

THE VOICE

OF

THE WORKING WOMAN



Vol II No. 3

May-June 1982

50 P.

CITU Greet Working Women on May Day

"The CITU greets the working women of India on the occasion of this year's May Day. Last year has seen a big spurt in the activities and struggles of the working women. The CITU assures them that its Unions will continue to work for their increased participation in the Trade Union movement so that they occupy their legitimate position in it.

The CITU is confident that Indian Working Women will continue to raise their voice against the nuclear war plans of the USA and join with women of other countries to protect peace."

B.T. Ranadive
President-CITU



A huge demonstration in Bombay. Over 5000 women rallied from different

IN THIS ISSUE

Sadistic Treatment of a Working Girl	2
A Visit to a Cashewnut Factory	3
News from the States	5
A 17-Year Fight for Recognition	7
Delhi Dharna—Social Welfare Women Workers	8
Where Women Outnumbered Men	10
Women in the Bombay Textile Strike	11
AIDWA Executive Meets	12
Of Witches, Midwives and Nurses	13
The Case of the Bradford Twelve	15
Haryana Govt's Shameful Petition	18
Luxury Hotels, Yes — Schools, No.	18
Banned Drugs Used on Women in India	20

Cover Page:

Demonstration in Bombay, Mrinal Gore (fourth from right), to her right Kamal Desai, Ahilya Rangnekar and Pramila Dandavate, representing the Bhartiya Mahila Federation, Shramik Mahila Samiti, Shramjivi Mahila Sabha, Anti-Price Rise Women's Cttee. etc.

Sadistic Treatment Of A Working Girl

THE horrifying story of the mysterious death in December last of 18-year old Mary Vakkachan, in a contractor's camp at Veraval, Gujarat, which has just come to light, reveals once again how labour laws are totally disregarded and what is the treatment meted out to the poor in this society. Taking advantage of the mounting unemployment, unscrupulous contractors are luring away men and women both, to work and live in distant places under sub-human conditions, often ending as in this case, in agonising death.

Mary Vakkachan, who had been ailing for some time, died on the night of December 28, 1981. It was first alleged that she died while being taken to hospital, and the police initially accepted this explanation. Then when it was alleged that facts were being suppressed with police agreement, the case was handed over to the Crime Branch. And rightly so, for many questions remain unanswered: why for example, did a police constable take her to hospital? Why was a post-mortem performed the following morning if death was due to illness? Why was the post-mortem report released only after a week?

Two Totally Different Stories

The contractor alleges that Mary fell ill on December 3, was medically treated, and the relevant bills for purchase of medicines submitted to the police, but discrepancies have been found here also. The story as told by Mary's sisters, who were employed along with her, is very different.

The three sisters were brought to Veraval some time in August, 1981, along with quite a few other girls by K. Norbert, a labour contractor, retained by M/s Ravi Ratna Exporters, Ltd., a firm owned by a Mr. M.P. Chopra, for being employed in processing sea-

(Contd. on page 9)

A Visit to A Cashewnut Factory

THE cashew industry employs more than 80 per cent women, mainly in the departments of shelling, peeling and grading. Men workers are used for roasting the kernels, taking out the oil and storing it, keeping the finished product in the oven and again in the cold storage. The factory we visited in Mangalore had 475 women and 25 men.

The Shelling Department

As you enter the department of shelling, you will see women sitting in rows, with heaps of roasted black kernels, covered with a white ash, breaking the shell and trying to take out the whole nut. A few women could do the job well, but a large part of the women were not able to bring the fruit out whole and pieces of broken cashews were to be seen in baskets.

"How much do you get for 1 k.g.?" I enquired. "The rate is only 65 paise for 1 kilo if you can get the cashew out without breaking it." "How much can you earn this way?" One woman showed me two baskets, in which broken pieces were stored. Wages are given only for those nuts which are not broken. The job seemed difficult for most of the women. That meant a number of women lose the wages for the day. The piece-rated worker gets 65 paise per kg of whole nuts, plus Rs. 2 as dearness allowance, and the daily-rated workers, Rs. 8.86 per day, including DA.

From conversation and from the nature of work in this particular shelling department, it appears women would not be able to earn even Rs. 4 to 5 daily for work which begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m. The women workers wanted that the broken cashews should be paid for, if not at full, at least at half rates, i.e., 33 paise, as the women in the peeling department were getting. The management not only sells the broken cashews in the market but even the smallest granules are sieved in different varieties and sold to biscuit factories and bakeries, bringing in considerable income to the factory. Why then should the women be deprived of a small

wage in the shelling department? The discontent was sharply visible among them.

Peeling and Grading

In the department of peeling and grading the work is somewhat easier and rates are Rs. 7.20 per kg., including DA. Women are paid here for the peeling and grading for the broken cashews also. The cashews are divided into ten grades: the first grade the big fruit nut, has a value of Rs. 90 a kilo at cost price. It is sold for a much higher price when exported to the Soviet Union, USA and other countries. Of course our common Indian people cannot afford to purchase this product! It is a luxury even for the rich people!

The factory has a system whereby all the 475 women work in every department, by rotation for a certain period.

Coffee Curing

The factory has also a coffee curing department where about 50-60 women sort out different varieties of coffee seeds. They are given 'tasks', quotas, which are to be finished in a day. During our visit to this department, we suddenly found the General Secretary of the Union being gheraoed by a number of women over a dispute that had arisen that day. Gyanamma, one of the leaders of the Union, appeared on the scene. The point of dispute was that the Minimum Wage agreement and the terms arrived at on April 1, 1982, were being broken, by the introduction of different methods for sorting out the coffee seeds, requiring extra time and labour, and resulting thereby in lesser pay packets per day.

Formerly for one 'task' the women were paid Rs. 4.10, and they used to finish about 3-4 tasks a day, earning about Rs. 10-12. The management noting this, mixed different kinds of seeds together, which meant more time to separate the seeds which were of inferior quality. Some women could not earn even the minimum wage fixed. This had created the trouble. All the women workers decided

then and there to hold a dharna and they went out demanding to see the manager!

Other Facilities

Last year the women workers received 13 per cent bonus and the same quantum is expected this year. The women get maternity leave for three months and benefits, paid according to their daily rate. A few beds are reserved for them in the ESI hospital in Mangalore. However the prescribed medicines are never available at the dispensary and they have to spend money from their own pocket.

Tea, coffee, snacks and any item in the canteen is subsidised and available to the workers for only 7 paise. This does help the workers to make up for some of the loss in wages, especially in the shelling department. The Union is adamant on continuing this 7 paise rate against the insistence of the management to increase it to 14 paise. There is a creche for the children, which was quite good compared to what we have observed in other industries. The children have cradles, clothes, toys, milk and so on; an ayah is present. Gyanamma came forward and proudly told us that because of their insistence this creche came into existence.

Health Hazards

The manager of the factory was categorical that they had removed the health hazards created by the injurious oil while the kernels are roasted in the ovens, and elsewhere. The oil is very bad for the fingers. Hence the throwing of dry ash on the roasted kernels. But even then the women sustain injuries. The fingers should have no contact with the oil. But often just the opposite happens. In another factory where 550 women are working under the same management, every woman is provided with a small shell-breaking machine. The output of work here is naturally greater than in the factory we visited. On inquiry as to why this mechanised process by which the shell is easily broken and the cashewnut comes out whole, is not used in the first factory, the Secretary explained that greater injury was inflicted on the fingers when using this machine! "We refused to put the machine here in spite of the manager appealing to the women that they could earn much more than

what they are earning at present". An interesting episode took place at the time when the Minimum Wage Committee of Karnataka visited this particular factory three months ago which clearly explains why: The CITU General Secretary represented the Union on the Committee. He took the opportunity to ask the following questions to women workers, in the presence of the Committee members.

- "Are you able to comb your hair yourself"?
- "No".
- "Can you grind the masala at home"?
- "No".
- "Can you wash your clothes"?
- Again "No".
- "Why is this"?

— "After working in this department for a month our fingers start burning because of the extra oil coming out while breaking the shell with the help of the machine. Boils, abscesses and other injuries appear on the hands..... The oil is very harmful. Some sort of oil is given to us to use while breaking the shell, but it is not possible to use it before handling every shell; it takes too much time, and no purpose is served".

The fingers of these women look as though they have been affected with leprosy. It was but natural, therefore, that the union should think twice before accepting the offer of the manager to use the machines in this factory too. No doubt the work becomes easier, and the output is three times greater. But the union has not accepted this because of the oil health hazards. I inquired whether protective gloves would not lessen the danger. This has not yet been tried. It is questionable whether the management would be ready to spend so much money on gloves, that too for unskilled women workers.

Demands of the Workers

1. The main demand of the workers is an increase of Rs. 2 in wages, with dearness allowance according to the consumer price index.

(Contd. on page 19)

News from the States

Baroda

THERE are more than 6000 working Women in Baroda alone, belonging to different unions in the city. A Coordination Committee of Working Women set up here only recently has on it representatives of women in the LIC, GIC, Banks, Universities, Government employees, Panchayat offices, Rationing offices, the GPCL, ONGC, Sarabhai, Jyoti and Novino Companies, etc.

Working Women's Conference

The Committee convened a conference in which 250-300 working women participated, to draw up a Charter of Demands. The charter touches on all aspects affecting women, as workers, as women and as citizens, such as the demand for security of service, protection against molestation, rising prices. The Charter was presented to the Collector. While accepting only the demand for introduction of separate rest rooms for women in Government offices, he asked the delegation to meet him again regarding their other demands.

At the same time, at the meeting of the Baroda Corporation, the women Corporators moved for and obtained sanction for the building of a hostel for working women. The Committee then went in delegation to the Mayor that the amount of Rs. one and a half lakh sanctioned was inadequate for the purpose and should be increased. The Mayor accepted the point, promising that the project would be taken up this year.

In order to take up the demand for arrangement of special buses for working women or special seat reservation, the Committee has begun collecting information from women at different bus stands to find out the number of women travelling, the peak times and routes. Side by side the demand for creches in offices is being taken up, and an enquiry into what the requirements will be.

A nurse has come to the Committee with her grievance of not receiving the full remuneration for her work, according to her quali-

cations. All representations to the authorities having brought no response, the case is now to be taken up in the courts. Women advocates of Baroda have promised whatever legal aid that will be required.

The Committee has also taken up the grievances of women working in the Panchayat offices. These mainly relate to too frequent transfers from one village to another, where under some technical rule, they are prevented from returning home at night even where this is feasible. Nurses have also compulsorily to remain at night in the village, whereas no such rule applies to male clerks. The matter has been raised with the Panchayat Officer.

Even though the Committee has been functioning for only a short while, the neglect of working women's needs is sharply brought out in the manner working women have turned to the Committee for redressing their grievances. It is our task now to convince these women and their associations and unions to take up and the fight for these demands.

Nalini Mehendale

Kerala

From January 11-16, a programme of action jointly organised by a number of women's and other mass organisations was undertaken against repression and the cancellation of the various relief measures introduced by the LDF Government. These measures included the agricultural workers' pension scheme, unemployment allowance, an efficient scheme of public distribution of essential commodities, provision for creches for working women in urban and rural areas, and the adult literary programmes. Hundreds of women campaigned, wearing badges, selling pamphlets, picketting — fifty village offices were picketed exclusively by women. February 26, was observed as a Protest Day; demonstrations and meetings were held in all the talukas, addressed only by women.

Steps are being taken to organise the women teachers in the Balwadis, and train volunteers in every village.

West Bengal

During the January 19 strike goondas attacked Dulu Mazumdar, a leading member of the Mahila Samiti at Birbhum, Minathu Sen Gupta of Hasirhat, and raided the house of Maya Banerjee and attacked her daughter-in-law. Protest demonstrations were held at Birbhum and 24-Parganas.

From March 29 to April 5, 1982, an 8-day jatha had been organised from Purulia to Calcutta, a distance of 305 kms, on 16 demands, to focus attention on the needs of this backward region. The demands included opening of new railway lines, broadening and extending the existing railway tracks, establishing new industries, and a fair policy for recruitment to Government services. More than 200 women from Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapur, Howrah and Hooghly participated.

Tripura

The Tripura CITU, meeting in its Fifth State Conference, decided to convene a State Convention of Working Women at Agartala. The dates of the Conference will be fixed in consultation with the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, to enable fraternal participation from the more experienced units in other States.

Bhilai

The Madhya Pradesh Committee of the CITU is holding a Women's Convention on June 3 and 4, 1982 at Bhilai, to which the Secretary of the All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women, Vimal Ranadive, has been invited to attend and address.

Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu State Committee of the CITU in its meeting on March 26-28, 1982, took a decision to hold Working Women's Conventions in Madras, Madurai, Nilgiris, Kanyakumari and Salem.

(Contd. on page 16)

WBSLIDC Serving the Small Tanners/Artisans

- * A leather factory in Tangra Area of Calcutta with the most modern equipment to assist small and cottage units in the manufacture of quality leather.
- * Marketing arrangement for leather goods produced by the workers engaged in the industry through the Corporation.
- * Supply of necessary raw materials and technical know-how to the small industrial units and leather artisans.
- * A new project in India—Leather Board plant out of chrome shavings to be set up at Calcutta.
- * Determination to forge further ahead with the co-operation of tannery workers, leather artisans and technologists.

**THE WEST BENGAL STATE LEATHER
INDUSTRIES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.**

**2 & 3, Black Burn Lane (4th floor)
Calcutta-700 012**

A 17-Year Fight For Recognition

UNBELIEVABLE as it may seem, a group of nurses attached to the S.E. Railway Hospital, Garden Reach, have been fighting for recognition as Staff Nurses, for the last seventeen years — without success.

In 1965, when there was an acute shortage of Staff Nurses, they were recruited as Auxiliary Nurses and posted to this hospital. They expected that in the course of a reasonable time, they would be promoted to the posts of Staff Nurses, taking into consideration their efficiency and practical experience. During all these years they have been doing exactly the same nature of duties as that of a Staff Nurse in the wards, as there were no specific and separate duties for a Staff Nurse which they, though designated as Auxiliaries, were not doing.

At Your Own Cost

Several appeals in the past for their regularisation as Staff Nurses met with the very curious response that, since they were not holding the Senior Nursing Certificate, promotion was out of the question until and unless they made their own arrangements, at their own cost and forfeiting their due leave to undergo training for the S.N.C., from a private centre.

This response is curious from two aspects: all other categories of Railway Staff are given duty leave to undergo training in their respective professional lines, whenever necessary, at the Railway's expense. Secondly, neither within Calcutta, nor in the surrounding area, was there, or is there now, any private nursing school where training for the Senior Nursing Certificate is given. The conditions laid down by the Railway Board were, in other

words, impossible to fulfill. On the other hand, there actually exists a Railway Nursing Training Centre at Danapur, Eastern Railway and the nurses have repeatedly requested that they be sent there, by the Railways, for the requisite training and certification. Again, the request has not been conceded.

Stagnation in Pay Scale

There is discrimination in another way also. By grace of the Third Pay Commission, their scales of pay were so fixed that they are all facing stagnation at the scale of Rs. 350. Representation on this was first made as far back as 1975, and is still pending. Moreover, they have been deprived of the special privilege being enjoyed by other Nursing and female Health Staff of the Medical Department, of getting one class higher pass on the railways.

The General Manager, S.E. Railway, has endorsed their representation. Both the recognised unions as well as the S.E. Railway administration recognise that these Auxiliary Nurses have been performing the same duties as Staff Nurses and therefore are eligible for, and merit the pay and facilities attached to the posts of Staff Nurses. The matter was last represented by the General Manager in June, 1980. But the Railway Board refuses to listen.

Not only has the All-India Coordination Committee taken up the case with a letter from its General Secretary to the Prime Minister in April of this year (in reply it has been informed that the Railway Ministry has been advised to take appropriate action) but the S.E. Railway Union has all along been actively pursuing this case of the Auxiliary Nurses, as it has the case of mazdoor and other women workers on this section of the railways. □

DELHI DHARNA

Social Welfare Center Workers

SINCE April 27, 1982, the women workers in the Training-cum-Production Centres run by the Directorate of Social Welfare Centre of Delhi Administration, have been on dharna.

The women, numbering about 600, most of whom are refugees, originally from Pakistan, have been employed to stitch the clothes of class IV employees. From 1947 the Department was under the Government of India and then transferred to the Delhi Administration in 1974. The women are working in 19 centres spread all over Delhi.

The working conditions and wages in these 19 centres are deplorable. Generally, 30-35 women work at each centre. The women have to sit on the floor, even in winter on "durries" which are in rags. There is no proper lighting arrangements, hence they are forced to work in the open verandah even during the summer months. There are no adequate fans and ventilation and they have to huddle together while working, due to lack of space.

Though they have been working in these centres for more than 30 years, they are still treated as piece-rated workers, and have not been regularised so far. Thus they are deprived of all benefits. In addition they have to pay from their pocket for the raw material, such as thread, buttons, buckles, machine oil, and repairing of the sewing machines. These workers earn from Re. 1 for pyjama and bags, to a maximum of Rs. 33.35 for woollen overcoats for men. Their average monthly income is Rs. 125 to 150, out of which the Administration deducts 25 per cent on the plea of maintenance charges. The most inhuman part of their work is having to carry huge bundles of raw materials as well readymade material to and from the trucks, on their heads, to their centres, some of which are on the first floor.

Most of these women are in their 70's but they are forced to work in these harrowing

conditions because they have no other source of livelihood. Their helplessness is being utilised to exploit them in the most inhuman manner. From 1974 there had been no revision in the wage rates, though the wages in other departments were revised. When the department was transferred to Delhi Administration in 1974, the wage-rates of these workers were actually revised, but the bureaucrats did not implement the revised rates till 1978.

Threatened Retrenchment

Recently, the Directorate has decided to shift its Handicraft shop situated in E Block at Connaught Place, to the Shanker Market Centre where other piece-rate workers are already working. Apart from there being practically no space to accommodate the shop, the Administration is bent upon shifting in which case these women will have to be retrenched.

The women went to see the Director, Mr. K. Nath, at Jamnagar House, with a request not to shift the shop. However, he blatantly replied that the existing number of centres would be reduced to one only.

It is alleged that the present shop in Connaught Place is being given in return for some personal benefit to some officers. It is necessary to enquire into the matter so that any underhand dealing done in this regard is brought to light.

The Untraceable Orders

On May 1, Sri R.S. Raj, Secretary-cum-Director, Training-cum-Production Centre, visited the shop with Sri K. Nath, Chief of the Rehabilitation Services, and gave a verbal assurance that the Chief Secretary had countermanded the orders for shifting the shop. When the women requested him to show the order, he asked Mr. Nath to do so. Mr. Nath, however, refused to produce them.

(Contd. on page 17)

SADISTIC TREATMENT (from page 2)

food for export. A meagre sum of Rs. 150 was paid as advance to her parents.

In a letter written to the DSP, Junagadh on January 3, 1982, demanding a thorough enquiry into the circumstances under which his daughter died, the father, Mr. M.A. Vakkachan has quoted from a letter written by his daughter just before her death. In it Mary had said that they were not properly looked after with the result that they became sick and even then were not given proper treatment or medicine. Instead they were intimidated and threatened not to reveal their plight to their parents. Mary asked her father to call all of them back, without mentioning about the letter, by sending a telegram care of the contractor saying the father was unwell. Otherwise the parents would see only the dead bodies of their daughters.

A catholic priest, Father Josseph Maduraveli, who performed the last rites of Mary, told a press correspondent that he had distinctly noticed marks resembling burn brandings on the left foot and left arm of the girl, after the post-mortem, when the body was handed over for the last rites. The two sisters have also since left service and gone home.

Miss Amini Vakkachan in a petition to the police submitted on January 29, 1982 has pointed out that they were not allowed to write to their parents without showing the letter to the contractor and his men. Similarly the letters from home were censored by them. The three girls did not know any other language except Malayalam.

Sexual Exploitation

According to Amini, about 50 girls, all contract labour from Kerala were accommodated in a closed block of nine rooms along with 12 males, bachelors. The correspondent who visited the dormitory accompanied by the contractor, Mr. Norbert, also saw for himself that the contractor and his men were living in the same premises with the girls. Amini has pointed out that some of the girls residing there were willing accomplices and joined the males over drinks. Some of these girls danced and slept with the males.

She has identified the girls and the men by name. Those girls who refused to join in were ill-treated.

She also narrated an incident when her sister was summoned to a gathering of males inside the dormitory. When she refused she was dragged to one room while the two sisters were shut up in another. When Mary emerged from the room about an hour later her blouse was torn from the left shoulder and there were nail scratch marks on it. Her skirt was stained with dirt and blood. Next morning she confessed to her sister that she had been raped and, "If I am living it is a shame for you and our family". According to Amini, it was after this that she fell seriously sick. All efforts to persuade the contractor to take her to a doctor were in vain. Instead she was taken to a dargah on the ground that she was possessed by evil spirits. A perusal of her post-mortem report clearly brings out that a red and black cotton thread lay wound round the right arm. Such a thread is normally tied as an exorcism ritual.

Sadistic Torture

Eye witness Amini has said that during the early part of the day on which Mary died she was subjected to brandings, in her seriously ill state, on her left hand and feet. Later camphor was placed in her hands and burnt. Since Mary began shrieking in agony and her sisters also started crying loudly, the volume of music from the record player was raised to drown out their voices. The two sisters, she said, were forcefully thrown out of the room which was bolted. Around 9 p.m. Mary's body was taken out of the room. Later, Amini said, she came to know from the other girls that her sister had died. Vittamma, her younger sister who is reported to have witnessed the ill-treatment meted out to Mary, also became unconscious and was admitted to hospital.

According to one version, Mary was taken to hospital in an auto-rickshaw from the dormitory, while according to another she was brought to the hospital in a black Ambassador car. According to Amini, the contractor and his men are said to have threatened the two sisters that if a word was uttered about what happened therein, they would be severely dealt

(Contd. on page 17)

Where the Women Outnumbered the Men

THE Fourth Conference of the Karnataka State Beedi Workers' Federation was held at Buntwal, on April 24 and 25, 1982. This was perhaps the first State Conference where the women delegates outnumbered the men. Usually, in spite of women making up the majority in an industry, it is the men who are always in the forefront, and with their larger numbers dominate the proceedings. This time, out of a total of around 110 delegates, and observers, 60 were women and 50 men. Four out of the six districts where the beedi industry is concentrated were represented at the Conference.

The age-wise composition of the delegates showed that a large number of the women delegates were between 18 and 25 years of age. In fact as many as 83 of the total 110 delegates were below 40 years. The youngest delegate was a girl of 18, Jalaja, from Kundapur district.

There are more than five and a half lakh workers engaged in the work of rolling beedies in Karnataka. Women, and particularly Muslim women, form a large part of this workforce, and are one of the most exploited sections of the working class.

Contract Labour

The principal cause and source of the severe exploitation remains the contract system for recruitment of labour, where it is not the actual employer who hires the worker, but his intermediaries, the contractor. These contractors then deal with their wages and service conditions. There are various and very profitable ways in which the employers gain through this arrangement — the contractor, like all intermediaries makes his 'cut'. Firstly, whatever small benefits are available according to the provisions of the Beedi and Cigar workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, do not reach them fully.

Effecting illegal deductions from wages in the name of an arbitrarily fixed 'leaf average', collecting an extra bundle of beedi per

thousand beedies rolled, entering the names of the husbands in the records when the actual worker is the wife so as to deprive her of maternity benefit, rejecting the beedis on the pretext of not conforming to standards, etc., are some of the ways in which the contractors cheat the workers. Often beedi leaves are brought by the manufacturers from Madhya Pradesh. On the way, if there is rain, the leaves get spoilt. But the entire loss due to damage to the leaves is shifted to the workers by means of the system of 'leaf average' and the necessary deductions are made from their wages. Delegate after delegate who spoke at the Conference expressed their anger at this exploitation as well as their readiness to sacrifice for its elimination.

Conference Demands

Placing abolition of the contract system as the central demand, the Conference also demanded Central intervention in the Supreme Court case which seeks to deny the facility of Provident Fund to beedi workers, plus receipts for the P.F. deductions made so far; a 20 per cent bonus to beedi rollers to bring them on par with the office staff.

As part of the programme of agitation to realise these demands, the Conference called on beedi workers throughout Karnataka to conduct satyagraha and picketing before Government offices and the offices of beedi manufacturers on May 24, 1982, in the taluk and district headquarters towns.

Historic Rally

The big procession and the 10,000-strong rally in the small town of Buntwal on the evening of April 25 was a unique occurrence for the townspeople. Men and women beedi workers had come from different centres of Dakshina Kannada and Mangalore, a distance of over 32 kms. Singing songs, playing lathis & 'swords', in their white saris and red blouses,

(Contd. on page 16)

Women Workers Fight in Bombay Textile Strike

FOR the last three and a half months, since January 18, 1982, 2,50,000 textile workers of Bombay have been on strike, among whom are many women workers. Many of them are members of our Shramik Mahila Sangh (SMS), other members are the wives of textile workers. All of them therefore know, first-hand, the hardships that such a long drawn-out strike entails. But these hardships, far from demoralising them, has only served to strengthen their resolve to bear the burden and carry on the struggle. Special mention must be made here of the women workers of the Prakash Cotton Mills, who last year battled for bonus where over 25 have come forward to join the SMS, and many others are its supporters. The workers of this mill have been on strike now in all for over six months. Towards the end of March, two months after the general textile strike began, some members of the factory management entered the factory at night armed with tins of kerosene, with the intention of setting it on fire. The picketting workers, including several women, getting news of this, rushed to the factory and prevented the management agents from carrying out their plan. The matter was reported to the police, who of course, took no action. The women workers of this mill have been very active participants right from the beginning in all actions, attending all meetings and taking part in all processions and demonstrations.

Solidarity Support

Throughout the strike, in different parts of the city, from different sections have come expressions of support, both moral and material, for the strike — mass collections of money and grain for the strikers by various

organisations, CITU, the Democratic Youth Federation, Left parties, etc. In a recent mass collection drive on April 6, 35 women activists led by Ahilya Rangnekar made the rounds of the busy and popular shopping centre around Dadar Railway Station and in just two hours from 4-6 p.m. from this one centre alone, collected Rs. 800.

April 1 Morcha

The most significant action to date has been the preparations for and the actual 1000-strong women's demonstration on April 1, jointly organised by the Shramik Mahila Sangh and the Bharatiya Mahila Federation, in support of the Textile strike.

To prepare for this march, joint women's meetings big and small, were held in different mill areas, for housewives and women workers of China Mill, Jupiter, Morbag and Prakash Cotton. Quite often the meetings were organised and addressed by the women workers themselves, besides leaders of the women's organisations. On March 30, the women activists went round in a jeep holding street corner meetings all over the working class areas, to which came men as well as women, in large numbers. Their main appeal was to the women to participate in the April 1 solidarity demonstration.

Their efforts were well rewarded, for in response to the entire campaign and earlier work, more than a 1000 women turned up to take part in this unprecedented and exclusive women's procession. Of these nearly 400-500 women, textile workers from seven to eight

(Contd. on p. 19)

AIDWA MEETS

THE Executive Committee of the AIDWA met on April 10-11, 1982 in New Delhi, with the President, Manju Gupta in the Chair. Twenty members attended from the following States: Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Assam, and Delhi. The General Secretary, Susheela Gopalan, presented the reports.

March 8th

March 8th had been widely observed in a big way in all States, as "Anti-War, For Peace" Day. Women demonstrated outside the US Embassy and Consular Offices, burnt effigies of the US President, held exhibitions on the effects of nuclear war, as well as seminars and meetings. In most States these actions were jointly undertaken by the AIDWA and the NFIW.

Other Activities

It was found that in the various agitations, programmes, seminars, etc., organised on a variety of issues affecting women, it is becoming possible to mobilise wider and newer sections, including women scientists, doctors, social workers, and so on. The activities ranged from discussions on the Dowry Act; molestation of Harijan and other women, with special focus on the anti-social acts and crimes perpetrated by the police and hired goondas; on the non-availability of rations and other essential commodities in the Fair Price Shops, rising prices, shortage of drinking water, demand for creches; against the Essential Services Maintenance Act, study classes for women activists, through to joint mobilisation with the State Working Women's Coordination Committees of women workers in support of the January 19 General Strike and protest demonstrations against the imposition of a minority Government in Kerala and the demand for immediate elections in the States of West Bengal and Kerala.

Thousands of signatures had been collected

wires and letters sent to the Egyptian Embassy against the repression let loose on the common people, and on women in particular, just prior to the assassination of the late President Sadat, and demanding the release of political prisoners.

All these activities have found a national reflection in the increase in membership.

The salient points of the immediate programme of the next five months, till the Executive Committee meets again in September 1982 are:

1. Special attention to be paid to the States where the movement is still weak, through a convention and conference in Madhya Pradesh and Punjab respectively in June, and the early formation of Ad-Hoc Organising Committees in Gujarat, Assam and Rajasthan.

2. Observance of Children's Day on June 1, 1982, emphasising on the present situation of the vast majority of the children of the poor in our country, and the continuing use of child labour.

3. Observance of August 18 as Women's Employment Day to highlight the acute unemployment among women and the rising incidence of contract labour in fields where it has not previously existed.

4. Campaign against the growing intensity of the forces of communalism and casteism, and on the importance of National Integration.

In separate resolutions the Executive Committee condemned the economic policies followed by the Congress Government, the increasing danger of fissiparous tendencies in the country; greeting the achievements of the Left Front Governments and pledging full support to the Left forces in the coming elections in West Bengal, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. □

Of Witches, Midwives and Nurses

B. EHRENREICH

D. ENGLISH

WOMEN have always been healers. They were the unlicensed doctors and anatomists of Western history. They were abortionists, nurses, and counsellors. They were pharmacists, cultivating healing herbs and exchanging the secrets of their uses. They were midwives, travelling from home to home and village to village. For centuries women were doctors without degrees, barred from books and lectures, learning from each other, and passing on experience from neighbour to neighbour and mother to daughter. They were called "wise women" by the people, witches or charlatans by the authorities. Medicine is part of our heritage as women, our history.

Today, however, health care in the United States is the property of male professionals. Ninety-three per cent of U.S. doctors are men, as are almost all the top directors and administrators of health institutions. Women are still in the overall majority — 70 per cent of health workers are women — but we have been incorporated as workers into an industry where the bosses are men. We are no longer independent practitioners. When we are allowed to participate in the healing process, we can do so only as nurses. And nurses of every rank, from aide up, are just "ancillary workers" in relation to the doctors (from the Latin *ancilla*, maidservant).

How did we arrive at our present position of subservience from our former position of leadership?"

Evidence clearly shows that this was not a "natural process" resulting automatically from changes in medical science. The suppression of women healers was part of a political struggle, tied to the more general class and sex struggles of the times.

Witchcraft and Medicine in the Middle Ages

The age of witch-hunting spanned more than four centuries (from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century) in its sweep from Ger-

many, through France to England. Many writers estimate the number killed, usually by being burned alive at the stake, to have been in millions. Women made up some 85 per cent of those executed. There are accounts of peasant villages in which the entire female population was wiped out.

The witch-hunts were not spontaneous; they were organised campaigns — initiated, financed, and executed by church and State, with the **Hammer of Witches**, written in 1484 under the blessings of Pope Innocent VIII, as the guideline.

What really motivated the witch-hunters? We have no full and satisfactory answers, but one of the major accusations against "witches" in the Catholic witch-hunts was the crime of healing.

What made healing a crime? The Church itself had little interest in medicine, being content to offer prayers for the dead. Basically the Church saw its attack on peasant healers as an attack on magic, not medicine. Although the state of medical science at this time was itself based on little more than superstition, it was the witch-healers who were persecuted for being practitioners of "magic".

This same witch, till then the wise woman, had developed an extensive understanding of bones and muscles, herbs and drugs and had a host of remedies tested over years of use. Many of these herbal remedies still have their place in modern pharmacology.

They had pain-killers, digestive aids, and anti-inflammatory agents. They used ergot for the pain of labour at a time when the Church held that pain in labour was the Lord's punishment for Eve's original sin. (Ergot derivatives are the principal drugs used today to hasten labour and aid in the recovery from childbirth). Belladonna — still used today as an anti-spasmodic — was used by the witch-healers to inhibit uterine contractions when miscarriage threatened. Digitalis, still an

important drug in treating heart ailments, is said to have been discovered by an English witch. Undoubtedly many of the witches' other remedies were purely magical, and owed their effectiveness — if they had any — to their reputation.

A Triple Threat

It was, the 'witch's' methods which constituted the great threat, for she relied on her senses rather than on faith or doctrine. She believed in trial and error, cause and effect; she trusted her ability to find ways to deal with disease, pregnancy, and childbirth — whether through medications or charms. In short, her "magic" was the science of her time. The Church by contrast, deeply distrusted the senses as the source of all evil and the handiwork of the devil. For it, therefore, the witch was a triple threat:

She was a woman, and not ashamed of it: she appeared, to the witch-hunters at least, to be part of an organised underground of peasant women: and she was a healer whose practice was based on empirical study.

The Church and the ruling classes had to counter this threat to their supremacy. The only way was to exclude women altogether from this field and they did this by making university training a requirement for practising doctors, then closing all universities to women, making medicine an all-male preserve.

The first to be eliminated were the better-off literate women-healers, who competed with the male doctors in the urban areas. Many were brought to trial and charged not with being incompetent for in fact they were curing, but with the fact that as women they dared to cure.

By the fourteenth century the campaign against them was virtually complete throughout Europe. The next target was elimination of the great mass of female healers and midwives — now labelled as witches.

The Triple Alliance

For this the Church, State and the medical profession came into partnership and reached full bloom in the witch trials of the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There was only one argument against which there was no appeal: If a woman dared to cure without having 'studied', she was a witch, and

she must die — and of course there wasn't any way for a woman to study.

The witch-hunts did not eliminate the lower-class woman healer, but successfully branded *her* as superstitious, and evil, so much so that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was possible to break the last presence of female healing — midwifery — through the use of 'higher technology', the obstetrical forceps, which women were legally barred from using. When women midwives tried to organise and fight, it was already too late.

In the US

In the United States the male take-over of healing roles started later than in England or France, but ultimately went much further. As late as 1818, medical practice was mainly in the hands of women, but beginning in the 1800s, a growing number of formally trained doctors the "regulars" took great pains to distinguish themselves from the host of lay practitioners, the "irregulars". The 'regulars' were male, usually middle-class and always more expensive, largely confining themselves to middle and upper class patients.

While it was certainly true that lengthier training became necessary with greater medical knowledge, medicine now became established as a branch of "higher" learning, accessible only through lengthy and expensive university training. Non-funded medical schools began to close by the score, including six of America's eight black medical schools, the "irregular" schools which had opened their doors to women, and the low-priced "regular" schools which had served the poorer lower-middle-class white youth. All that remained was to wipe out the midwives, and this was done by outlawing midwifery and restricting attendance on pregnant women to 'doctors'.

And so, to Nursing

The only occupation left for women, in health was nursing. Though not in the beginning a paid occupation, the functions of curing and caring, doctoring and nursing, previously combined by the earlier women lay healers, were split. Curing became the exclusive province of the doctor, caring was relegated to the nurse. The doctor diagnosed, prescribed, moved on. The tedious details of

(Contd. on page 15)

The Case of the Bradford 12

ON April 26, 1982, the trial began in Leeds Crown Court of 12 Asian youth who have come to be known as the Bradford 12. They are charged with conspiracy to make explosive substances with intent to endanger life and property. The events which led to this trial occurred last July, in Bradford, in Northern England, when in the face of systematic harassment through the racist and repressive legislation, the police forces and the courts, as well as the violent attacks on them, the black youth erupted in more than 30 towns and cities of England. They were joined by the unemployed white working youth in the fight against the police.

Many of the 12 are members of the United Black Youth League, an independent racial organisation committed to defend the rights of black people. They helped in securing Anwar Ditta's right to bring her children from Pakistan to Britain; in securing the court acquittal of Gary Pemberton, a Black worker who faced charges trumped up by the Bradford police. They supported the struggles of Jaswinder Kaur, Nasira Begum and many others against deportation; they have been active in the trade union movement as well as in campaigning for the republican cause in Northern Ireland.

In the words of Anwar Ditta at a rally on April 3 — "The Bradford Twelve are like my sons — without them my children would not be with me today. It was their support over the years of my struggle which helped me to defeat the racism and sex discrimination of the Home Office."

They were arrested in a series of dawn raids on Bradford's Black community on July 30 and 31. Following their arrest, they were subjected to two days of interrogation, racist abuse and harassment; their family and friends were not allowed to meet them.

They are charged with supposedly building up a stock of petrol-filled milk bottles which the police claim to have found on some waste ground in Bradford. It is clear the real purpose in arresting them is to suppress the legitimate political activity of their organisation. And

their real crime in the eyes of Mrs. Thatcher's Government is their fight against racism.

All the Bradford 12 will plead not guilty to the charges levelled against them, nor were any petrol-filled milk bottles or petrol bombs ever found in their possession.

National Campaign

A strong national campaign has been built in their support. On April 3, 4000 people marched in protest in Leeds to the Town Hall where the Crown Court is held. An international rally was to take place on April 23 in Central London, addressed by speakers from the African National Congress, El Salvador, South-East Region Trades Union Council. Mass picketing of the Town Hall was planned for the opening day of the trial, a daily protest, and a mass picket every Wednesday from the second week on, for the four to five weeks that the trial is expected to last. The campaign calls to see that justice is done and the charges thrown out.

Thousands of people, black and white, are supporting the 12, for their rights as Black people in the society, and therefore the rights of all Black and White, to live equal, decent lives.

A message of solidarity has been sent from the All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women to the National Campaign Committee to Free the Bradford 12, together with revolutionary greetings to the 12 Asian Youth for their courageous stand. □

OF WITCHES (from page 14)

bedside care, the menial tasks, were the job of the obedient helper, the nurse. All credit for the patient's recovery went, of course, to the doctor.

The medical profession today largely remains a class and a male monopoly. The aim of the women's movement must be not just to open up the exclusive medical profession to women, but to open up medicine — to all women and all men. □

Extracted from Monthly Review, Oct., 1973

Karnataka Beedi Conference

(Contd. from page 10)

the women workers were the main attraction of the procession. Many of them had started from their homes the previous day, holding aloft flags and placards, trekking through hills and fields, to join their co-workers.

Shed Communal Religious Prejudices

Addressing the rally, Salima Begum, a woman beedi worker and a leader of the beedi workers in Kunigal (Tumkur district) made a fervent appeal to the working class to shed all communal and religious prejudices and instead develop strong ties of fraternity and camaraderie. The capitalists do not make communal distinctions in exploiting the workers, she pointed out. A Shukurseth or a Ganesh, both exploit us in the same cruel way. Beedi workers have no religion, no caste. Razia or Radha, Salima or Sulochana — we are all sisters, and the CITU is our home".

"Why do Muslim contractors and employers insist that we must wear the 'burkha'? More, they make it a condition for accepting our genuine demands. Does Abida Ahmed, the wife of the late President, Fakruddin Ahmed, or other Muslim lady Members of Parliament, doctors, are they forced to observe purdah? Then why us?

"We have heard how Muslim women fought in Iran against the Shah, how in public they denounced him as an agent of American imperialism and drove him out. Come on, let us also fight together for our common demands, against the common enemy, forgetting religion, forgetting caste. United we are bound to succeed".

Hazira was another speaker who pointed out to the women workers, "Many of us are not so particular about the entries of beedies rolled in our pass books, as in getting work for our children. Out of our poverty we are being forced to help in the exploitation of our own children. We must fight this poverty and lift this burden from our shoulders".

Saraswati from Mangalore was bitter about the present system in which a worker has to 'present' one bundle free to the contractor, "Why? Because he provides us with the work. We do not need their intermediaries; we want direct employer-employee relations". Jayamala echoed her.

Salima, Hazira, Saraswati and the many others, have a history of struggle behind them. They had fought during the emergency in 1975; along with 85 others, they were arrested on April 19 this year during the struggle, when their menfolk were already in prison. They are ready for battle in the future also. But for this, as Vimal Ranadive, Secretary of the All-India Coordination Committee of Working Women, pointed out in her address to the rally: the women workers must now begin to take up positions of leadership in the Union, so that the vast numbers of the unorganised women beedi workers in particular, are brought into the fold of the organisation, and give the movement the necessary unity and strength to overthrow the contract labour system. □

(from page 6)

Uttar Pradesh

In Kanpur the lack of proper civil amenities has become an acute problem, and the Kanpur women's committee, Working Women's Committee together with the Democratic Youth Federation, decided to take up and mobilise the women and youth on this urgent need of the people. Deputations of women went to meet the officials of the Health Section of the Urban Development Scheme. Demonstrations were held demanding basic civic amenities. On February 28 a joint procession of the AIDWA, JMS and DYFI in which 60 women participated, went to the residence of the Chief Administrator and dumped three cartloads of garbage there, held a huge meeting and then drew up a mohalla-wise charter of demands.

Jammu & Kashmir

It is reported that the Jammu and Kashmir Government proposes to set up a 'women's complex' with the idea of providing training facilities to women to help them to find gainful employment. The complex is to have a separate polytechnic exclusively for women for this purpose.

This was announced by the J & K Minister of State for Education and Health, Mohammed Shafi, while addressing a meeting of officials of the Maharashtra Education Ministry in Bombay recently. □

SADISTIC TREATMENT

(from page 9)

with. An uncle of the girls came from their village and with the help of the Rev. Fr. Joseph and two others, they had gone to the living quarters of the girls on January 1, 1982 to take them away. One of the persons who had gone to take the girls, Mr. T.P. Wilfred, is learnt to have been beaten up and admitted to the Veraval municipal hospital. The two sisters left the dormitory the next day. Contending that it was impossible for any of the girls staying and depending on the labour contractor for their livelihood, to give any statements.

A visit to the living quarters of the contract labour reveals sub-human conditions. There is dirt and filth all over the dingy cubby-holes of rooms. Warning had ostensibly gone out, and there was a massive cleaning operation in progress when the press reporter reached there.

Action Committee Formed

Following the death of Mary, an action committee was formed in Veraval. The convener of the committee, Mr. C. Thomas, had in a letter to the Chief Minister, Mr. Madhavsinh Solanki, pleaded for a thorough inquiry into the case and for handing over the matter to the Crime Branch of the police, which was subsequently done.

The Junagadh District Collector, Miss Manjula Subramaniam, who has also been taking a keen interest in the plight of the Keralite contract labour in Veraval, is also learnt to have recommended that the entire matter be gone into by the Social Defence Cell so that steps can be taken in the matter of the general improvement of their condition. Though the residential quarters for the contract labour is provided by the firm employing them, the welfare and care of the labour is the sole responsibility of the contractor.

Some of the firms have begun employing the processing labour directly on their rolls, but the bulk still follow the old exploitative ways.

CITU Demands

There are simply not words enough to condemn such a dastardly and heinous crime. The CITU as well as the Working Women's Coordination Committee have severely condemned the Government of India and the

Gujarat Government for failing to ensure that the two important Acts on State Migrant Labour and Contract Labour are implemented. The CITU has demanded that the Government of India order a thorough probe into the matter in order to bring to book those guilty of these heinous crimes, and to secure relief for the other women workers who are still in the camp. The CITU has also demanded exemplary punishment to all those involved in the crime and immediate steps to ensure that these Acts are implemented in every State.

The Coordination Committee of Working Women has addressed a letter to the Prime Minister and Labour Minister, Gujarat, and together with the CITU appeals to all other democratic and trade union organisations to raise their powerful voice for bringing to an end this abuse of inter-State migrant labour and female labour in particular, and the total abolition of the contract system of hiring labour.

DELHI DHARNA (from page 8)

Since May 1 the women have been trying to obtain the order in vain. They have now decided to represent their case to the Chief Secretary in a mass deputation on May 14 to obtain a speedy solution to their problem.

They are demanding the following immediate measures:

- No shifting of the Handicraft shop at E-27 Connaught Place.
- Dismissal of Mr. K. Nath.
- Enquiry into the malpractices and alleged bribes taken by Mr. Nath.
- Stoppage of the existing 25% cut in wages.
- Old age pension.
- All facilities given to other employees be given to the women, such as Provident Fund, ESI, Pension, medical leave, casual leave, earned leave, etc.
- Increase in piece-rates; the cost of thread buttons, pads (for coats) buckles, machine repairs be borne by the Administration.
- Regularisation of all piece-rated workers.
- Residential accommodation to be provided to the widows and destitutes who have come from Pakistan.

Pramila Pandhe,
General Secretary,
Delhi Social Welfare Karamchari Union.

Haryana Govt's Shameful Petition

THE Supreme Court on May 3 made a scathing indictment of the Haryana Government for its shameful conduct in contesting the meagre compensation awarded to a widow, Misra Devi.

Misra Devi's husband was run over by a recklessly driven Haryana Government vehicle. "Instead of voluntarily offering to compensate the widow and other heirs, the Government contested the claim for compensation on all sorts of grounds, one among which was that the victim was an old man incapable of earning anything, and so his widow was not entitled to any compensation". So stated Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy and Justice V B. Eradi, in their order. They considered it a matter of "very deep regret", that such a defence should have been raised. "We are amazed, indeed, shocked, that this petition should have been filed by a Government in a welfare State.

It is truly an example of Government callousness and vindictiveness to the poor, in contrast to its invariable considerateness to the rich in all matters and on all issues, from black-marketing and smuggling to legalising illegal industrial practices. The Haryana Government, spending public money which it takes from the people any way, came to the Supreme Court contesting the award by the Accident Claims Tribunal, of a meagre Rs. 14,400 to the widow and heirs, for the irreplaceable loss remember, of a husband, a breadwinner, and a father. The Government had first appealed against the award to the High Court. The High Court, to its credit, summarily rejected the appeal. Not content with this, the Government insisted on bringing the matter to the Supreme Court, for a reversal of the decision.

"Apart from the waste of public time and money, at least respect for human dignity and life should have prevented filing of this petition", the judges said. They hoped that such appeals would not be filed in future.

Unfortunately, past experience does not allow us to share this hope of the learned judges. □

LUXURY HOTELS—YES, SCHOOLS—NO!

ALTHOUGH our rulers go on talking about socialism, India has a government which is of the affluent, by the affluent and for the affluent. This was again indicated by two replies on the same day in Parliament. The Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism recently told the Lok Sabha that nearly Rs. 225 crores will be spent on 10 five-star hotels in Delhi to create nearly 3,500 luxury rooms. On the same day, the Minister of Education informed the Rajya Sabha in a written reply that as many as 82 secondary and senior secondary schools in Delhi had no permanent buildings. Out of these 82 schools 54 were in purely tented accommodation and 24 were in temporary rooms. And 72 of them were government schools! It was estimated that even if the government gave only Rs. 10 lakhs to each school, at a cost of Rs. 8 crores, the schools would have permanent structures. But this government, which is never tired of speaking about garibi hatao or the 20-point programme has Rs. 225 crores for luxury hotels but not even Rs. 10 crores for providing school buildings for the schools already established. Are you surprised that young men burn buses and destroy public property? A society which spends more than Rs. 6 lakh for one single room in a luxury hotel but not even a rupee for 82 school buildings would crumble by the weight of heartless inefficiency. COMMERCE, April 3, 1982."

(Editor's Notebook). □

DRUGS (from Back page)

Around six lakh women die annually in India as a result of illegal criminal abortions and the crude methods used in most family planning centres. Where they survive these women suffer serious and lasting complications. Add to this the maternal mortality as a result of child-birth. Money can be found for a 10-day Asiad for the rich, one crore of rupees can be spared for a Festival of India in Britain. But money cannot be found for developing cheap, safe diagnostic tests for early pregnancy and early abortions. It appears that human lives have no value for the Government when the humans happen to be poor, and particularly when they happen to be women. □

BOMBAY TEXTILE STRIKE

(from page 11)

mills, were participating in such activities for the first time. The 'non-working' wives of textile workers were there in large numbers. Led by Ahilya Rangnekar, Prabha Savant, Manju Gandhi, Tara Reddy and Subhashini Ali of the SMS and BMF, the procession, carrying large placards, and shouting slogans covering their own and the textile workers' demands, wound its way from the historic Kamgar Maidan through the entire textile mill area, culminating in a huge public rally. The women's procession was a novel and imposing event, which had a signal effect in mobilising public opinion in support of the textile workers.

Women's Employment

The important question of employment, or rather the growing unemployment of women, was raised in the slogans and the speeches, just as it had been a foremost issue throughout the campaign. It is not yet sufficiently well-known or appreciated that the number women employed in the textile industry has come down from 40,000 to just 4000 today in the last two decades—due largely to the introduction of mechanisation in factories. The reeling and winding departments in many cases have been completely shut down, and some only of the women workers offered re-employment on a contract basis. This system whereby women are deprived of secure and permanent employment, all protective legislation and all benefits such as Provident Fund, maternity leave, medical facilities, and earn only Rs. 4 a day, was introduced with the agreement of the RMS, a wing of the INTUC. While the contract and labour system is prevalent in Kanpur and other textile centres, it was not so far a feature of textile employment in Bombay. All the women workers are now naturally very angry with this union. Added to all the existing discrimination, the women workers, the Coordin-

ation Committee of Working Women and the women's organisations will now have to fight against this trick of employers to cheapen women's labour and thereby increase their profits. □

IN A CASHEWNUT FACTORY

(from page 4)

2. 33 paise per kilo for broken cashews in the shelling department. Transport facility for women. For example, a women worker, Mariamma, having 4 children, cannot afford travelling in the bus at Rs. 1.90 daily, with the result she walks 12-13 kilometres from her village every morning to reach the factory by 7 a.m.

Union Leadership

The Cashewnut and Allied Workers Union, affiliated to the CITU Union is strong here with 771 membership from Cashew, Arecanut and other industries. There is an Executive Committee of 20, of which 18 are women and two are men. Except the President and General Secretary whose work requires some knowledge of English, the office-bearers are all women. The Works Committees consist of four women, all of them very proud of being leaders in the CITU.

Cashew Nut Industry earns Good Foreign Exchange

Though the management told us that the industry was in crisis due to non-availability of kernels from other countries, and so on, the profits to the company, and the foreign exchange the Governments gets from the export, tell a different story. The amount of Foreign Exchange earned was Rs. 123.2 crores for the export of 28 million Kg in 1980-81 and the price of 1 Kg. of cashews is Rs. 100. □

—VIMAL RANADIVE

BANNED DRUGS USED ON WOMEN IN INDIA

IN the market in India today are a large variety of imported drugs which are being extensively used on middle class, but more particularly on the poor and ignorant urban and village women. These drugs have been banned in their countries of origin, America and Western Europe, but they still continue to be off-loaded and used in Third World countries. Why? Because sale of these drugs spell huge profits — which are built on the suffering, disease and death of hundreds of thousands of women in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The 'Pregnancy Test' Drugs

The first of these are the drugs which are supposed to test for pregnancy. Despite the ban on their use for such tests, many firms continue to market them without indicating the possible side-effects. In the last session of the Lok Sabha, an MP brought up the question of the sale of spurious and harmful drugs worth about Rs. 60 crores, brought into this country through the big foreign multinational firms, which have caused several deaths. The Minister of Health denied these reports and disclaimed any further responsibility in the matter. But a voluntary organisation — Health Action India — has written on the use of *Oestrogen-Progesterone*, a hormone preparation sold in the market under 15 brand names:

"Many women wrongly believe or have been told that this is an injection for abortion; on the contrary, a pregnant woman who receives this injection runs the risk of giving birth to a malformed baby".

In another letter the same organisation has reminded doctors and chemists that,

"the scientific group of the World Health Organisation in its reports of the effect of the female sex hormone on foetal development and infant health, has recommended that these tests no longer be done".

The *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics* categorically stated that,

"hormonal tests for pregnancy are not reliable. There is also an increased risk of foetal abnormalities".

A Cancer-Causing Contraceptive

Another equally dangerous, injectible contraceptive, *Depo Provera*, has been banned in the USA, Canada and Britain, because it is suspected of causing cancer of the cervix. But it would appear that this ban is enforced only

in the case of the white female population, or the better-off sections of it, probably because they are better organised, more knowledgeable and more vocal. For the shocking and scandalous fact is that this contraceptive injection is used — imposed would be the more correct term — very widely and freely on women in all the Third World Countries, including our own country, and particularly in the rural areas. And it is no other than the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, WHO, and especially the International Planned Parenthood Federation who are supplying the Third World with *Depo Provera*. An eloquent testimony to the control exercised by the drug multinationals.

Evidence of this practice comes right from the heartland of the West, London, from a study conducted by the Brent Community Health Council, in April 1981. The study found that for the last two years, *Depo Provera* has been extensively given to working class women, with about half the prescriptions going to black women. As a result there has been an increase in the incidence of cervical cancer.

Minister's Staggering Unconcern

When questioned on the sale in India of drugs banned elsewhere the Union Minister of Health is reported to have said that it was a "conscious" decision to permit their marketing, "because the medical needs of the country warranted it". What medical needs of the country warrant inducing sterility and cancer in our women? This colossal unconcern is staggering. As if that were not enough, it is further justified on the grounds that "a caution is printed on the label". Where 75 per cent of the people are illiterate, a caution in English is made to justify the import of banned drugs!

This attitude of callousness towards public health and safety has become the rule with those who govern this country. For there should be no question but to ban the import and sale of all the 15 brands of drugs — their manufacturers are well-known business giants — E.P. Forte, Unichem, Lyka, Organon, Glaxo, Allenburys, etc.

(Contd. on page 18)