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OF



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Delhi University Teachers' Dharna in front of UGC Office

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Barbaric Conditions for Women in Pakistan

ON December 25 in a jail in North Pakistan, Saidu Sharif, some 200 miles north of Islamabad, a mother of two children convicted of adultery was flogged **twenty times** by the jail superintendent, at the start of a five-year imprisonment.

Another four women at the least have been similarly lashed in the past few months in Peshawar Jail, under the country's Islamic laws against sexual relations out of wedlock. One of them 20-year old Mehro Jana, was flogged ten times by a jail official, in the presence of 200 women prisoners, forced to witness the punishment. She is also serving a five-year sentence.

In still another case, Jamiya, a mother of several children, was sentenced to **twenty** lashings, carried out in public for the first time in the history of Pakistan, a fine of Rs. 10,000 and five years' imprisonment. She was sentenced by the Sessions Judge of Swat, under the Islamic Hudood Ordinance on a complaint filed by her husband of eloping with a young man. Her appeal before the Federal Shariat Court was rejected. What makes this case particularly odorous is the special training to another woman prisoner to carry out the flogging, reminiscent of the brutalisation of women to act as bestial jailors under Hitler's Nazi regime.

That there are ardent defenders of this type of law and punishment among eminent jurists is not surprising, though perhaps it was never so blatantly expressed as an ex-Pakistan High Commissioner, Mr. A.K. Brohi, did in Delhi recently. Again not surprisingly he was attending the Second International Koran Congress at the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies.

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W. Bengal—Government Employees Break with Tradition

A Seminar on the problems of working women and women's participation in trade unions was organised by the West Bengal Government Employees' Association and State Co-ordination Committee on December 28, 1982, along with the 7th Conference of the West Bengal Government Employees' Association. This is the only representative organisation of the State Employees, which is supported by a membership of over 2 lakhs. The attendance was spectacular. About 1200 delegates and observers including 55 women delegates and 19 volunteers were present. Besides, a sizable number of women, family members of the State employees also were present. Out of these, sixty were women from among nurses, clerks and others. The Nurses

Association which is very strong in West Bengal, actively participated in the conference as volunteers, serving food, in the kitchen and in the hall. About 30-35 nurses from Krishnagar, Kalyani and other places took leave from their jobs for one month in preparation for this conference. They collected funds, put up the exhibition and helped in all ways. Altogether about 300 volunteers worked day and night to make the conference a success.

Despite this, the participation of women delegates in the discussion was minimal. This only underlined the need and correctness of the decision to hold a seminar on the problems of working women during the conference itself.

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CITU President Speaks Out

The following is an excerpt from the speech by B.T. Ranadiye, President CITU while speaking at Poona, at the Conference of the Railway Mail & Motor Mail Service, Class III Employees' Union in November 1982.

Comrades,

Our trade union movement has a common weakness. The trade unions by and large are indifferent to the demands of women workers. Your department perhaps has a large number of women workers. P & T certainly has. I have yet to see any reference to the special demands of women in your demands, yet to see a struggle waged on their behalf. A few months ago, I read in the Press that women employees of the Central Government were being asked to vacate premises where creches for children were lodged in Shastri Bhawan, in Madras.

Discrimination in promotions and wages, lack of special facilities like creches, lack of equal treatment, sexual harassment in some cases — these are the grievances from which women workers suffer. The trade union movement is not

a preserve of men; it is the common organisation of all workers, men and women. Yet, in India, it functions more as a men's organisation, treating women workers with the same feudal outlook that is found in Indian society in relation to women. A logical consequence of this is that very few women are elected to union executives and still less, or hardly any, to the posts of office-bearers.

Because of the social conditions surrounding her, a woman worker's participation in day-to-day trade union activities is rendered difficult. The union leaders must make special efforts to draw women workers into active work, appoint special women's committees for work among women members, champion their special demands. I am sure I will not be far from the truth if I say that a number of our workers are trade unionists outside the house and traditional husbands at home, little believing in equality of women. This dual role must be given up. The struggle of the working woman for her rights is part of the workers' struggle and it must be championed by the union.

The Industrial Relations Act and YOU

WORKING women in India, as a part of the mainstream of the trade union movement, have started agitations on their rights, their just demands and against oppression including sex harassment. Doctors, nurses, teachers and middle class employees in Government and other offices have led determined struggles, such as the SIET struggle in Tamilnadu, the teachers' struggle in Bihar and Delhi, the nurses struggle in various hospitals, etc.

The Congress(1) Government, while shedding crocodile tears for the weaker sections of the society, has actually attacked the working class, affecting almost all industries, specially those in which large numbers of women are employed, like hospitals, dispensaries, educational and research institutions, clubs, charitable, social and philanthropic services, agricultural operations, Khadi and Villages industries, etc. By the Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Act passed by the Government last year, the definition of "Industry" has been changed to exclude these institutions so that no industrial dispute can be raised on their just demands, under the Industrial Disputes Act, a right which was recognised by the Supreme Court of India.

Circumvention of Supreme Court Judgement

The Government has by such an amendment, circumvented a Supreme Court judgement in which all these institutions in which there is employer-employee relations, were termed as industry. This judgement had benefited a large section of employees, as their unions could raise industrial disputes and the Labour Department of the Government had to move, sometimes, for conciliation and settlement. The movement of the women in the Social Service Centre at Delhi is one such example. The Government has claimed that through "The Hospitals and other Institutions (Settlement of Disputes) Bill" a procedure has been laid down for settlement of disputes in these institutions. This is a false claim.

Right to Collective Bargaining taken away

In Section 19(1) "Strikes, go slow, work to rule or any other movement" which may cause

cessation or retardation of work has been prohibited and any workman or working woman who violates this section can be punished with six months' imprisonment or with a fine upto five thousand rupees or both. Thus this Bill takes away the elementary right to collective bargaining which includes the right to strike.

Grievance Settlement a Hoax

Under the Bill every employer is directed to establish a Grievance Settlement Committee under Section 3(1) in which equal representation from the labour and employer has been provided. But under Section 3(4) the employer has been given the exclusive right to nominate the Chairman of the Committee. This Committee has been vested with powers "to regulate its own procedure" in Section 3(5). All expenses of the Committee including travelling and compensatory allowances of the workmen will be paid by the employer. It would thus be virtually an employer's committee and the workmen cannot get any justice from them. These committees will deal with individual disputes and even retrenchment becomes an individual dispute under this Bill.

Consultative Councils or Local Consultative Councils are to be formed to deal with industrial disputes. But here again the employers have been given the right to make regulations for their functions. In case of disagreement between the labour and the employers in these committees or councils, the disputes shall be referred to for arbitration either to a mutually agreed Arbitrator or a Board of Arbitrators, whose decisions shall be final. The employer has to bear the expenses of the Arbitrators also. It is known to every body that "one who pays the piper calls the tune". Hence justice will be a far cry as far as all workmen in these institutions are concerned.

Recognition of Unions

Under this Bill only those unions who have a membership of 30 per cent of employees and whose Office-Bearers are all employees would be recognised. It means that whenever the

(on page 5)

Bhilai : Hunger Strike

THE speech made by Jogabai of Bhilai who addressed the 22nd November 1981 Convention of Working Women in Delhi, is still fresh in our memory! She is now on hunger strike alongwith others. Since the month of August the contract labourers of Bhilai have been demanding their wages and gate passes, but with the connivance of the management, contractors and the INTUC leaders, they were arrested from the premises of the plant and sent to jail. (A report appeared in our last issue). The workers after coming out from the jail started continuous agitation in front of the Bhilai Ispat Bhawan but with no results! Then the workers of B.S.P., H.S.C.L. and Industrial Estate came forward and started a relay fast from December 6. As the authorities

were not ready to listen to the voice of the workers, the latter decided to go on indefinite fast. M.K. Vijayan Secretary of the M.P. State Committee of CITU and Jogabai, a leader of the contract labourers, sat on hunger strike in the evening of December 16. All workers, including women workers with their little children, are since then daily demonstrating before the Ispat Bhawan. The contract workers of other plants are also joining these fighting workers, as well as getting support from other workers and trade unions. Management, unable to suppress the workers' movement, is trying to involve the activists in false cases. The late news received in the office reveals that Jogabai and M.K. Vijayan have been again arrested by the police.

Accord with SIET Staff

THE five month-old struggle by the AUT unit of the SIET Women's College, Teynampet, has been withdrawn. The agitating teaching and non-teaching staff of the institution resumed normal work from November 18.

The decision follows an agreement reached between the management and the section of the teaching and non-teaching staff concerned, in the presence of the Education Minister, Mr. C. Aranganayakam, on Tuesday.

The strike was launched by the AUT in June 1982 demanding resumption of admissions to the first year courses. But the strike continued, even after the admissions were resumed, the AUT protesting against the suspension of some teachers and non-teaching staff.

According to the agreement reached after several rounds of discussions, the management has agreed to withdraw all proceedings initiated against teachers and members of non-teaching staff in connection with the conflict. Both the parties have agreed to do their utmost to maintain a cordial atmosphere in the campus and to promote harmonious functioning of the institution.

The I.R.A.... (from page 4)

management does not want to recognise a particular union, it would victimise one of its office-bearers by throwing him or her out of employment on flimsy grounds and then refuse recognition treating the victimised employee as an outsider.

Resist this draconian Bill

Already the organisations of Hospitals, Teachers and Research Institutions who are affected by this Bill have come together and formed an All-India Joint Action Committee which met at Delhi on November 3. The Committee after reviewing the movement decided to intensify the struggle. City and State Level Conventions have been planned. Committee decided that even if the Bill is passed into an Act by the brute majority which the Congress(I) Government has in the Lok Sabha, the struggle would continue. Resistance to this authoritarian measure which takes away all basic trade union rights must continue. We expect that all militant working women will join us in this common workers' struggle.

Nrsingha Chakravarty,
Secretary, CITU

DELHI

Nurses Lathicharged

THE hospital employees of Moolchand including the nurses went on an indefinite strike for redressal of their demands for better promotion avenues, revised wage scales, maternity benefits and other allowances. Instead of trying to solve the issues by negotiations, the hospital employees were lathicharged without provocation and arrested on December 9, 1982. The employees incensed by this action decided to continue the strike, with the result that admissions were stopped by the authorities. Only a skeleton staff was maintaining emergency services, as almost 400 employees including nurses, ward boys, sweepers and laboratory technicians stayed away from work.

The hospital management brought an injunction from the court banning the holding of demonstrations within 200 metres of the hospital premises. The dispute has been pending before the Labour Commissioner for several months without any solution. The hospital employees, who were on strike from November 9 had to withdraw it because the Essential Services Maintenance Act had been evoked in the capital during Asiad '82.

Take Up Women's Problems

The following letter was published in the Bulletin of the Steel Workers' Federation. The letter speaks for itself and is reproduced in full.

Dear Comrade,

Congratulations for publishing a mouth-piece of the Steel Workers' Federation of India, on behalf of all Steel workers of India. Let me wish it an uninterrupted publication.

Women working inside plants, hospitals or offices, should primarily be known as workers. But due to the existing socio-economic system there remains a division of work between male and female workers. This in turn is generating many conflicting ideas. Due to these very reasons, even after formal enrolment in unions, everybody cannot be attracted towards the mainstream of struggle. The working women are called upon, after perform-

ing 8 hrs duty, to take up domestic chores with equal enthusiasm. It is a bitter truth that working women also cannot escape the existing social repression suffered by women in general. The denial of medical facility to the parents of married working women, avoiding statutory obligation of providing creches etc., in the steel industry are some examples of the injustices to women workers. There are many married women, whose husbands are working elsewhere. Trade Unions are duty bound to fight for the arrangement of an undisturbed conjugal life for these workers.

A sense of social insecurity in the course of employment provokes many women to consider the participation in mass movements or trade union struggles a mere luxury. The working class must give sympathetic thought to these social problems.

Hope our Bulletin will be able to reflect these common problems of women workers.

With revolutionary greetings,

Comradely Yours
Manjula Mukherjee,
Durgapur Steel Plant

AIDWA Conference Ahmedabad

THE Fourth Conference of the Ahmedabad AIDWA was held on December 19, 1982 at Jyoti Sangh Hall with about 235 delegates coming from all walks of life, particularly working women from textiles, beedi, handicrafts, shepherds, etc. Vimala Ranadive, Vice-President AIDWA was received enthusiastically at the station. On the 19th the delegates took a procession of 200 to the Jyoti Sangh Hall, offering flowers at the martyrs column before the session began, presided over by Niraben Patel, Convenor Gujarat AIDWA. The Chief Guest was Jayaben Thakur lecturer from B.D. College.

The Conference paid homage to Pankaj Acharya, of West Bengal Democratic Mahila Samiti and Shipra Bhowmick who recently died.

To greet the Conference, came Jeevanlal Jairamdas, (Kisan Sabha), G.K. Parmar (CITU), Miss K. Sinatra (SFI), Raghubir Mali (DYFI) and Rehena Chopra (SEWA). A small
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Tribute to Promode Das Gupta

IT is a matter of great sorrow that Promode Dasgupta, builder, guide and inspirer of the Left and democratic movement in West Bengal, and Chairman of the Left Front Committee, passed away in Peking on November 29, 1982, where he had gone for treatment.

While his work in building the democratic movement in West Bengal is well known, it will perhaps come as a surprise to many outside West Bengal to know of his sustained contribution in helping to build the women's organisation in West Bengal. His advice, help and guidance was always available to the West Bengal Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti from its inception after the break with the Atma Raksha Samiti in the early 40's, to its powerful position today in the vanguard of the AIDWA.

The women's movement in West Bengal has become a part and parcel now of the democratic movement. More than a hundred women fell martyrs during the carnage of Congress rule in 1971-72. Hundreds of women activists came forward inspite of the terror and gangsterism. This courage, this conviction, this pride in the movement and its cause arose from the inspiration PDG was able to arouse in others.

Promode Dasgupta was born in 1910 and threw himself as a young man into the revolutionary movement in Bengal, against British rule, was implicated in a number of cases in 1929, and in jail and underground for nearly eight years. On May Day 1938, he joined the Communist Party, and after spending nearly 25 years in its cause, rose to become the Secretary of the West Bengal Committee of the united CPI in 1961. Throughout his life he remained a steadfast and staunch revolutionary equally fighting extremists and reformists. The present growth of the Communist Party in West Bengal and after 1964, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), heading the democratic movement as a whole, composed of Trade Union, the kisan, students, youth and women's organisations, is the fruit of his intense and dedicated labour. He developed them with a zeal and responsibility he tried to infuse in others. This is why, at the

time of his funeral masses and masses of ordinary people came to pay a tearful last farewell to a leader who had engraved himself in their hearts.

It is but natural that the women's movement in West Bengal, its members and its leaders will feel this loss most keenly. Our heartfelt condolences go to them and the family of Promode Dasgupta.

AIDWA Conference.

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delegation of four from Bhavnagar also greeted the delegates. Smt Damyanti Parekh gave the work report stressing particularly the participation of women in the textile strike, and the work at the different centres set up by the AIDWA. The resolutions read out by Uma Krishnan included: on the price-rise and unemployment of women, the war danger, the Bihar Press Bill, in support of the Bombay textile strike and closure of many mills in Ahmedabad, the Baroda riot situation; cyclone and drought situation in Gujarat, on dowry deaths and on problems of working women, particularly regarding transport.

In her presidential address Niruben Patel made pointed reference to the closure of mills, and the rift between the different groups of Congress(I). Vimala Ranadive, summing up the discussion, called special attention to the close link between the working women and the women in general, and appealed to women to come forward to fight the communal danger, and the authoritarian rule of Indira Gandhi by uniting all the women's organisations and joining the democratic movement.

A new committee was elected with the following members: Damyanti Parekh-President, Nannu Appa and Noorja-Vice-Presidents, Uma Krishnan-Secretary, Sarju Malsingh and Chaturben-Joint Secretaries, and Uma Krishnan-Treasurer. Ten members of the Committee were drawn from different areas.

A drama "Aurat", was enacted by the Kala Manch artists to end the Conference.

So-called Guardians of the Law

REPRESENTATIVES of various women's organisations on December 23, demonstrated before the Nizamuddin police station, and gheraoed the Assistant Commissioner of Police demanding a written apology from the police for their reported defamatory remarks against a voluntary women's organisation, and its activists.

They also demanded the immediate suspension of the Station House Officer, Mr. O.P. Yadav, and the sub-inspector, Mr. Chetan Dass, for harassing them, as also for manhandling and detaining an *Indian Express* reporter at the Nizamuddin police station on December 23.

The demonstrators representing Saheli, Mahila Dakshata Samiti, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Jigyasa, Manushi, People's Union for Democratic Rights and Action India were detained and later released by the police.

Representatives of these organisations submitted a memorandum to the Lt-Governor demanding a public inquiry into the incident, in which representatives of various women's organisations should be associated, as well as the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, in charge of the Women's Bureau.

The Nizamuddin police officials, according to Saheli, had entered Saheli premises on December 28. Under the pretext of investigating a complaint, they had threatened and abused the volunteers there. Some of them, who later went to lodge a complaint against this, were also abused. An *Indian Express* reporter, who went to investigate the matter, was manhandled and detained for over 45 minutes by the police.

Meanwhile, *The Times of India* reporters have protested against an attempt by the police on December 24, to prevent *The Times of India* photographer from taking photographs of the women police trying to take away the demonstrators.

As the women demonstrators became more and more militant and vocal in their criticism of the police, a vanload of armed police arrived on the scene and surrounded them. Two women police were also brought. As they were trying to get the women squatting on the

ground to accompany them in the van, the photographer took some photographs. Immediately the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mr. Deepchand, protested and tried to push the photographer away. There was an altercation and soon another police officer arrived on the scene and pacified Mr. Deepchand. Soon after, the police cordon was removed and the women were released.

Later in the evening, members of various women's organisations met and passed a resolution condemning the behaviour of the police towards the Saheli volunteers and an *Indian Express* reporter. They also demanded the suspension of the police officials concerned and an end to police harassment of Women activists.

The meeting was attended by members of Action India, Saheli, Ankur, YWCA, Manushi, Janawadi Mahila Samiti, Sewa Ahmedabad, Streetal, Centre for Women's Development Studies and others.

Steady Rise in Female Suicides-Why?

According to the report published by Dr. K. Janaki, Professor of the Department of Forensic Medicine, Madras Medical College, there is a steady rise in female suicides in our country, and the majority of these are found to be in the age group between 20 to 30 years, and newly-weds.

Some of the points made by Dr. Janaki are important in view of the present social and economic conditions existing in our country. Dr Janaki said the study showed that the first three years of married life were the most critical period when women resorted to taking their lives. The common method adopted by these women for committing suicide was hanging, or setting themselves ablaze. According to the study it was difficult to prove beyond doubt that the victim poured the inflammatory liquid on herself or whether it was poured on her. In some cases, burns were found mostly on the victim's back, making suicides highly impossible.

THIS IS TRIPURA IN 1983

Planning and implementation of schemes now rest with the democratic institutions at the grass root level like the Block Panchayat Samities and Gaon Panchayats.

With land-revenue exempted and protection of law for the establishment of share croppers' right pronounced, small farmers find a new hope of building their lot.

With the Autonomous District Council set up, their mother tongue having been recognised as the second language of the state, the quota in the government service having been properly protected, the tribesmen of Tripura have now been restored to their honourable position in the society.

With an enhanced rate of wages already enforced, various welfare measures adopted, and minimum amenities of life assured, the labouring force in the state have proved themselves more active than ever before.

With the introduction of free education upto class-XII, mid-day meal for the primary students, enhancement of the rate of stipends and other facilities, the student enrolment in educational institutions has gone remarkably high.

The Left Front Government in Tripura stands committed to strive for a united, democratic and self-reliant society free from all exploitation.

*Issued by the Directorate of Information, Cultural Affairs & Tourism.
Government of Tripura.*

IN THE NAME OF LIFE—

Never Again Hiroshima—Women Take Oath

WOMEN and children all over the world are in the forefront of the Peace Marches in Europe, America, Japan and other places. The slogans "No more Hiroshimas and Nagasakis", "When I grow up I want to be alive", "Stop Arms Race, March for Peace", and so on are raised by thousands and lakhs of men and women all over the world. The protests against the Reagan Administration's preparations for nuclear war, MX missiles, and for the deployment of a number of neutron bombs and Pershing-2, are growing all over Europe, and in America. In all these actions women are in the forefront, fighting against war and for peace, demanding a reduction in military expenditure, a freezing of the production and deployment of nuclear weapons, and serious negotiations on the Soviet proposals for disarmament.

Seminars and conferences have taken place in more than 600 American towns, 35 universities and colleges and 1200 schools on the subject of the right of workers to peace. In all the conferences and seminars, women intellectuals, girl students etc., have participated on a large scale.

Among the numerous demonstrations and rallies, one demonstration on October 25, in London, attracted everybody's attention. There were big and small children, even toddlers on the "March against the Bomb". The procession started from Hyde Park to Downing Street, to the residence of the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The children were shouting "When I grow up I want to be alive", and "I want to grow up — not blow up!" At the very front of the March, two groups of women dressed in Black, one representing Hiroshima, the other Nagasaki, wheeled empty pushchairs behind banners which read, "These pushchairs are empty in memory of the thousands of children killed by one small nuclear bomb". A sponsored "pushchair walk" was organised for collection of the cash needed for the anti-nuclear weapons campaigns.

A Peace-Train from Pacific to Europe

The Soviet Union organised a 'Disarmament Week' in which the Peace Train was the main attraction. Women and children along with workers were as usual in the forefront. The train left the Pacific Coast to go across to Europe carrying propaganda material with them. Wherever the train stopped, meetings were held and the effects of the deployment of nuclear weapons in Europe were explained. The response was tremendous.

In West Germany to observe the 43rd Anniversary of the out-break of World War-II when Hitler and his gang tried to destroy humanity, the trade unions and workers organised demonstrations in the month of October. The important item of this campaign was the women's conference of IG Metal which took place between September 8 and 10, 1982, in Frankfurt. The over-whelming majority of the 216 delegates, representing 370,000 women members of the Metal Union decided to fight for Peace, and collected over 3 million signatures.

This vote for peace did not suit some of the members of the Metal Union, in particular the President, and they tried all methods to dissuade those who wanted the resolution for peace. This group tried the usual trick of "Communist propaganda". But the reply was given by the delegates stating "what was important for us was peace, and whoever stands for this we will support them." A demonstration was held after the women's conference on September 9 in Frankfurt, with a rally attended by 15,000 trade unionists, and addressed by Ursula Igler, a member of the Union. Referring to the claim of limited war in Europe, she said, "It is not a question of whether it is in Europe, America or anywhere else in the world, what is certain is that this war can only be won by death".

Peace Marchers Block U.S. Base in England

More than 15,000 anti-nuclear demonstrators on December 12, most of them women formed a "human chain" in a peace "emb-

MARCH FOR PEACE

race", around the 14.4 km perimeter of this U.S. Air Force base, planned site of 96 U.S. Cruise missiles.

The women linked hands and as the huge circle was completed joined in shouts of "freedom" and lit candles in the falling darkness.

Thousands then camped in freezing weather through the night outside the base, which they plan to blockade in a one-day protest by lying across roads to the seven main entrances.

At the British nuclear submarine base Faslane, on the west coast of Scotland, 14 people were arrested during a protest by some 150 demonstrators.

The demonstrators, protesting against the Conservative Government's plan to update Britain's Polaris nuclear submarines with the U.S. Trident missile system, tried to block an access road about 274 metres from the base.

As the women fanned out in rain and cold, they hung baby clothes, photographs of chil-

dren and carefully embroidered appeals for peace on the perimeter fence.

NATO Concern

The wave of anti-nuclear protests in West Europe, dramatically symbolized by a "gherao" of this U.S. Air Force base, is causing concern to NATO, as well as the U.S. President Reagan who has sent Vice-President Bush to try to smooth over this concern.

They are raising false warnings that the peace movement in several Western nations would pose problems for the defence of Europe. The movement is dubbed pro-Communist in official quarters.

Demonstrations are being held in other places in Europe, where the peace movement is planning to intensify its campaign against the decision to deploy U.S. Pershing and Cruise missiles. A series of demonstrations is planned for next year in Britain, West Germany, Italy, Belgium and Holland.

Women Coalminers Back Strike

WOMEN workers working in coal mines under BCCL in different parts of Bihar and West Bengal fully supported the November 8, 1982 one-day token strike called by the Central Trade Unions in protest against the unilateral decision adopted by the management, not giving proper representation to the unions according to their strength.

In the preparations for the strike, hundreds of women workers participated in the demonstration before the BCCL office at Dhanbad on November 4, covering 7 kilometers from Dhanbad Station to the BCCL Office.

On November 5 at Swang Colliery women attended a public meeting in support of the strike. Large numbers of tribal women workers doing loading and unloading of coal went in a procession in support of the strike. They also equally raised their voice against the vicious attitude of the management.

At Sounda Colliery most of the women came out bravely in support of the strike.

Women from different collieries, at Asansol, Raniganj, Jharia, and from the Dhanbad Coal Belt took a leading part in picketting at the mines and faced the management-supported goondas' attacks to disrupt the strike. About 50,000 women participated in the strike action.

After the success of the one-day token strike on November 8, 1982, the women workers have decided to join the 72-hour strike from January 17-19, 1983 called for by the Central Trade Unions, even though they will again have to face the goonda attacks.

Women Job Seekers

Women work-seekers on the live register at the end of October 1981 were 26.66 lakhs as against 22.69 lakhs in October 1980.

The number of placements effected in respect of the period January-October 1981 was 50,615 as against 56,788 during January-October 1980.

Women Teachers in the Forefront of the Struggle

**Madhu Prasad, Lecturer,
Zakir Hussain College**

THE current strike of Delhi University teachers which has now continued for almost three months, is unprecedented in the history of the university, for the unity, commitment and determination which it has generated. A novel and enthralling feature has been the leading role played by the lecturers of women's colleges. Though this section has always participated actively in all major DUTA-led actions, it is for the first time that the initiative for a prolonged and determined struggle unmistakably originated with the bold decisions of the staff associations of leading women's colleges like Lady Shri Ram College, Kamala Nehru College, Gargi College, Jesus and Mary College, Maitreyi College, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College, etc.

The militant decisions have been backed by an active participation in the daily dharna's outside the V.C.'s Office, in the relay hunger fast which is presently going on. Women lecturers constitute more than two-thirds of those on strike. In fact the dominance of women lecturers has become a feature of the protest actions in the past month.

The women's colleges have given the lead in holding frequent and regular staff association meetings to discuss the major issues focussed by the strike. Prominent in the discussions is the anti-democratic Hospitals & Other Institutions Bill which seeks to suppress all protest and holds out the threat of delinking colleges from the university, thus leaving them at the mercy of the governing bodies. A clear awareness of the irreparable damage that such steps would do to academic endeavour and the dignity of the academic community, both teachers and students, is widespread. On the question of promotions the teachers have with one voice rejected the U.G.C. proposed scheme as one which seeks to divide the teaching community by handing out a 'selection grade' to the teachers. They have successfully exposed

the view that the strike means a 'holiday' for all, besides having educated each other enormously on the issues for which they are fighting.

The significant step of calling meetings of their students to explain the strike issue was again initiated by Jesus & Mary College teachers. They assured the students of their constant help and assistance in their studies and exposed before them the callousness of the authorities as the cause of the disruption of teaching and appealed to them for support. The response to this direct approach to students was so encouraging that it led to its being successfully employed in almost all the women's colleges and in a number of co-educational colleges as well. The mature support of various college student unions, student organisations and the DUSU and their condemnation of the negligent and callous attitude of the authorities to the teachers' demands and the careers of students has thus emerged as an important cementing factor for the strike. Teachers have reciprocated at all levels with a firm commitment to compensate in every possible way the loss of teaching time for the students.

The cowardly ultimatum of wage-cut issued by the university authorities has been totally rebuffed by the teachers and women teachers once again have been quick to give expression to the general indignation at authorities who believe they would resume work under such a threat.

In the face of such an active and united participation of all sections of the teaching community the authorities would do well to see the writing on the wall and refrain from issuing 'ultimatums' that can only aggravate the situation. Serious negotiations to concede the major, long-standing and just demands of the teachers cannot be delayed any longer if conditions of normalcy are to be created in the university.

A Survey of Conditions of Women Beedi Workers

A survey of the conditions of women in Beedi Industry in Ahmedabad was conducted by Uma Krishnan, Secretary of the Ahmedabad branch of the AIDWA in the two colonies of Rakhial and Bapunagar, in Ahmedabad.

There are about 10,000 Beedi workers in Ahmedabad coming mostly from Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the majority of them women, working, for more than 20-25 years. Sometimes the whole family including children have to work to earn minimum wages. The daily minimum wage here is Rs. 7 for 1,000 beedis. Tobacco and leaves are supplied by the contractor, 350 grams and 900 grams respectively. The thread to be used is to be provided by the worker at her own cost. Everyone complained that the material provided was not sufficient to make 1,000 beedis. Here as everywhere the leaves are of very inferior quality, a large number of beedis are rejected by the contractor for which the worker is not paid, but which nevertheless are sold in the market.

In any case very few women can fulfil the quota of 1,000 beedis. It requires some 15 hours continuous sitting with constant practice and rapid movements of the fingers. After a few years it is not possible for these workers to work with the same speed! New workers can make a maximum of 100 to 150 beedis. With children having to work day and night schooling is almost automatically ruled out.

Maximum Bonus available to workers directly employed by the employers is Rs. 75 only. And these workers are supposed to be privileged workers since other workers do not get anything. There is of course no house rent allowance. The Gujrat Government recently started an E.S.I. dispensary at Rakhial, but the women have to pay Rs. 6 monthly as their contribution. Workers have sufficient experience of the "watery medicine", of the same colour, for every ailment, through the E.S.I. Naturally they are reluctant to contribute for sub-standard medicines, where no proper diagnosis is done.

Women beedi workers take no holiday because they can't afford to do so. Govern-

ment's reports naturally show that the incidence of tuberculosis is the highest among the Beedi and Tobacco workers. The whole day they inhale the tobacco which affects their lungs. Back and joints pain, and constant fever leading to T.B. and lung diseases, are the common complaints.

For packing 25 packets of 10,000 beedis which is called one PADIKA, the packers get only Rs. 1.40, meaning that they cannot earn even Rs. 3 per day because they are supposed to sort out superior beedis from the inferior ones.

It was found that these women and families from Andhra have not once visited their native places. Only a very few go once in three or four years.

There are more than 30 lakhs workers in the Beedi Industry all over India, the majority of whom are women. Only the pressure of the movement from below will compell the employer to implement the schemes and legislation set up for their protection.

Greetings to Women of Tripura

THE All-India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women sends its warm congratulations to the people and particularly the women of Tripura in voting back to power the Left Front Government, which already in the last five years has taken steps to improve the conditions of work and training for the women of Tripura, swiftly restored harmony between the tribal and non-tribal people in the State. The Left Front Government has shown itself to be deeply committed to furthering the interests of women, to changing and enhancing their status, and that it can be depended upon to defend their honour and dignity.

It greets its sisters in the Tripura Gantantrik Mahila Samiti and is certain that they will redouble their efforts to organise and mobilise still more the women of Tripura to participate in the struggle for a brighter future.

Pakistan women will not be cowed

(from 2nd cover)

Mr. Brohi considers that women are weak, equipped by nature for only one role—bearing children; she is not inferior, but cannot also be described as equal to men. If she is a good wife, she will be accepted naturally. By fighting her own father, son, brother, husband, she is fighting herself — will that not only make her lonely? It is a woman's job to take care of men, a relationship induced by nature. When women fight for equality, are they not at war with nature? Familiar words, with the same male selfishness distorting the nature of all things, including nature itself.

Flogging Thru Pakistan Eyes

General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military dictator, proclaimed in the United States that he was "proud" of Pakistan's record. "We are not apologetic about it ... what happens in Pakistan should be seen through Pakistan eyes." General Zia is very right — but seen through the eyes of the Pakistan people, and not their oppressors, the picture is very different.

The Women's Action Forum, led by Begum Liaquat Ali, has condemned the existing and proposed new laws as giving an impetus to crimes against women. At present the punishment against rape is less than that for sex outside of marriage. Four male eyewitnesses are required to prove rape! The proposed 'Qisas' and 'Diyat' law (retribution and blood money), drafted by the Council of Islamic Ideology, reduces the weight of a woman's evidence by half, and makes it totally unacceptable in murder cases.

A seminar in Karachi on Human Rights, organized by the Karachi Bar Association in December, 1982, condemned the suppression of political and democratic rights in Pakistan. The Association's Acting President Khalid Ahmed, decried the restriction on the independence of the judiciary. A noted writer, Begum Hajra Masroor, forthrightly stated that whatever rights the women of the sub-continent had secured through a century of struggles were being eroded systematically in Pakistan.

Five lawyers detained in Karachi jail went on a 48-hour hunger-strike to protest against the denial of human rights in Pakistan.

Khawja Khairsuddin, Secretary-General of the nine-parties Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in Pakistan, has regretted that people were without any rights in a country created as a result of people's struggle.

This is the true voice of Pakistan.

Purdah un-Islamic

By contrast, in another 'Islamic' country, conditions are very different, for women and changing progressively in their favour. In Libya, in North Africa for example, women are throwing off the traditional burqua, going to school, working outside the home, driving cars, joining the army and demanding an end to arranged marriages — activities and conditions all but unheard of in traditional Libyan society, encouraged and supported by the Government and the country's leader, Colonel Gaddafi's call for equality between the sexes.

Education there is now compulsory for boys and girls as is military training for high school students of both sexes. Four years ago a women's military academy was opened with an enrolment of 2,000 and there are today several hundred women officers serving in the Libyan Army, and in the President's Bodyguard. The Government estimates that 50,000 women work outside the home, in a country of three million.

At the same International Koran Congress in Delhi, two Libyan Islamic Scholar-delegates declared that the Purdah-system is un-Islamic and that the Islamic faith does not require women to be fettered and covered.

Solidarity Protest by Indian Women

The All India Democratic Women's Association and the Co-ordination Committee of Working Women have strongly condemned the continuous attack on women's rights in Pakistan, and the barbaric and heinous practice of flogging of both men and women. These are the ways of a dictator to cow down the democratic aspirations of the people. The women and men of Pakistan have shown they will not be cowed.

Greetings from China

A five-member delegation from the All China Women's Federation visited India from December 8-11, 1982 and held discussions with various women's organisations in Delhi. This was the first delegation coming from China to India to strengthen the ties between our two countries. And India-China Friendship Committee sponsored by All-India Women's Conference and Indian Women's Society was formed in Delhi to chalk out the programmes for meeting the women's organisations and a reception arranged in the Chinese Embassy where representative from various organisations, including the AIDWA, were present. The leader of the delegation Madam Lu Chi said in one of the meetings held for their reception, that under imperialist and capitalist rule in China, women were oppressed to the point of having no identity of their own. They were mere appendages of either their fathers or husbands, not having even their own names. Now, however, she said, things have changed drastically. The number of women participating in national decision-making jumped from 147 at the First Chinese Congress in 1949, to 741 in the Fifth Congress held recently. The number of women in the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has increased from 4 to 38. She also stated that in the current session of the Fifth Chinese Congress, far-reaching decisions had been taken to grant greater equality to women.

W. Bengal (from page 3)

In his report to the Conference Ajoy Mukherjee, General Secretary, had stated, "I want to bring to your notice one of the weaknesses of our organisation, the weakness with regard to women's participation in our organisation. The employment of women in offices is on the increase. To bring these women into the struggle and to organise them has become a task of our unions. Women do participate in the meetings and struggles. But very few of them have become activists in the unions. Therefore, we have to seriously take up this matter of considering their difficulties at home, and try to bring them into trade unions..."

From the Transport Workers' International

Budapest, December 1, 1982.

We have read with great interest the material of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women sent to us by the World Federation of Trade Unions.

A couple of years ago a Women's Commission was established in the TUI of Transport Workers with the aim of studying the living and working conditions of women workers employed in the transport industry in the various parts of the world. To this end we are looking for sources of information and possibilities of cooperation in the field mentioned above. We would be very interested in receiving more material from you, especially in the domain of the situation of women workers in the transport industry in India and in the surrounding countries. We would be very grateful if you could feed us with information, in turn we are prepared to let you know the result of our study and research.

Looking forward to receiving a favourable response from you and wishing you successes in you activities,

Sd/-
Debkumar Ganguli, General Secretary.

A large number of the women of Krishnagar came to the seminar. All delegates attended enthusiastically and welcomed the criticism made by speakers regarding the male domination of trade unions, and neglect of their problems as working women.

Vimal Ranadive, Secretary of the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, and Mrinalini Das Gupta, Vice-President of West Bengal Gantantrik Mahila Samiti, also underlined the lower percentage of women in employment, and the discrimination women have to face in every field. Further, women at home were treated as second class citizens with the result that they are neglected totally.

Divorce Law Amendment—What Does It Mean?

A Select Committee of the Parliament has been set up to consider amendments to the Hindu Marriage Act and the Special Marriage Act in regard to Divorce, and certain other provisions based on the Law Commission's recommendations. However, far from protecting the women against being thrown out of the house and marriage, or making it easier for her to obtain a divorce where she so desires, the Bill in question gives legal sanction to the husband to terminate the marriage to suit his desire—or his pocket. Now, if the Bill is passed, instead of burning his wife, he may divorce her. The Bill is called the Marriage Laws Amendment Bill, 1981 and the vital clause relates to “irretrievable breakdown of marriage” as a ground for Divorce.

The Bill does not define “irretrievable breakdown of marriage”. But the new Section, 13-C, of the Bill requires the Court to grant divorce on the above mentioned ground, once it is shown by the plaintiff that the parties, i.e., the husband and the wife, have lived apart for three years prior to the petition, unless it is proved that the marriage has not broken down irretrievably. In other words, the plaintiff, who would be the husband in most cases in our society, has merely to show the ‘living apart’, and the Court has to grant divorce on the ground of irretrievable breakdown of marriage. Only if it is proved that there is no irretrievable breakdown, will it refuse divorce.

It is obvious that the plaintiff-husband would not be interested in showing that there is no breakdown. Thus the burden of proof is shifted to the defendant-wife and if she fails in proving that there is no irretrievable breakdown, the divorce follows. Thus the Bill is heavily loaded against the wife, who in most cases would be the defendant. This is a very dangerous step, as it would give easy passport for men to get out of marriage—particularly in our society where more and more rural men leave their wives to go and seek better lives in urban areas, or change wives, throwing her and children out of the homestead, for the sake of a bicycle or a wrist watch which will come with the new wife, or the increasing number of wives forced to live apart from

their husband due to mental and physical tortures for dowry. Marriage is even now considered largely a measure of social security for the women in our society and the present conditions do not at all call for such a drastic amendment.

Not a Women's Demand

It is to be noted that there was no public demand for such an amendment, unlike in the case of the amendments to the Rape or Dowry laws. There may be certain genuine cases of matrimonial disharmony and breakdown of marriage, which are not able to get proper and speedy justice. But the remedy for that is not an amendment like the proposed one but reforms in the laws like provision of family counsellors, family courts with women adjudicators and legal aid, etc. Further, unless proper and adequate provision for the maintenance and well-being of the wife and the children is made compulsory, including sharing of the husband's property like provident fund, etc., no such amendment should be even contemplated.

In this context it is extremely significant and heartening to us to see what even the highest legal body in the land, the Supreme Court, was forced to observe in a recent judgement dealing with divorce: (1982(2) Supreme Court Cases 474).

“We have constitutional and legal equality for the sexes. But even so, economic and social equality between the sexes appears to be a very distant goal. One has to only read the daily sickening reports of ‘dowry deaths’ and atrocities on women’ to realise that women in our country, are as yet treated as commodities and playthings. The root cause of the inequality between the sexes, like other class inequalities, is their social and economic inequality. All inequality will end when social and economic inequality ends...Let no law compel the union of man and woman who have agreed on separation. If they desire to be two, why should the society insist that they be one? But I have a qualification. The woman must be protected. Our society still looks ask-

(on page 19)

The Fighting Women of Palestine

The Palestinian Women and their organisation the General Union of Palestinian Women, have had an important part to play in the struggle of their people, for their just cause of recognition of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, in particular its right to return to its homeland, to self-determination and the establishment of its own independent State.

On June 6, 1982, a tragedy began which struck world public opinion and all peace-loving forces with horror, when the Israelis launched their war of genocide against the Palestinian people.

This barbarous aggression brought untold grief to the Lebanese and Palestinian population: more than 30,000 dead and injured, 10,000 missing and more than a million Lebanese and Palestinians rendered homeless. Peaceful Lebanese towns and cities and Palestinian refugee camps were laid in ruins, and Beirut, the capital of Lebanon was almost uninterruptedly bombarded. Water and energy supplies were cut off by the invaders. The blockade of Beirut by Israeli troops meant half a million people were crowded together on 50 square kilometres. The towns of Tyr, Nabatiye and Saida were completely destroyed. And in the two refugee camps of Chatilla and Sabra, over 300 men, women and particularly the children, were brutally and deliberately massacred.

This was the fifth war that Israel has waged against the Palestinian people. As a result the Palestinian women are now dispersed over many Arab countries, the great majority of them living in extremely hard conditions, in constant danger and worry about their relatives. Very often they are alone, with their husbands away fighting or killed in the struggle; thousands of women had died in Israeli prisons, fallen victims to the bombing raids on the camps, or died as a result of their terribly bad living conditions. Those who are still alive have devoted their lives to Palestine. This report of life before the latest war, is dedicated to them.

35 Years as Refugees

It is more than 35 years now since the bloody events of 1948. At that time, the Zionists choked in blood the resistance of the native Palestinian population and occupied two-thirds of the former British mandate. That was the beginning of the great exodus of the Palestinian people.

The second wave began after the Israeli aggression in July 1957. Thousands of Palestinian families had to leave the territories on the West Bank of the Jordan River and in the Gaza Strip. Many of them, those who had found a place of refuge there after 1948, had to flee for the second time.

In the course of the 15 years that have passed since 1967, more and more have had to leave the occupied areas. The Israeli authorities have themselves deported thousands, and there are today almost 1.6 million homeless Palestinians — the majority of them living in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria but also in other Arab countries. Many are living in camps. Only a few of them have succeeded in re-creating passable living conditions.

Thinking of the word "camp", you have automatically before your eyes a number of tents. However, in the camp in Beirut, there were hardly any tents, only big and small houses, buildings of one-room flats and multi-storied houses, jostled closely together. In place of streets there were only some narrow passages. As the houses, the smallest being really only huts, were built so closely together, the over-crowded one-room flats had hardly any light. The most vital things were missing, there were no drains and no laid-on water in the houses. A few kilometres from Beirut is the Al Damur Camp with a number of half constructed houses in which the people had settled down. The camps in Southern Lebanon Radshadija for instance, were more like villages. However, the makeshift houses were nowhere near big enough to accommodate the great number of families. Here communal facilities were likewise missing. The bad living con-

ditions in the camps were the reason for the high percentage of sick people. The doctors knew that in the camps most people were suffering from anaemia (as a result of bad nutrition) and from diseases caused by the unhealthy housing conditions (mainly catarrhal diseases and pneumonia).

The Bourdah el Baradshne Camp on one side was surrounded by a high earth wall—a protection against a sudden attack, since life in the camp was not only difficult but also under constant threat. In 1976, during the civil war, the Palestinian camps were the special target of attacks by the Falangists, the Rightist Christian organisation. There was the bloody massacre in the Tell al Zaatar Camp near Beirut, where 45,000 Palestinians had taken shelter. The struggles in that camp have gone down in the history of the Palestinian liberation movement as one of the bloodiest armed conflicts and at the same time as proof of the heroic courage of the Palestinians — men, women and children.

Special Position of Women

During these struggles the Palestinian women achieved a special position. At a time of extreme danger, when the camps were surrounded, a women's organization was formed. It organized courses in first-aid where the women could learn how to bandage the wounded and prevent infectious diseases. They organised child-care facilities so that schooling could be continued even under these most difficult conditions. As soon as the initial steps were ensured they formed a group of the General Union of Palestinian Women.

When in 1976 the Falangists beleaguered Tell al Zaatar in order to destroy it completely, it was the women who stood in the forefront of the struggle.

The General Union of Palestinian Women ran a workshop where 40 girls earned their living by sewing and embroidery, and also helped to raise funds for the women's organisation by their financial support. The window-panes of the workshop were shot to pieces and had been substituted by wooden boards. It was safer not to have any window-panes at all. The attacks came from the land or from the sea — the Israeli war-ships used to approach

close and cover the camps with shell fire. Al Damur was bombed from the air and many people, mainly women and children, lost their lives.

Maintaining National Culture

Everywhere, if you went from camp to camp, you would be confronted with the national culture — here, on alien soil — in the songs sung with such enthusiasm in both small and large groups, and in the national dances. There need be no special reason since the young Palestinian people dance and sing wherever they are together. There are folk ensembles, dancing and music groups, and children's dancing and music groups and children's choirs.

These folk traditions are among the main factors in the education of children and young people, the future generation, who have to live outside their homeland. The best example is the orphanage in Tell al Zaatar headed by the General Union of Palestinian Women.

An important element within the work of the General Union of Palestinian Women with the women in the camps, is patriotic education, the finding of their own identity in alien surroundings under the most difficult, often inhuman, conditions. "If you don't find yourself, if you don't know where to stand", says Hala, a girl working with the women in the camp, "you can't give anything to others". To find yourself — that means to become literate, to make yourself acquainted with the basic knowledge in the field of education, to study your own history. "Politics are for our women neither incomprehensible nor alien", Hala said. "They are quite natural for them, something one can experience day after day. However, this natural feeling has to be strengthened by well-grounded knowledge. We form small women's groupings and speak with these women quite openly. They speak frankly about their daily troubles, but also about the political questions they are concerned about. We endeavour to reply to all their questions, to give them advice and to clarify any doubts. We want them to have the feeling that there is somebody who listens to them, that they are not alone. We want them to educate their

children well, for they shall become our future, happy generation.”

A stranger is surprised to see that all Palestinian children attend school, even those who have to live under extremely difficult conditions. The Palestinians are rightly proud of this fact.

Today there are various social organisations, but in 1967 there were only two of them — the women's and the students' organisations. Their number has grown in the meantime to 13 with all of them fulfilling important functions in society.

Here in Lebanon it was particularly evident that people endeavoured to organise social life. There was, for instance, the example of the SAMED workshops (SAMED means “steadfast”). SAMED, where the relatives of the Palestinians killed in the struggle could find an occupation and, thereby, a certain economic independence, forms the basis for the future national economy. It disposes of 33 enterprises in Syria and Lebanon where there are 3.5 thousand people working, 70 per cent of them being women. The SAMED workshops produce civil and military clothing, rugs, furniture, leatherware, boots, handicraft, toys and food-stuff. SAMED maintains economic relations with numerous Socialist countries where its staff is trained. It maintains relations with other States as well. SAMED is the economic visiting card of the PLO in the international arena.

Life in S. Lebanon

South Lebanon — the name is symbolic of struggle. There death comes from the air, the sea and the land. While it is that true, thousands have fled, in the three main camps, the majority have stayed. Where should they go? “We don't think that the population should leave”, stated the PLO representatives. We organise the civil self-defence, we build shelters and endeavour at least partly to compensate for the damage caused by the attacks. We keep the schools and nurseries in the camps open. In one word: we do our utmost, so that life remains normal despite every menace.”

The women's organisation here also has tasks to fulfil. To see that the inhabitants are

not alone in the danger, to provide medical aid, to look after the children, above all to oppose any panic.

Here in the south as throughout the whole country, the Palestinian women closely co-operate with their Lebanese sisters, first and foremost in the Lebanese Women's Rights League.

The Palestinian women, whose whole heart and soul is in their struggle and its aims, want only to live, to form a family of their own in a free country. They want to belong to a people that is not oppressed and which itself will not oppress any other people. They have a long road before them, full of dangers, a road not easy to traverse. In order to reach their goal they need international solidarity — our solidarity!

Divorce Law (from page 16)

ance at a divorced woman. A woman divorcee is yet a suspect. Her chances of survival are diminished by the divorce. So, the law which grants the decree for divorce must secure for her some measure of economic independence. It should be so, whatever be the ground for divorce, whether it is mutual consent, irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, or even the fault of the woman herself. Every divorce solves a problem and creates another. Both problems need to be solved, no matter who is responsible for the breakdown of the marriage. If the divorce Law is to be a real success, it should make provision for the economic independence of the female spouse. After all, Indian society today is so constituted that a woman is generally helpless and her position becomes worse if she is divorced. It is necessary that the law should protect her interests even if she be the erring spouse, lest she become destitute and a dead loss to the society”.

Women all over the country must join hands to make the parliament provide these proper safeguards to them. To this end the All-India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women has placed the above views before the Select Committee, has opposed the Bill in its present form and has asked for provisions to safeguard women's interests.

R. Vaigai
Advocate, Supreme Court

We Shall Not Forget. . .

SHRI VENKATRAMAN in the debate on increasing crimes in the capital in the month of August 1982 stated that crimes in the capital were on the decline. In support of his argument, he quoted the figure of crimes as 44086 in 1980 and 36646 in 1981.

But what are the facts? Let us take the question of the atrocities on Harijans and scheduled caste women. In 1980, there were 31,500 recorded crimes against Harijans. In the period March 1982 to August 1982 alone, 314 cases of rape on scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women were the reported cases from ten States.

Recently, there was a reported case of two Harijan girls from village Deh Kalan, Punjab who were tortured by police with the help of the high-caste village chief. These girls committed the crime of asking for better wages. This was their only fault. The three Harijan girls wanted to change to another employer who was willing to pay better wages than what they were receiving. According to the reports, the village chief having sent for these girls, pounced upon them, pulled them by their hair, tore off their clothes, blackened their faces and took them round the village streets, with the people watching all this. He then tied all the three girls to a tree outside the village. By this time, a half-dozen strong police party led by the inspector arrived on the scene. Instead of arresting the village chief, the police party themselves beat the girls mercilessly till they exhausted themselves.

When a deputation consisting of villagers and political parties took up the matter with the IGP, he only expressed surprise how the whole incident had taken place with people witnessing the scene; but no word of condemnation for his police personnel.

Gang-rapes organised by caste Hindu landlords, of Harijan women who are in struggle for better wages and for land, has become a common phenomenon, with the active connivance of the police.

Another incident took place at Akavalya Taparo, a small Harijan village 90 kms from

Bhopal in August 1982. On August 23, when some 150 Rajput Thakurs attacked the village and demolished twelve out of thirteen huts because the Harijans had not only refused to carry the caracases of dead animals, an age-old custom, but even left their old abode at Rala where they were working as bonded labourers, to go to another village where they started cultivating Government land one acre per family. This was the starting point for taking revenge on these families.

At the time of the attack, they brought their cattle and released them in the fields of the Harijans in order to destroy their harvest. A number of Harijan women were also brutally molested by the Rajputs.

In the hospital at Nasrulganj, one of the women, 30 year old, Dullibai said "These shaitans came all of a sudden in the midst of rains and lightning and started lathi-charging without any warning. I was stripped of my clothes... I do not know how many persons raped me. The whole of my body was injured by them." She kept repeating that she did not want to live anymore..... Another woman Kamala, aged 29, said, "These people held both of my breasts and dragged me for some distance — my clothes were stripped off. When I resisted, I was beaten...the chief of the village landlords pushed the lathi into my vagina... my child started crying. They threw him out in the field .. One after another they molested me... I was also forced to witness three other women being molested. We are finished..." A widow aged 35 years, Assobai said, "I am finished. I wept in front of the Panch, requested him not to touch me.... I told them I was a widow... but they shouted 'Maro Saliko — Nanga Karo', and they molested me one after another." Sundarbai, 55 years old, showed the injuries all over her body. Sarjobai, 34 years, wept and narrated the same story. She knew they were all from Rala village. She was unconscious in hospital for two days, and continued bleeding from her mouth.

This is the way in which crimes in the country are coming down. But never must these crimes nor their perpetrators be forgotten.