victimisation of workers in other States by the Central and State Governments for participating in the 19th January Strike. A Central Rally of workers and employees was held in Calcutta on that day jointly by the Left Trade Unions and Federations. To protest against the anti-labour bills introduced in Parliament, a central rally of workers was held in Calcutta on 8th July '82 to observe Anti Labour Black Bill Day at the call of the National Campaign Committee.

Industrial Actions.

Seamen of Calcutta and Haldia Ports, along with Seamen in other Ports of India and even in some foreign Ports, observed a 72-hour strike on their demands on 24-26 November '82 at the call of the Forward Seamen's Union of India. The Coal mine workers of Raniganj-Asansol belt responded magnificently to the call for All India Strikes on 8th November '82 and again for 72 hours on 17-19 January '83.

The working class of West Bengal also participated in all

solidarity actions in support of struggling workers in other States. The All India Strike in Public Sector industries on 11th March '81, called by the Central Trade Unions and National Federations in support of the public sector employees of Bangalore and Hyderabad, Locomen and LIC employees was supported by the working class of the State. In spite of attacks by INTUC hoodlums, causing death of two workers in colliery area and injuries to many, the strike was successful. Workers in the State also observed 'Solidarity Day' on 12th August '82 in support of the striking textile workers of Bombay through gate meetings and adoption of resolutions. More than 50 thousand textile workers in the State participated in the All India Textile Strike on 21st December '82 in support of the struggle of the Bombay textile workers.

Fight Against Attack on Democratic Rights and Conspiracies Against the L. F. Govt.

During the last three years, the working class had to carry on prolonged and determined struggles against the authoritarian attacks on democratic rights and against conspiracies hatched by the Cong (I) and Central Govt. against L. F. Govt. The State Cong (I) repeatedly attempted to create chaos in the State in order to have the L. F. Govt. dismissed by the Centre on the plea of break-down of law and order. The working class resolutely fought against these and defended the Left Front Govt.

The orgy of violence and murder unleashed by the Cong (I) on 3rd April '81 in support of a so-called Bundh called by them was something unprecedented. The indiscriminate attacks on public transport by the Cong (I) hoodlums including hurling of incendiary bombs resulted in death of 21 persons including a State Bus Driver, five women passengers of a State bus and a boy and injuries to many. Despite widespread violence of the Cong (I), workers in factories, coal mines, plantations worked normally and the heroic transport workers kept the trams and buses plying even at the cost of their lives and limbs. The transport workers also played a vital role in foiling the attempts

of the private bus operators to go on strike on the demand for increase in bus fares, by keeping the buses moving on the roads. At the same time in March '83, when the State Govt. due to repeated rise of prices of Petrol, Diesel etc. by the Centre was compelled to enhance the fares of public transport, the transport workers kept the buses and trams plying despite obstructions and attempts to creat chaos by Cong (I) and other anti-left front parties.

Struggle for Holding Elections :

The working class and democratic movement forced the Centre to hold the overdue by-elections in the State in June '81 through prolonged struggles. In the by-election, most of the seats were won by L. F. candidates by overwhelming majority of votes. In the Municipal elections held in May 1981 the working class and the people voted overwhelmingly for L. F. candidates. Out of 1488 seats in 87 municipalities 1004 seats were won by L. F. candidates and of this 686 seats went to the CPI(M) candidates.

The most prolonged political struggle had to be waged by the working class and democratic people of the State to force the Centre to hold the Assembly Elections in 1982. The Cong (I) and other reactionary parties spared no efforts to delay the poll, and to impose President's rule in the State by dismissing the L. F. Govt., even to the extent of going to the High Court and Supreme Court. The Centre was ultimately forced to hold the elections in June, 1982.

Working Class Struggle Against Communal and Divisive Forces.

All along this period the working class in West Bengal played a significant role in the struggle against communal and divisive forces. The serious threat to communal harmony created by Vinoba Bhave's fast unto death over the question of cow slaughter and all attempts by reactionary forces to foment communal trouble in the industrial areas was frustrated through

strong and timely measures of the L. F. Govt, Left Parties, mass organisations and constant vigilance of the working class. Similarly, the communal disturbances occurring in a village in Nadia in June 1979 could be contained speedily due to the vigilance of the working class and the people and the firm steps of the State Govt. Hundreds of workers belonging to CITU and other mass organisations rushed to the area and helped in restoring communal harmony and peace. The working class also played a positive role in maintaining communal amity during the Id and Puja festivals which were held at the same time in 1981 and 1982.

The long history of working class and democratic movement in the State and the political consciousness of the working class and people, helped during the period to keep in check the divisive forces like Jharkband Mukti Morcha, protagonists of Uttarkhand and Gorkhaland etc. which were trying to raise their heads. The CITU and other mass organisations, particularly Kishan Sabha, have a record of constant campaign against such forces which helped in containing these forces. The results of these campaigns were evident during the by-elections in 1981 and Assembly elections in 1982. In the 1981 by-election, a CPI (M) candidate was returned for the first time from the Darjeeling seat defeating the Gokha League and Cong (I) candidates. In the 1982 elections communal and divisive parties like the BJP, Muslim League, Jharkand Party and Gorkha Parishad, Amra Bangali, Christian Democratic Party could not win a single seat even though some of them were supported by the Cong (I). Only the Gorkha League got one seat in the Darjeeling non-plantation area.

It is also worth mentioning that the percentage distribution of employment to State of origin in all industries combined, West Bengal constitute only 42.53% and all other State combined constitute 57.47% in our State. Divisive forces tried to raise a slogan of employment for Sons of the Soil, but it goes to the credit of the organised Trade Union movement that it has all along fought against the divisive forces and has been able to maintain the unity of the working class.

STRUGGLE AGAINST EMPLOYER'S ATTACK

Since 1980, the employers in the State have gradually intensified their attack on the working class through lay off, lock-outs and closures. This will be evident from the figures of lock-outs during 1980, 1981 and 1982.

LOCK-OUTS

Year	No. of Cases	Men involved (in thousand)	Mandays Lost- (in lakhs)
1980	130	85.4	47.0
1981	117	142.7	99.0
1982	115	130.3	162.9

The intensity of the attack can be seen from the fact that in 1981 alone, there were 117 cases of work stoppages due to lock-outs in West Bengal affecting over 1.4 lakh workers and resulting in loss of 9.9 million man-days. This account for 66 per cent of the total man-days lost in the whole of India in 1981 due to lock outs. This shows that the intensity of the attack was much higher in West Bengal than in the rest of India. 1982 figures show that there were 115 cases of lock-out affecting 1.30 lakh workers and resulting in loss of 16.2 million man-days. These attacks have by and large affected workers in all industries, but more particularly in Jute, Plantation and Engineering industries.

Just after the signing of the 1979 tripartite agreement after the 50 day strike of Jute workers, the Jute barons started attacking the hard-won rights and benefits of the workers. They refused to accept the recommendations of the State Labour Minister on Grades & Scales of Pay and work-load of jute workers defying the earlier agreement. In the last two years the Jute Millowners started declaring lock-out in Mills after Mills in a calculated manner. In all 23 Jute Mills were kept under lock-out for varying periods from 10 months to 18 months in which over 81 thousand workers were thrown out of employment. Under the threat of lock-outs and closures the Jute

barons imposed unbearable work-load on the workers of other mills and took away many of their existing rights and benefits. They also refused to settle the workers Bonus demands for 1980 and 1981. Our disadvantage was there in fighting back through strikes.

In the last two years, the Jute Barons have also cheated lakhs of jute growers in the State of a fair price for their produce by refusing to buy raw jute during the season. The loans and advances of Rs. 100 crores given to them by the Central Govt. for buying raw jute was also not used by them for buying raw jute but was diverted to other purposes. All this time, the Central Govt. did nothing to protect the interests of the Jute workers and jute growers. The Govt. of India did not even direct the Jute barons to lift the lock-outs on Mills or take them to task for misusing the money advanced for buying raw jute. The management of the five nationalised Jute mills (NJMC) are also following similar anti-labour practices and has not implemented the agreement on grade & scale.

Led by the Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor Union (CITU) and other Left Trade Unions, the jute workers of West Bengal have been fighting heroically against these attacks. But the efforts of the BCMU and other Left Trade Unions to build up united struggle against these attacks are being frustrated by the anti-unity stand taken by a section of the T.U. movement including the UTUC (LS), BMS, and a section of INTUC. Their anti-unity activities have only helped the employers to intensify the attacks. The efforts for uniting the workers is still continuing. In the meantime a protest strike on 10th August, 1982 called by the Left Trade Unions and a section of INTUC, proved totally successful. As a result of the continuous struggle of the workers, lock-outs have been withdrawn in 18 jute mills.

Plantation Workers Struggle Against Employers, offensive

The Tea Garden workers of Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai are also facing severe attacks from their employers. On the plea of high cost and financial crisis employers in many gardens are increasing work-load and taking away the existing rights

and benefits of workers. In a number of gardens even due wages are not being paid and benefits of subsidised ration are being denied. Protests by workers against these attacks are being met with threats of closures. Already 12 gardens in Darjeeling have been closed, besides 4 other closed gardens taken over by the State Govt.

The main problem of the industry is that the tea bushes in the Darjeeling are more than 100 year old and need immediate re-planting. But the owners of big gardens, who have cornered most of the funds received from the Tea Board for re-planting, are not interested in this and have diverted the funds for other purposes. Moreover, the failure of the Tea Board to effectively promote sale of Darjeeling Tea has led to decline in export price. The medium and small gardens are however facing genuine difficulties due to lack of liquid funds and Bank finance.

Efforts are being made by the CITU to build up united movement of Tea workers against these attacks. There is a united co-ordination committee of all unions working among plantation workers in West Bengal including that of INTUC since 1966. At the call of the Co-ordination Committee plantation workers observed one day protest strike against the offensive of the employers on 24 January, 1983.

Cotton Textile And Engineering Workers Struggle

The workers of Cotton Textile industry in the State are also continuing their struggle against the employers who are refusing to honour previous agreements and to implement the recommendations of the State Labour Minister on grade & scale of pay. In the Engineering industry, managements of several factories including GKW and Gloster Cables declared lock-out for varying periods and the workers are continuing their struggle against these attacks. Although the previous tripartite agreement expired some time back, the employers of Jute, Textile and Engineering are not showing any sign to enter into new agreement on the Character of Demands submitted by the Unions on various pleas. Over 3.5 lakh Engineering workers in the

State went on a one day's strike on 16.3.83 in support of the their Charter of Dmands. The Call was given by the CITU and four other Left Trade Unions and supported by the INTUC and other trade unions. The strike was completely successful.

There was a State-wise Printing Press workers' strike on 21.1.83 on demand of implementation of minimum wages & other demands.

CLOSURES

In the last four years, closures have posed a serious threat to the livelihood and employment of workers, particularly in medium and small units. The following figures will indicate the gravity of the situation.

Year	Units Closed	Men involved.
1979	83	5409
1980	56	3830
1981	46	7364
1982	30	2688

The growing recession, lack of working capital, mismanagement, internal discord, corruption and want of marketting arrangements are some of the reasons for the sickness and closure of some units.

Through the efforts and intervention of the L.F. Govt. some units were re-opened. The figures are as follows :

Year	Units re-opened	Men involved.
1979	43	9982
1980	17	3105
1981	19	1363
1982	11	2695

(*Total reopening out of the cases occurring in the year and pending case of the previous year.)

In the course of conducting struggles against lock-outs and closures the working class is facing a new problem. To frustrate the struggles, the employers are frequently taking recourse to Law Courts and obtaining Court orders restricting the workers

right to agitate against lock-outs and closures and getting ex-parte injunctions. In such situations the L.F. Govt. is also powerless to provide any relief to the workers.

Moreover, in the case of closed or locked-out factories the workers very often expect that the L.F. Govt. will come forward to take over the factory. But this is not always possible in the absence of Central approval and also due to limited financial resources of the State Govt. and lack of Bank finance. Even then, with its limited financial resources the L.F. Govt. has already taken over and reopened a number of units. 13 of the taken over units by the State Govt. are proposed to be nationalised soon. Where the Centre itself has taken over some units through the IRCI, the units are often denied the required financial support which ultimately results in the total decay of the unit concerned. The unhelpful attitude of the Centre in this respect also aggravates the problem. The State's request to the Centre for the nationalisation of some taken over units like Inchek Tyre, National Rubber etc. has not been accepted as yet.

Second Left Front Govt. and the Changed Situation.

The installation of L. F. Govt. in the State for the Second time signifies a great victory for the working class, the people and the democratic masses. It has naturally raised high hopes and expectations among the working class and the people. But compared to 1977, when the first Left Front Govt. came to power, the State is now faced with a difficult situation and various problems. The growing economic crisis leading to closures and lock-outs in small and medium units and even some big units has placed a severe burden on the working class and the economy of the State. This is particularly being felt in Jute, Engineering and Tea industries where the employers are trying to shift the entire burden of the crisis on the workers. This has resulted not only in loss of jobs for thousands of workers and curtailment of job opportunities, but has also seriously accentuated the already acute unemployment

problem. The number of registered unemployed in the State has now reached 32.55 lakh, the highest among the States. More Employment Exchanges have been set up than before. In 1978 itself the State Govt. introduced unemployment benefit Scheme. It covers over 2 lakh unemployed. The amount of relief, though a very small sum, still it has fulfilled a long standing demand of the T. U. movement throughout the country, this being the first of its kind in India.

Economic Gains and Progressive Labour Policy of the L. F. Govt.

It is to be noted that since its formation in 1977, the L. F. Govt. has been consistently following a just and progressive labour policy fully committed to protect the interest of the working class. The democratic and T. U. rights of workers have not only been fully restored, it has been extended even to Govt. employees including right to strike, and the Police organisations have also been recognised. The age-old Service Conduct Rule framed by the British rulers has been scrapped. L.F. Govt has refused to give effect to NASA and ESMA. By strengthening the conciliation machinery it encouraged settlement through negotiations, wherever possible. In the tripartite negotiations, the L. F. Govt. always upheld the just demand and rights of the workers. Tripartite Agreements in 1979 in Engineering and Textile industries resulted in substantial wage rise and benefits. Where negotiation failed and the workers were forced to strike due to the adamant attitude of the employers, the L.F. Govt. always stood by the workers. For the first time, the working class could feel that they have a sympathetic Govt. committed to protect their interest. It helped in raising their political consciousness and in creating a new awareness about their responsibility towards the people and the Left Front Govt.

The existence of the L. F. Government made it possible for all sections of workers and employees to achieve substantial wage rise and other economic benefits' during this period. The Government enhanced minimum wages under the Minimum Wages Act in about 11 industries. In the case of State Govt. employees

and employees of Govt. run institutions, Municipalities & Educational institutions etc. the gains were achieved with the sympathetic attitude of the Govt. The recommendations of the Pay Commission on grades and scales and other economic benefits have been almost fully implemented by the L. F. Government. Despite limited financial resources, the rate of D. A. for State Govt. employees has been brought at par with that of Central Govt. employees. Six instalments of DA remain to be paid, but these will be paid.

It is also to be mentioned that the working hours of the Fire Brigade employees since its inception was 12 hours a day. The L. F. Govt. has abolished this age old practice and exploitation and introduced 8 hrs. shift.

As a result of the wage rise during the first four years, not only money wages but also real wages of workers have gone up as compared to 1976, specially in the major industries. And this has happened despite phenomenal rise in prices in this period.

Index of Money & Real Wage.

Base—1976—100

Year	C.P.I. (Calcutta Average)	Money Earnings	Real Earnings
1977	110	108.12	98.29
1978	112	120.36	107.48
1979	119	126.64	106.42
1980	129	138.65	107.48

State's Economy and Injustice by Centre.

The difficulties arising out of the growing economic crisis have further been accentuated, on the one hand by the limited financial and constitutional powers of the State, and on the other by the gross injustice against the State by the Central Govt. in the matters of new investment in the State, supply of essential raw materials, supply of institutional finance and Central assistance for refugee rehabilitation and drought relief etc.

In the last one decade or more hardly any new investment

has been made by the Centre in West Bengal. The proposals sent by the L. F. Govt. for setting up of a ship-repairing yard at Haldia, Electronic Industry at Salt Lake and some Defence establishments have not yet been sanctioned. The Petro-Chemical Complex at Haldia still awaits final clearance by the Centre. If these new projects had been sanctioned earlier it could have relieved to some extent the acute unemployment problem in the State. The Centre has also refused to take up the construction of the Second Hooghly Bridge as a Central Project. Unless Central assistance is received, work on this vital project may have to be stopped for lack of funds. In the sphere of railways practically little investment has been made.

The Centre is also discriminating against the State in the matter of supply of food-grains, kerosene, cement as well as essential raw materials. The locational advantage enjoyed by West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the matter of coal and steel has been taken away through equalisation of freight, but no such facility has been extended to the Eastern States in the case of raw materials and essential goods.

The point is that there should be equal opportunity of all the States and balanced and proportionate development, and in order to ensure that, in 1956 there should have been simultaneous equalisation of freight also for petroleum, fertilizers, Soda and Salt, several group of light and heavy chemicals, cotton, jute, sugar, paper pulp and natural gas as in the case of coal and steel. But nothing so far has been done. As a result, whatever industrial development there could be under capitalism, has been grievously hampered in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, not to speak of North East. This has immensely complicated the industrial situation in West Bengal and the working class in West Bengal is facing a problem almost like that of Cashewnut and Coir in Kerala.

Such injustice and unhelpful attitude of the Centre is also evident in the matter of issue of industrial licences either for setting up of new units or expansion of existing units in the private sector. Nationalised Banks and Public Sector financing institutions are also not coming forward to provide adequate

financial assistance for development of Industries in the State. All these have seriously hampered industrial development in the State which, to say the least, has been seriously neglected during the last two decades. This is now having a grave impact on the economy and unemployment situation of the State and, the capacity of the L. F. Govt. to provide much needed relief to the working class and the people has been seriously hamstrung.

Under the circumstances, disruptive forces like UTUC (L. S) etc. are trying frantically to mobilise workers and direct their fire against the L. F. Govt.

Therefore, the question of a centralised mass working class movement on closure, lockouts etc. and such other related socio-economic and political issues on a continuous and massive scale, with its edge directed against the Centre, to be coupled by mass direct action has become a live question for the working class of West Bengal.

Power shortage is another factor which is causing a serious problem. Frequent break-down of some power plants and consequent low generation is a fact. But due to constant efforts by the L. F. Govt. and the vital role played by our CITU Union and cadres in the SEB, average generation of power units has been much improved. But much more remains to be done. Although our Union is a minority Union, our cadres have worked hard to maintain and increase generation of the power units, sometimes even at the risk of their lives. But there are several other unions in the SEB, all of which are opposed to the Left Front and their non-cooperation is creating serious difficulties. Moreover, membership of our Union is weak in the key sectors of the generating plants.

However, even if generation from the existing power units is improved it will not even touch the fringe of the problem. The basic problem arises from the fact that, while demand for power has been rising rapidly in the last two decades, there has been a total neglect of the power needs of the whole eastern region including West Bengal. The Cong (I) Governments at the Centre and States did neither have any perspective plan nor any desire to increase the installed power capacity in this region.

The following figures will show how the power needs of the eastern region have been neglected in successive five year plans :

Total Installed Capacity after Current Plan

Western Region—12,213 MW	South Region—10,063 MW
Northern Region—10,825 MW	Eastern Region—7,145 MW

Additional Capacity—7th Plan

Western Region—4883 MW	Southern Region—4166 MW
Northern Region—5345 MW	Eastern Region—2835 MW

Installed Capacity upto 1980-Comparative figures.

	1951	—	1961	—	1980
Western Region—	422	—	1359	—	7318
Northern Region—	354	—	908	—	7907
Southern Region—	363	—	1115	—	6897
Eastern Region—	599	—	1241	—	4535

In 1951 Installed capacity was the highest in Eastern Region and in 1980 Eastern Region's installed capacity comes to the lowest.

Discriminations in Private Sector.

The discrimination practised by employers of some big industries like Indian Oxygen and Philips etc. is also posing a serious problem. The employers of these units are paying much higher wages to their workers and employees working in units located in other States, as compared to that paid to their workers in West Bengal. Such discriminstions have to be fought by the workers.

In this changed situation, the working class in the State must be made conscious of the difficulties facing the State and the L. F. Govt. due to the limited financial and consituational powers on the hand and the injustice and discriminatory attitude of the Centre on the other.

Responsibilities of workers in Taken-over Units.

Inspite of its limited resources, the L. F. Govt. has taken over some sick units. The workers and T. U. s in these units

have to realise that they have a special responsibility. Unless they make special efforts to improve the performance of those units and make them viable as early as possible, it will be difficult for the Govt. to continue to subsidise the units from its limited resources for an indefinite period. They have also to display greater consciousness regarding the difficulties of the L. F. Government before raising new demands. Unfortunately, Unions and workers under our leadership have not always displayed awareness of these responsibilities and have failed to play proper role. We have to make special efforts and raise the consciousness of workers in these units.

Our Unions and cadres in the sick units taken over by the Central Government through the IRCI, like Sen Raleigh and Sen Pandit (now nationalised), Inchek Tyre, National Rubber, Bengal Potteries, National Tannery etc. have, however, displayed a better sense of responsibility. They have made constant efforts to improve performance and have demanded sufficient funds and raw materials from the IRCI, to enable them to increase production and make these units viable. They are also vigilant about the mismanagement and corruption of the bureaucrats.

Role of the workers in Essential Services

The workers of State undertakings, particularly of essential services like Electricity, Transport, Hospital, Milk Supply etc. have a special role to play. Unless performance of these undertakings are improved, it will not only increase the sufferings of the people but will also put an unbearable burden on the financial resources of the State Government. Our Union and cadres in the SEB & State Transport have generally shown awareness of this responsibility and are playing a proper role. But the same cannot be said about the other undertakings and essential services. Our Unions and cadres in these services must set an example before other workers by improving their performance even by sacrificing their self-interest. Unless this is done, the worker in general cannot be enthused to put in a better per-

formance. Some of our conscious cadres do perform their duties with responsibility, but we have not been able to inculcate the same awareness among other workers.

Our Organisational Weaknesses

The total employment in the organised sector (both public and private) in this State is about 25 lakhs of which total membership of our CITU Unions comes to about 7 lakhs. Industrywise break-up of our Unions is given in Annexure—A. Of the 15 lakh public sector employees, those in State and Central Govt. establishments, Banks, Insurance etc. have separate organisations of their own and they are our staunch allies in various movements and campaigns.

Although it is a fact that the CITU has influence over a larger section of organised workers than what is reflected in membership of our Unions, it can not be denied that our Unions are weak in some important industries like Textile, Port & Dock and some essential services like Municipalities, Hospitals etc.

One of our main weakness lies in our failure to organise the workers in the unorganised sector. We have Unions in some major industries in the unorganised sector like Bidi, Rickshaw, Press, Hosiery, Handloom and Powerloom weavers, but organisational strength is still weak in these industries for lack of proper guidance from the State Centre. Similarly, we have some influence in Private Road Transport. There are Unions in Carrier Transport and Private Bus but their influence is limited. We have very little strength among Burgemen, Contractors' workers, workers in FCI and other go-downs. Because of this we have no means of properly guiding these workers in their struggles. The wild-cat strikes observed by these workers create problems for the Left Front Government in the matter of supply of essential commodities, besides creating law and order problems, which is taken advantage of by the anti-Left Front forces.

The question of organising and guiding the struggles of Construction workers is also posing a problem. By the very

nature of their work, the construction workers have no security of job, since they become surplus as soon as the construction work is completed. Slowing down of development work has also made it impossible to absorb the workers of a completed construction project in other projects. The employment policy initiated by the L. F. Government provides for employment of construction workers and apprentices to fill up 20% of the jobs in the completed project. But this is not enough. We have to consider, how this problem can be tackled.

The attitude taken by the Central Govt. regarding CITU Unions in some major Central Govt. undertakings is also posing a problem before the CITU and the working class. Our Forward Seamen's Union of India is the majority union among seamen in the Calcutta, Haldia and other ports. Its strength was amply reflected during the recent 72 hour successful strike of Seamen. But the Central Govt. refuses to recognise the Union. On the other hand, the Centre is threatening to stop recruitment of Seamen through Calcutta port unless the activities of our Union is restricted. Similar attitude has been taken by the bureaucrats of the IOC (a Central Govt. undertaking). The recognised Union was so long affiliated with AITUC, but it has all along been playing a pro-management and anti-L. F. Govt. role. Recently the Union has overnight changed its allegiance and has taken the affiliation of INTUC. Although our Union has a sizeable membership, it is not recognised and is not even allowed to participate in negotiations with the management. Moreover, in collusion with management the recognised Union is often suspending supply of essential petroleum products on flimsy grounds to put the people into difficulty and thereby to discredit the L. F. Govt.

Working Women

Another weakness is our failure to organise the working women, particularly in the unorganised sector. In the organised industries like Jute, Textile, Engineering the number of women workers have been drastically reduced through retrenchments

etc., but our CITU Unions could not be activated to take up the cause of the women workers earnestly.

Problems of Women Workers

In West Bengal, the number of women workers is the largest in the tea industry. Besides this, women workers are mainly employed in some small scale industries, especially electronics industry. The number of women workers still remaining in the Jute and Textile industries is very small.

About 50 per cent of the workers in the tea industry are women workers. Since the birth of the trade union movement in the Tea industry, women workers have been playing a glorious role. In the past many women workers lost their jobs and were even driven out of the gardens with their families for taking part in trade union movement of tea workers. They became victims of the hated 'hatabahar' system of the past. In 1955, during the strike of the tea workers of the entire Darjeeling hills, the police brutally opened fire on the procession of the striking workers of the Margaret Hope Tea Estate. As a result six workers, including two women workers, were killed. In 1973-74, the women workers of the Tea industry in West Bengal carried on a prolonged struggle on the demand for equal wages for equal work, and realised their demands.

In a word it may be said that, the history of trade union movement in tea gardens is the history of women workers struggling side by side with the male workers. But the participation of women workers in the day to day work of the trade unions is very little for obvious reasons. For they have to look after their children and household works.

Keeping these difficulties in mind we should still try to give responsibilities of trade union movement to the women workers as much as possible and bring them up to positions of leadership.

In the coal-mines also, about 10 per cent are women workers. They also participate in trade union movement jointly with the men workers.

Besides the ordinary trade union demands, women workers have some demands of their own. Women employees who work in office, courts and hospitals as nurses and attendants also have their special demands, besides the trade union demands for wages, allowances, better service conditions etc.

Without going into detailed explanation of these demands it may be said that, wherever there are women workers in unions under our leadership a sub-committee of women workers should be set up to give special attention to these demands and for the purpose of building up movement on them.

One thing must be understood clearly that, women workers must be in their respective unions and along with that they must also join the women's organisation and must organise movements on their demands with the active support of the Mahila Samity. The role of the women workers must never be contradictory with their role as members of the Mahila Samity, rather these must be complementary to each other.

Working Class & the Peasantry

In the past, the working class in West Bengal had fought many battles and even shed their blood for the demands of the peasantry. During the devastating floods of 1978 and the recent drought the working class responded magnificently in providing relief to the victims in rural areas. But by and large we have failed to make the working class aware of the tremendous achievements of the L. F. Govt. for the peasantry and the rural poor and the changes taking place in the rural areas. This lack of awareness has retarded the task of developing worker-peasant alliance and the working class, by and large, has failed to discharge its proper role. We have to consider seriously, how this weakness can be overcome.

Although the L. F. Govt. has been in power in this State for the last six years, a major weakness on our part has been our failure to introduce some progressive labour Bills even at the risk of their assent being withheld by the Governor or the Centre. We could also have done much more for improving and extending social security and Labour Welfare measures like

E. S. I. Industrial Housing etc. We have to consider how best to overcome this weakness in the coming years.

OUR TASKS :

Considering the entire situation the State Committee shall have to organise working class struggle on day to day economic demands on the one hand and at the same time we must resolutely oppose the move of the Central Govt. to hand over the taken over units to their original owners, fight back the attack of the employers particularly against the violations of the subsisting agreements, curtailment of existing rights and benefits and imposition of more and more work-loads. Our major tasks should be :

1. To organise campaign against the conspiracy of U. S. imperialists for a nuclear war and for world peace. Wider participation of working class in the anti-war campaign.

2. To organise united movement against authoritarian attacks on the working class and the people, for defence of democracy and hard won rights of workers and against price rise and the anti-people policies of the Central Govt.

3. To make the working class conscious of the changed situation, when a Left Front Govt. is in power in a State under the overall bourgeoisie-landlord State structure and the limited financial and constitutional powers of the L. F. Govt. To make the working class politically conscious about the need for changing the present social system.

4. To organise movements against the Centre's discrimination toward the State.

5. To resist and defeat all conspiracies of reactionary forces against the L. F. Govt and to defend and protect the L. F. Govt at all costs.

6. To fight against communal and divisive forces and to defend national integrity.

7. More emphasis should be given to organise the unorganised workers.

8. To give special emphasis on women workers and to encourage them to take part in day to day activities of the Union, to see that they are promoted in Union leadership.

Annexure—A

Industry :	No. of Unions	Member-ship	No. of Unions	Member-ship
ENGINEERING			376	1,22,545

TEXTILE

Cotton	38	30,288		
Powerloom	19	5,266		
Handloom	4	5,615		
Wool	2	760		
Rayon	1	1,249		
Belting	2	228		
Hosiery	5	2,722		
Jute	10	1,11,461		
Silk	3	934		
			84	1,58,523

CHEMICAL

Pharmaceutical	34	9,008		
General	33	1,775		
Plastic	12	4,192		
Dyes, Matches & Shellac	5	1,411		
Cosmetic, Toilet	4	1,788		
Heavy	3	1,447		
Paint & Varnish	18	1,042		
Acid & Fertilizer	2	795		
Fat & Oil	9	1,821		
			120	23,279

Industry :	No. of Unions	Member- ship
ROPE	3	776
SUGAR	1	301
COIR	1	200
POTTERY	17	7,646
GLASS	17	4,630
LEATHER & TANNERY	7	2,059
LOCAL BODIES	11	9,208
RURAL WORKER	8	1,285
TRANSPORT	46	46,751
FOOD & DRINK	37	9,433
PLANTATION	3	69,093
AGRICULTURE	2	4,105
PORT & DOCK	2	18,608
ELECTRIC, POWER & Gas	11	24,099
BANKING	3	1,260
MINING	2	29,817
STEEL	3	33,432
CEMENT	2	387
PRINTING	27	8,156
BUILDING, CIVIL ENGINEERING	16	3,786
RUBBER	22	9,079
WOOD	15	2,762
PAPER	21	7,684
PERSONAL SERVICE-Hospital	14	1,150
HOTEL	23	6,438
TOBACCO	25	54,014
SALARIED & PROFESSIONAL	79	27,383
MISCELLANEOUS	22	7,523
TOTAL :	1020	6,89,112

Annexure—B

CONTRIBUTION OF CITU UNIONS TO FUNDS

1. Tripura Relief Fund	78,224
2. Bihar Sarif Relief	6,088
3. Orissa Cyclone & Flood Relief	20,000
4. To P. L. O. representatives	60,495
5. Bombay Textile Workers' Strike	10,000
6. Drought Relief Fund	1,18,000