



THE WORKING CLASS

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE CITU

NPMO CALLS FOR NATIONWIDE CAMPAIGNS

The National Platform of Mass Organisations met at the CITU Central office on 10th March evening under the presidentship of Com.K L Mahendra, General Secretary of AITUC. Representatives of all the constituent central trade unions and organisations of peasantry, agricultural workers, students, youth and women and the national industrial federations attended the meeting. The meeting congratulated the workers and all mass organisations for implementing the 22nd February programme against the Patent and IRA Bills.

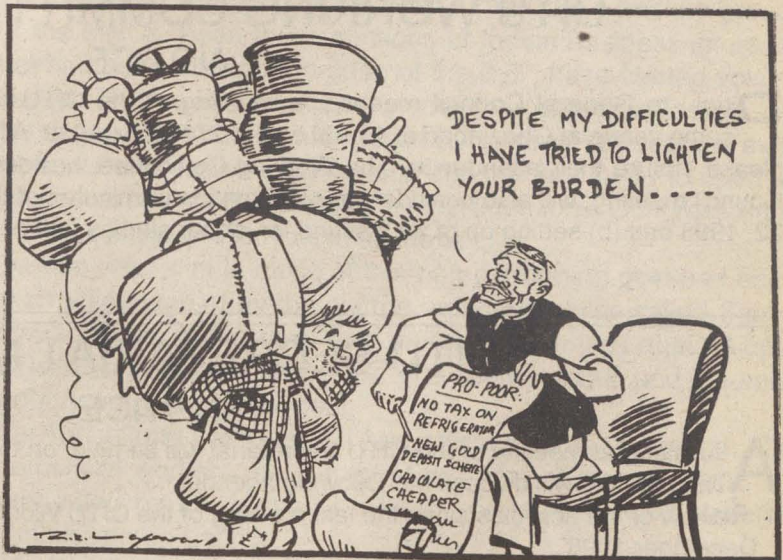
The meeting expressed concern at the all round deteriorating economic situation in the country as a result of the pursuit of the anti-people and communal policies by the BJP-led Government. The Railway and Union Budgets will further aggravate the economic situation and spiral up the price rises.

ACTION PROGRAMME

In the light of the discussions, the meeting unanimously decided to observe a nationwide campaign

month from 12th April to 12th May focusing on several specific issues facing the people of India. The following programme will be implemented during the period:

1. 12.4.99: Dharna in all the states demanding 33 per cent reservation of women in Parliament and the State Assemblies, and for implementation of the Supreme Court verdict on sexual harassment of women at work places.
2. 19.4.99: Dharna in all the states against Price Rise and for Food security.
3. 1st May 1999: May Day to be observed by giving special emphasis against Globalisation and against Communalism.
4. 7.5.99: Demonstrations all over the States demanding introduction of a central legislation for the agricultural workers.
5. 12.5.99: Demonstration in the states and in capital demanding jobs for all and education for all. The demonstration and other programmes may be implemented with torchlight procession all over India.
6. The meeting also decided to hold an All India Convention against communalism at the end of May or early June. The exact date and venue of the convention will be decided later on.



CITU GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING NOTICE

A meeting of the General Council of the CITU will be held at Ghaziabad near Delhi, from the 28th to 30th May 1999. The meeting will be preceded by a massive rally on 27th May 1999. The agenda of the meeting will be:

1. Confirmation of the minutes of the last meeting held at Chennai, 22-25 April, 1998.
2. Presidential Address
3. Report by the General Secretary
4. Statement of Accounts for the year 1998
5. Special Discussion on the two decades of activities of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women
6. Affiliations etc
7. Com. BTR Memorial Fund and BTR Bhawan
8. Resolutions
9. Any other matter with the permission of the Chair

The meeting will commence at 10 AM on Friday, the 28th May, 1999. All members of the General Council are requested to positively attend the meeting. Venue of the meeting will be intimated in due course. Comrades are requested to arrange their return-reservations at their respective destinations sufficiently in advance. All members will contribute Rs 350 only towards boarding etc., expenses.

Comrades may please inform their arrival at Delhi/Ghaziabad at the following address:

Com. S B Bhardwaj
General Secretary, Delhi State Committee of CITU
3 V P House, Rafi Marg, New Delhi - 110 001.
Phone(011) 3714543 Fax (011) 3355856

M K Pandhe
General Secretary

CITU WORKING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTICE

Prior to General Council meeting, a meeting of the CITU Working Committee will be held at the same venue at Ghaziabad at 11 AM on the 27th May, 1999. All members of the Working Committee will please ensure their attendance. The Working Committee, besides discussing the agenda of the General Council meeting, will also consider (a) confirmation of minutes of the last meeting held at Chennai on Dec. 22, 1998 and (b) setting up of an Institute for labour studies and research under Com. BTR Memorial Trust.

M K Pandhe
General Secretary

CITU SECRETARIAT MEETING NOTICE

A full fledged meeting of the CITU Secretariat will be held on the 27th and 28th of April, 1999. The meeting will discuss the following agenda:

- 1) Review of the activities since the last meeting of the CITU Working Committee at Ahmedabad 22-24 December 1998.
- 2) Setting up of an Institute for labour studies and education under Com. BTR Memorial Trust.
- 3) Preparations for the General Council meeting of the CITU, at Ghaziabad from the 27th to 30th May 1999.
- 4) Miscellaneous

All office bearers are requested to ensure their participation at the meeting. The meeting will be held at the CITU Headquarters at 15, Talkatora Road, New Delhi and commence at 10 AM on 27th April 1999.

M K Pandhe
General Secretary

THE WORKING CLASS

CITU ORGAN

APRIL 1999

BUSINESS AS USUAL

by UNNY



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AN YEAR OF ALL ROUND RUINATION

The Atal Behari Vajpayee Government at the Centre had completed an year in office on 19th March 1999. That this eighteen party coalition had kept its flock together and managed to survive for one whole year is, perhaps, the only achievement of this motley group, which calls itself a government!

Even the most ardent well wisher of this government credits it with only two events — 'shakthi' to 'shanthi' — i.e. Pokhran blasts and Bus to Lahore, as something that Vajpayee can boast of. The one other plus point of the government - the accord between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu on Cauvery waters is decried by the second largest party in the coalition. Hence the Government itself is scared to list it as an achievement.

But what has befallen the country in this period? All round ruination and the country is being loose shunted on rails to disaster.

The economy is in shambles. Industry is in recession. Exports declined. Trade deficit ballooned. Price-rise is so phenomenal that the BJP had to pay the price of two of the State governments ruled by it, in the Assembly elections during 1998.

On the economic front, the IMF-WB-WTO regime could not have found such an obedient Govt ever before in any part of the world. The US administration with its 'sanctions-blackmail' tactics has virtually been whipping the BJP government to fulfil all its requirements. The country has been turned into a hunting ground for the MNCs. Even those sections of Indian business interests, that had been the support-base of the BJP, have started voicing dissent. The 'swadeshi' slogan stands thoroughly unmasked.

Passing of the Patents Amendment Bill in scant disregard of even the Law Commission observations and the mad hurry to open up the Insurance industry reveals the Govt intentions. Congress Party had colluded with the Govt in all these.

The one year stint in office of this non-performing govt had been taken advantage of by the saffron army, otherwise called *Sangh Parivar*, to let loose terror and murderous attacks against both Christian and muslim minorities. The secular fabric and the unity of our country is in great peril.

The Agricultural Workers' Bill had officially been discarded. The interests of workers are placed at the altar of globalisation - as manifested by the terms of reference to the Second National Commission on Labour.

With this Govt in office, each passing day will witness more of miseries heaped on the toiling masses of our country. The working people have to close ranks to fight the disastrous policies of this govt., particularly after the recent budget imposts.

Fight against economic policies and fight against communalism - around which the National Platform of Mass Organisation has dovetailed its campaign and struggle, must be the battle cry of the trade union movement.

PEOPLE TO SUFFER, ECONOMY TO CONTINUE TO SINK

After lot of noise and unseemingly activity in its formulation stage, this year's central budget is a hopeless exercise that would achieve nothing, deliver nothing and take this country's economy and the countrymen too deeper into already setting in gloom.

The budget (1999-2000) was presented in the background of visible decline in almost all sectors of the economy. Even the pre-budget Economic Survey could not but admit this. Almost all the budget estimates of the previous budget year have been revised downwards. Industries in both consumer and capital goods sector cut down production owing to declining demand. Growth in industry declined to less than 4%, service sector from 8.2% to 6.7%, during 1998-99. Growth in agriculture was 5.3% but foodgrain production in particular has recorded an absolute decline. Still then off-take from the public distribution system declined despite increase in population. This meant a sharp reduction in the purchasing capacity of the majority of population and a decline in food intake. Decline in growth in private consumption reached 3.9% which is grossly inconsistent with GDP growth. Such a situation warranted the budget to generate demand through expansion in purchasing capacity of the common people. But budget moved just in opposite direction creating

ground for further contraction of market, and towards deeper recession.

BURDEN ON PEOPLE

Budget targetted the indirect taxation for revenue generation. In the name of rationalisation of excise duties, incidence of tax on commodities are increased by 1% to 3% on the average, to be passed on to common people through increase in prices. This, together with the increase in administered price for foodgrain in PDS and increase in the price of diesel and hike in Railway freight would make goods dearer, push up the inflation, and further contract market.

Further reduction in customs

ARDHENDU DAKSHI

duty on import along with higher incidence of excise duty on the domestic products would put many domestic industries, already in crisis, into more disadvantage vis-a-vis the MNCs and aggravate the downward trend.

Added to the above is the hike in the postal rates increasing the burden on the common people. 10% surcharge on Income Tax will leave less disposable money with the salaried workers and middle class and in turn will slacken demand of consumer durables, and consumables affecting production, employment and revenue earnings of the govt. Further non-enhancement of the exemption ceiling of income tax would bring even many

unskilled workers in the income tax net.

Relief on Income Tax for house building has been aimed at relieving NRIs and promoters to get their houses, already built in large numbers, sold.

LESS TO RURAL ECONOMY

Majority of population still live in villages. The budget has many pronouncements regarding the need to raise the quality of life in the countryside. But the hypocrisy of the govt is exposed as, in practical terms, the allocation on rural economy has been drastically slashed down. Almost in all areas of the rural economy, viz., agriculture and allied fields, rural development, rural employment generation and poverty alleviation, irrigation, flood control, etc, budgetary allocation marked a sharp decline. This will aggravate rural poverty. On the other hand so called Kisan credit Card Scheme will benefit mainly the rich peasantry, who have still been kept out of the tax net.

CHEATING THE PEOPLE

Like his predecessors, the present Finance Minister has shed gallons of tears for the lot of rural people in his budget speech. But that was mere a show business.

A programme of one elementary school in each habitation has been declared. But mind it, budget is not going to spare any fund for the same. The premises of the school and salary of teachers for such ambitious

programme of Yashwant Sinha has to be provided not by his budget but by the local people. The govt may provide, at best, some black boards.

Similar gimmick has also been made in respect of rural health care. The local community and through their gram panchayats, will have to arrange for primary health care facilities first through their own contribution, to qualify for getting the Central Govt's meagre grant from the already truncated allocation.

Same is the case with providing shelter to the homeless, as the declaration is not matched by provision of adequate funding. In fact all the above schemes for rural welfare are destined to remain on paper and carry little meaning for common people.

BONANZA TO ELITE

The budget has offered bonanza to big business, MNCs and the upper classes.

Several measures/relief have been announced to boost the stock market (while commodity market for the people has been left out with utter neglect) to the benefit of the speculators and those industrial houses diverting their funds from production to speculation in the period of recession.

Budgetary concession for the share market cost around Rs 5000 crores which could have been utilised through public investment to boost the stagnating real economy of the country.

Besides the above, tax concessions granted to the big business and foreign companies on various accounts amount to Rs 8000 crores. Merger and

acquisition of business houses have been granted liberal tax relief which would lead to concentration of capital and militate against the very concept of competition, so long being loudly talked about by the policy makers themselves. And such merger and acquisitions are not going to contribute anything to the national economy either through increase in production or employment generation. Rather the past experience of all mergers/takeovers on Indian soil shows the downward pressure both on production and employment.

In this background of encouragement of merger and acquisition, the budget also propose to practically do away with the Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act to assist the newly emerging monopolies.

Containment of fiscal deficit has been given highest importance and top priority. This is a bogus claim and a case of misplaced enthusiasm, again, because of IMF directive. Budget exercises made all kinds of statistical manipulation to show fiscal deficit at an unrealistically lower level. The questions the Finance Minister has to answer are: Budgetary support to public sector enterprises was stopped to reduce budgetary deficit, since 1991-92. Then why, is the deficit increasing? When budgetary support is not there, as pointed out by many economists, why the money collected through disinvestment is not being ploughed back to modernise the public sector industries? Why should the

money go to meet the budget or fiscal deficit? We raise these questions despite our total opposition to disinvestment.

One aspect has been ignored by the Finance Minister and that may result in severe crisis for India. Last year OPEC (Oil Producing and Exporting Countries) failed to act together and oil price came down to unbelievable level to below 10 dollars per barrel (in 1974 it was 35 dollars per barrel). This has saved about Rs 20,000 crores to govt of India. This year OPEC has come to consensus and is going to cut production and raise prices. It will be a disaster for India. The Finance Minister has failed to foresee such a possibility.

TOWARDS DEEPER CRISIS

The basic questions have remained unanswered. Who and what will be done about capital investment for boosting the national economy and generate employment? What will be exactly done to augment food and agricultural production where we are lagging below the rate of population growth? The fragile balance may result in famine in case of slightest crop failure anytime. Can the budget of a country like India remain silent about employment which is growing menacingly, tearing apart our social fabric, shooting up crime rate to such an alarming level.

The budget is a poor people's burden, an endless nightmare for industrial workers, unemployed and rural folk. Nothing else.

PORT & DOCK WORKERS FIGHT AGAINST PORT PRIVATISATION

M K PANDHE

The decision of the BJP Government to privatise the Major Indian Ports has evoked strong resentment among the port and dock workers all over India. For the first time in India a united countywide strike of the workers was organised on 11th December 1998 as per call of National Platform of Mass Organisation. The strike was complete in most of the ports totally paralysing the loading and unloading work.

The MNCS are very keen to control the operation of Indian ports so that their cargo handling jobs would be done expeditiously. After the introduction of New Economic Policy the Government of India relaxed the Cabotage Law - an internationally accepted law which clearly prohibits all foreign ships from taking cargo in coastal shipping. While most of the advanced countries are following the Cabotage Law, the relaxation given by the Government of India has only hit the Indian Shipping Companies. Even the country like USA, Jones Act completely bans the foreign ships from operating on the U.S. Coast. In fact, the Jones Act further restricts coastal operation to only those ships which are built in USA, owned by U.S. Citizens, registered in USA and manned by U.S. Citizens. Under these circumstances the steps taken by the BJP Government has only damaged the growth of Indian shipping companies whose share in the world trade is continuously on the decline.

The Bill brought by Surface Transport Ministry seeks to allow entry of MNC's to own and operate Indian port on the plea that Indian Ports would be at par with major International ports. No Indian private sector would come forward to invest money in this case unless the Indian capitalists become junior partners of foreign companies. Once the port administration is handed over to the foreign companies they will be able jack up the port charges in order to earn profits and Indian companies would find it extremely difficult to undertake traffic with such high charges. Foreign shipping companies will be able to compete

effectively with larger size of their ships.

The MNCS once they control the ports will further reduce the manpower in ports and there would be large scale retrenchments. In the name of labour flexibility they will recruit a large number of contract workers while reducing the permanent workforce and try to reduce the cost of operation by resorting to engagement of cheap labour.

While accepting the dictates of the World Bank and the IMF, the Government of India has not taken into account the danger, the MNCS would pose to the security of the country. The naval ships which operate in major ports will face the danger of the new port management knowing all the movement of our navy and some of the classified information may be passed on to other countries. The conditions would be worse during the period of external emergency or at the time of war.

The port authorities have a great role to play in combating smuggling operations. Despite custom control the port authorities can also help smuggling of good from the sea itself without the knowledge of official agencies. There are many examples of foreign shipping travelers depriving the Government from huge amount of revenues in connivance of the port authorities. In the event of Port Management being handed over to MNCs through Privatisation, it is but natural that this vital National interest against smuggling operations would face utter neglect and smugglers may even get patronage, to the detriment of country's economy and security.

The MNCs who are keen to marginalise the trade unions in their undertakings will take full advantage of the situation and bypass the trade union movement.

The Major Ports Amendment Bill was referred to Parliamentary Standing Committee. The Committee has not gone into various crucial issues and generally approved the Bill. The 5 recognised Federations working in port and dock industry viz., All India Port and Dock Workers Federation (HMS), All India Port and Dock Workers

Federation (W) (HMS), Water Transport Workers Federation of India (CITU), Indian National Port and Dock Workers Federation (INTUC), and Port and Dock Waterfront Workers Federation (AITUC) have jointly written to the Standing Committee to hear their views before taking a final decision in the matter. However, Standing Committee despite its visit to Calcutta and other ports did not invite trade unions to appear before them. The Committee did not even hear all the 5 federations jointly. It was clear that the committee was determined to go ahead with the proposal without giving an opportunity to trade unions to express their views. Only in Mumbai the Committee heard the trade unions for a brief period.

The Five Federations gave a call to observe All India Protest Day on 11th March which was unitedly observed by the unions in all the ports by wearing badges, holding rallies and processions. A remarkable unity of all the port workers was achieved while observing the Day. The trade unions warned the Government in these rallies for a bigger struggles if the BJP Government persists in the proposal for privatisation of the ports.

The BMS owing allegiance to RSS has openly declared its opposition to the privatisation of ports and called upon the port workers to oppose the drive towards privatisation of ports. BMS Federation in ports is not recognised for All India negotiations but BMS workers participate in the nationwide campaign against privatisation.

In a meeting of Five Federations held in Chennai on 20th March 1999 it was decided to write a letter to the Prime Minister opposing the move to privatise the ports. The Federation decided to send a joint deputation to the Prime Minister prior to the commencement of the Session of Parliament

on 12th April. The Federation would request the Prime Minister not to pursue the Bill. However, if despite united voice of the port and dock workers the BJP Government go ahead with the bill the trade unions in port and dock industry would go on spontaneous strike on the date the Bill would be brought in Parliament.

The Officers Association in port and dock industry have decided to make a common cause with the workers and it is expected that they would also join the nationwide strike action if the Central Government insist an bringing the Bill in Parliament.

The port and dock workers are preparing themselves even to go in for an indefinite strike action if the Government of India follows the IMF World Bank dictates to privatise Indian ports.

Meanwhile, the wage negotiations have been stalled in the Industry due to paltry benefit offered by the port managements. The trade Unions resolutely opposed the guidelines issued by the Department of public enterprise and told the management that there would be no settlement within the framework of the guidelines. The port managements also propose to introduce humiliating working conditions for the workers which would deprive the workers from their hardwon rights. The trade unions therefore opposed these policies of the Indian Ports Association and demanded a favourable settlement taking into account the improved performance of the ports.

The delay in wage negotiations is adding to the discontent among the workers. The trade unions therefore have decided to agitate on both these issues so that the privatisation is firmly opposed and issue the wage negotiations result in a favourable settlement to the workers.

MARCH 8: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

INDIAN WOMEN SEEK EQUALITY, EMPOWERMENT

'Women are no longer prepared to remain victims but have become symbols of struggle', declared Capt. Laxmi Sahagal at a Women's Grand Convention organised at Kotla groudns in New Delhi on the eve of international women's day. The Convention organised by the All India Democratic Women's Association charted out a political agenda for women's advancement.

In a message, K.R. Narayanan, President, aptly pointed out that 'the women's question is not an isolated issue but is part and parcel of the economic, social, cultural and political condition'. He called for organised effort to bring about attitudinal transformation governing the status of women in our society.

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON COAL INDUSTRY

GOPINATH DEY

A National Seminar on 25 years of Nationalisation of Coal Industry was held in Calcutta at Sisir Mancha on 19.1.99 which organised by Coal Mines Authority Ltd Employees' Union, an affiliate of All India Coal Workers' Federation. The seminar dealt on the problems of coal industry in the background of liberalisation and globalisation.

Besides distinguished personalities in the field of economics, and social research, coal miners' leaders from AITUC and INTUC also took part in deliberation.

250 delegates, from the Calcutta-based coal unions and coal unions all over the country affiliated with All India Coal Workers' Federation attended the National Seminar.

Inaugurating the Seminar, the veteran freedom fighter and former Minister of the West Bengal Left-Front Government Benoy Chowdhury recalled his long association with the Coalfield Labour in Raniganj-Asansol belt. He said that consequent upon Nationalisation of coal industry the favourable condition created in the coal workers' movement has been sought to be jeopardised by the new economic and industrial policy of the Govt of India. Raniganj-Asansol coal belt was the earliest centre of coal raising. That the conspiracy to forestall the coal production from this belt is evident from the attempt to close 64 coal mines thereby

rendering 72,000 coal workers surplus.

All concerned are well aware that one of the reasons of losses in ECL is theft of a large quantity of coal in which management has an indirect hand. Central Govt knowingly plays dumb in the affair. West Bengal Govt has minimised the cess on coal sustaining enormous loss of 250 crores of rupees. On the contrary, the Central Coal Minister even after assuring the Chief Minister of the State that no ECL mines would be closed down, took no positive step. Benoy Chowdhury asserted that it is apparent from the move of the Central authorities, denationalisation and closure of mines are aimed at in the interest of multinationals and foreign investors.

Preoccupied elsewhere, M K Pandhe, General Secretary, CITU, sent a write-up for the National Seminar on 'Crisis in Coal Industry - How can it be solved?' Pandhe emphasised that 'the crisis is originated in the wrong policies pursued by successive governments and hence it is policy oriented.... Any attempt by the management to solve the crisis within the framework of the present policies is bound to come to a dead end.'

In the circumstances, Pandhe strongly felt that 'there is urgent need of total trade union unity in coal industry for nationwide movement,' as in the past all the 5 federations working in coal, built a magnificent unity of the

coal workers and gave a call for strike. It was, however, deferred due to assurance given by former Prime Minister that the Government would not take any decision without consulting the trade unions. However, during the discussion the government miserably failed to justify the stand of the government. Govt of India today is carrying forward the same policies, resulting in the present decline in market of coal. Pandhe was confident enough to mention that 'the follow-up action of Dhanbad convention if properly organised by all the trade unions, the coal workers all over India will be enthusiastically prepared for any struggle to save the coal industry.'

The main key-note paper of the seminar, was placed by Sunil Basu Roy, General Secretary, All India Coal Workers' Federation. The key-note paper traces the status and structure, the finance and functions of the coal industry since nationalisation. The key-note paper elaborately put up the structural changes from pre-nationalisation period down to day during the course of 25 years and the problems of the industry and its workers, being rolled up to date alongwith detail statistics. Basu Roy vividly categorised from his personal experience the ignorance of the authority about mining and inefficient management of the collieries resulting in wastage and losses, indulgence to inept handling and theft of coal,

thereby bringing destruction to coal mining industry. The coal workers became victim of accidents due to wrong method of mining and sheer motivation to raise more coal ignoring safety measures.

Ashok Mitra, while deliberating at the seminar recalled that since First Five Years Plan only the leftists have been drawing attention of all to give importance and status to coal mining industry at par with mineral oil. But the leaders of capital in this country took no interest in the development of coal industry after its nationalisation. The leftists alone with their limited power have been working in favour of improvement of coal industry and its workers. Conspiracy is on to allow the industry to die slowly.

The Finance Minister of Government of West Bengal, Ashim Dasgupta made comprehensive and informative presentation comprising the present state of affairs of coal mines in Bengal and Bihar. Dasgupta ruled out the so-called allegation of the cess on coal being a factor for sickness, on which the Central Government and Eastern Coalfields Ltd base their ground for closure of 64 ECL collieries and termination of service of 72,000 coal workers. He wondered, how collieries in Bihar also are sought to be closed when Bihar government does not charge any cess on coal.

Ashim Dasgupta apprised the delegates of the seminar of a bunch of proposals prepared by Govt of W. Bengal including

withdrawal of 20 per cent cess on coal. Now it is the turn of the Central Govt to reciprocate and they should come forward for emancipation of national coal industry from disaster by raising the import duty on foreign coal by 20 per cent. Ashim Dasgupta reminded that since 1994 budget onwards successive govt drastically reduced the import duty from 85 to only 15 per cent. It is feared that under IMF-World Bank pressure the duty may be brought down to such a bottom as 3 per cent. The coal industry under this govt faces a grim future.

In one of the two technical sessions appeared the INTUC leader Prabhat Goswamy and AITUC leader Sunil Sen. Both of them gave the national seminar very well thought valuable deliberations. Prabhat Goswamy in somewhat self-critical tone accepted that the Central Govt and Coal India have taken to the dangerous path. He, therefore, emphasised on continuous joint struggle of coal workers. Sunil Sen dwelt on technical aspects and accused the coal managements of adopting wrong methods of excavation leading to wastage of an important mineral like coal. Sen suggested to revive the spirit of Dhanbad convention and build up joint campaign to culminate in joint strike.

The Working President of AICWF S K Bakshi accused the authorities of playing contradictory roles. On the one hand, they hold the coal workers responsible for less production and on the other, ECL and BCCL managements have

asked to reduce production of coal by 15 million tonnes. He also accused officers of openly helping 'mafias' involved in the theft of coal.

Amiya Bagchi, eminent economist, Lakshman Bagdi, MLA and Coal Workers' leader and Dipankar Mukherjee MP, also addressed the session.

The valedictory session was addressed by Chittabrata Mazumdar, General Secretary, West Bengal CITU. Mazumdar at the outset expressed surprise as to why at the seminar Chairman, Coal India Ltd and other officials having consented earlier remained absent altogether. He recalled that at a recent National Seminar on Steel Industry, the active participation of a number of responsible steel industry officials was a unique example of participative management. The coal industry management exhibited their hollowness by their absence.

Mazumdar claimed that the seminar was a real success. Mazumdar also stated that government and coal authorities are creating confusions. ECL had a work force of 1,92,000 25 years back. In 1997 it came down to 1,50,000 and now the work force is less than that. ECL produced 90 lakh tonnes at the time of nationalisation. But with a lesser work force in 1997 the coal raising stood at 2 crores 60 lakh tonnes. Hence, the claim of the vested interests that the loss is incurred due to trade union movement is totally false.

The seminar concluded with vote of thanks by Prodyut Kumar Mukherjee.

"DIG YOUR OWN GRAVE !": GOVT to PSUs

SWADESH DEV ROYE

The so called new economic policy, formulated and being pursued in India at the dictate of IMF and World Bank, has been mounting multipronged attack on the public sector industries of the country. It is obvious that since the policy of liberalisation and globalisation is inimical to the very concept of public sector, privatisation is the major plank of that policy.

Therefore it must be understood that various steps pertaining to public sector taken by the Government in the name of organisational restructuring and disinvestment, buy back, cross holding of shares etc. are all aimed at dismantling the entire public sector net work in favour of monopoly capital of the country and abroad.

The darkening canvas in the economic front is continuously enlarging with all round failure BJP-led government, notoriously faithful to 'IMF-World Bank dictates'. The government have miserably failed to contain fiscal deficit and exercise any control over excessive market borrowings. Huge concessions granted to the Indian and foreign private monopoly capital through massive cuts in duties and taxes coupled with wide gap between target and actual collection of revenue has its contribution to the situation.

In their desperate bid to reduce fiscal deficit, the BJP-led government has been taking one after another suicidal steps in economic front against the interest of the common people in particular and the country in general. By privatising PSUs through offloading the shares, the government is fulfilling two aims - finding an 'easy' but devastating answer to the fiscal deficit question and at the same time satisfying the Fund-Bank, who have been expressing their utter annoyance for the slow progress in 'public sector reform' in India - thanks to the resistance by the working class of the country.

THE BUYBACK ROUTE

True to their 'proud' declaration in the budget for 1998-99 that this government shall exceed the targeted realisation from disinvestment of PSU

shares, the BJP-led government is out to hammer the last nail in the coffin of public sector.

Taking cue (but without taking any lesson) from the repeated failure of the successive governments to realise the target of disinvestment from the market, the BJP-led government have embarked on the unprecedented disastrous path of buyback of shares and/or cross holding of shares by the blue cheap public sector companies. The whole exercise is nothing but robbing the investible surplus from the concerned PSUs by the BJP-led government.

The Cabinet decision to permit six cash rich PSUs - ONGC, IOC, GAIL, VSNL, MTNL and NALCO to buyback their own shares or sell to other PSUs (cross holding) was followed by a Presidential Ordinance to enable the buyback deal. Accordingly the ONGC has decided to buy 10 per cent and 5 per cent of the shares of IOC and GAIL respectively and IOC to buy 10 per cent and 5 per cent of the shares of ONGC and GAIL respectively. As per report ONGC and IOC will offload Rs.1,700 crore and Rs.3,000 crore from their investible surplus respectively in the name of cross holding of shares. MTNL has also announced its decision to buyback shares worth Rs.500 crore. Similarly GAIL is slated to buyback shares worth Rs.700 crore. Reports suggest that the government has targeted to mop up around of Rs.10,000 crore in the process of buyback and/or cross holding of public sector shares. So far "advance payment" Rs.500 crore each has been made to the government by ONGC and IOC. According to press report, the government has asked the oil companies to pay every 15 days from February 1 to reach the overall disinvestment target by 31st March, 1999. (The Economic Times 10.2.99)

THE DANGEROUS FALLOUT

The immediate fallout of the buyback move has been that, "the market capitalisation of these companies has plummeted by Rs.21,698 crore or

24.36 per cent since the government announced its cross holding plans. ... In effect, by trying to raise Rs.6,000 crore in a hurry, the government has lost over Rs. 20,000 crore ..." (Business Standard 15.2.99). In this connection it is interesting to note that in the exercise to buy back their own shares, the price the PSUs will have to pay is yet to be finally decided. Controversy has already arisen about the cut-off date on which there shall be serious financial implications on the PSUs. The extent of extra financial burden imposed on the PSUs by the BJP-led government is clear from the fact that PSUs are compelled to pay market price for the shares which the government originally subscribed at par.

In one hand the government is refusing budgetary support for financing various projects of the PSUs and on the other hand it is snatching the investible surplus. This will not only create severe fund constraint for the PSUs but will seriously affect their market credibility as well. Moreover, the more the equity base of the PSUs are reduced they shall become more vulnerable to 'take over' by private sector.

THE 1999-2000 BUDGET

The destructive approach of the BJP-led government towards public sector is further manifested from the fact that the Plan outlay for the oil and natural gas sector has been fixed at Rs.11,784.56 crore. This is in effect less than the previous revised outlay. Moreover budgetary support has been totally withdrawn and it is to be financed completely by internal generation and borrowings. Conversely the disinvestment target has been doubled to a whopping Rs.10,000 crore ! Speaking at a post-budget meeting organised by the CII, Yashwant Sinha, the Finance Minister announced that while full-time machinery for implementing disinvestment of PSU shares shall be established, the Disinvestment Commission shall be delegated with fresh powers and large-scale strategic sale of PSUs shall be launched by the government.

According to news the Union Cabinet in its meeting held on 9th March'99 have cleared the strategic sale of 51% share of BALCO. It is reported that " Cabinet would take a final view on the time-bound strategy for disinvestment

during 1999-2000 at its next meeting, while it cleared a list of PSUs for strategic sale." (Economic Times 10.3.99)

DEFEAT THIS SUICIDAL GAME

Financing the budget deficit by taking out the free reserve of the PSUs is by no means an answer to the economic ills. Even 'The Economic Times' has editorially commented that: "When the government finances expenditure by selling PSU shares, what happens is that its assets come down without liquidating any existing liabilities !" Thus by taking away the free reserves of PSUs the government is killing the goose laying golden eggs. Under the pressure of IMF and World Bank the BJP-led government is nakedly neglecting the fact that these PSUs have been posting hundreds of crore of rupees in the government exchequer on account of dividend, taxes and duties. And it is not a simple question of privatisation of public sector. It is in effect a serious blow to the economic sovereignty of the country. We must not forget that public sector is the guarantee to check-mate the big business houses and foreign MNCs to take over the economy to reap unlimited profit at the cost of the country and the people.

When the 'new economic policy' was declared in 1991, the BJP had lamented that their economic policy has been stolen by the Congress (I) party. Now the BJP-led government has become desperate to prove that they are more committed to the Fund-Bank dictated policies of liberalisation and privatisation. Thus it is evident that this government is bartering the economic sovereignty of the country to establish to the IMF and World Bank that they are more 'efficient' than the Congress (I) in accomplishing the deeply desired by the Fund-Bank but unfinished task to 'reform' (better read 'ruin') the public sector.

Public sector came into existence and flourished in our country by fighting tooth and nail the opposition of the imperialist forces. It is, therefore, imperative that public sector shall have to be defended by defeating the enemies of our public sector at all levels within and outside the country. It must be conceived as a national task and all the true patriotic forces must be mobilised under the leadership of the working class to defeat the game plan of the imperialist forces and their stooges.

CENTRAL BUDGET AND PSUs

Dipankar Mukherjee

The same drama of chicanery and hypocrisy was enacted again by the Finance Minister when even in a recorded budget speech, he tried to mislead the Parliament with regard to sick enterprises of public sector by presenting a bold face. He claimed that a provision of Rs.1735 crore has been made for non-plan loan to public sector enterprises, mainly for payment of salaries to the employees of sick PSUs. What he did not mention was that this is against revised provision of Rs.1853.72 crore for the year 98-99 and Rs.1735 crore this year include Rs. 437 crore for Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) and statutory dues. Thus, the non-plan support to the PSEs has actually been reduced by another 30% this year.

Yashwant Sinha has now made it a habit to confuse the people by quoting sometimes revised budget figures and mentioning sometimes original budget figures of the last year. But whom is he fooling? For instance, non-plan support for National Instruments Ltd. (NIL), Bharat Ophthalmic Glass Ltd. (BOGL), Cycle Corporation of India (CCI), Mining & Allied Machinery Corporation (MAMC), Rehabilitation Industries Corporation (RIC), Bharat Process and Mechanical Engineers Ltd. (BPMEL), Weighbird India Ltd. (WIL), National Bicycle Corporation Ltd (NBCL) and Tannery & Footwear Corporation (TAFCO)

is zero but at the same time the Government is talking about the revival of these units, ostensibly for political objective.

Five paras have been devoted to public sector in the Budget speech out of which one para is for disinvestment and two paras are for VRS. The picture is very clear - closure forsick units and disinvestment for profit-making units. The Budget reveals that disinvestment in 43 PSEs as recommended by the Disinvestment Commission, is at various stages of implementation. Some more PSUs will be retened to Disinvestment Commission, obviously for closure or privatisation. There is half sentence which talks of "devising viable" rehabilitation strategies for sick units". However, plan investment is Rs.179 crores only, for 60 BIFR referred companies. This shows reluctance to allocate funds for revival of sick units.

Budget claims credit for receipt of disinvestment Rs.8000 crore against budgeted figures of Rs.5000 crores. Is it actually disinvestment? Some of the cash-rich Public Sector companies have been forced to dispense with Rs.6000 crore to meet Government's fiscal deficit. The result is an erosion of Rs.22,000 crore in market cap of 8 such PSUs, viz., IOC, ONGC, IBPCL, GAIL, HPCL, MTNL, VSNL and BHEL. The steepest fall in the market capitalisation of these public

sector companies, by more or less 24%, has occurred because of this crossholding operation. Still the Finance Minister has the temerity to claim credit for disinvestment of more than Rs.5,000 crore and announced to disinvest Rs.10,000 crore in 1999-2000.

REDUCED OUTLAYS

Despite industrial recession, outlay for public sector investment has not been increased at all. The total plan outlay for the PSEs has been reduced from Rs.71,398 crore in 1998-99 to Rs.68,157.98 crore this year, even though the champions of private sector, who are the main advisers to the Finance Minister, have clamoured for more public investment to boost up industry. In 1998-99 the shortfall in central plan outlay has been to the tune of about 16%, because of fall in budgetary support.

As for infrastructure in the power sector, against the central plan outlay of Rs.9500 crore in 98-99, there has been a shortfall of 20%. This year, there has been an increase in outlay by hardly 1%. In the area of non-conventional energy, the budgetary support has been reduced from Rs.189.52 crore to Rs.90.19 crore only. In the coal sector, the central plan outlay has been reduced to Rs.3898 crore against Rs.4052.75 crore in 98-99. For the Petroleum & Natural Gas Sector, the plan outlay has been reduced to Rs.12123.80 crore against

Rs.15389 crore in 98-99. (See Table below)

The Budget clearly shows that the working class is not on the

agenda of the present Government. The industrial lobbies have welcomed this Budget. Why should then the

Government bother about workers? Swadesh without Desh is now the motto of this 'Swadeshi' Government.

BUDGETARY SUPPORT (PLAN & NON-PLAN) TO SICK PSEs REFERRED TO BIFR

<i>Rs. in Crores</i>					
		Non-Plan Loans		Plan Investment	
		1998-99 (Revised)	1999-2000 (Budget)	1998-99 (Revised)	1999-2000 (Budget)
Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilisers					
Smith Stainstreet Pharma. Ltd.		2.70	2.34	—	0.01
Bengal Chemicals & Pharma. Ltd.		1.00	0.25	3.50	4.00
Bengal Immunity Ltd.		3.50	2.88	—	0.01
Indian Drugs & Pharma. Ltd.		67.13	33.72	0.05	0.01
Hindustan Antibiotics Ltd.		—	1.00	3.00	3.00
Hindustan Fertiliser Corp. Ltd.		143.00	107.25	35.00	84.00
Fertiliser Corp. of India		257.00	192.75	48.00	10.00
Total A		474.33	340.19	89.55	101.03
Ministry of Steel & Mines					
Bharat Refractories Ltd.		20.50	0.50	—	—
Bharat Gold Mines Ltd.		16.55	10.00	4.50	5.00
Total B		37.05	10.50	4.50	5.00
Ministry of Textiles					
National Textiles Corporation		423.50	400.00	0.01	0.01
British India Corporation		25.30	—	0.01	0.01
National Jute Manufactures Corp.		104.11	50.00	0.01	0.01
Elgin Mills Ltd.		14.23	—	—	—
Cawnpore Textiles Mills Ltd.		5.15	—	—	—
Total C		572.29	450.00	0.03	0.03
Ministry of Industry					
National Instruments Ltd.		3.60	—	—	0.01
Bharat Ophthalmic Glass Ltd.		2.25	—	—	0.01
Cycle Corporation of India		7.50	—	—	0.01
National Bicycle Corp. of India		3.15	—	—	—
Heavy Engineering Corp. of India		16.37	15.84	20.00	20.00
Mining & Allied Machinery Corp.		25.50	—	—	0.01
Bharat Yantra Nigam Ltd.		5.90	—	2.30	2.32
Bharat Bhari Udyog Nigam Ltd.		33.47	9.00	17.36	36.98
Rehabilitation Industries Cor.		5.70	—	—	—
Tannery & Footwear Cor. Of Ind.		6.75	—	—	—
Tyre Corporation of India		3.75	4.00	6.45	2.00
NEPA Ltd.		5.00	5.00	5.00	6.34
Hindustan Photo Film		5.10	5.00	3.34	0.01
Instrumentation Ltd.		11.50	6.50	4.50	1.50
Scooters India Ltd.		—	—	—	—
Total D		135.54	45.34	58.95	73.49
Grand Total (A+B+C+D)		1219.21	* 846.03	153.03	179.55

* includes 337.00 crores for VSS in Department of heavy Industry and also includes 100.00 crores for terminal benefit for Department of Textiles.

SECOND NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

The 35th session of the Standing Labour Committee (SLC), held on 6.2.1999, while noting the decision of the Govt. to set up the Second National Commission on Labour, further suggested that the composition and terms of reference of the Commission should be finalised in consultation with the employers' and workers' organisations.

The Ministry of labour decided to call for the views of trade unions and employers' organisations in this regard.

The CITU, AITUC, HMS and INTUC in a joint letter dated 15.3.1999 to Satyanarayan Jatia, Labour Minister, have communicated their views on the composition and terms of reference of the Commission.

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION

The letter urged that "We would have preferred consultations on the subject being held by you jointly with the central trade unions. We, however, hope that you may still hold joint discussions after this preliminary step of seeking our views in writing".

The central trade unions have urged that the Chairman of the proposed commission should, besides being a person of a very high stature, be one who had dealt with the issues of labour with a positive bent of mind to improve the lot of workers, particularly those in the unorganised, rural, informal and home-based sectors.

The following names have also been suggested for consideration:

Justice D.A. Desai
Justice P. Jeevan Reddy
Justice Rajinder Sachar
Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The central trade unions felt that "the proposed terms of reference as contained in the Government announcement on setting up of the Second National Commission on Labour, are narrow and limited in scope". They emphasised that the terms of reference should be broader and comprise the pressing problems confronted by Indian labour. They have suggested the following terms:

1) To comprehensively review the implementation

of the recommendations of the First National Commission on Labour;

2) To review the changes that have occurred in the economic scenario in the country since 1969, more particularly in the wake of Structural Adjustment Programme from 1991 and protect the interest of workers;

3) To evaluate the existing legislative and other provisions to protect the interest of labour in the organised, unorganised, rural, informal and home based sectors and the self-employed;

4) To study the condition of unorganised and rural workers and suggest 'umbrella' legislations for protection and ensuring fair living standards for the workers in the unorganised sector and agricultural workers;

5) To study the condition of women workers and the socio-economic problems faced by them and suggest measures for strict enforcement of equal pay for equal work and to end discrimination and harassment of women at workplace;

6) To study and report on: (i) the establishment of a social safety net for workers in all sectors ensuring unemployment relief, pension, old age care and medical facility; (ii) the prevalent proliferation of industrial sickness and measures for prevention of sickness and speedy revival of sick units, to protect against job losses resulting therefrom; (iii) the low unionisation rate in the country its causes and remedial measures; (iv) steps to ensure right to association, collective bargaining in accordance with ILO convention and mandatory recognition of trade unions; (v) the abolition of child labour and provision of free and compulsory education to all children; (vi) the guidelines for evolving a national policy on wages and incomes keeping in view the price fluctuations; (vii) the ethos of tripartism and strengthening the tripartite machinery; (viii) the working of labour administration in the country and steps for democratising the same; (ix) the existing income parameters/ceilings in various labour legislations like the payment of bonus Act, payment of wages Act, workmen's compensation Act, etc.; (x) the mechanism of compiling labour statistics and compilation of price indices to ensure transparency

and fair-play; (xi) the need for ensuring workers' participation in management and legal provisions required therefor; (xii) the working of the construction workers Act and the need to improve the welfare measures incorporated therein and to further extend the welfare measures to other similarly placed workers;

(7) To make recommendations on all the above

matters.

The unions have also reiterated that a meeting be called for completing the process of consultations, before the Government took a final decision.

The joint letter has been signed by M K Pandhe (CITU), K L Mahendra (AITUC), R A Mital (HMS) and Chandidas Sinha (INTUC).

STANDARD CHARTERED BANK

ATTEMPT AT DE-UNIONISATION

Standard Chartered Bank is one of the oldest foreign bank operating in our country. It has been having its operations in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Madras and also has its presence in Amritsar, Shimla, Cochin, Calicut etc. Unions were formed in Standard Chartered Bank during late forties.

During last few years, this Bank Management has been steadily embarking on a policy of deunionisation, driving the employees out of employment with alluring schemes under VRS on the one hand and systematic closure of branches on the other. From 1994 to 1996, this Bank has thrown out more than 1000 workmen. In the first half of 1998, this Bank has closed down a number of offices in different parts of India particularly in Calcutta, Bombay, Chennai. At that time the Bank had assured in writing to all the employees that their jobs would be saved and they are finding out alternate employment for them.

Now, from 1.2.1999 onwards the Bank has come out with another staff retrenchment process, euphemistically called "Early Separation Scheme" applicable to all employees even those with one year service to his credit. Large scale coercive process is set in motion.

The Management's scheme was simple. First close down the Branches, render employees surplus in the name of highest form of technological application called "hubbing". Headquarters of all transactions have been shifted out of India to Singapore. Thanks to an obliging Government and Reserve Bank of India who have allowed this Bank to transmit out of the country all particulars about their customers and business in India.

After the employees have been rendered surplus, they have been huddled in a room in hundreds and kept without any job for months together. This made them mentally weak and morally disgruntled.

After having done this exercise, now the Chief Executive of the Bank in a communication to the employees says that they have got to retrench them and that is their business compulsion. On the one hand comes luring offer of some extra money and on the other, threats of retrenchment and what not are held.

Alongside, the Management has started recruiting on contract basis a large army of unemployed youth giving them a grand designation as "Officer" but utilising them for doing exactly the same work which the clerks and peons have so far been doing.

Management's designs are clear. Deunionisation is the objective.

Grindlays Bank Management has also closed down Branches and are also reportedly contemplating to introduce another VRS scheme shortly. This Grindlays Bank Management has suggested to their Unions that all full time employees of the Bank should agree to work on part time basis.

Bank of America has closed down its operation in India. British Bank of Middle East has closed down its Branches and the same has been taken over by Hongkong Bank, which in its turn, has introduced VRS. Once the foreign Banks are able to do it, heat will be turned on Indian Banks. All these are part of a grand design of deunionisation.

Bank Employees have got to fight against these things. These are no less important than wage revision.

(Courtesy: AIBEA Circular, 18.2.99)

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Himachal Pradesh

Braving Police Repression and Mass Scale Arrest

NAPTHA JHAKHRI WORKERS ON CONTINUOUS STRIKE

1700 workers deployed in construction of Naptha Jhakhri Power Project under a joint venture construction company controlled by an Italian firm were on continuous strike since 18.2.99.

Workers' main demands are withdrawal of illegal and vindictive termination of 92 workmen by the contractor company and payment of equal pay for equal work, besides implementation of labour legislations. The NJJV workers' union leading the continuous strike was earlier a INTUC affiliate. But since the local INTUC leadership refused to oppose the illegal termination of 92 workmen and take up the just demands of the workers, the union with the entire 1700 workforce severed affiliation with INTUC and joined CITU, while commencing the struggle programme.]

The Naptha Jhakhri Power Project is launched jointly by Govt. of India and Himachal Govt. forming Naptha Jhakhri Power Corporation (NJPC) to build up 1500 MW power plant (6x250MW) on the Satlez river basin spreading over from Jhakhri in Simla Dist. to Tapri in Kinnaur district. The Govt. of India owns 75% share of the company.

The NJPC awarded the contract

for construction work to two different joint venture construction companies namely M/s NJJV and M/s CFJV with three Multinational Companies from Italy, Canada & South Korea having major stakes in them.

The entire 2700 workforce of M/s CFJV are organised under CITU union from the beginning and led many successful struggles to discipline the autocratic MNC management. The 1700 workmen of NJJV which were earlier organised under INTUC union have also been drawn to struggle against retrenchment and wage rise and CITU came forward to lead the struggle after the local INTUC leaders backed out in order to oblige the management.

The strike of 1700 NJJV workers commenced on 18.2.99 with a massive rally of CFJV & NJJV workers on the first day which was addressed by Chandrakala Pandey MP & PK Ganguly, Secretary CITU, besides Rakesh Singha and Hemraj, President and Vice-President of Himachal state CITU. During 25 days of strike, when this report is going to press, the work in all construction sites under NJJV stood completely paralysed, although the management left no stone unturned to break the morale of the striking workers. The CFJV workers also joined the strike enmasse with a separate notice but

after a week's strike action, CFJV management had to agree to withdraw the retrenchment orders and start negotiation on the issue of equal pay for equal wage and the strike ended in CFJV area of construction. But NJJV management refused to see reasons and the strike is still continuing.

In order to break the strike the BJP Govt. in the state came forward to the aid of the MNC led construction company. The strike was declared illegal. In response to the demand of a Congress MLA, the Chief Minister of H.P. promptly declared that the strike in NJPC would be tackled in strong hands and immediately thereafter police force was let loose against the striking workers. Arrest warrant was issued against all the CITU leaders camping at Naptha Jhakhri area. On 12th March morning, police lathicharged in the peaceful sit-in demonstration of the striking workers at Jeori and 600 workers were arrested by a big Police contingent led by SP, ADM and JDM of Simla district. Meantime 300 workers coming from different sites to join the rally at Jeori were cordoned at Jhakhri and all of them were arrested on the same morning. In the midst of such a terror the management tried to start work in some of the sites

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but in vain. On 12th afternoon, Police arrested Bhagatram, Vice-President of Himachal Pradesh CITU, Omkar Singh, President State Kisan Sabha and Tikendra Singh, the DYFI leader when they were addressing the workers rally at Jeori.

The workers in the other Construction Company, M/s CFJV promptly resorted to solidarity action on 12th March itself by lightning strike on the same day and all the 2700 workers joined the strike. After the strike, workers rallied towards the nearby National Highway and blocked the road for three hours demanding immediate release of the arrested NJJV workers. The thousand strong rally of the CFJV workers was addressed by Tapan Sen, Secretary CITU, Hemraj, Vice-President Himachal state CITU and Ravinder, General Secretary of CFJV Workers Ekta Union. On 13th March, the local peasantry staged a demonstration in CFJV sites and CFJV workers also stopped work again

demanding end of repression on NJJV workers. Most of NJJV workers who were arrested have to be released by that time, but the state leader of CITU Jagatram, Kisan leader Omkar Singh and youth leader Tivendra Singh were sent to central jail.

In the entire Naptha Jhakhri Project Police force have unleashed a reign of terror by assault and intimidating action in workers camp and many of the workers had to leave the site camp and take shelter in nearby villages. On 14th and 15th March the police force alongwith NJJV managers and local INTUC leaders carried a manhunt in the workers camp and adjoining area, arrested 93 workers and forced them to sign on blank paper through torture. But despite such terror and torture and arrest of the state leaders, the impact and extent of strike could not be lessened in the least and in none of the NJJV sites work can be started.

Moreover the local village population and the peasantry also

came forward in support of the striking workers. While the strike was going on, local villagers and peasantry, also started their agitation through rallies, road blocks to highlight the demands of the local residents, land oustees who were affected by the construction of Power Project. This has created a charged atmosphere of unrest in the entire Naptha Jhakhri area which the State Administration is finding difficult to tackle.

On 17.3.99, Basudev Acharya MP visited Naptha Jhakhri Area to address the workers-peasant rally. Meantime M.K. Pandhe, General Secretary CITU met NJPC Chairman and demanding immediate commencement of negotiation with the striking workers. Jibon Roy MP, Secretary CITU also raised the matter at the level of Union Power Minister and demanded action against the irresponsible NJJV management responsible for stoppage of construction work in Naptha Jhakhri sites.

TAMIL NADU: STATE LEVEL CAMPAIGNS

Three State level conferences of Industrial Federations held during February '99 called for building up mass campaigns and struggles in the State.

Electricity Employees' Conferences

10th conference of Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu

Electricity Employees (COTEE) was held on 13-16, Feb 1999 at Cuddalore. Representing various sections of electricity workers and engineers, including contract, part-time, trainees 472 delegates participated. Among them 29 were women.

Amongst the State-wide

campaigns were undertaken by the union, preceding the conference, was a 'jyothi' - the flame against caste oppression and communal violence taken to Cuddalore from Kanyakumari. It covered all the southern districts, where caste clashes have been taking place during the last few months.

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Thousands of workers and other sections of people participated in the programmes *en route*.

The conference was presided by D Janakiraman, and inaugurated by A K Padmanabhan, Secretary CITU. E Balanandan, President, CITU greeted the conference on the inaugural day.

S Pancharathnam, General Secretary, presented the report. The fact that the Electricity Board had accorded recognition to COTEE on the eve of the conference, was itself an act of acknowledgment of the strength of the organisation.

It was during this period that the issue of regularisation of contract workers could be successfully completed. Another struggle of contract workers in thermal stations resulted in achieving wage parity for contract workers. Wage issue of regular workers was settled amicably. Another major issue taken up by the union for campaigns and struggles was against privatisation moves of the State Government.

81 delegates participated in the discussions. R Umanath, Vice President, CITU and T K Rengarajan, State General Secretary greeted the conference. They exhorted the members of COTEE to continue the good work done.

Four Commissions were formed to discuss two papers - one on 'caste clashes and toiling masses' and another on 'unification of workers and category issues.'

As decided by conference state-

wide campaigns against privatisation of electricity were held upto 15.3.99. Seminars and workshops would be organised on caste issues during April-May 99. State-wide calling attention demonstrations were held on the issues of contract workers.

Handloom Workers' Conference

The 8th conference of Tamil Nadu Handloom Workers' Federation was held at Kumbakonam, 26-22, Feb '99.

The conference was inaugurated by T K Rengarajan, General Secretary, State CITU and chaired by A K Padmanabhan, President of the federation.

A massive procession was taken out and a public meeting was held in the evening which was addressed by T K Rengarajan, A K Padmanabhan, G Bharathi Mohan and others. The delegates' session on 27th was attended by 332 delegates from 20 districts including 45 women.

Report presented by E Muthukumar, contained details about the serious crisis faced by the handloom weavers in the State. Thousands have been thrown out of job. Policies of the governments at the Centre and the State had severely affected the industry, including the cooperatives. 34 delegates participated in the discussion. The conference was greeted by Natarajan, General Secretary of Coimbatore District Handloom Workers Union, an independent union functioning for more than 25 years. He announced

that their union has decided to affiliate with CITU so as to strengthen the struggles of handloom workers in the state.

The conference decided to conduct state-wide campaigns till April 1999 and organise massive picketing of Central and State Government offices on 20th April. The main slogan will be "Save the Handloom Industry and Save the Weavers."

The conference elected the new team of office-bearers with A K Padmanabhan as President, E Muthukumar, as General Secretary and K Jeeva as treasurer. The office-bearers included one woman leader, P Palaniammal, who is the President of the Madurai district handloom workers union.

Auto Rickshaw Workers' Federation

The Second State Conference of the Tamil Nadu Auto Rickshaw Workers' Federation (CITU) was held at Coimbatore, 27-28 Feb 1999. 249 delegates from 28 districts in Tamil Nadu attended. A Soundararajan, presided over the conference. A massive procession was taken out in the evening. Nearly 5000 auto-drivers in khaki uniform participated in the procession. The public meeting was addressed by Susantho Ghas, West Bengal Transport Minister, K K Divakaran, General Secretary, AIRTWF, A Soundararajan and T N Nambirajan; R Balakrishnan presided. T K Rengarajan and K K Divakaran addressed the

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delegates' session.

The General Secretary, M Chandran, presented the report. Discussions on the report brought out various problems faced by them. With growing unemployment, many youth, including graduates and post

graduates, are entering this area. Added to this are those from closed factories or those thrown out through VRS.

The conference decided to conduct state-wide campaign on the charter of demands, which included setting up of Welfare

Board and Social Security cover to auto drivers and picketing of government offices in district centres on 20th April.

The conference elected A Soundarajan as President and S Thangam as General Secretary.

(Report from A K Padmanabhan)

CAPTIVE POWER PLANTS SALE BY SAIL OPPOSED

Top management of SAIL have recently decided to sell off or invite partners in running, some of its units considered to be non-core in nature, meaning not directly connected with steel making. They have identified captive power plants, fertilizer unit, oxygen plant etc. for such purposes. Such steps have invited unanimous widespread protest from all sections of workers and, privately, from officers also.

SAIL has shortlisted ENRON and Bombay Suburban Electric Supply (BSES) Ltd as possible joint partners for its power plants

in Rourkela (2x60mw units), Bokaro (3x60mw) and Durgapur (2x60mw units). In Bokaro the workers, irrespective of union affiliations threatened the management that any such move would be resisted by all means. In Durgapur Steel the workers under the leadership of Hindustan Steel Employees Union blocked all entrances of the Administrative Buildings on 11th February for almost a full day. On 19th February a joint front of CITU, INTUC and AITUC held similar demonstration and dharna against such a move.

In Rourkela the workers led by CITU union assembled in hundreds at the Railway Station on 21st February and braving lathicharge did not allow a team of engineers coming from BSES to inspect power plants of RSP. They had to go back.

The workers and also lower level officers hold this step will be a big financial loss to SAIL apart from causing operational, managerial difficulties. This arrangement will not solve any problem but create many others.

They have vowed to resist such a move by all means.

ASSAM: CITU ON THE MOVE

As per decision of NPMO, the All India Protest Day was observed throughout Assam. At Guwahati, a public meeting was addressed by Deben Bhattacharyya (CITU), Upen Talukdar (AITUC), Bimal Nandi (UTUC-LS) and Biren Kalita (AICCTU). After the meeting, a procession was also taken out through the main streets of

Guwahati.

The state level study camp was held 7-9, Feb '99 at Guwahati. 40 leading comrades participated in the camp. Kanai Banerjee, Secretary, CITU, Uddhab Barman and Hemen Das conducted the classes.

The State Committee of CITU, Assam met on 9th Feb and as decided thereat state-wide protest

day was observed on 17.2.99 against the murder of Anabrita Barla wife of Kalian Kundalana Vice President of NACMS by the Adivasi extremist forces. Kalian Kundalana and his daughter Tony were seriously injured. It may be recalled that Sagrika Soren, a leader of the garden was dastardly murdered by the extremist in 1996.

(Report from Deben Bhattacharyya)

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TRANSPORT FEDERATION MEETS

The General Council of the All India Transport Workers' Federation held its General Council in Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu) on 27-28, Feb 1999. Shyamal Chakraborty presided. A Soundara Rajan, General Secretary, Transport Federation, TN, welcomed. K K Divakaran presented the report.

The meeting decided on certain organisational steps to mobilise the transport workers in the Northern States. It also decided to carry out several campaigns as under:

i) Literacy campaign among

transport workers, who are members of the federation

ii) Village-level campaigns by transport unions against the Patent Amendments

iii) Campaign against the social evil of dowry, collecting pledges from members not to accept dowry

iv) Fight against communalism and casteism including signature campaign.

The meeting also discussed the preparations for holding the National Convention of Coordination Committee, to be hosted by HMS in Pune during

April. AITUC was also being approached in this regard.

The Federation also decided to hold sector wise Conventions during this year. Statewise trade union classes, including subjects like transport policy, Patent Act, IRA etc, and impact of globalisation have been planned. A booklet in English, Hindi, and Bengali on the impact of liberalisation policy on road transport, authored by Shyamal Chakraborty, Working President, is being published by the federation. In Tamil Nadu, it will be published in Tamil as well.

MAHARASHTRA: MISUSE OF PROFESSIONAL TAX

Maharashtra Government introduced a state-wide profession tax in 1975 during the Chief Ministership of S B Chavan of Congress(I). The proceeds of collections of this tax were to fund an Employment Guarantee Scheme to help the rural poor, who faced acute drought and scarcity conditions then. Governments have changed in Maharashtra but the levy of tax continues. The Shiv-Sena-BJP combine promised to withdraw this profession tax during their election-campaign. But on assuming power in the state, the combine threw to winds

all their electoral promises including the one on profession tax. Rather, in May 1998, the Shiv Sena-BJP Govt hiked the tax-rates.

On the other side, there is an accumulation of over Rs 3500 crore in this fund, lying unutilised. Wherever it was utilised to provide some jobs to rural poor, the wages paid was a paltry sum of Rs 20 to 25 per day.

A conference was organised on 13.2.99 in Mumbai, to protest against misuse of the profession tax levy by Maharashtra Government. K L Bajaj (CITU),

presided. Dada Samant (Kamgar Aghadi), G C Chitnis (AITUC) Suryakant Bagal (HMS). Sayeed Ahmed (CITU) and leaders of Port & Dock, Insurance, Govt employees and other organisations addressed.

The conference demanded withdrawal of hike in tax effected in May 1998 and for proper implementation of the employment guarantee scheme with Rs 50 as daily wage and Rs 25 as fall back wages to the rural workers. District wise meetings on similar lines have been organised during March 1999.

(Report from P R Krishnan)

ILC MEETS ON 3-4 APRIL 1999

The Government of India have convened the 35th session of the Indian Labour Conference on the 3-4 April, 99, with industrial sickness and employment opportunities as part of the agenda.

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NAVI MUMBAI PORT: CITU WIN

The Nhava Sheva Bunder Kamgar Sanghatana (A), an affiliate of the Water Transport Workers' Federation of India (CITU) has won the secret ballot conducted at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, Navi Mumbai, to verify the membership of the

unions operating in the Port. Out of the total votes cast (1447), the CITU union came first with 570 votes. Two other unions polled 469 and 406 votes (2 votes were cancelled). The RLC (C), Mumbai, who was the Returning Officer, declared the results of the

poll on 26.2.99. The union has nominated Bhushan Nathuram Patil, General Secretary to represent the CITU on the Board of Trustees of the JN Port Trust, which is to be reconstituted from 1.4.99.

(Report from Suresh K Patil)

WORKING WOMEN COMMITTEE MEETING

The AICCWW met at Delhi on 9th-10th March, 1999, to review the activities and organisation since the last 20 years. Nazeemunnissa from Kerala presided. The meeting was attended by representatives from 9 states. CITU Vice President Umanath, and Secretaries Kanai Banerjee and Varada Rajan were present.

The Secretary of AICCWW, Vimal Ranadive has not completely recovered from the fracture she sustained some time ago and could not attend the meeting. Hemalatha from the CITU centre presented the report. The meeting was held mainly with the purpose of starting a process of review of the work of CITU among working women in the last 20 years in increasing the membership of women in CITU, in educating and training them and in promoting women to leadership positions in CITU committees at various levels and in the CITU affiliated unions. As such, a preliminary report was presented to initiate discussions.

The report noted that the initiative taken by CITU in forming the AICCWW, way back in 1979, has certainly helped in focusing the special problems of working women and the necessity of bringing more and more working women into the mainstream of the trade union movement. After the initiative of CITU, some other national trade unions and NGOs started taking up the issue. The govt also started paying some attention.

CITU started organising the anganwadi employees on a national scale in 1989 and formed the All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers. The AIFAWA has now emerged as a major fighting force of the anganwadi employees in many states, with a membership of about 1 lakh. The bi-monthly journal 'The Voice of the Working Woman' is being published uninterruptedly since the last 19 years. In many states, state level coordination committees of working women have been formed. In some states, district

level co-cos and industry wise sub-committees have been formed. There is some improvement in promoting women workers into the union committees and CITU committees at various levels, though it cannot be said to be satisfactory. Some unions take up the specific problems of working women.

Some office employees' associations, which are close to CITU, have also taken up the issue. AIEA, NFPTA and state govt employees' associations in some states hold regular working women's conventions at state, district and regional levels and have formed sub-committees and coordination committees.

While noting the achievements, the report also pointed out that weaknesses still continue, though they vary in intensity and extent in different states. Feudal attitudes towards women still exist to a large extent in male leadership. Women are also not free from this attitude. Financial assistance is not provided for women to attend meetings. There is still resistance

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to promote women and to develop them as trade union leaders. Various organisational tasks were proposed in the report to overcome the weaknesses and to carry forward CITU among working women.

21 women from all the states and the centre participated in the discussion. While broadly endorsing the review and the tasks proposed in the report they enriched it with their own

experiences in the states, and examples of concrete conditions in various unions, federations and CITU Committees. After the reply on the discussion it was adopted. Umanath, in his concluding remarks, told that the report will be further discussed by the CITU centre. Basing on the discussion in the AICCWW, the full secretariat of CITU will discuss the issue and present a report to the General Council of

CITU. The General Council of the CITU, after a thorough discussion will adopt a report which will help in carrying forward the work in the future. Umanath also clarified the role of the Coordination Committee and asked the members to have an objective assessment of the conditions and work towards the realisation of the objectives of CITU in forming the AICCWW.

SAVE RUBBER PLANTATIONS

India is the 4th largest rubber producer as well as the consumer in the world. The first comes Thailand in production and the USA in consumption.

85 per cent of the supply of the natural rubber is produced by the small growers. A major part of the natural rubber is used for the manufacture of tyres.

The natural rubber producers in India are facing a grave threat due to the steep fall in rubber prices. Natural rubber price remains below Rs 25 per kg for the last two years. It was Rs 65 per kg during the 1995-96 season. The present price of natural rubber is even below 50% of production cost.

The fall in rubber price affects the rubber growers as well as the 3 lakh workers in the rubber plantation sector. The workers are not getting wages and other benefits properly due to the fall in rubber price.

The situation prevailing in the

rubber industry is favourable for getting fair price for natural rubber. The use of synthetic rubber has fallen continuously since 1979. It fell from 70% to 60% of the world market share of rubber.

Tyre industry, the largest user of natural rubber is growing rapidly. The prices of tyres are increasing year after year. But tyre manufacturers are conspiring to push down the natural rubber prices. The tyre lobby deliberately stayed away from purchasing in the local natural rubber market. This led to an all time low price of rubber at Rs 25 per kg.

The BJP Government helped the game of the tyre lobby with its inaction. The government of Kerala, which earns Rs 3 crore tax from the rubber industry, has taken some steps for improving the market. But, it is the duty of the Central Government, especially that of the Ministry of

Commerce, to intervene in the matter urgently in view of the seriousness of the situation. Though they have proclaimed the Bench Mark price at Rs 3405 per quintal for RSS-4 and Rs 3355 per quintal for RSS-5, there is no body to purchase it in that price. There is no meaning in declaring Bench Mark price in the absence of market support.

Even after declaring the Bench Mark price, the Centre directed the State Trading Corporation (STC) to procure rubber only at the prevailing market price. And so it failed to improve the situation.

Though production of natural rubber declined by 14,000 tonnes in 1998, the prices failed to look up.

The government should take initiative to explore new avenues for the use of natural rubber. If it is used for road rubberisation, it has 35% economic advantage. The advantage of road

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rubberisation is evident in Kerala. The rubberised portion of the road leading to Sabarimala is an eloquent testimony. The rubberised portion has developed only some potholes in 7 years while other areas had to be retarred twice every year. The FACT (Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore Ltd) has

already modernised its plants for producing rubberised bitumen. The government must give direction to use rubberised bitumen in the construction of Delhi-Kanyakumari super highway and all other major highways. In addition to the above, for saving the rubber plantation

sector, the governments must implement the following steps:

- a) give direction to the State Trading Corporation (STC) to procure natural rubber at Beach Mark price
 - b) impose higher duty on poly urethane
 - c) Reduce duty of latex foam.
- (Report from Lalaji Babu, AIPWF)*

CITU-ILO TU TRAINING ACTIVITY

A five day trade union training programme was organised by the Steel Workers' Federation of India (SWFI) at Rourkela from 23rd to 27th Feb 1999. This was a part of an ILO project for workers' education assistance in selected Asian countries, which include India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Mangolia. CITU deputed Pranab Chakraborty (SWFI) and S Pancharatnam (Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees) for a 3-week workshop in Kathmandu where the training modules were designed after a thorough going discussion. Besides CITU, AITUC, BMS, HMS and INTUC are counterpart trade unions for this programme from India. The training programme was

inaugurated by Chittabrata Mazumdar, Secretary, CITU on 23.2.99. M K Pandhe, President, SWFI, chaired the inaugural session. A 4 volume-18 modules training materials got up by the ILO, are also translated into Bengali for use by the trainees. The training programme was attended by 28 leaders from different steel plants and mines. Subjects covered included: emerging challenges of TUs, TU response to technological change, economic systems and structural adjustments, organisational development of TUs, organising, TU mission and goals, gender equality in TUs, workers' education and TU training, TU unity, etc. W R Varada Rajan, Secretary CITU and National

Coordinator, P Chakraborty, Union Coordinator, Peter Mortensen, Chief Technical Adviser of the ILO Project, K Hemalatha, General Secretary, Anganwadi Federation, A Dakshi Gen. Secretary, SWFI conducted the training programme spread over eight sessions. The participants were divided into 4 groups named 'MINERAL', 'COAL', 'POWER' and 'LABOUR' and intense group discussions and presentation through activity sheets were the highlight of this training activity. Bishnu Mohanty and Binod Das President and General Secretary of Steel Employees TU, Rourkela took an active part in organising the programme.

CPSTU CALL

Committee of Public Sector Trade Unions (CPSTU) has called upon all Public Sector Unions to send protest telegrams to Prime Minister opposing retrograde guidelines of DPE on public sector wage negotiations. Telegram should be sent simultaneously by all trade unions on 12th April 1999, the next opening day of the Parliament.

Extended meeting of CPSTU will be held on 4th May'99 at New Delhi, to decide further course of action on issues facing PSU workers, including the long over due wage revision.

ESI SUPPLIES CONTAMINATED FLUIDS

The ESI scheme is supposed to be providing medical and cash benefits to more than 90 lakh workers. But because of the unsatisfactory functioning and lack of will on the part of the government to improve the services, more often than not workers do not get the benefits they are entitled to under the scheme. Large number of employers, particularly in the unorganised sector avoid the scheme. Large number of posts of medical staff are lying vacant. Drugs are not available and the patients are forced to buy from outside. Medical claims are not reimbursed and delayed for months.

The trade unions have voiced

concern about the state of things in ESI many times and protests were launched. But things continue to be the same. While the cost of medicines has increased in the last few years, the per capita expenditure of ESI on medicare increased only marginally. While it was Rs 516.42 in 96-97, in 1997, the ESIC has fixed a ceiling of Rs 500/- per annum. In many states the per capita expenditure on medicines has actually come down.

Besides the lack of essential medicines in the ESI hospitals due to dwindling allocations, even the drugs used are often substandard. There are many allegations of substandard drugs or contaminated I.V. fluids causing

serious illness or loss of life in ESI hospitals.

In one such instance, I.V. fluids contaminated with fungus were detected in the ESI hospital at Rajajinagar, Bangalore by Rajendran - a worker in Minerva Mills who is also the president of the Karnataka ESIC Insured Persons Welfare Association. On his complaint, the ESIC director ordered withdrawal of the batch of I.V. fluids but no other action was taken. An investigation, ordered by the Additional Chief Metropolitan magistrate of Bangalore is in progress.

How many more workers have to suffer or lose their lives because of the negligence of the ESIC?

(Report from V.J.K Nair)

MULTIFARIOUS CAMPAIGN BY BEFI

The fifth conference of Bank Employees' Federation of India (BEFI), held at Kochi in January last was marked by a multifarious campaign programme. It consisted of various seminars at district centres all over Kerala and area centres in and around Ernakulam district, a national seminar, camp of artists, survey on customer service and banking policy, meeting of retired bank employees, various cultural programmes, essay competition for bank employees and students etc.

The seminar programmes in various parts of Ernakulam district

started with one at North Paravoor on the subject "Import Policy and Traditional Industries" on 31.12.1998. Subsequently, seminars like "Historic background of Indian Nationalism", "Industrial policy - 1956 to 1998", "Globalisation of Financial Sector", "Fascism Resurrecting", "The Farmer losing his seeds", "From Gurukulam to public school", "Reorganisation of Agriculture in the State", "People's planning and Banks" and "Communist Manifesto and the working class" were held.

A national seminar on "financial

sector reforms experience in developing countries, prospects for India", was conducted on 19.1.99. V.R. Krishna Iyer inaugurated the seminar. N.Ram was the moderator. Papers were presented by Prabhat Patnaik, K.R.S. Nair (State Bank of India), S. Uma Devi and P. Sadasivan Pillai.

A discussion was held on "Development of Kerala and banks" on 25.1.99. The key note address was delivered by E.M. Sreedharan, Member, Planning Board, Kerala. Prasantha Menon, Chairman, State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), M. Moideen,

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President, Kerala Small Industries Association and others participated in the discussion.

A camp of renowned artists was organised on the theme "Artists against Communalism and Re-colonisation" at Calicut. Nearly, 50 artists from different parts of the State assembled at Calicut and gave vent to their feelings through their paintings.

An exhibition which, attracted

thousands of people from all walks of life, was held at Kochi. Educative postures depicting the evil designs of the imperialist forces were arranged. The paintings produced in the artist camp at Calicut were the main attraction.

More than 4000 Bank Employees from various parts of the state participated in the procession which culminated at Kaloor

ground.

The public meeting was inaugurated by N.M. Sundaram, General Secretary of All India Insurance Employees Association (AIIEA). K.N. Raveendranath (CITU), K. Babu MLA (INTUC), V.A.N. Namboodiri, N. Sasidharan, Sebastian Paul MLA, Naresh Pal, Ashis Sen and other leaders of BEFI addressed.

(Report from P.Sadasivan Pillai)

MULTINATIONAL WAY OF RECOVERY

In the recent past, reports are available in the Press about engaging of thugs and goons by the Multinational/Foreign banks for recovery of their dues. The latest report available is that of Citi Bank. A South Mumbai based businessman who was alleged to have defaulted on the credit card was first threatened by the bank officials over phone and subsequently three persons came to the businessman's office and threatened him with knife. This course was resorted to by the bank for default by the businessman to pay dues upto Rs 7.75 lacs. It was confirmed in the Press conference by bank officials along with

former Police Commissioner and Citi Bank consultant, Rebeiro that the bank had engaged the services of Quality Consultants to recover dues from defaulters. They said that quality consultants had been told only to persuade defaulters to clear their dues and not be aggressive. Possibly brandishing of knife by the goons to effect recovery of moneys is not taken as aggressive as per Citi Bank culture. Further Rebeiro also justified appointment of collection agencies by bank saying, "It is necessary because in the present legal system, nothing happens." Hence, according to the Foreign Banks, the alternative to the

lacunae in the legal system is to encourage criminals. All are aware of the fragrant violation of RBI guidelines by these foreign banks in the security scam to garner huge illegal profits. The larger question arising out of the present Citi Bank episode and its extra-legal methods adopted to effect recovery of its dues is that, whether similar treatment is to be applied to big corporates who have defaulted crores of rupees to the commercial banks?

The alternative is not the criminalisation of the recovery process but stringent laws and recovery tribunals as demanded by the trade unions in banking sector.

ACCORD ON WAGE REVISION FOR BANK EMPLOYEES

After a nation-wide successful strike for two days, the Bank employees and officers were to embark on an indefinite strike from 17.3.1999. Meanwhile marathon conciliation proceedings were held in Mumbai on the 10th and 11th March,

between the Indian Banks' Association and the United Forum of Bank Unions. Accord was finally reached at 11.30 pm on 11.3.99. As per the MoU signed, the Bank employees will get wage revision effective from 1.11.1997 and the overall rise shall be

12.25% (including superannuation benefits) of the wage bill for the year ended 31.3.97.

With this, the strike has been called off and formal negotiations to finalise the settlement is expected to commence soon.

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CEMENT WORKERS OPPOSE SALE OF UNITS

Hundreds of workers from all the ten units of the Cement Corporation of India assembled at Jantar Mantar on 16.3.99 and staged a demonstration and a day long dharna to record their protest against the Corporation attempt to sell out units. They also demanded modernisation of the old units to make them viable. A number of units of the Corporation are out of production stream for quite some time on the plea that they were running at loss. It is now months that the workers belonging to these units are not

getting wages and consequently facing starvation. The demonstrators demanded immediate payment of wages to the workers. The workers were addressed by leaders of the central trade unions.

The Cement Corporation of India is the only company in the central public sector in the cement industry which is otherwise dominated by private enterprises. The Corporation has been referred to the BIFR but the authorities are delaying submission of rehabilitation package to the

BIFR.

A deputation of representatives of all the major central trade unions led by Jibon Roy MP, Secretary, CITU, met the Prime Minister and explained their view points while submitting a memorandum. An official present during the meeting denied the report in a section of the Press on proposed sale of three more units.

The Prime Minister told the deputation that he would take up the matter after the Parliament session adjourned.

ANGANWADI WORKERS

Assam: On 18.2.1999, anganwadi workers and helpers in Assam held a huge procession at Guwahati. They were responding to the call given by AIFAWH to observe an all India Protest Day. More than a thousand workers participated in the procession. A memorandum was submitted to the Director of the Social Welfare

Deptt. A convention was held in 28.2.'99 at Guwahati and the Asom Rajyik Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Sansthan, affiliated to CITU was formally formed and elected a 21 member state committee.

Haryana: The anganwadi employees of Haryana launched a massive struggle against the

sexual harassment of an anganwadi worker by a Block Development Officer (BDO). A big rally was held in Rohtak and a memorandum was submitted to the District Collector. The Collector, who initially tried to shield the officer, ultimately agreed for an enquiry and the BDO was suspended.

ILO CRITICISES AUSTRALIAN GOVT.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has criticised the Australian government anti-union laws. The ILO called on the Australian government to amend the anti-union provisions in a series of industrial relations and trade practices laws and to restore the

rights of working people to union membership and representation. Since its election over three years ago, the conservative Australian government has introduced a raft of new laws in an effort to give employers a free hand to set wages and conditions for the country's workers. The ILO has especially

criticised the draconian limitations on the right of workers to take strike action. The right of union members to take solidarity action in support of workers in other workplaces or in other countries has also been reaffirmed as a fundamental right by the ILO.

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ALLOY STEELS PLANT, DURGAPUR, LANGUISHING

Durgapur Alloy Steels Plant (ASP) is the country's premier Alloy and special steel producing plant catering the need of entire spectrum of special steel use and consumption right from kitchen-wares to rockets.

ASP had the misfortune that it was not expanded, as per original schedule in 1970's. By middle of 80's it was expanded first to 160,000 tons per year (from 100,000 tpa) and then to 260,000 tons per year. But it was denied any rolling facility of stainless steel or any other finishing units.

It could supply slabs to Salem (stainless steel) or slabs to Bokaro for Railway Wagon/Coach building plates or sheets.

ASP has acquired ISO 9002 certification. It has developed several special steels needed for defence, petrochemical industry, aerospace. It has an impeccable record in the matters of quality.

But still it is languishing because of its vintage technology and lack of proper steps by SAIL management to modernise and expand it to make it a viable unit. To-day suddenly stainless steel

market has become sluggish and imported slab or sheets are cheaper. SAILCOR steel for the Railways is being produced by integrated steel plants like Bokaro. Thus ASP has no market, has cut back production and is making losses that has become a matter of serious concern.

Hindustan Steel Employees Union (CITU) has demanded certain immediate steps including some short term investment to improve the marketability and value addition of its products to save it from becoming sick.

STRUGGLE AGAINST CEL PRIVATISATION

The employees of Central Electronics Ltd, Ghaziabad carried on a month long agitation and campaign against the Govt bid to privatise the only public sector company producing solar photovoltaic cell in the country and also against corruption and mismanagement in the company. Despite contracting market and unfair competition from the MNCs the CEL consistently performed quite well. But still govt is bent on privatising it.

Besides, the CEL Employees Union highlighted the corruption and irregularity in recruitment of executives, purchase and inventory management in the company and demanded punishment of the erring officials. Union also focused on delay in wage revision.

The union staged massive demonstrations on 26.2.99, also participated by the officers.

The union also organised a mass petition campaign addressed to Lok Sabha against Govt policy on CEL which was signed by almost cent percent of workers and executives and submitted to Lok Sabha through Bikash Chowdhury MP.

On 4.3.99 a day long dharna was organised at the company gate. On 10.3.99 onwards a three-day programme of relay hunger strike and dharna by the union leaders and activists was undertaken. On 11.3.99, mass of the workers and officers staged lunch boycott in support of the relay hunger strike and wore black badges.

On 12.3.99, on the third day of relay hunger strike, union gave the

ultimatum to management of their resolve to go in for indefinite hunger strike. On the same day a massive demonstration was held at the gate which was addressed by S B Bharadwaj, General Secretary, Delhi State CITU, and K M Tiwari, General Secretary of Ghaziabad Dist CITU besides Manchanda and ShivKumar Sharma working president and General Secretary of the union.

On 13.3.99, management agreed to consider changes in inventory and production management, removal of irregularities in purchase etc and also arrears of interim relief. Management agreed to take up with govt union's demand on placement of orders to CEL from govt deptt and appointment of full time CMD etc.

Consumer Price Index Numbers for Industrial Workers on base: 1982 = 100

Sr. No	Centre	Nov 98	Dec 98	Jan 99	Sr. No.	Centre	Nov 98	Dec 98	Jan 99
1	Gudur	450	442	437	45	Amritsar	400	387	380
2	Guntur	421	421	407	46	Ludhiana	417	390	383
3	Hyderabad	399	399	390	47	Ajmer	418	406	401
4	Visakhapatnam	420	409	404	48	Jaipur	408	397	387
5	Warangal	426	415	409	49	Chennai	451	449	443
6	D D Tinsukia	401	387	376	50	Coimbatore	403	403	395
7	Guwahati	443	431	423	51	Coonoor	424	426	414
8	Labac-Silchar	379	371	359	52	Madurai	420	429	420
9	Mariani Jorhat	431	427	419	53	Salem	425	425	415
10	Rangapara-Tezpur	435	423	397	54	Tiruchirapally	494	476	465
11	Jamshedpur	424	414	399	55	Agra	412	400	392
12	Jharia	396	376	359	56	Ghaziabad	454	437	427
13	Kodarma	405	391	381	57	Kanpur	445	427	418
14	Monghyr Jamalpur	437	423	417	58	Saharanpur	403	395	385
15	Noamundi	399	393	375	59	Varanasi	493	470	460
16	Ranchi-Hatia	454	433	412	60	Asansol	428	411	397
17	Ahmedabad	435	424	414	61	Calcutta	470	461	429
18	Bhavnagar	464	449	441	62	Darjeeling	406	400	380
19	Rajkot	434	420	410	63	Durgapur	474	451	430
20	Surat	459	439	430	64	Haldia	472	468	452
21	Vadodra	427	407	401	65	Howrah	506	491	471
22	Faridabad	454	436	432	66	Jalpaiguri	423	407	389
23	Yamunanagar	409	397	386	67	Raniganj	397	388	373
24	Srinagar	452	437	461	68	Chandigarh	452	441	434
25	Bangalore	406	405	398	69	Delhi	482	464	472
26	Belgaum	436	443	454	70	Pondicherry	479	485	469
27	Hubli-Dharwar	426	430	426					
28	Mercara	437	443	440		All India	438	429	420
29	Alwaye	419	416	416					
30	Mundakayam	432	427	427		Additional Series of Labour Bureau			
31	Quilon	405	410	416	1	Kothagudem	464	440	406
32	Thiruvananthapuram	455	450	451	2	Himachal Pradesh	415	403	400
33	Balaghat	400	386	370	3	Bhilwara	426	423	413
34	Bhilai	388	377	362	4	Chhindwara	432	426	416
35	Bhopal	465	452	443	5	Tripura	428	419	399
36	Indore	436	428	418	6	Goa	471	471	464
37	Jabalpur	448	434	436					
38	Mumbai	479	475	467					
39	Nagpur	454	446	439					
40	Nasik	451	443	441					
41	Pune	471	469	468					
42	Solapur	469	479	472					
43	Barbil	407	398	385					
44	Rourkela	432	413	397					

Government of India
Ministry of Labour
Labour Bureau
Shimla - 171 004