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WOMAN



PROTEST MEETING AGAINST RETRENCHMENT
THROUGH MECHANISATION

TOBACCO, BEEDI, MATCH, COALMINES, CONSTRUCTION.

While the 6th Five Year Plan is considering various schemes for employment of women in different fields, in urban and rural areas to increase employment of women, they are faced with immediate retrenchment on a mass scale in Tobacco, Match, Mines, Pharmaceutical, Garment and such industries due to introduction of sophisticated machinery in which women are not trained for such jobs. The Central Government and the Planning Commission have accepted the fact that there is a "serious decline in some sectors" in employment of women and suggested some schemes for women where they can be employed. Due to absence of training facilities, illiteracy, competition and such other factors women are not in a position to find jobs where they constitute more than 80-90 p.c. This is a serious matter for the consideration for all, including women's organisation, Trade Unions and social organisations.

Accordingly, the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU), has called a meeting of working women and men in trade unions, women's organisations, social organisations, and individuals concerned about this problem to discuss this question and in particular, to protest against the introduction of Green Leaf Threshing Plants and other machinery in the Tobacco Industry, (report on page 12 and 13) and Match Industry, which threatens the jobs of more than a lakh of women workers.

The meeting will be held on Sunday, February 1, 1981, at 4.p.m., at the M.P's Club, North Avenue, New Delhi.

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W O M E N I N S T R U G G L E

Decisive Victory in Kanpur
Textile Mills.

- From Dr. Lakshmi Sehgal, President
Kanpur Kamgar Mahila Samiti.

AFTER a protracted struggle beginning last August, The Sooti Mill Mazdoor Sabha and the Kamgar Mahila Samiti have won a victory in the New Victoria Mills, forcing the management to reinstate thirty-three women and forty-two boys, thrown out of the mill on the 26th August, for demanding a pay rise. From Rs.4.50 per day, their wage has increased to Rs.8 daily.

The New Victoria Mills, which was taken over by the Government-run National Textile Corporation after 33 months of closure, employs 33 women and 42 boys in the Reeling Department of the mill. Though a regular and integral part of the mill, these workers were employed as contract labour, through an agent, and not directly recruited and employed. Consequently, they were not covered by any of the Factory Acts, worked anything from 8 to 12 hours a day, with no paid holiday, Provident Fund, etc., and received a daily wage of Rs.4.50 and Rs.6. The Sooti Mill Mazdoor Sabha led by a militant worker of the mill and the Treasurer of the Union, had been organising these workers for the past two years, and the movement gained momentum after the formation of the Kamgar Mahila Samiti.

In August 1979, the women and boys had launched a struggle as a result of which the services of the contractor were terminated and two of the women instead put in charge of the work. They weighed and distributed the raw cotton and collected the finished products. Whatever was paid by the mill was equally distributed among the workers. After two months a contractor was again appointed. In a verbal agreement made through the Chairman of the National Textile Corporation, the daily wage was to be raised to Rs.10. It was when the General Manager went back on this agreement and on Raksha Bandan day, August 26, ordered a lathi charge on the women waiting to meet

him at the gate, one of the women sustaining permanent damage to her eyes, that the women and boy workers were dismissed.

.Then followed the long-drawn out process of appealing to the Labour Department, the Labour Minister, the Chairman of the N.T.C. Everyone approached, conceded that the demands were just, but no-one came forward to grant these demands. The General Manager washed his hands of the whole affair by stating the matter was no concern of his, but one between the contractor and "his labourers". Ultimately the General Secretary of the Union had to give notice of an indefinite Hunger Strike at the mill gate from November 27, 1980. A relay 24-hour hunger strike began, led each day by a senior Trade Union leader, two of leaders of the Kamgar Mahila Samiti, two of the women workers and two of the boy workers, and leading workers from other mills. Gate meetings were held before the beginning of every shift, addressed among others by the General Secretary of the U.P. State CIU and AITUC.

For the first two days there was little response from the male workers of the mill; but with the campaigning carried on inside the mill, the attitude started changing and from the third day support began to be built up. Attendance at the gate meetings became daily larger, and slogans raised with great vigour. Once they perceived the rising tempo of the agitation, the management began to send out feelers for talks. On December 4, the eighth day of the hunger-strike action, after hard bargaining, a compromise was reached. All the workers would be taken back and work commence on the 6th, and the daily wage would be increased to Rs.10.

This is still only a partial victory. The struggle will still be continued to totally abolish the contract system of hiring labour, and have the women employed as regular workers on the basis of equal pay.

M A H A R A S H T R A N U R S E S
S T R U G G L E

*From Dr. Sujata Dhawale, Joint
Secretary, Maharashtra Mahila
Kamgar Karmachari Parishad.

The Maharashtra nurses have been pressing for their demands persistently. The 7-hour duty schedule which they had demanded on par with other Government servants and which had been granted by the former EDF-Government in Maharashtra, has not yet been implemented.

When the Health Minister of Maharashtra was scheduled to visit the Sassoon Hospital in Pune, a large number of militant nurses gathered there and staged a massive protest demonstration to press for their demands. The President of the Maharashtra Government Nurses Federation, Smt. A.A. Athavale, even sat in front of the Minister's car and journey was brought to a standstill.

In the Government Hospital at Cundh in Pune District, a militant nurse who was being regularly victimised due to her active interest in the Union activities, went on a hunger-strike to protest against the Hospital Authorities. All the nurses also went on strike in protest, with the result that Cundh Hospital was closed for the day. Sassoon Hospital also had a one-day strike of nurses for their long-standing demands.

In retaliation to the nurses struggles, the President of the Federation Smt. Athavale, was immediately transferred from the Sassoon Hospital in Pune to some remote town in Maharashtra. But she has not yet gone there and has chosen to take leave without pay for the last 2 months, and continue with the struggle of the nurses.

The Maharashtra Mahila Kamgar Karmachari Parishad has continuously stood by the Maharashtra Govt. Nurses Federation and continues to support and actively help in all their struggles for a better future.

DEMANDS WON IN INCOME-TAX OFFICE, BOMBAY.

In the Income-Tax Office at Bombay for the last several years the working women have had no rest room available to them. Since last year, our representatives had been trying to see the Commissioner to put forward the demand, but he had refused to even see the representatives. Now, hand in hand with the powerful Income-Tax Employees Association, the Maharashtra Mahila Kamgar-Karmachari Parishad has won this basic but important demand and has secured a separate Rest Room for the working women of the Income Tax Office at the Aayakar Bhavan, Bombay.

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K H O Z I K O D E W O M E N ' S
D H A R N A

FOR SPECIAL TRANSPORT FACILITIES

* From Janaki Kutty, Convenor -
Working Women's Committee

Since the private bus-owner refused his permit for running the 'special bus' for ladies and school-going children the plea that he would lose heavily if he undertook this service, and no alternate arrangements were made, the Working Women's Co-ordination Committee of Khozikode, decided to launch a dharna, in support of its demand outside the District Transport Office, Calicut. When the decision was communicated to the Transport Minister, District Transport Officer, District Collector and Regional Transport Officer, the latter sent a request asking the Committee to abstain from direct action as instructions had already been given to the operating staff to extend all possible help to lady passengers, and to see that the seats earmarked for ladies, were in fact made available to them. The matter of increasing the number of seats and of 'Ladies Specials' would have to be taken up with the General Manager, Kerala State Road Transport Corporation, Trivandrum.

Nevertheless the dharna took place on January 5, 1981, with good support and success. About 100 working women participated; the action caused much sympathetic comment among the people and the local newspapers gave the dharna wide publicity.

Now seats earmarked for ladies have been made available. The demand for 'Ladies Special' still remains to be fulfilled.

JAI PUR - Dharna by Women outside
Rajasthan Assembly.

* From: Kanchan Sharma, Working Women's
Co-ordination Committee, Raj.

More than 250 women from all sections of society participated in a dharna observed in protest against rape atrocities on women, and against the spiralling price-rise of daily necessities.

The participants, mainly working women, including college lecturers, advocates, workers from the chemical factories, spinning mills and many other factories, first went in a procession to the Assembly gates then sat there in dharna from 10.a.m. to 4.p.m. In slogans and speeches they castigated the State Government for its failure to bring to book the rape culprits, as well as the black-marketeers and hoarders. Speakers included the local women workers and leaders, and Smt. Subhashini Ali from the Maharashtra Mahila Kamgar Parishad. Smt. Prabhatibai, a worker from the Pole Factory warned the Government of further strong action by women, if the Government failed to take effective steps against these known anti-socials.

As working women, they also demanded the provision of creches for children of the workers, at their place of work, strict observance in the spirit as well as the letter of the law laying down equal pay for equal work, a halt to the presently rising volume of retrenchment of women workers, and an end to the contract labour system in the beedi and other industries, which was the cause of so much of the extreme exploitation of women labour.

A memorandum was presented to the Education Minister of Rajasthan, in the absence of any other Minister.

BRING TO BOOK RAPE CULPRITS, BLACKMARKETEERS & HOARDERS.

NOVEMBER 14 - CHILD CARE DEMANDS DAY IN MADRAS

From Our Correspondent

November 14, the birthday of Jawaharlal Nehru, is conventionally celebrated in the country as Children's Day. The Working Women's Co-ordination Committee of Madras, decided to observe the day instead as a Child-Care Demands Day, to highlight the problems and sufferings of working women and their children. Accordingly a day-long dharna was held from 10 a.m. to 5.p.m. Over 125 participated, despite heavy showers.

Although more and more women are now going out to work, child care services for the children of working women is a rarity. The lack of such services affects all working women, be they rural or urban, government employees or daily wage labourers.

The law stipulates that in factories employing women, in plantations and mines, child-care services must be provided. Yet, such facilities can scarcely be found even in big and prestigious factories in the major cities of India which employ a great number of women. The law remains merely on paper. For women employed in Government or private offices, schools and colleges, banks and hospitals, child-care provision does not exist even on paper. The response from the Government to these demands by the employees is most regrettable.

Lack of creche facilities affect working women in many ways in terms of a high rate of absenteeism, inability to concentrate on work, ill health and emotional disturbances. The plight of the poor peasant and landless women who have to leave their babies on the ground while they work in the fields, is still worse. The harmful impact on the children who are denied proper care at a tender age needs no elaboration.

It is because of all these reasons that we strongly urge that

child-care services be provided at all work sites. The Government must ensure provision of creches in public and private sector concerns. And expansion of such services where they are found to be inadequate. Such provision of child-care must be looked upon as a social responsibility and not a charity provided to working women.

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* F O U N D I N G - ALL-INDIA DEMOCRATIC *
* C O N F E R E N C E WOMEN'S ORGANISATION *
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* An All-India Conference of Women will be *
* held in Madras on March 10, 11 and 12, 1981, *
* following celebration of International Women's *
* Day on March 8. *
* *

* To fulfill the historic mission of leading *
* common women in the struggle for democratic *
* rights and a new social order, and organisation *
* clear in perspective is required. The All-India *
* Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) *
* heartily welcomes therefore the setting up of the *
* All India Democratic Women's Organisation and sends *
* its warm fraternal greetings to its First *
* Conference while assuring its close fraternal *
* support in the future. *

HERE ARE THE TINS -
WHERE IS THE KEROSENE

* From our Correspondent
Delhi Janwadi Mahila Samiti

On the 23rd December, 1980, a large number of women, organised by the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, workers, teachers, students stormed the office of the Delhi Administration's Food and Civil Supplies Office and presented a memorandum to its Deputy Commissioner demanding -

restoration of the full quota of wheat; withdrawal of the increase in the price of wheat, rice, sugar and increase in the quota of sugar supply; regular supply of kerosene and coal, and distribution of wheat instead of atta in the rations.

Shouting slogans and beating empty dalda tins with their rolling pins, the women refuted the claim of the Deputy Commissioner that his department was supplying more than the requirements of wheat and kerosene. The women told him to come to the fair price shops and see for himself. The Deputy Commissioner who was virtually gheraoed, conceded that kerosene supply could be irregular because of the shortage of tankers. The Deputy Commissioner deputed an officer to go to Mangolpuri and Nandnagari two of the areas mentioned by the women, the next day alongwith the representatives of the Samiti to check the fair price shops in the area. He also assured them that wheat would not be replaced by atta at these shops.

Susheela Gopalan, M.P., who participated in the protest, told the women, "Inspite of Mrs. Gandhi's pre-election promises to bring down the prices of essential commodities, the situation is getting worse everyday." She called upon the women to be prepared for a long struggle, even courting arrest and going to jail to demand that the government take over the trade in essential commodities and ensure a proper public distribution system.

- S E X U A L H A R A S S M E N T

THE SO CALLED EMPLOYMENT BUREAUS
IN BOMBAY

- COVER FOR SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION

SURAJITA, a qualified typist, was facing hard times after the sad demise of her father. She applied to a box number advertisement in the newspapers and was given a job in a small firm at Tardeo near the air-conditioned market. The timings were convenient - 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. - and the salary much needed.

After a few days, however, the boss revealed his true intentions. This firm supplied government tenders (a cover for other illegal activities), and she was ordered to entertain its clients. She refused and was thereafter given a harrowing time and kept on long after working hours. Because of her financial responsibilities, she endured the harassment until it culminated in an attempted assault, which prompted her to leave immediately.

This is one of the many situations faced by girls on the lookout for jobs, strained financial conditions deter them from registering with the Government exchange bureaus, bureaucratic red-tape exhausts their patience. Thus they flock to the small one-man bureaus that have sprung up in the city. Under a veneer of helpfulness, these agencies often dupe clients. Care is taken not to advertise prominently so as to retain anonymity. At the same time to attract clients, they seek refuge under a newspaper box number that is difficult to trace. Sometimes agencies connive with firms of somewhat dubious reputation. Impressionable individuals from economically weak backgrounds, and in dire need of a job, are attracted by the high salaries touted and unwittingly enter the trap.

Most such cases are invariably not brought to light.. Women caught in these situations are reluctant to talk because of threats from influential employers or the possibility of this proving a blot on their working records.

We give below some of the incidents narrated in an article in NEWSWEEK, on Sexual Harassment.

Sexual harassment can be found in typing pools and factories, Army barracks and legislature suites, city rooms and college lecture halls. The authorities can only guess how widespread sexual harassment on the job really is, but the number and nature of reported episodes form an ugly pattern. In Los Angeles, supermarket checker Hallie Edwards walked into a storeroom and found a manager exposing himself and groping for her. After Edwards complained the chain promoted her boss and transferred her. In Cambridge, Mass., college freshman Helene Sahadi York went to her Harvard professor's office looking for research help. She found an instructor determined to kiss her. In New York, typist Doreen Romano's boss offered her a raise if she would sleep with him. When she refused, he fired her. In each case, the women did not ignore the incident. Edwards and Romano won out-of-court money settlements; York's professor received a university reprimand.

Men are learning that women are not going to take this kind of behaviour. What women are learning is how to fight back. They've sued, won judicial condemnations of a 'boys-will-be-boys' attitude and convinced at least a few corporations that harassment in the workplace will cost them money. Women have opened counselling centres in major cities, and their appearances on television shows in places like Boston and Dallas have promoted enormous viewer response. They've lobbied State legislatures, and they're monitoring Federal agencies' threats to terminate government contracts with offending companies or, perhaps worse, tie up corporations in protracted equal employment litigation. Women are realizing that harassment is a form of discrimination and it's not O.K.

The increase in complaints parallels the upsurge in the number of women working outside the home. Although many have entered the professional ranks,

women, as a class, are still largely segregated into "pink collar" jobs - clerks, typists, waitresses - and usually work for a man. Their supervisors often have complete control over raises, promotions and other working conditions, and some treat sexual favors as just another badge of rank. No Federal statute specifically bans sexual harassment. So far, enforcement has come mainly from the courts. During the last five years, several Federal judges have ruled that if sexual harassment costs women jobs or benefits, it violates Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits sex discrimination in employment. Judges have ordered corporations to pay for lost wages and attorneys' fees.

Even if they have legal recourse, however, victims have serious problems of proof. As in rape cases, women who bring complaints are often taunted with the suggestion that they invited the harassment. In hearings, one person's word against another's may not be enough. Sometimes, written evidence barely suffices. For more than a year, the boss of Cathy Peter, a 37-year old secretary to a New Jersey school superintendent, repeatedly made passes at her. Because she needed the job, she did not complain. One day, he left a note on her desk describing the attributes of a good secretary. Among them: "neat appearance, slender in body and willing to go to bed with the boss, satisfaction guaranteed." Peter protested to the board of education, which dismissed her charges. Finally, Peter sued. The school board and the superintendent paid her a \$14,000 settlement. The superintendent, who resigned after a similar incident with another woman, apologized in writing.

Under any circumstances, bringing a sexual-harassment law suit or complaint is emotionally demanding. The psychological drain can be particularly severe in a university. Harvard, Yale and the University of California. Berkeley, are among the institutions where formal charges have been filed. A lawsuit alleging that a Yale political-science professor promised an "A" grade in return for sexual intercourse, is now pending in a Federal appeals court.

MECHANISATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

TOBACCO LEAF INDUSTRY IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The Leaf Tobacco industry is an important industry in the country, holding the same relationship to the cigarette industry, as spinning mills to the textile industry - viz, the processing prior to manufacture. Wage Committees and Wage Boards, therefore, in framing wages and other service conditions, have never made any distinction between the spinning mills and the cloth manufacturing units in the textile industry. The Government, however, taking a different stand, is treating the tobacco industry as separate from the cigarette industry.

More than 90% of the 1,25,000 work force in the industry, are women coming mainly from the rural areas, Their period of employment ranges from two to six months in the year, coinciding with the summer months when there is no agricultural employment. Wages in the industry are very low. In 1976, Rs.6.25 per day was fixed as the minimum wage by the State Government. However where there is no agricultural employment most employers do not pay more than Rs.4 to Rs.5.

Now these women workers are faced with a new and more devastating problem of unemployment. With the mechanisation of the processes formerly done by hand being progressively introduced by the employers, their source of alternate employment and earnings in the idle months of the agricultural year, is being threatened and may be permanently stopped. Nearly 400 big and small companies operate in this industry but it is dominated by four major companies, all of whom own their own cigarette manufacturing units. The Indian Tobacco Company Ltd., Calcutta, Golden Tobacco Company, National Tobacco Company and Navbharat Enterprises Ltd. The biggest of these is the I.T.C. Ltd., which employs nearly 20,000 workers in its Leaf Division, the I.L.T.D. The I.T.C. is linked to the world's biggest tobacco monopolists, the British American Tobacco Company, and serves the interest of its

principal company in London.

Despite increased volume of business, a number of firms had reduced the number of their units and branches, causing 45,000 workers to lose their jobs. Now comes mechanisation, led by the I.T.C. Its threshing plant in Bangalore deprived 5-6,000 workers of employment of six to eight months in the year. Four more plants have been set up in Bangalore and Andhra Pradesh, three more under installation, and fresh applications^{for}/licences have been made. A lakh of women workers stand to be affected. The Government, completely callous to these effects, has reportedly already given its sanction, for these licences.

A second representation has again been made to the Prime Minister and Industries Minister by all the Central Trade Unions in the industry, a memorandum submitted to the Labour Minister by Susheela Gopalan M.P., and Vimal Ranadive, on behalf of the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women. The memorandum amongst other demands has stated that

- licences already granted for installation of threshing plants in the tobacco industry be cancelled, and no fresh licences be granted to the employers.
- women workers thrown out of employment due to installation of such machinery in factories and elsewhere, should be reinstated.

The Co-ordination Committee has given a call to all women's organisation and working women to protest against this attack on working men, to save these women from starvation and destitution.

DISCRIMINATION

AGE-BAR FOR AIR HOSTESSES TO STAY.

While leave petitions are pending before the Supreme Court on behalf of nearly 20 percent of the air-hostesses employed by Indian Airlines, the Minister for Civil Aviation, Mr.A.P.Sharma, in the Rajya Sabha on November 26, refused to give any assurance that the service rules governing retirement age of air-hostesses, would be changed. He denied, as alleged by members when this matter was raised, that the rules which required air-hostesses to retire at 35 years of age, extendable to 40 subject to suitability, while air stewards retire at 55, were discriminatory. On the contrary, it is apparently the Minister's opinion that since the conditions of service are known before hand to all those who seek an air hostesses job, this is sufficient justification.

The whole debate was marked by objectionable jocularity on the part of some male members. This is how they and the Minister respect the equality enshrined in the Constitution.

PREGNANCY TESTS ON LADY DOCTORS

In a written reply on December 12, in the Rajya Sabha the Health Minister Shri B.Shankaranand confirmed this practice of pregnancy tests on lady doctors, but gave no indication that Government intended or thought it necessary to change this condition of service in the Delhi Govt. Women's hospitals.

Presently, all junior (1st year) residents are appointed subject to "medical fitness". But such medical fitness apparently means only pregnancy and all appointments or re-appointments are subject to the doctor not being pregnant.

The reason for this provision as reported by PTI, is 'consideration' for the young lady doctor. Such concern is very laudable and very rare! There are, however, one or two curious features.

Firstly, The Medical Council of India has never found it necessary to prescribe any such examination. Secondly, to the best of our knowledge, this is not a condition or practice in any other hospitals in other parts of the country. Thirdly again to the best of our knowledge, in all the doctors' movement and agitations in the recent past, such a demand has previously never been raised on behalf of either doctors or nurses. Lastly, the Lady Hardinge Medical College is a well-established institution of the city of many years standing. What happened in all these past years to the many young residents who may have become pregnant, out of the many hundreds who have passed through the portals of this august hospital. Why is it that the hospital authorities have woken up to this question only now?

* I N A S I A SHAMELESS DEGRADATION *

* * *

* A shocking piece of news has been reported *
 * from Japan, touching upon the organisation of *
 * certain kinds of tours in Asian Countries, which *
 * are degrading to the women victims of such *
 * shameless exploitation, and even more degrading *
 * of the men who consciously participate in them. *
 * Certain travel companies are organising 'group *
 * sex tours' - package tours to the Phillipines, *
 * Thailand, Taiwan and South Korea, which offer *
 * as entertainment, cut-rate plane fares, hotel *
 * rooms - and services by prostitutes! *
 * * *

* Japanese women in Tokyo last month organised *
 * a 500-strong placard - carrying demonstration on *
 * a Sunday, mocking at the men who go on such tours. *
 * The women also staged a young short street play, *
 * depicting the plight of the young women in Asian *
 * countries who have to turn to prostitution for *
 * economic reasons. *
 * * *

W O M E N I N I N D U S T R Y

PRAWN-PROCESSING IN KERALA

The Prawn-Processing industry in Kerala and nearby States, is another industry under the system of contract labour.

The factories are located in Calicut and Cochin; the majority of the workers are women, who do the actual cleaning and packing; transportation by vehicles, within and without the factory is carried out by male workers.

The work has always to be done at night, for the prawns are brought in only at night, and handled in ice. The women are forced to work without any protective clothing, boots, etc.

In the Calicut factories, immediately after being weighed, the prawns are iced and kept in a store room. They are then transported to the peeling sheds by male workers, but the peeling is done by the women, on a contract basis. Immediately thereafter, the prawns are transported in cars to the Processing Hall, the loading and unloading again carried out by male workers.

After separating the prawns into different categories and placed in storage. Before shipment they are checked by a quality control inspector, after which they are transported to the docks for transshipment.

All the women are engaged on a casual, daily basis, and paid on piece-rate. The rate varies from factory to factory, the wage for peeling five to eight kilos of prawns is just one rupee! For the classification and packing work, the wage varies from seven to nine rupees a day. Thus their daily earnings vary from Rs.5 to Rs.9, as and when they get work. There is no guarantee of employment, and the chances are obviously greater with the bigger than with the smaller owners. In the only Government-run concern, the Kerala Fisheries Corporation, the workers get a higher salary of between Rs.300 and Rs.400 a month, besides bonus, uniform, E.S.I., leave, etc. All

such benefits are of course absent in the factories under private management.

In the Cochin area the work is differently organised, as a cottage industry. Here the women take the prawns from the freezing plants, or from contractors, to their homes and bring them back after peeling.

A good number of women workers from Kerala are taken to other places in Maharashtra, or Karwar, Mangalore, Goa, etc., by contractors agents. There, they can earn about Rs.200 to 275 a month, but only if they work 16 to 20 hours a day. Since they are contract labour not directly employed by the factory owners, the latter is not concerned about any labour problems which arise, and disowns all responsibility for settling any dispute.

This industry, it should be noted has a growing home and export market, with processed prawns very much in demand in the developed countries of the world - therefore a profitable business but through the device of contract labour, once again, women workers are being deprived of all protection and benefits under the existing laws. /

* Excerpts from the letter received
* from the Office for Women Workers'
* Questions, INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
* OFFICE.

* "....Thank you for your letter of 18th August
* with which you attached your bulletin entitled
* "Working Woman". Some of the information
* provided therein on the working conditions of
* women in certain industries and offices, is
* extremely useful for our work. We shall circulate
* your Bulletin to various ILO technical units
* working on women's questions and wish you all the
* success for your future issues."

Sd/-- Krishna Patel
Office for Women Workers' Questions

WEST BENGAL GOVT. EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATIONS & UNIONS

Organising the Women Employees

Women employees now-a-days constitute a large section of the total work force in State government services. In Calcutta particularly, several thousand women are employed in the Government departments. This is besides the nurses employed in hospitals.

The State Co-ordination Committee of the West Bengal Govt. Employees' Associations & Unions is paying special attention to the task of organising the women employees, and drawing them into day-to-day trade union work. And the effect of this is becoming more apparent day by day.

Aside from the general duty assistants in the hospitals, those in state services, are mostly drawn from the educated middle class families. They have thus problems over and above the usual trade union problems. In a heavily populated city like Calcutta, with its enormously crowded transport system, travelling is the first. Then the want of creches put the married employees into further difficulties in the matter of keeping their babies during the period they work in the offices. Added to this is the lack of adequate cloak-room facilities for them in most of the office-buildings and so on.

Reluctance to join the Union: The main hurdle faced by the unions with regard to women employees is that of drawing them en masse, into trade union struggle. When there is a strike, then every woman employee will participate, but when it comes to joining demonstrations, rallies and other day-to-day programmes, the women hold back.

To overcome this lacuna, initially in the Writers' Buildings and New Secretariat Zones, where there is a specially large concentration of women employees, two women's Committees, were set up from the two zonal committees with the purpose ^{of} making special attempts to organise the employees and to take up their particular problems. These two women's committees, composed fully of women employees, are proving to be exceptionally effective. Their

members are meeting women employees individually, and impressing upon them the necessity of involving themselves in day-to-day trade union activities. Special meetings of the women employees are also being held, addressed by the women activists.

On the basis of this experience, this method of approaching women employees was adopted in all the other four zones by the respective Zonal Committees. As a result, throughout the city of Calcutta in almost all the offices, the women employees are being specially organised.

The response is highly satisfactory, with participation of women in meetings, processions and other trade union activities markedly increasing. Women are also now joining the propaganda squads of the unions. And since the unions are now paying attention to the particular problems of the women employees, this is also enthrusting them to work for the union.

The West Bengal Nurses Association is an affiliate of the State Co-ordination Committee, which is making statewide efforts to build the nurses' organisation on a solid footing as it is the only organisation composed only of women. The West Bengal Nurses Association is making rapid strides in unionising the nurses, and more and more of them are today joining the mainstream of the trade union struggle.

The State Committee is now planning to make more extensive efforts to reach wider sections of working women and draw them into organisation.

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The need to incorporate specific measures for increasing women's employment and access to other departmental services, was the subject of a discussion that women M.Ps and representatives of different women's organisations had with members of the Planning Commission in December, 1980.

The discussions focused sharply on the need to explicitly introduce women as a target group in all sectoral programmes, and especially in programmes designed to generate employment among the population below the poverty line. The women suggested that special measures be introduced to provide rural women with the title, or joint title, to surplus agricultural land and homestead sites being distributed by Government; reservation in all training programmes, particularly in the non-traditional trades; and a national programme for provision of child facilities. All these were accepted by the Commission, which also agreed to introduce a sub-plan for women's employment, within the framework of the District Manpower and Employment Planning Council. In this way, complementary measures for identification of job opportunities, training, credit and marketing planning could be initiated as a part of the District Plan. Suggestions for including representatives of organisations of working women in the State level committees constituted under the Equal Remuneration Act, and statutory obligation of employers regarding childcare facilities, were noted for consideration.

The Commission was of the view that a cess on all employers to finance the national programme could make it feasible to extend childcare services to all working women in both rural and urban areas. For location of such services voluntary organisations, neighbourhood committees of beneficiaries, schools, etc., could be considered. It was indicated that childcare centres would be provided near all work sites under the National Rural Employment Programme.

The Commission also agreed to provide special monitoring of the impact

of various programmes on women, especially the result of mechanisation on women's traditional jobs. While mechanisation may be necessary in some sectors, for both economic and social reasons (as for instance in sanitation), alternative job training and employment must be initiated before the mechanisation is implemented, to avoid dislocation. The Commission indicated that the women's suggestions for enhanced and special allocations for women's education and health needs have been accepted.

The organisations represented in the meeting with the Planning Commission included the All India Women's Conference, National Federation of Indian Women, All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, YMCA, Janwadi Mahila Samiti, and the Centre for Women's Development Studies. Members of Parliament present were Susheela Gopalan, Gita Mukherjee, Ila Bhattacharya.

Earlier in October 1980, on the initiative of Vina Mazumdar of the Centre for Women's Development Studies, a one-day Seminar had been organised in Delhi, presided over by Dr. Ashok Mitra of JNU, to which the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan had been invited. The representatives of the Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU) while speaking on the Plan, placed the following points for inclusion in the recommendations which were accepted unanimously by the women's organisations and others:

1. Improving enforcement of existing laws for the protection of women and women workers and women's access to legal remedies;
2. Abolition of women contract labour, special protection for migrant labour and
3. Extension of Maternity Benefit to all women workers including the agricultural and unorganised workers.

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A CRYING NEED FOR LAW REFORMS

* From Vaige Ramamurti
Advocate.

The social crimes and atrocities being committed today are the manifestations of the depravity that exists among certain sections of our society. In the present system which sanctions and rests upon exploitation of man by man, such manifestations will go on increasing. Rape is among the most heinous of these crimes. It violates the most valued, cherished, and the most intimate personal freedom of an individual.

The long-term and permanent cure for such crimes can only be when the condition of the masses of our people in general changes, through a major awakening in our society. But the recent spurt in rape crimes has made deterrent measures an urgent necessity. Thus, in view of the inadequacy of the existing laws in this regard, there is a crying need for more effective and comprehensive legislation.

The Law Commission had made some very useful recommendations not only on laws relating to rape, but on other matters like interrogation, investigation, imprisonment, trial procedures, etc., for women. These are the stages when a woman comes into contact with a man - a stranger - and is, in fact, prone to further harassment and exploitation. Therefore, several safeguards were recommended and deterrent punishments were prescribed for public officers who violate them.

The Government has incorporated only some of the said recommendations in the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 1980, introduced in Parliament. Most important of them is the recognition of custodial rape, i.e., rape by policemen, jail authorities, hospital authorities and other similarly situated

public officers, on people in their custody, as a separate category calling for severe punishment. In such cases due to the authority exercised by the accused over the victim, the proposed law says that the court will presume the guilt of the accused once the act of intercourse is proved by the victim. It is suggested that this provision should also apply to rape committed by landlords and employers. The provision for closed trial of rape cases and prohibition of press reports of such cases, is likely to be misused by the offenders. Therefore, the victim should be allowed to have people of her choice to witness the trial and report it.

Provision should also be made for:

- (i) procedural safeguards to protect a woman at all stages of the case - such as allowing her to have by her side relatives or friends or social workers of her choice, to give her guidance and protection,
- (ii) exemplary punishments to officials for non-compliance with such procedures,
- (iii) publication of such cases without disclosing the victim's identity,
- (iv) right to the victim or any person authorised by her to prosecute the case alongwith the state, and
- (v) legal aid, compensation and rehabilitation of the victim.

Women all over the country must rally now to ensure that the proposed legislation incorporates these suggestions to make the Bill effective, instead of becoming just another piece of paper.

THE RISING STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Recently a popular TV compere in Karachi, Mehtab Channa, by profession a political scientist lecturing on International Relations, was reportedly sacked under orders from Islamabad, for her persistent refusal to keep her head covered with her dupatta, while presenting popular stage shows for the youth on television. This incident has stirred a wider debate on the rights of women, in the context of the current Islamisation drive in Pakistan.

ISLAM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In September 1980, the military regime of General Zia made it compulsory for students and teachers in women's educational institutions to cover their heads and shoulders with an overflowing chader. But in a national conference, called by the Zia regime, the women turned the tables to declare that discrimination against them was un-Islamic, and their rights had been buried under customs alien to Islam. To a suggestion made by General Zia himself, but rejected by the women that separate universities be established for women at Karachi and Lahore, they countered with a demand for education relevant to the 20th century. Far from agreeing to segregation they demanded greater access to work and the sharing of responsibilities in running the country, more reserved seats for women in local councils and legislative assemblies - if and when elections are held. In particular, it should not be the male prerogative to become the President of Pakistan, as under the present constitution.

PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN

There is a strong on-going effort to take away what has been won in the last 20 years, and many delegates expressed the view that a number of scholars had wrongly interpreted the Koranic versus to unduly favour men.

They therefore sought a reinterpretation of passages dealing with the role, status and rights of women.

The present status of women in Pakistan is deplorable. Only 20 per cent of the population over the age of ten is literate. For women the figure is probably less than ten per cent, and in rural areas, less than five per cent. The average life span of a Pakistani woman is less than 52 years. For men it is 53. A contributing factor may be that the women average six births.

In rural areas, and often in city slums, education is reserved for boys. According to recent figures, about 75 per cent of all boys between the ages of 5 and 9 are enrolled in primary schools, but only 33 per cent of the girls in the same age group. In the city the situation is reversed with a tremendous thirst for education there are not enough schools for girls, and waiting lists at every educational level. There are relatively large numbers of physicians and lawyers. There are ten female civil court judges in Sind Province.

THE MARRIAGE LAWS

Women are particularly concerned at Press reports that a 1961 law putting a check on indiscriminate polygamy, might be repealed at the instance of the Ministry of Law and Religious Affairs, which had declared it un-Islamic. The Islamic Ideology Council, which has no law-making power, endorsed repeal with but one dissenting vote, that of its lone woman member.

Promulgated during the Ayub regime, the Family Laws Ordinance besides raising the marriage age for women from 11 to 16, requires that before a man can enter into a second or third marriage, he must submit an application to an arbitration council stating his reasons for the marriage and indicating whether he has the consent of his current wife or wives. The arbitration councils were dissolved when martial law was declared but much of their work is performed by family courts. The women's demand is for a clear law

against plural marriage; in the meantime more family courts to clear the backlog of divorce and maintenance.

Orthodox leaders have always opposed the 1961 law and at one time the National and Provincial Assemblies even recommended its repeal. Processions and agitations by women forced the Government to backtrack.

DIVORCE LAW

The women's conference further demanded a statutory provision putting a bar on a man giving 'talaq' (divorce) to his wife before full payment of 'haq mehr' (maintenance), return of the wife's personal belongings, and provision for the children. When a man seeks divorce, he should be required to leave the house and the mother should have the custody of children of a tender age. Under the present Muslim family law, it is a man's prerogative to divorce a woman, and he can do so by merely informing the local Union Council. After a so-called reconciliation attempt, the divorce is automatically established after 90 days. The women's right to divorce is highly circumscribed and permitted only under desperate conditions: if the husband has deserted her for four years, neglected or failed to provide her maintenance for two years, failed to perform his marital duties for three years, is impotent, insane, suffering from leprosy or a virulent venereal disease or has been in jail for seven years or more.

The 1961 law, in theory allows a woman to seek divorce if the husband takes another wife without carrying out the provisions of the law. From our own experience here, women in India will know how much protection the law in fact gives to a woman particularly to the poor.

Nevertheless, even in the severely restricted conditions in which they find themselves, women in Pakistan - as in Iran - are fighting back against outdated, obscurantist ideas which seek to keep them perpetually oppressed and exploited. Their efforts must be supported by women everywhere.

Kerala Marches Ahead

- * Pension, Provident Fund, Homesteads etc., for Agricultural Workers.
- * Relief to unemployed youth : Rs. 50/- per month to those between 18 and 40 years of age.
- * A bold bid to boost employment potential — Rs. 55 crore scheme to provide employment to 55,000 a year in small industries sector.
- * Health cards for school children — Physical examination and medical test for 55 lakh school going children — District level merit awards for students.
- * Ambitious Seven Point Programme of rural reconstruction.

Our only identity,

We are Indians.

Our tradition,

Unity in diversity.

Our objective,

Concerted struggle against exploitation,
deprivation, hunger and poverty.

Our greatest enemy,

Communalism, Regionalism,
Successionist tendencies.

Our aim,

Eradication of poverty,
Removal of all disparities, checking communal
and disruptive forces, ensuring peace,
tranquillity, fraternity and democracy.

WE ARE ONE

WE ARE INDIVISIBLE

WE ARE INDIANS.

ISSUED BY THE DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS & TOURISM,
GOVERNMENT OF TRIPURA
