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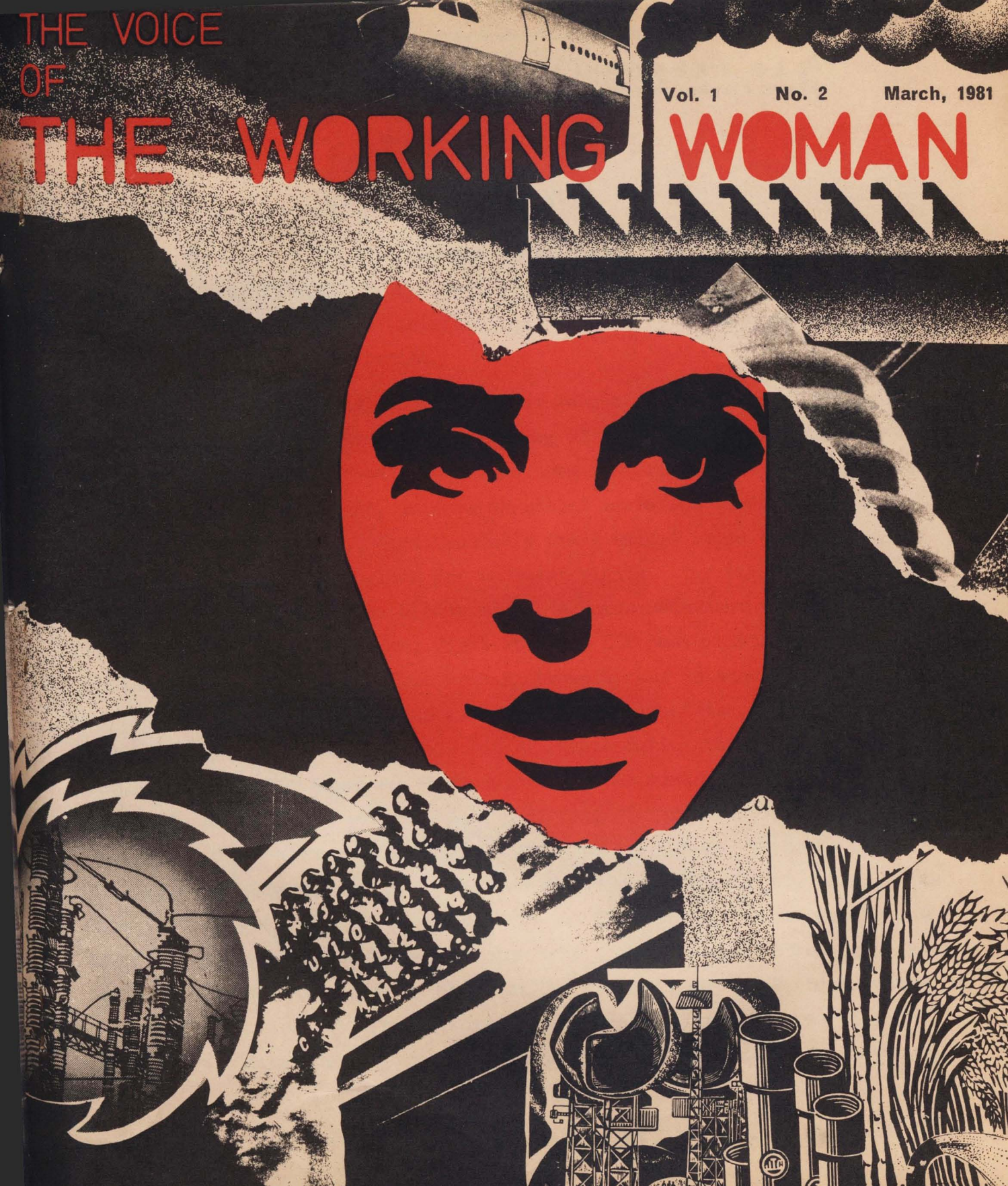
THE WORKING

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WOMAN



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\* M A R C H 8 \* - - \* I N T E R N A T I O N A L W O M E N ' S D A Y \*  
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## T h e D a y o f W o m e n ' s S o l i d a r i t y

### I N S T R U G G L E

Every year for the last seventy years, March 8 has come to be celebrated as International Women's Day, to focus attention on the many-sided problems of women, a day of international solidarity among women, in their struggle for total emancipation.

The idea of a special Women's Day arose out of the workers' struggles in the European countries at the beginning of this century. As capitalist development spread and took root in the 19th century women also entered the ranks of the working class, in some countries among the first to be recruited as cheap factory labour. Simultaneously trade unions began to be formed to conduct and lead the struggles for workers' rights. The struggles of women workers and the demands for higher wages, a human behaviour towards them, and equal status with men workers, first arose in European countries like France, Germany, England, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and in America, because capitalist development first took place in these countries. The demand for equal rights for women first came out of France during the Great French Revolution of 1789, which ended feudalism and the monarchy forever in France, and again in the first working class political struggles in 1848. Olvampede Gouges, a young woman revolutionary proclaimed her famous "17 Articles on the Rights of Women", during these struggles. Her impassioned cry then, rings down through the years -- "If women have the right to die on the guillotine, they must have the right to speak". The same year she herself heroically faced her execution fighting for the cause of the working class of France. Twenty one years later in 1871, French women, young and old, took up arms to fight, and die, defending the workers' Paris Commune, the first State of the working class.

The centre of the emerging Socialist movement, as also the greatest

impetus to building of a women's movement rested wherever the working class movement was going ahead. Thus when the centre of activity and leadership shifted to Germany, it was because the working class movement there was developing the greatest strengths. Karl Marx, one of the founders of the First International Workingmen's Association, 1866 (the First International), submitted a memorandum to the International on "Female Labour", championing the demands of women workers. This inspired women in factories and work places to come out and battle for their rights, and different women's groups began forming within the international Socialist movement. Women socialists began meeting in clubs and other organisations to discuss the problems of working women. Bourgeois women's organisations were already in existence and women Socialists in Russia and elsewhere began participating in their conferences to put forward their own viewpoints on the basic problems facing women, and their solution.

When in 1907, the Second International organisation of the working class (the First International was dissolved in 1872; the Second International was established in Paris in 1889), held its seventh Congress in Stuttgart in Germany, at the same time and in the same building, a conference of women was held - the First International Conference of Socialist Women. While the working class and socialist movements were recording progress, at the same time the attitude towards working women was not changing. Voices were being raised on this question within the movement, and therefore the special conference of women. The Conference set up an International Secretariat for the women's movement, headed by Clara Zetkin, an ardent fighter of the working class movement and for equal rights and status for women.

Following this, groups of Socialist women in America began organising demonstrations for the 8-hour day, and for working women's political rights. Women in the needle trade on Manhattan's Lower East Side, (the working class side), for example, came out on strike, and later decided this day should be celebrated as a political holiday.

Three years later, in the summer of 1910, the Second International

Conference of Socialist Women was held in Copenhagen attended by more than 100 delegates from 17 countries. Russia was represented by Alexandra Kollontai, the well-known leader of the St. Petersburg Textile Workers' Union, later to become the Soviet Union's first Ambassador to Finland. It was from this Conference that the call went out to working women in all countries to observe March 8 as International Working Women's Day. Women then still did not have the right to vote, so the main agenda of the conference was, "The Question of Suffrage for Women", and "Ways and Means" of reaching a solution.

Clara Zetkin moved a resolution in the Conference, "to establish an International Working Women's Day". The decision stated: Socialist women in each country shall organise, in agreement with political workers' parties and trade unions, a special Women's Day, whose object is first and foremost, to agitate for suffrage for women. This demand must be based on the general provisions of the Socialist Programme." The Conference especially emphasised that the day must be "international by nature and should be carefully prepared."

The next year, 1911, marked the first year of the celebration of International Women's Day, in Germany, Austria, Denmark and Switzerland. Vast demonstrations took place in Germany and Austria on the major demand of the right to vote, and became the largest suffrage demonstrations ever seen. Men comrades gave support in various ways, staying at home to take care of children to free the women to demonstrate, intervening when police started breaking up a demonstration of 30,000 women in Vienna.

After the First World War, Women's Day continued to be celebrated; 1926 was a particularly notable year, when women in Shanghai, supported by communists and nationalists, celebrated March 8 with strikes and insurrection, in which they fought and fell in the front line. In England it was the year of the General Strike, when hundreds of women were inf-used with the courage to celebrate it for the first time in demonstrations in London, Manchester and elsewhere. During the years of the Great Depression in the '30s, women workers in Europe were finding increasing representation on strike committees and picket lines.

By 1936, with the shadow of Fascism and war threatening Europe, Women's Day slogans had begun to link demands for equal pay and labour conditions with calls for forming a united front against fascism. In Italy, a Women's Day, demonstration tore down mobilisation orders and forced their way into the military barracks to speak with the soldiers. In Brussels there was a Women's Day demonstration against the Italian invasion and occupation of Abyssinia; women in Vienna protested to the Italian Ambassador; 20,000 Swedish women demanded that the League of Nations take sanctions against Germany; and in Norway, Finland and Poland, there were large anti-war women's demonstrations.

The 50th Anniversary of International Women's Day 1960, was celebrated by a massive Congress held in its Copenhagen birthplace, attended by women from various countries, socialist parties, catholic organisations and trade unions. Since then each year has marked the intensification of the struggle and growing international solidarity. With the achieving of independence by a number of erstwhile colonial countries, the women's movement and its international day, have spread to nearly all the developing countries of the Asia, Africa and Latin America, until today it has become a real world movement, unlike in the past when celebration of International Women's Day was confined to the Western countries.

In India March 8 was observed this year in conditions of acute economic distress, high inflation, growing retrenchment and increasing attacks and rape of women. The slogans remain the slogans of the world movement - equality and emancipation, but the first step for Indian women is ending the grinding feudal oppression which keeps all of them in backwardness, poverty and extreme misery. As working women in voicing our demands, we must carry on the struggle for emancipation with greater determination, in the fighting tradition handed down to us by our sisters in all countries. In the words of Clara Zetkin, the first international women's leader, who continued to struggle till she died at the age of 73 -

"For as long as there is life,  
I will continue to fight".

L O N G   L I V E   I N T E R N A T I O N A L   W O M E N ' S   D A Y

ACTIONS FOR SECURITY

-BOMBAY---

FOR WOMEN COMMUTERS

"Three youths between 20,22, carrying knives and speaking Marathi then came towards me. They jabbed the handle of a knife in my mouth, another held a knife to my throat and the third to my stomach, and warned that they could cut me into pieces if I shouted. Then they robbed me of my bangles, chain, watch, purse and threw me out of the running train." This was the story of Suman Palekar, a 35-year-old nurse who was picked up from the tracks between Santa Cruz and Vile Parle on July 25, 1978. She lost her front teeth, her right leg was fractured in two places, her shoulder bone dislocated and a rib broken. Yet she lived to tell her story. Others were not so lucky.

"Manda Pantanker was stabbed to death on a Kalyan-bound train between Mubra and Kalva stations in 1969. When her body was discovered, it bore 12 to 14 stab injuries. Seventeen-year-old Harrinder Chanchal Kaur's corpse was discovered at Bombay Central on a Borivili-bound local, with a deep neck wound. This was January, 1978."

"The writer of a letter to a Bombay newspaper in February, 1980, meticulously detailed how a gang of eight to ten boys, 14 to 18 year's old, have been terrorising women travelling in second class compartments of the Harbour Line between Bandra and V.T. They jump into the train as it leaves the platform or come in through a connecting door from the general compartment. They had in the last few months, unzipped a girl's dress, burnt a woman's hand with a cigarette butt, thrown itching powder at women, pelted them with stones and even dragged a poor lady who had da ed to reprimand them, into the general compartment."

These are some of the instances cited by Pamela Philipose, writing in "The Times of India". Then in January 1981 three years after Harvinder Kaur's death, came the ghastly news of the murder in broad daylight of Mrs. Shanti Devi, a Professor of English, in the First Class Ladies Compartment of a local fast train between Bandra and Andheri Stations, a journey of barely 7½ minutes.

Smt. Shanti Devi was stabbed in several places and killed for the sake of her gold ornaments. Apparently, she was to go to a wedding immediately after college. She had bravely resisted the murderer but to no avail, as he made off with her ornaments after brutally killing her, leaving his blood-stained trousers and chappals behind.

The Working Women's Co-ordination Committee and the Shramik Mahila Sangh immediately gave a call for a demonstration outside the Western Railway Office, Church Gate, for two days later, on Tuesday. On Monday, members of the Committee visited various offices such as LIC, Income Tax, AG's Office, Western Railway, Bombay Municipal Corporation, Times of India, Bombay Telephones, etc., with a Memorandum to the General Manager, Western Railway for signatures. Everywhere the women expressed great indignation and their fears regarding their security.

On Tuesday afternoon, a mass deputation from the two organisations met the General Manager, Western Railways. A large number of women from the slums and working class areas came, together with the teachers and students of the College where Smt. Shanti Devi used to teach. The DIG Police (Railways), Mr. Ribeiro, revealed that in the next compartment, separated only by a wooden partition with a small window in it, were two or more CID personnel in civilian clothes, who had been playing cards while the murder was taking place. They had been spotted by the motorman, had then left Andheri station and were still to be identified and questioned.

The same evening at 5.00 P.M. a demonstration was held, in which many office-going women joined, demanding the early apprehension of the murderer (who has still not been caught), and condemning the police and administrative apathy. The demonstration became converted into a meeting which was addressed by Ahilya Rangnekar, Smt. Vatsala Parelkar (Working President of the Co-ordination Committee and President of the Bombay Municipal Corporation Employees' Union), Smt. Kamal Desai of the Samajwadi Manch and Smt. Shubhangi Joshi of the Janata Mahila Manch.

On February 1, a delegation of the Co-ordination Committee also met the visiting Lok Sabha Petitions Committee, and placed before them a number of suggestions, two of which have been accepted: (i) provis on of a barred window between the Ladies and general compartments, and (ii) provision of a bell in the Ladies compartment which will ring in the adjacent compartment to give warning to stop the train and give protection. A bell has already been fixed on one of the lines.

On January 23, another brutal murder of a housewife took place in Borivili, a suburb of Bombay. It was later established that the murderer and his accomplice were influenced by the film "Insaaf Ka Parazu".

In view of these growing incidents of crime and goondaism, the Co-ordination Committee observed a "Security Week" from February 11-20, supported by the CITU, LIC, AITUC, Central Government Employees' Co-ordination Committee, the State Government Employees' Co-ordination Committee, the Beedi Kamgar Union and the Bombay University Teachers' Union. Lunch-hour meetings of women workers were held at the Industrial Estates, LIC, Provident Fund, Maharashtra Housing Board, Central Government Offices, Sachivalaya, Bombay Telephones. A dharna marked the end of the week, and a memorandum was presented to the Government.

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\* Bombay Telephones have agreed to provide conveyance to women operators on night duty for travel to and from work, and to exempt women over 50 f om night duty. The Union Labour Minister has agreed to call a meeting on the question of security measures for all Government women employees on night duty.

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\* Intervention by the Co-ordination Committee ensured that women employees of the Bombay Corporation were not sent on evening Census Duty, as well as not being asked to go to certain "unsafe" areas. Instead an extra off every week was given for this work.

L I C E N C E   B L O C K E D

In a reply to a letter from Smt. Susheela Gopalan to the Minister of Commerce, Pranab Mukherjee, protesting the import of a high speed sophisticated machine for the manufacture of Label Printed Match Box Skillets, etc., by the Pioneer Press Pvt. Ltd., of Sivakasi, the Minister has stated that the Government has held up the issue of licence for the time being. Printing of the outer labels of match boxes is undertaken by a number of small-scale units which afford employment to large numbers of women in both Sivakasi in Tamilnadu as well as in Kerala. The Pioneer Press in Sivakasi, wished to import a 4-colour Special Offset Printing Machine, which if installed would have meant hundreds of women losing even this small opportunity to earn their pittance wages. The Deputy Commissioner, Small Scale Industries, has been asked to undertake a study in this matter, and the final decision will be based on this report.

The Working Women's Committees will have to remain vigilant to see that under some protest or other, such a licence is not in fact ultimately sanctioned as was done in the case of Tobacco Leaf Threshing Plant in Anarparthy in Andhra, which will affect 1800 female stemmers at present employed there. Despite repeated and united trade union and women's organisation's protests and representations to the Government and the Prime Minister, these licences have still not been revoked. Installation of such machines is being proposed in industries such as tobacco, matches, coir, etc.

To focus attention on this problem a meeting was held in Delhi on February 1, 1981, on the joint invitation of Vimal Banadive, Secretary, All India Co-ordination Committee and Parvati Krishnan, Secretary, AITUC. The meeting was attended by 50 representatives from 20 different organisations of women, trade unions, college and school teachers, social workers, etc. Vina Mazumdar, Director, Centre for Studies on Women's Development chaired the

W I N   T H E I R   D E M A N D S

The six-month old dharna by the militant employees under the banner of Hindustan Computers Employees' Union (CITU) and protest strike, were withdrawn after an amicable settlement reached between the employees and the management at the intervention of the Labour Minister and the Chief Labour Commissioner Government of India, on 27th January, 1981.

The management has agreed to give employment to all the retrenched workers in one of its sister concerns, on the basis of last-drawn pay by the employees before their retrenchment from the Calculators Sections of HCL., as the basic pay in the new employment <sup>at</sup> the Indian Communication Network (P) Ltd. All the amenities and facilities <sup>demands</sup> previously enjoyed by the employees will be retained. The management's of six-month probation period was turned down. It was agreed that the management would send employment letters to the employees before February 20, 1981, and the employees would join duty, before March 31, 81.

The management also agreed to jointly file a case with the union to the Delhi Administration under the Industrial Disputes Acts 1947, regarding the dismissed employees, who are the office bearers of the union and were actively supporting their retrenched colleagues, for their reinstatement.

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## AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT (From Page 10)

meeting. Vimal Ranadive put forward the resolution on "Mechanisation in the Tobacco Industry and Unemployment", seconded by Parvati Krishnan. Speakers included Professor Lotika Sarkar, Law Faculty, Delhi University, Bani Dasgupta, National Federation of Indian Women; Kausalya Baisantray, Bharatiya Mahila Jagruti Parishad (Dalit), Mrs. Hashmi, on behalf of Nursery School, teachers Phulvati, Delhi Janwadi Mahila Samiti, Ranjana, Delhi Working Women's Co-ordination Committee, Nila Rao, Delhi University Teachers; Tundubala, Unit Trust of India; Nainwal, LIC; S. Balaram, Canara Bank, and N.J. Ayyar, Confederation of Central Government Employees & Workers. A representative from the AIWC also attended the meeting.

I N  
K E R A L A  
W O R K I N G W O M E N ' S O R G A N I S A T I O N  
A N D A C T I V I T I E S

A.G'S OFFICE LADIES' CLUB

The Ladies' Club of the A.G's Office, Trivandrum, has played a great role during the last one decade in mobilising the women employees of the office for the fight for achieving workers' demands, and in making the ladies conscious of their rights and their responsibilities. Immediately after the token strike of the Central Government employees in September, 1968, the management of the Ladies' club was taken over by the conscious women workers of the office, who have since run it as a meaningful forum for discussion and taking up problems of women employees in particular, and workers in general.

In the struggle the employees of the A.G's Office waged in 1972-73, against the dismissal of N.B.Thrivikraman Pillai, General Secretary of the A.G's Office N.G.O. Association, Kerala, in the Central Government Employees strike of May 1974, and in all the agitations in later years, the Ladies' Club made valuable contributions by rallying the women employees of the office in these struggles.

In the course of these years the Ladies' Club has also taken on other functions: running a nursery-cum-creche since 1970, and a Ladies' Hostel since 1971, without receiving any aid from the Central or State Governments in this ten years. Only the Left and Democratic Front Government has come forward with a grant-in-aid to the Club. A sewing class, a library, credit facilities, hire-purchase arrangements etc., as well as periodical discussions with leaders like Smt.Susheela Gopalan, Devaki Warriar, K.R.Gouri, M.P. Parameswaran are being held. Many women workers have now started participating actively in the trade union movement, many of them closely associated with the Kerala Working Womens' Association and the Working Womens' Co-ordination Committee at the leadership level.

## \*K E R A L A W O R K I N G W O M E N ' S A S S O C I A T I O N

During the State NGO strike in 1973, some working women residing in a private hostel were forced to vacate for the only reason that they had taken an active part in the strike. Some ten or twelve of the active women employees of the NGO Union decided to form an association to give shelter to the evicted inmates by starting a new hostel, in which only 30 ladies are accommodated at present. The Hostel also has a library. Due to our earnest efforts the Association has been able to get a grant of Rs.3000 per annum from the Central Social Welfare Board, and is also trying to get land, free of cost, from the State Government. It is learned that the Government is considering our demand to allot land for constructing another hostel.

Creche-cum-Nursery: The Association has also obtained a grant from the Social Welfare Department of the State Government to run a creche-cum-nursery to look after the children from low-income families from the area surrounding the association's office building. The fees fixed for each child in the creche is Rs.5 per month only. The people in the locality are very happy about our activities even though for the moment we can help only a few families. We are also trying to establish another nursery to look after the children of working women from various offices.

At present the association has about 350 members from the various state, Central and Public Sector Offices. In 1978 representatives attended the All-India Convention of Working Women held at Madras in April, and the association is now functioning under the guidance of the Working Women's Coordination Committee, Trivandrum.

Discussions: During last seven years the association has conducted many symposia, and group meetings on various subjects, such as

- i) Women in socialist countries.
- ii) Role of Women in Social activities.
- iii) Role of Women in Trade Unions.

\*KERALA STATE ELECTRICITY BOARD - WORKING WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

In the Kerala State Electricity Board, a Working Women's Committee was formed in May 1980. The working women of the KSEB are members of different unions and the cooperation of ladies belonging to different unions had to be sought, to form a Working Womens' Committee. The women employees who had participated in the First All-India Working Women's Conference held at Madras in 1979, took a keen interest to convey among the ladies the problems discussed in the conference. By constant efforts almost all the working women were awakened and as a result, their participation in the unions became a regular feature. It was at this time that we approached the women employees, appraising them of the necessity to form a common platform to discuss the various problems facing them as women workers and to solve their problems.

After forming the KSEB Working Women's Committee comprising members from all the Unions, we prepared and submitted a mass memorandum to the Chairman of the Board with the signature of 327 women employees working in Electricity Board offices in Trivandrum City.

The main demands in the Memorandum were.

1. Conveyance facilities should be provided for the working women in KSEB.
2. Creches and kindergartans should be instituted wherever the women workers are concentrated.
3. Housing and quarters should be allocated to the working women wherever they are transferred.
4. Toilet facilities and retiring rooms should be established in the section offices, as well as the main offices.
5. Security from anti-social elements.

The KSEB agreed to take the necessary steps to implement the proposals contained in the memorandum.

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## M E A N I N G O F T H E L . I . C O R D I N A N C E

Working Women are amongst the lowest paid, worst exploited, last to be hired, first to be dismissed. In the last three decades particularly in the last ten years, the growing economic crisis, the increasing economic distress hitting every poor and middle class family, has pushed more and more women and young girls into the labour market. There they find themselves discriminated against in terms of choice of occupations, training, pay and conditions of work, not to speak of things such as their safety, security and dignity of person. But growingly, also, working women are discovering their only defence against this gross all-round exploitation is organised struggle, and therefore, the right to organise, the right to fight, and the assurance that the gains won will be respected. Till now they looked to the Government and the Law, to enforce these rights and the agreements which embodied these gains.

But now has come the LIC Ordinance which represents a tremendous threat and danger, most particularly to the lowest-paid and unorganised sections of workers, the women, wherever they are employed, to their past small gains, and future possibilities of improving their lot.

How is it a threat? Because the acceptance of bonus as deferred wage was a gain which entire sections of the working class fought for and won, for all workers. The amount of bonus which LIC workers had achieved, just like their higher grades of pay, was won in grim and protracted struggles over many years - it was not a gift from anyone, least of all the Government. These were achievements put down in writing, accepted and signed by the Government upheld by the highest legal authority in the country - the Supreme Court. It is this agreement which the same Government has now torn up through the promulgation of the LIC Ordinance and the Bill. In its place, the Government now wishes to dictate on all questions of wages, bonus, conditions of work, etc. This Ordinance in fact means that any agreements reached between employer and workers, will not necessarily be respected. In other words, that any gains won through struggle can be snatched away by the Government.

(Contd. to Page. 29)

(HARYANA)

W O R K I N G W O M E N ' S C O N V E N T I O N

Faridabad Kamgar Mahila Samiti held its First Convention on February 16, 1981. Since almost all the public transport had been taken over for the Congress (I) 'kisan' rally, many among the 108 women present had to change as many as five buses to reach the Convention. The women had also to defy the orders to keep the factories open on what is the normal weekly off for Faridabad workers. Many men workers from different unions also came as observers.

Of the 108 delegates, 98 women were workers from 11 factories, machine-operators, packers or helpers, and the others were wives of workers, one school teacher and <sup>a</sup>nurse, most of them below 25 years of age. Seven were office-bearers of their unions. While most delegates belonged to CITU Unions, a delegation of five, came from the Electro Master factory, an H.L. Union, where the 15 girls out of the 50 employees, have been on strike for the last two months.

The convention was greeted by Vimal Ranadive, Pramilla Pandhe from the Delhi Coordination Committee, Garg of the LIC Employees' Association Ram Sakal of the Dabriwala Steel Employees' Union, Faridabad CITU President, Gandhi, and General Secretary Mohan.

In her report to the Convention, Samiti Secretary Ranjana focussed attention on the economic crisis, the working conditions in Faridabad, and the growing struggles of the women workers. In Faridabad, about 3500 women, out of total working population of about 105 lakhs, are working in various industries such as readymade and woollen garments, engineering, electronics, pharmaceuticals, etc., occupying the worst and lowest-paid jobs. But only about fifteen per cent are organised in trade unions.

In the discussion the delegates spoke of these conditions and the struggles they have entered into, most of them for the first time. Asha, working at Bolton's, reported how recently, when union activist was <sup>a</sup>victimised

the women stopped work forcing the management to withdraw the suspension orders. Gyanwati from A.K. Packaging, marketing the Horlicks beverage, which declared a lock-out on February 7, recounted how some of them, having worked for over ten years, receive only Rs.300 wage. The management used to tease and harass them, but after the formation of the CITU Union, "we put a stop to that". Now we are facing the lock-out, and picket at the factory gate every day." Durgadevi from the same factory spoke of the wage disparities between the women working in different units of the same concern in Calcutta, Bangalore and Faridabad. Shanti from the Lemont garment-making factory spoke of the managements' attempt to cut their increment, won only three years ago after agitation. The hundred women workers downed tools for one and a half days and won its restoration at 1981 levels. After 6 years in this factory, Shanti is earning only Rs.390. There is no creche at the factory, the Government creche charges Rs.48 per month for non-Government employees. Maternity leave is available but maternity benefit is to be obtained from the ESI, not the factory. Now all the women have joined the union.

In the JMA Light Factory, 90 out of 700-800 are women. After 5 to 6 years service, they receive Rs.250 to 450. Previously only unmarried girls were employed; after unionisation married women are also taken on. Normal increment of Rs.7 was won only after struggle. Many of the young girl employees come to Faridabad from Hissar, since girls are refused factory employment in Hissar. Here they have to pay Rs.300 rent for two rooms; in most cases the whole family has come down; in others a number of girls club together to share the rooms.

In Electro Master, 15 women and 40/50 men are employed, the women hand-assembling the fan switches, while the men make the fan blades, the women have been on strike for two months supported by all but one or two of the men. Five years ago when there was no union, and the workers thought permanency would be granted by the employer, their pay was Rs.150-180. Far from permanency or pay rise, the employer disclaimed them as his workers, having surreptitiously switched the assembly department to another factory one Sunday night, and taken on new workers on a contract-basis. One of the

F A M O U S   S E A F O O D  
E X P O R T S - - - - -I N F A M O U S   W O R K I N G  
C O N D I T I O N S

The Andhra Coast is rich in seafoods, and Visakhapatnam famous for its seafood exporting industry. Its workers are mostly women, drawn to this industry because the processing and packaging of fish requires no skill or experience.

The minimum hours of work they have to put in is 12, the maximum ranges from 16 to 18 hours, over and above their house work. On the pretext that there is difficulty in storing the material, the worker must finish whatever material is allotted as the day's share, the 'norm', which is periodically refixed. In this way the employers intensify the rate of work, as well as lengthen the working day.

For all these 12, 16 or 18 hours, these women have to stand barefoot in chlorinated ice water, cleaning the fish with their bare hands. They have also to clean the trays in which the fish is brought; sometimes work in the garden of the company and as domestic servants - even in the Government-run Fisheries Corporation. As always they are sexually harassed and abused.

For this kind of labour and torment, the monthly salary ranges from Rs.90 to Rs.150. One company, for example, pays Rs.5 for 12 hours of work a day, and Rs.2 as total for all extra hours worked in the month. There is a legal provision, in law, that for any industry employing more than 1000 workers, a Minimum Wages Committee has to be set up by the Government to see that minimum wages are paid to all employees. But, the Andhra Pradesh Government has neglected setting up such a committee in this industry. Taking advantage of this, the owners are paying the lowest they can get away with.

Most women suffer from the particular occupational diseases, the most prominent amongst these being diseases arising from the <sup>contaminated</sup> chlorinated atmosphere. Another common affliction is the numbing of the fingers after a few years of constant working in icy water. The fingers then become useless for work.

Despite managements opposition, the women, are coming forward to set up unions to improve their conditions. In one company - Devi Marine Products - <sup>the</sup> management went to extent of requesting the CITU union leaders not to organise the workers, on threat of their suspension. The workers united, fought for their rights and obtained a reduction of minimum working hours from 12 to 8 hours. Similarly in one of the biggest seafood-exporting companies, Union Carbide, by uniting in their union the workers not only won a reduction in working hours, but also an increase in salary from Rs.150 to Rs.400 per month, plus bonus.

Now the union and the Working Women's Coordination Committee are fighting for a reduction of the working day in all companies, provision of gloves and boots, plus foot rests, and adequate security for the women workers.

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Faridabad (From Page 17)

delegates from this factory, a lady with three children, stated how she had worked for three and a half years on the same salary of Rs.180. Her husband as well as her in-laws objected to her remaining on strike, but she insisted. "Let what may happen. I am not moving from here", was her reply. In this factory meals have to be taken at the work place. There is no water facilities, and they are not allowed to go out. With no adequate bus transport they walk an hour to work to avoid paying Rs.2 rickshaw fare.

It is from this background and with determination that the 108 delegates unanimously endorsed the resolution of the Convention proposed by Chandrakala of CDIL, on price-rise, discrimination in employment and atrocities on women, and pledged support to the work of their Kamgar Mahila Samiti in the coming months.

One of the notable features in all industries and occupations where women work is that by and large, women stay aloof from their respective trade unions. They take little interest or part in the general activities of the union, few get elected to its leading committees, and seldom do they have the confidence to raise the problems of women workers in the only forum which can effectively fight for and defend their rights. This pattern cuts across all industries and all States in the country, even where a sizable number of women are employed.

For example, the States of Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Kerala, which have a higher concentration of industry. In a sample survey of 336 unions in these States as registered in 1979, women members made up just eight per cent of the total union membership; women office-bearers were only 34 - 13 in Maharashtra, eight in Tamilnadu and six in West Bengal. In the industries where women constitute the overwhelming majority of the work force - plantations coir, beedi, tobacco - the executive committees of the unions consist mainly of male members, and at conferences, women workers make up hardly one to two per cent of the delegates.

In a sample survey covering all the major States covering 580 unions as registered in 1977, it was seen that 18 per cent of the membership was of women workers, and only 80 women, less than one per cent, were in the executive committees. If all unions were to be included then the representation would be much less.

In the Durgapur Steel Plant in 1979, only 200 out of 900 women workers employed were enrolled as union members, in a total union membership of 15,000. While two women were in the 220-strong Council, there was no women representative in the leading body, the Executive Committee. The picture is often worse in the much smaller units - in a watch factory in Dharwad District of Karnataka, women number 90 in a workforce of 250, i.e., 36 per cent. All the 90 women, alongwith their male colleagues, 160 men, are in the union - but there are only 3 women in the Executive Committee.

The Salem Magnesite mines in Tamilnadu is another such case. Here the women workers are almost exclusively women, 6,500, out of a total workforce of about 7,000, yet no woman has yet been elected to any leading position at any level. In fact in mines in general, the proportion of women trade unionists to total women workers is about 52 per cent. Women formed about 13 per cent of the total membership, while their share in the total employment, is roughly 16 per cent. Most of women workers are ignorant about either the utility or the benefits of unionism, and no woman worker is an office-bearer or holding any prominent position in any of the trade unions.

Out of 10 factories in Faridabad, near Delhi, where women are employed, only four unions have women office-bearers, as General Secretaries, Joint Secretaries, and Treasurers, but these were elected only in 1981. Before that no woman held an executive post.

While inactivity and disinterestedness of working women towards the unions arises from their present unequal status in society, which hinders all their activities outside - a house and children to care for after attending the factory or office, making<sup>it</sup> difficult for them to pay extra attention to trade unions and play an active part in them, it is also true that no special efforts have been made to draw them into the unions, primarily by trying to solve some of their more urgent problems. Only in this way can women learn how the union can defend them,

The responsibility is two-fold: working women must demand specific union activity to meet their specific requirements and problems - change<sup>s</sup> in the timing of union meetings to enable women workers to conveniently participate; special training to enable women to take up general trade union responsibilities, and a special Women's Committee in each factory, office and work place that can act as the link between the women workers and the union, articulating their demands and special requirements, and mobilising the women to active participation in the general struggle of the union and the working class movement.

The effectiveness of such steps is amply borne out in a number of States such as Kerala, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Andhra as also in the Delhi



BEEDI MAKING

Exploitation in THE UNORGANISED SECTOR

Of the 3 million workers employed by the beedi industry across the country, as many as 90 per cent are women, employed as "home workers" with a heavy concentration among Muslim women. Although there exists a Beedi Cigar Act which gives adequate protection to both factory and home workers, under the labour-contract system which prevails throughout the industry, the workers are deprived of all benefits under the Act. The companies operate through middlemen, there is no link with the employer, and contractors seldom pay more than the equivalent of half the statutory minimum wage. The women's wage is, of course, always less than the male worker's. In Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu and U.P., the payment for rolling 1000 beedis is from Rs.4.50 to Rs.6, but it is seldom that one person can complete this in one day. In Gujarat the average daily income rarely exceeds Rs.4 to Rs.5. Only in Karnataka and Kerala, have the workers, through struggle, compelled the owners to pay better wages, maternity benefits, paid leave, etc. Here the daily wage ranges from Rs.8 to Rs.10. However the biggest loss is sustained through the cheating the contractor perpetrate on the illiterate women (and children), by the 'rejection' of sub-standard beedis, for which no payment is made, though beedis are actually sold at the same price as the rest.

The number of women offering themselves for employment far exceeds the demand, and with little union organisation, the contractors can keep wages low. For the poorer rural households, this is an important source of income - and for widows, who are the only breadwinners, sometimes having to support even aged parents-in-law, this is the main or only source. For Muslim women who observe Purdah, there are no other employment options outside their homes.

Women's earnings in this respect, have been estimated to constitute on an average as much as 45 per cent of the total household incomes in some areas. An ILO survey estimates that about ~~\$450 million~~ (Rs.340 crores) worth

of bidis are produced annually, but only about \$160 million goes to the workers as wages. And the returns are likely to rise still further with expansion of export markets into the USA and Europe.

Rolling beedies is also a standards invitation to disease. The work calls for hardly any bodily movement; sitting for hours bent over the work, brings a permanent hunch to the back, and stiffens the elbow joints. The stifling atmosphere and the poor light in the working quarter is murderous. The workers cannot roll the beedies in the open because the slightest breeze sends the tobacco flying. The fumes from the raw beedis and the oil lamps line the workers lungs with layer upon layer of carbon, giving a high incidence of TB and other lung diseases, and impairing their eyesight. It is no wonder that a large number of patients in the hospitals are beedi workers.

Despite notable women's participation, including Muslim women, in the beedi workers' struggles in West Bengal, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, etc., their representation in the T.U.'s and at Conferences is marginal - at the first conference of Beedi Cigar Workers organised by the CITU in 1975 in Vellore, Tamilnadu, there were hardly 15 to 20 women delegates.

This situation must be speedily rectified in order to draw larger sections of these severely exploited women workers in the fight for the implementation of the Beedi, Cigar Act, as well as into the organised general struggle against the contract-labour system, for implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and against wage discrimination.

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# EQUALITY

## THE MYTH OF CONSTITUTIONAL

### G U A R A N T E E

\*from R. VAIGAI.

Thirty years after the enactment of the Constitution, the guarantee of equality and prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex in Articles 14, 15 and 16 are a myth and not reality.

"That our founding faith enshrined in Articles 14 and 16 should have been tragically ignored vis-a-vis half of India's humanity, viz., our women, is a sad reflection on the distance between Constitution in the book and Law in action, "bemoaned the Supreme Court recently in the case of Miss.C.B.Muthamma, a senior IFS Officer, who was denied promotions only on the ground of sex. Referring to the IFS Rules which empower the Government to require a woman officer to resign after marriage, the Court further said, "discrimination against women, in traumatic transparency, is found in this rule". Muthamma won.

But there are millions in other areas who continue to be discriminated against.

About 800 airhostesses in Air India, a public corporation, work on flights (cabin crew), on the ground and at traffic counters. There are male cabin crew also, the lowest category being Assistant Flight Purser - Rs.385-535. His job on flights is confined to the gallery, and is to heat up trays, remove trolleys and demonstrate safety measures. But an Air-hostess' job is more arduous, physically and mentally, such as passenger care, service, account keeping for cash received for drinks etc., safety demonstrations and the like. The 494 Assistant Flight Purser, after 4 years of service, get promoted in turn as Flight Purser (327 Posts) - Rs.485-1020, Check Flight Purser (61 posts) with Rs.200 extra allowance, In-flight Supervisors (69 posts) - Rs.830-1320 extendable upto Rs.1600 and later to all managerial posts. Whereas an Air-hostess, paid Rs.485-700 of equal qualifications, seniority

and job does not get any promotion. Until 1977, promotion was possible though the posts were less than 80, as Deputy Chief Air Hostess, Additional Chief Air Hostess and later as Chief Air Hostess. These posts are now frozen. Check Air hostesses are not even given the Rs.200 extra allowance given to Check Flight Pursers.

Further, Regulation 46 of Air India's Service Regulations says that the retiring age of all employees is 58, but Air-hostesses upon attaining the age of 35, or on marriage, if it takes place within 4 years of service, or first pregnancy, whichever is earlier, shall retire from service. Air hostesses in all the airlines abroad enjoy a common seniority, promotions and retirement age with male cabin crew. In Air India itself, for Air hostesses recruited abroad but of Indian origin, called "foreign Air-hostesses", no such discrimination exists because of the laws of those countries.

Four brave Air-hostesses - Nergesh Meerya, Marilyu Mendes, Adil Khambatta and Avril Stanley - have challenged the above as violating their fundamental rights. Air hostesses of Indian Airlines have also challenged a similar retirement rule. Both cases are to be heard soon by the Supreme Court which has passed an interim order saying that all promotions during the pendency of the cases would be subject to its final decision.

It is highly shameful that Government-owned Corporations practice such blatant discrimination. The Government and private employers must be made to realise that such open or covert penalising of the working woman will not be tolerated. The air-hostesses and other women employees of Air-India and those in Indian Airlines, have the full support of the Co-ordination Committee of Working Women, as of all women's organisations.

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\* Nationalised Banks, like the Government of India, do not appoint female  
\* candidates who are pregnant at the time of appointment, as they are consi-  
\* dered "temporarily unfit for employment". The Government claims that after  
\* confinement the concerned candidate becomes "entitled" to appointment. This  
\* practice will continue--Reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha.  
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D I S C R I M I N A T I O N    --    I N    T H E    U. N. O. I N  
D E V E L O P E D  
C O U N T R I E S

"Women are always at work but not permanently employed":-- So stated the Secretary-General of the United Nations Organisation. However, even within the U.N. only 22.1% of the professional jobs in the Secretariat are held by women, including posts with special language requirements which have traditionally been held by a relatively high proportion of women. If these are not included, only 18.6% of professional posts are held by women. The proportion of women in the upper decision-making levels of the Secretariat is even lower, with only 12% of those jobs being held by women. The average increase in the number of professional positions as far as women employees are concerned, is only 0.7% a year. At this rate, it will take 41 years for women to achieve equality and hold 50% of the jobs in U.N.

The U.N. situation is only a microcosm of the global situation. Women make up 50% of the world's population, comprise 33.3% of the official labour force perform for nearly 66.6% of all working hours, receive 10% of the world's income and own less than one per cent of the world's property.

Reports shows that two out of every three illiterate people in the world are women; over 80% of all women in Asia and Africa cannot read or write; and between 25-33 percent of all house holds in the world are headed by women. In the developed countries of the world, where the position of women is supposed to be better, discrimination is still very prominent: in Sweden, where the father is entitled to 'paternity leave' so that he may share the responsibility of bringing up the child, Swedish women have a choice of about 25 different occupations, whereas a man chooses from 300 careers; in the U.K. women are paid an average of 25% less, and in the U.S., they are paid 40 per cent less than their male colleagues. In part-time and less demanding jobs, because of family responsibilities, the women have less time for training and less opportunity for promotion.

The ILO notes: pensioners are the poorest social group in the industrialised world. But here too, it is the women who are the worst off, partly because

inequality during their working life is reflected in the lower pensions. In the U.S. for example, the eight million women who are over the age of 65, make up, by far, one of the poorest groups in America with almost half of them living below the poverty line.

According to a U.N.D.P. Report on 'Rural Women's Participation in Development'; The contribution of women to labour productivity is ignored because the tasks women perform - post-harvest food processing, fetching water and fuel, child-care and cooking - are not recognised as work at all, and thus excluded from official labour statistics. Village studies indicate that women's work is of much greater importance than officially recognised, that women often work longer hours than men, and that women's relative contribution to family income is the largest among the poor.

Trade unions are also dominated by men. In America's garment industry, 80 per cent of the union members are women but 21, of the 22 member-board of the union, are men. In New Zealand, only 15 of the country's 323 unions have any women executives, despite the fact that women carry over a third of all union membership cards.

On December 18, 1980 the U.N. adopted a Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. So far only 77 States have signed it and only 6 states have ratified it. Ratification by 20 States is required to bring the Convention into force. India is not one of the six.

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This is not a lone example. What happened with the LIC, happened also with the public sector workers in Bangalore, Hyderabad and other places. The written agreement on increase in wages signed earlier by this Government, was arbitrarily repudiated. Three people died in the firing on workers who struck work for 77 days. The same attitude was seen in the treatment of locomen. In Talcher, Orissa, it will be recalled, railwaymen protesting against the rape of railwaymen's wives by the railway contractor's men, were victimised. Five hundred locomen were arrested, 500 dismissed and another 500 compulsorily retired.

Thus the LIC Ordinance is not a lone occurrence. It would be totally illusory to think that this policy is meant only for the well-organised or the better-paid worker. The real target of this policy is the trade union movement itself. The LIC strike therefore, called for April 2, is in fact, a fight for the right to defend the worker's standard of living through collective bargaining on his behalf by the union.

How does it concern the working woman earning Rs.150, 200,450 with no big demand? Because the Ordinance strikes at the only manner in which any improvement in the conditions of life and work can be attained - the organised struggle of the working class. If this attack on the right of the unions to negotiate on behalf of their members, if law and court judgments in favour of workers can be arbitrarily set aside, then no worker or groups of workers are safe. And women being the weakest in organisation and the worst exploited will, in the Government's opinion, be the easiest to crush.

That is why in its implications this ordinance and the policy towards labour that it implies, is fraught with danger for working women.

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