



UNION POWER

NTUI

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EDITORIAL

Close to a hundred million workers joined the 7 September General Strike to fight price rise and to resist disinvestment of the public sector. The general strike was not just another strike against capital - it made history by bringing to the fore more workers in a general strike than ever before. The strike was a clear signal of the dissatisfaction and militancy of working people throughout the country.

This is the first time in its history that the INTUC has joined a national call for action and that too at a time when the Congress Party is in government. This in fact reaffirms the NTUI's understanding that trade unions if they have to serve the working class must occupy the opposition space in a capitalist society.

One million members of the NTUI, representing the largest membership of contract workers and large sections of other informal workers, joined the strike. In addition to the 5-point charter agreed upon at the National Convention of Workers, NTUI raised the demands of: living wage for all working people; progressive elimination of contract work and a regeneration of the public sector. The dynamism of contract workers organised by the NTUI emerged and evolved as a decisive factor in shaping this strike even in the state of Gujarat. This is the first time that unions of regular workers also realised the relevance of a joint action and struck work together with unions of contract workers. The strike also derived its spontaneity from the fact that NTUI in its campaign on the ground based it on a strong demand for minimum wage. This was evident from the large mobilisation on Mysore Road by members of the Garment and Textile Workers' Union in Bangalore. NTUI was also able to draw unions in various multinationals companies who joined such national action for the first time.

This strike has also shown inherent weakness in this method of organising a strike action. While the strike was widespread in some states, there was a high degree of unevenness. The pre-supposition that unity of national trade union centres is sufficient to unite working people is restrictive. The mobilisation of workers along industry is necessary to build concrete solidarity and deepen unity amongst workers. The strike action continues to remain in a merely agitational framework with inadequate stress on concrete responses to the attack of imperialist globalisation. Both these limitations reduce such large and widespread actions to mere symbolism.

At all earlier national calls for action, NTUI has sought and been denied participation in the joint call. This remained the case this time too. Yet we have consistently responded to them keeping our abiding commitment to trade union unity to build a common

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programme of action and united struggle to face the attack of imperialist globalisation. Considerable momentum was built by the NTUI affiliates in the states of Maharashtra and Punjab which led to their inclusion in the state level preparatory committees despite the fact that there was no unanimity on this by the government recognised national trade union centres at the national level. We learnt from this that we cannot merely seek to build a united front at the national level but simultaneous and sustained efforts in the states will play a crucial role in the building of the united front and influencing decisions at the national level. This experience must be absorbed by our affiliates in other states and the momentum gained in Maharashtra and Punjab must be maintained and built upon. For it is these steps that will form the foundation on which we can build a truly representative united front of the democratic and militant working class that alone can launch an effective strike on capital.

SPECIAL REPORT

REPORT OF 7 SEPTEMBER GENERAL STRIKE

Almost a hundred million workers participated in the one-day all-India strike on 7 September 2010 to protest soaring prices, privatization and disinvestment in public sector, the casualisation and contracting out of work, and the failure of the government to enforce labour laws. Rehabilitation of workers and employees who have lost their jobs due to the economic recession was also one of the key demands. The strike was called by all national trade union centres under the umbrella of the Coordination Committee of Central Trade Unions, except the BMS.

The strike was joined by large numbers of contract workers in the engineering, power loom, fertiliser, chemical, and ship-building industries, as well as in the hospital and transport sectors. There was also widespread participation by workers in the informal sector. Construction workers, brick-kiln workers, ASHA, ANM and Anganwadi workers, para-teachers and domestic workers also joined the strike for the first time this year. Marking a new height, NTUI affiliates were able to deepen the strike in the private sector. In many multinational firms – including Areva, DHL and Siemens – workers joined the general strike for the first time. This strike was unquestionably a testimony to the growing anger and militancy in the working class. It also gave an inkling of the potential for a working class counter-offensive against big business and the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

The strike was complete in the left front led states of Kerala, Tripura and West Bengal. Speaking to the press AITUC General Secretary Gurudas Dasgupta asserted that, “if the government does not heed our demands after the strike the movement will be intensified. We will march to the parliament to lay siege to it.”

NTUI was founded with the notion of unity and working class militancy as its core values and hence has always joined national calls of action given by progressive national trade union centres. The progressive unions under the banner of the Sponsoring Committee of Trade Union this time expanded the call to include the INTUC. There was intense debate within the NTUI regarding the decision to join the strike that is being called by the trade union of the political party in power. Ultimately, it was decided that NTUI will join the strike and participate in joint programmes at state levels to build a united front. The joining of NTUI, which is one of the largest organiser of contract workers across the country both in formal and informal sector, showed the dynamism of contract workers union and they evolved as a decisive factor in making the strike a success in many areas. Unions of regular workers for the first time realised the relevance of joint action and struck work together with unions of contract workers. The demand for minimum wages raised by NTUI mobilised a large number of workers for this strike. No other union had raised this issue across the country.

Report from States

Kerala: The NTUI Kerala State Council while joining the joint trade union platform at the state level also conducted an independent campaign highlighting the demands specifically raised by NTUI, through posters, meetings and rallies in almost all the district and taluka headquarters for almost a month. The state Council also formulated separate demands which primarily focussed on restructuring of the PF-Pension scheme.



NTUI Rally on 7 September in Kerala

The strike though largely state sponsored, there was complete strike at all units that is organised by NTUI. In

Cochin Shipyard, where the union led by Comrade V B Cherian is the major union, the strike was almost complete. Out of 1300 permanent workers, less than 75 attended for duty. In Nedumpassery Air Port, cargo movements were badly affected by the strike. In the Aluva Industrial belt the strike was almost total. In the Electricity sector, the Kerala Power Workers unity Centre took initiative to highlight the refusal of the state government in regularising contract workers even after the favourable verdict from the Supreme Court. In the HMT unit at Kalamessery the workers were struggling since January 2010 against privatization. This was yet another opportunity for them to show their opposition to the government policies. Out of 1400 workers in FACT, less than 250 of essential staff exempt from strike who reported for duty. In TCC and HIL too the strike was complete.

NTUI in Kerala also highlighted the international aspect of this strike. The convergence of demands of retirement benefits both in Europe, which was seeing a series of strikes, including the one on the same day in France, and in India was highlighted.

Punjab: Banks, Insurance, A&G offices along with Electricity Boards joined the strike but the rallies on the day of the strike were not well attended. In industrial areas, dominated by unions affiliated to NTUI, the strike was complete. They were also joined by unions affiliated to CITU and AITUC. Contract workers in transport organised by NTUI joined the strike for the first time. CITU and AITUC unions in transport however did not join the strike. Safai workers in Chandigarh, organised by NTUI joined the strike.



ANM, ASHA workers at a Rally in Chandigarh

NTUI Punjab State Council organised a large demonstration in Chandigarh on 7 September. It was attended by over a thousand agricultural workers, ANMs and ASHAs, brick kiln workers, who for the first time in the history of joint action joined a general strike.

In the run up to the strike, given the ground swell of support and sheer presence on the ground of NTUI in Punjab, the recognised national trade union centres were for the first time forced to concede space to the NTUI in joint platforms and programmes in Punjab.

Maharashtra: The strike had a mixed reaction. Many industrial unions did not join the strike. Railways and buses that keep the city moving also stayed out of the strike. However, industrial areas where NTUI, CITU and AITUC organises workers joined the strike. Government employees and municipal employees participated in the strike. Unions in Siemens and DHL, for the first time joined the strike. In Pune, all industrial units organised by NTUI went on strike.



GATWU demonstration on Mysore Road in Bangalore

Karnataka: GATWU had a literally spontaneous strike. Going from one garment factory to another and getting workers out in the Mysore road area in Bangalore. About 5000 workers mainly women workers joined the dharna near BHEL factory on Mysore Road. The rally was led by Comrades Yamuna, Rukmini, Mallika, Rathamma and Lalitha of the Garment and Textile Workers Union. Union Vice-President Jayaram addressed the workers. This was the largest gathering of workers in Bangalore. The strike by GATWU derived its spontaneity from the fact that the campaign was grounded in a strong demand for minimum wage. The mobilisation for this strike showed the potential for organising around the issue of minimum wage.

Tamil Nadu: In the run up to the strike, there were demonstrations of unorganised workers held in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari. In the industrial areas where NTUI organises there was complete strike action. Union in Areva went on strike for the first time. It was the only union in south Chennai that went on strike despite the fact that 7 units around the Areva plant is organised by the CITU.

Gujarat: Industrial areas in Gujarat saw a decline in strike action this time. There was however wider campaigning that brought in a larger number of unions

on a united front against the government policies, bringing back the issues of labour in the process of public opinion building. But this could not be translated into strike action as much of it was also because the INTUC unions joined the campaign. This can be viewed as an advance in the state of Gujarat given the political condition there. This campaign has helped overcome the internal resistance that had been created within unions. It has opened up a space for formation of a united front. This was possible to some extent as the NTUI leadership showed a kind of maturity that amalgamated the united front strategy.

AFFILIATE NEWS

UT Powermen Union holds protest in Chandigarh:

16 September 2010: The UT Powermen Union held a protest demonstration before the electricity office in Chandigarh. Electricity employees protested against the authorities who had not acted on their previously agreed demands. Some of the agreed demands were to pay pension and gratuity of retired employees who had retired in 2006 and after, providing safety devices to the workers, issue confirmation orders, implementation of revised scales, paying the dues of expired employees to their dependents and removal of pay anomalies between senior and junior employees. They further demanded to grant offer of appointment to dependents of other deceased employees by scrapping 5% sealing on PSEB pattern.

Comrades Gopal Dutt Joshi, General Secretary and Ram Sarup, President of the union criticised the authorities for delaying the implementation of demands which had been already agreed in earlier meetings with them. A delegation consisting of union representatives met the Chief Engineer and appealed him to direct the concerned authorities to resolve the agreed demands, failing which they would intensify their struggle.

CTU Punjab support Powerloom workers Strike in Ludhiana:

29 September 2010: Powerloom workers in Ludhiana have been demanding the implementation of minimum wages and better pay for piece rate workers in the garments, shawl and knitwear industries. They are also demanding accident and health insurance benefits for injured workers. The month long stir has closed down 144 units employing over 3,800 workers. Most of the affected factories produce shawls on powered looms at piece rates, which work out lower than the current minimum wages of Rs.3, 552 a month. The products are retailed in the domestic market and also exported. Unlike contract hiring, here factory owners hire piece rate workers directly.

While the protest continues, many of the striking workers at Shakti Nagar have returned to work. The

unions, with the CTU-Punjab supporting them, after a tripartite negotiations managed to extract an 11% raise in piece rate wages.

Indefinite dharna of NREGA Workers in Raichur, Karnataka:

22 September 2010: Members of Grameen Coolie Karmikara Sangathane sat on an indefinite dharna in front of Zilla Panchayat office in Raichur bringing up various issues of irregularity in NREGA from 22 September. More than 5000 workers were not paid wages under NREGS amounting to approx Rs. 50 lakhs in 2009-10. Also, no new works were given across thirty villages in five talukas, even though workers had applied for work more than two months earlier. Block authorities also refused to pay unemployment allowance to these workers.

Protesting workers were also arrested but were later released. The matter has been raised with the State Chief Secretary and the Ministry of Rural Development. A state level meeting was convened on 26th September with the CEO, Zilla Panchayat and all the Block Executive Officers. As per the agreement, it was decided that all pending payments of 2009-10 will be made, unemployment allowance would be given in 7 villages, 5 responsible officers were fined Rs.1000 as per the provisions of the Act. The administration agreed that all demands would be implemented by 20 October.

AWBSRU holds Convention on Minimum Wage in Kolkata:

24 September 2010: All West Bengal Sales Representative Union (AWBSRU) held a mass convention on the issue of minimum wage in Kolkata on 24 September. Several unions in the unorganised sector such as the Shangrami Shramik Union (Kalyani Spinning Mill), Bashirhat Brick Field Shramik Union, Lumtex Sangrami Majdoor Union, Shramik Samannya Committee (Hasnabad), Haripal Group-D Karmachari Union participated in the meeting. Nagarik Mancha and Representatives of AICCTU, AIUTUC, TUCC, UTUC, IFTU, SSU and TUCI also attended the convention. A committee comprising of Naba Dutta (Nagarik Mancha), Dibakar Bhattacharjee (AICCTU) and Asish Kusum Ghosh (AWBSRU) was formed, which would develop a plan of action for the platform.

Rajasthan Mine Workers Union on hunger-strike for silicosis victims:

Jodhpur, 25 September 2010: With no relief in sight, the widows of about 50 reported silicosis victims took to the streets in Jodhpur. They are on a hunger-strike, under the banner of Rajasthan Mine Workers Union, in front of the collector's office for three days demanding compensation as directed by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

A NHRC delegation had visited Jodhpur on a complaint on the poor condition of work at the mines, including prevalence of silicosis in the district. The NHRC, on

interviewing the workers, had come to the conclusion that the concerned workers had died of silicosis and directed the state government to pay compensation to the kin of 22 workers. The NHRC deadline was failed by the state government. Following which, the NHRC issued a reminder asked the chief secretary to appear in person before the commission if compensation is not paid within November.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

CAMPAIGN FOR RIGHT TO FOOD AND WORK

Godamo ke Taala Todoh Abhiyan: 22-28 September 2010: The National Convention of the Right to Food Campaign held in Rourkela resolved to hold a national action week for distribution of food grains to people who needed the most as well as demand a comprehensive food security legislation.



Almost 10,000 people across eight districts of West Bengal protested against rotting food grains outside FCI and state godowns from 22 to 28 September. Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity, along with other constituents of Right to Food and Work joined this symbolic protest. They highlighted the appalling state of food schemes in the state, with special focus on ICDS, Mid day Meal and Public Distribution System. Apart from demonstrations, they submitted memoranda to the District Food Controller, Block Development Officer's and District Magistrates.

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Worker's Dharna for Peace and Communal Harmony in Mumbai: 23 September 2010: About 300 activists from NTUI, IFTU, TUCI, Krantikari Kamgar Union and other civil society organizations organised a dharna for peace and communal harmony at Azad Maidan in Mumbai on 23 September, on the eve of verdict on the Ayodhya dispute. Dharna was held keeping in mind Mumbai's communal riots in 1992. Comrades D Thankappan, M A Patil, Milind Ranade, and Maya Parmeshwar were present at the dharna. Dr. Ram Punyani, Sanjay Singhvi (TUCI), Pravin Nadkar (IFTU), Vijay Kulkarni (Sarva Shramik Sanghatana),

Sunder Navalkar (United Labour Union) were also present. Comrade Thankappan urged workers to create united platform in residential localities so that workers are able to together fight communalism and capitalism.

On 24 September, the three-judge Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court ruled that there be a three-way division of the disputed Ayodhya land - one-third for the Sunni Waqf Board, one-third for the Nirmohi Akhara and one-third to the party in behalf of 'Ram Lalla'. The Sunni Waqf Board will appeal in the Supreme Court against it. The chairman of the Sri Ram Janmbhoomi Trust, too, said they would challenge the decision to provide one-third of the disputed land to the Sunni Waqf Board in the Supreme Court. Crucially, the court has said there shall be status quo at the site for the next three months.

Israel Seizes Gaza Aid Boat: 28 September 2010: An aid ship carrying eight Jewish activists from Europe, Israel and the US was apprehended by the Israeli navy just miles off the coast of Gaza after being warned by a warship. The 10-metre catamaran, *Irene*, carrying symbolic aid in the form of children's toys and musical instruments, textbooks, fishing nets for Gaza's fishing communities and prosthetic limbs, was a gesture by left European Jewish groups. Navy commandos boarded the *Irene*, and the passengers were led off the boat despite Israel's claim that they had eased the naval blockade following the Mavi Marmara attack on 31 May 2010.

CAMPAIGN ON TRADE

India's trade deficit increases: The trade deficit for April - July 2010 is estimated at US \$ 43585 million which is higher than the deficit of US \$ 31420 million during April -July, 2009. Oil imports during July 2010 were valued at US \$ 7665 million which was 4.4 per cent higher in the corresponding period last year. Non-oil imports during April - July 2010 were valued at US\$ 79273 million which was 31.8 per cent higher than in April - July 2009.

In-principle Agreement on Japan-India Economic Partnership: *New Delhi, 9 September 2010:* India and Japan today reached an agreement in negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). There will be no further negotiations and is likely to be signed during the Prime Minister's visit to Tokyo for the India-Japan Summit, scheduled on 25 October 2010. The Commerce Ministry will now seek the Cabinet's approval for this.

This EPA is a comprehensive agreement that includes liberalisation of trade in goods between Japan and India. Duties will be reduced or eliminated in about 10,000 product lines. The contentious issue in the negotiation has been over the pharmaceutical and auto sectors. Japan specialises in production of high-grade steel used

by automobile industry in India. With signing of the FTA, import duty on high-grade steel will come down to zero from 5% and hence will facilitate global sourcing of auto components and pose a challenge to the Indian auto component industry.

CAMPAIGN ON CLIMATE JUSTICE

OPG power plant hits a hurdle as fishermen raise environmental fears: *11 September 2010:* The construction of a 300-MW coal-fired power plant at the coastal village of Bhadreshwar in Kutch district of Gujarat hangs in balance as the project of OPG Ltd - a British company with subsidiaries in India - has hit roadblocks. In July-end, Union Ministry of Environment's Expert Appraisal Committee on Coastal Regulation Zone rejected OPG Ltd's proposals to build multiple pipelines to draw in seawater to the plant, which would be used as a coolant and later released back into the sea. It said the proposal would have adverse impact on the marine life since the released water would raise the temperature of the surrounding water. This has come as a relief for nearly 6000 fisher people who carry out fishing by traditional methods on the sand bar - Randh Bander on the Bhadreshwar coast. The Machimar Adhikar Sangharsh Sangathan and Kutch Zilla Machimar Association have also approached the National Environment Appellate Authority challenging the environment clearance the company had obtained in June 2010.

NEWS UPDATES

10 per cent hike in DA of Central Government Employees: *New Delhi, 17 September 2010:* The Union Cabinet approved a 10 per cent hike in Dearness Allowance for Central government employees and pensioners considering the high rate of inflation in the past six months. DA now will be 45 per cent of the basic pay. This comes a day after the announcement of a 9.5 per cent interest rate on the Provident Fund.

The decision will extend some relief to around 50 lakh employees and 38 lakh pensioners from the soaring prices. Overall inflation stood at 8.5 per cent in August, while food inflation is around 15 per cent, according to a new set of price indices that kicked in this week.

The allowance will be paid with retrospective effect from July 2010. The proposed increase is in accordance with the formula devised by the Sixth Pay Commission to compensate for price rise. When the DA rate crosses 50 per cent, as expected next year, all allowances will go up 25 per cent, according to the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations.

Rate of growth of Indirect Tax collections more than 3 times than Direct Tax collections in April-August

2010: Net direct tax collections during the period April to August 2010 stood at Rs.1,00,112 crore, up from Rs.87,888 crore in the same period in the last fiscal year, registering a growth of 13.91 percent. Growth in Corporate Income Tax was 17.05 percent, while Personal Income Tax grew at 9.68 percent.

Indirect tax collections from Customs, Central Excise and Service Tax at all India level has increased more than 45% during April-August, 2010 compared to its corresponding period last year. Total Revenue Collections were Rs.124170 crore during this period.

ESIC to Provide Secondary Medical Care and Supply of Drugs Directly in Remote Areas: *New Delhi, 3 September 2010:* The ESI Corporation has decided to provide secondary Medical Care services directly in areas and districts where the existing ESI Hospitals are more than 25 km from the concentration of Insured Persons. To ensure that there is no shortage of widely used and life saving drugs in the state ESI hospitals and dispensaries, the Corporation has approved a pilot project for direct procurement and supply of these drugs to the States. The entire expenditure shall be fully borne by the Corporation outside the ceiling. The ESI Act has also been amended such that it can now utilize spare capacity of underutilized hospitals on user charges for schemes notified by the Central Government.

Protests at Vedanta site after 5000 contract workers sacked: *1 September 2010:* Days after the environment ministry cancelled its clearance to the Vedanta mining project in Orissa and put its refinery on notice, workers are protesting at the plant site in Lanjarh. More than 5000 workers were suddenly retrenched on Tuesday by Larsen & Turbo, the contractor for carrying out Vedanta's construction work. About 35 contract workers were arrested.

HC asks state to give workers 6th pay panel wages: *Ahmedabad, 2 September 2010:* The Gujarat High Court has directed the state government to give all government employees wages according to the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. This order came in wake of a Public Interest Litigation moved by an Ahmedabad-based legal rights group challenging the pay scales of certain government employees like Vidya Sahayaks, Lok Rakshaks, Jail Sipahis in Gujarat. The petitioner had challenged the government's policy of recruiting these workers on fixed wages of Rs 2500 for a period of five years which is less than minimum wages.

Rajasthan refuses to recognise NREGA workers' union: *30 September 2010:* The registrar of trade unions in Rajasthan has refused permission to National Employment Guarantee Scheme workers to form a

union, on the grounds that they do not qualify as workmen. The application for registration filed by Majdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti was turned down under the pretext that NREGA workers don't qualify as workmen as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act and the Trade Union Act of 1962, because they are not engaged in a particular definable trade, industry or commercial undertaking.

Maternity benefits for Anganwadi workers and helpers: 9 July 2010, Delhi: Ministry of Women and Child Development has issued a circular dated 9 July 2010 directing states to provide maternity benefits to all Anganwadi workers and helpers. The entitlement amounts to a maternity paid leave for a period of 135 days upto two children and paid absence for 45 days in case of abortion/miscarriage once. This benefit will be applicable for only those workers who have been in service for at least one year.

Supreme Court order on distribution of additional foodgrains: 6 September 2010, Delhi: Taking into cognizance the suggestions given by the Supreme Court, the Government of India has decided to allocate an additional quantity of 25 lakh tons of wheat or rice at BPL prices for the next six months to the State Governments and Union Territories on ad hoc basis. This allocation will be over and above the 469.7 lakhs tons already allocated under the targeted public distribution system.

PUDR finds gross violation of labour laws at Commonwealth Games: New Delhi, 2 Sept 2010: The Peoples' Union of Democratic Rights report on state of workers at Commonwealth Games construction sites was released today. Some of the findings in the report are: workers have been denied minimum wages, overtime and weekly offs besides being deprived of regular payment of wages, identity cards and wage slips to prove employment. Unskilled workers are being paid Rs.110-130 per day instead of stipulated minimum wages of Rs. 203; semi-skilled and skilled workers are paid between Rs.150 and Rs. 170 instead of the stipulated minimum wages of Rs.225 for semi-skilled workers and Rs. 248 for skilled workers. The report also points out that workers have worked a daily overtime of 10 hours and have not been paid the overtime rates. The report also commented on the abysmal living conditions of workers in the sites along with negligible safety regulations at work sites.

LEGAL NOTES

Cabinet Approval for introduction of the National Identification Authority of India Bill, 2010 in Parliament: 24 September 2010: The Cabinet has approved the proposal for introducing the National

Identification Authority of India Bill, 2010 in Parliament. The Bill proposes to constitute a statutory authority called the National Identification Authority of India and lay down the powers and functions of the Authority, the framework for issuing UID numbers and other related matters through an Act of Parliament. This will involve an expenditure of Rs. 3023.01 crore which includes project components for issue of UID numbers by March 2011 and other costs for the entire project phase of five years ending March 2014.

Amendment of the Multi-state Co-operative Societies Act, 2002 approved by Cabinet: 16 September 2010: The Union Cabinet approved the introduction of the Multi-State Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2010 in the Parliament. These amendments are aimed to enhance efficiency of the cooperative sector. It, however, proposes to allow the multi-state cooperatives to refund full or part of the share capital subscribed by the Government to reduce/eliminate Government control of these cooperatives. The existing restriction on borrowings by the society is also proposed to be relaxed. Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Fund for rehabilitation and development of cooperative societies have also been proposed.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS



French workers march in Paris against Pension Reforms

European unions strike against Pension Reforms: Over two million workers across France staged a one-day strike on 7 September to protest government plans to raise the retirement age. More than 200 demonstrations were planned throughout the country to coincide with the walkout. Workers from both the public and private sectors were on strike, including those in transportation, education, justice, hospitals, media, and banking. The strike, planned since June, is a reaction to government pension reforms aimed at raising the age of retirement to 62. The maximum retirement age is currently at 60, though some people in hardship posts may retire earlier, depending on the job. Additionally, full benefits can now be tapped only at 67 and not from 65.

Over fifty trade unions from 30 countries participated in the Euro-demonstration in Brussels demanding "No to

Austerity, Priority for Jobs" on 29 September 2010 marking the European Day of Action. About 100,000 people took to the streets of the Brussels. In support for the call for the day of action, the Spanish trade unions held a general strike on 29 September. Demonstrations were also organised in Portugal, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Serbia, Romania, Poland, Ireland and France. Greek workers also struck work on 29 September. Portugal's largest union CGTP held strikes and rallies in various sectors on 29 September, in coordination with other unions in Europe. Britain's biggest public sector union, Unison, also joined the European day of action and protested against the British government's plans to slash public spending as it tackles a budget deficit running at 11pc of national output.

South African public workers strike: 6 September 2010: On 18 August 2010, more than one million government employees in South Africa began an indefinite strike across the country to increase their wages. The unions' demands include an 8.6 per cent increase in wages and a monthly housing allowance of 1,000 rand. The strike was called off finally on 6 September when the government agreed to a 7.5 per cent increase in wages and a monthly housing allowance of 800 rand.

Chilean Unions hold the government responsible for safety lapses inside collapsed mine: Santiago, 30 September 2010: Today, relatives of 27 of the 33 miners trapped in the San José mine in northern Chile filed lawsuits against both the Government and the mining company, San Esteban Primera, seeking a total compensation of US\$12 million. The unions have issued a manifesto holding the government responsible for the safety lapses inside the San José mine as the Chilean Government has refused repeatedly to engage in tripartite dialogue to improve mine safety conditions, including refusing initiatives to discuss ratification of ILO Convention on Safety and Health in Mines.

COMRADE Y V CHAVAN TURNS 90

Comrade Yashwant V Chavan was born on 27 August 1920 in Kolhapur. He left home for Bombay at 18 inspired by the nationalist struggle and the upsurge in the trade union movement. Gate meetings during the 1938 textile strike led by SP Dange, provided a learning ground for young Chavan. On the suggestion of his mentor S K Limaye, Chavan began to live among the working class in Mumbai as a true communist. Along with his comrades, he worked tirelessly to organise textile mill workers on the eve of the World War II that has formed the foundation of the Indian trade union movement.

During the Quit India movement he left the Communist Party in the understanding that the sentiment of the

working class in India was for independence and yet advancing the largest democratic struggle worldwide would not dilute the efforts of Allied Forces in fending off Nazism and Fascism.



In 1960, recognising the sentiment for democracy on the shop floor he contested the AITUC affiliated Kamani Employees' Union (KEU) election, defeating the CPI stalwart Com. Vittal Choudhary. His election to the KEU set the

ground for the democratisation of shop floor unions paving the way for militant struggles that helped break new grounds for minimum wage, collective bargaining and workers control over labour process.

Comrade Chavan was in the working committee of AITUC from 1965 to 1971. With the split in AITUC, he followed the decisions of many unions to turn autonomous by disaffiliating from the AITUC and not joining CITU. In early 1971, he was elected the President of Sarva Shramik Sangh. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the industrial belt from Kurla to Thane came under the influence of Sarva Shramik Sangh. His strategy always involved merging his union with larger ones, if needed, to avoid dividing workers. Hence, with the emergence of Datta Samant as the key trade union leader in the Bombay textile industry, he dissolved the Kapda Kamgar Sangh, that was part of Shramik, and merged it with Samant's union. It was during this strike that Chavan was implicated on a murder charge and jailed for a year. He was acquitted many years later.

Comrade Chavan has been involved in innovative trade union struggles against industrial closure and to safeguard employment. He played an inspirational role in the movement for the historic workers' takeover of Kamani Tubes. He has also been instrumental in organising the unorganised workers like Anganwadi workers, municipal scavengers, PWD workers and agricultural workers.

Honouring his lifelong commitment and endeavour to build trade union unity, democracy and militancy, Comrade Chavan was elected the first President of the NTUI in March 2006.