



SPECIAL ISSUE

UNION POWER

NTUI

A monthly bulletin of the New Trade Union Initiative

September 2011

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EDITORIAL

We are witness, at this time, to some of the sharpest attacks by capital on the right to unionisation and collective bargaining. These actions of capital are blatant and rampant and are increasingly carried out with the assistance of the coercive arm of the state. And yet there is a complete lack of political will of the executive to act against unprecedented unfair labour practices and violations of workers' rights as protected under the country's constitution and various other legislations. The judiciary too is complicit in the inaction of government insofar as it is simply unable to move speedily. This trajectory is closely tied to events around the globe.

The global capitalist system is witnessing the deepest economic crises in living memory. This crisis is the source of unprecedented unemployment and an attack, in the global north, on some of the best social security systems that the working class has so far been able to win and retain. This crisis has also marked the shift in the balance of power between the global north and the global south. And yet countries of the global south, most notably India, have been unable to take advantage of this changing situation since their ruling classes remain within the framework of imperialism hoping to gain advantage by access to markets of the global north. In fact in India the direct impact of the global crisis has had a limited effect. And yet the crisis is being used as a pretext to undermine the share of wages and workers' rights further and simultaneously granting greater concession to capital.

The increasing linking of the economy with the global economy has significantly eroded governments'

capacity to rein in inflation especially that of wage goods. Spiralling prices have contributed further to the immiserisation of the working poor, in particular, those from the most marginalised rural communities have expanded employers' capacity to continually expand the number of irregular and unprotected workers in relation to the number of regular workers. In fact the failure to enforce the minimum wage and ensure its computation is linked to inflation has contributed to a decline even in the bargained wage in real terms. The inability of government to shore up a reasonable floor wage and rigorously implement the NREGA has given capital the space to force workers into competition with one and another at wages below the minimum wage. Alongside, government has also failed to keep its promise to expand both the scope and reach of the system of social security and deliver social protection efficiently. Government's failure to address the needs of working people has resulted in a change of government in the states each time there has been a state assembly election over the last eighteen months. The left parties too have faced an extraordinary reverse. This is a reflection of the enormous resentment of the working class. This resentment has also come to be articulated in the widespread anger against what is widely perceived as corrupt government. The resentment however does not adequately recognise the role of the expanding private sector, in all spheres of daily life, in increasing corruption. This sense of resentment needs to be transformed into a working class struggle that redresses the issues of corruption resulting from the imbalance in the power relationship between the ruling class and workers. The struggle to correct this imbalance must form the basis for building alliances with sections of the peasantry and the middle class.

The working class has been slow to respond to the attack on it and the challenges it faces. No common understanding has evolved beyond traditional symbolic struggles among trade unions. The only effective response can be that of evolving concrete strategies with adequate preparation based on a persistent unity of purpose and an unwavering sense of solidarity. The onus remains with the militant section of the working class to take this forward. It is with this understanding that the New Trade Union Initiative must advance as it goes forward to its Third General Council at Kolkata from the 6th to 8th January 2012.

SPECIAL REPORTS

Thousands of Informal Workers March to Parliament against Price Rise on 23 February, 2011:

Hundreds of thousands of workers joined the united call of trade unions to March to Parliament against the continuing price rise of essential commodities and unemployment; reckless contractorisation, casualisation and outsourcing; rampant violation of labour laws; and disinvestment in public sector units. The trade unions also demanded for allocation of adequate funds for the "National Social Security Fund" to provide for universal social security for unorganised workers. This is in continuation of the All India Protest Day on 28 October 2009, Massive Dharna on 16 December, 2009, Jail Bharo on 5 March 2010 and the General Strike on 7 September 2010 which was participated by about 10 crore of workers.

Thousands of members of affiliates of NTUI from Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Punjab, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu representing rural



workers, forest workers, and contract workers from chemical and garment industries, municipalities joined the march to Parliament along with the members of the AICCTU, AITUC, AIUTUC, CITU, HMS, INTUC, TUCC and UTUC. In addition to the demands raised by the central trade union organisations, NTUI called for a universal living wage, for elimination of contract labour and for a regeneration of the public sector for national development. This march marked a new beginning towards unity of working people.

National Forum against Contract Work: The two decades of policy changes induced by imperialist

globalisation has resulted in increased casualisation and contractualisation of employment along with abysmally low wages and severe attack on labour rights. Not only are all services in manufacturing, such as canteen, material handling, housekeeping, security overwhelmingly staffed by contract labour, but contract labour is also employed in direct production processes, in gross violation of the Contract Labour Act.

With the attack on workers intensifying, there is a felt need among workers to move beyond political divisions and come together to build effective bargaining strategies to establish an equal relationship of contract and permanent workers along with regulation of contract work in order to progressively reduce its incidence that will create the ground for a struggle for regularisation.

It is with this understanding, NTUI organised a meeting in Delhi on 22 February 2011. It was attended by over 200 workers from 26 unions from 12 states representing contract workers from construction, chemical, metal, municipal, garment, coal, transport industries as well as government employment. It was resolved at the meeting to constitute a *National Forum against Contract Work* and develop a militant and autonomous struggle to eliminate contract work. It was also resolved to form a Preparatory Committee that would take this task forward.

The Preparatory Committee met on 4 September 2011 in Delhi and finalised and adopted the proposed amendments to the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970.

The Preparatory Committee also passed a resolution calling upon the Government of India to:

- i. Immediately constitute a committee which includes representatives of contract workers unions and the *National Forum against Contract Work* to investigate the working condition, status, and the nature of work in the different establishments of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) and submit its report and recommendations within two years.
- ii. Invite representatives of the *National Forum against Contract Work* to give submission and representation to the (a) Working Group on Labour Laws and Regulations; (b) the Working Group on Regulatory Framework for Businesses; and (c) the 12th Five Year Plan Steering

Committee for Labour, Employment and Manpower.

For CPSEs, it was resolved to demand a wage for contract workers at a rate not less than 75% of the lowest category of permanent worker of the establishment with equal holidays, hours of work, and conditions of service as applicable to the worker directly employed by the establishment.

It was also decided to hold a national conference on 4-5 March 2012 of the *National Forum against Contract Work* during the Budget Session of Parliament in Delhi.

Construction Workers Unite under One Banner in Tamil Nadu: Setting aside political differences AICTU, AITUC, BMS, HMS, INTUC, MLF and the NTUI along with many other trade unions came together for the first time on 7 February 2010 to form the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Struggle Front to oppose and protest against the anti-labour policies of the DMK government that has been in power in the state since 2006 and put forward a 14 point charter of demands.



The Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Struggle Front held a state-wide protest on 9 February 2011 across 26 districts that not just brought 25 unions together under one banner but also broke a new ground at uniting workers, divided along political lines. The 9th February dharna saw a participation of more than 50,000 construction workers, both men and women, across the state who picketed shops and blocked roads and courted arrest in a show of their strength on the ground.

Since 2006, the state government steadily pursued policies that not just limited the rights of trade unions

but also systematically dismantled the autonomy of the Boards. In March 2008, the State government issued an order that arbitrarily transferred the functions of registering and issuing benefits under various schemes of the Welfare Board to the Revenue Department thereby transferring the right to identify workers for registration to the Board from trade unions to a Village Administrative Officer. Further, the Government also issued an order that stated that social security benefits to construction workers would be withdrawn if their membership to the Board was not renewed. This single order will result in more than 2 lakh workers losing their right to benefits and 50,000 elderly workers will be denied pension.

The 14-point Charter of Demand of the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Struggle Front include demands for autonomous and tripartite functioning of the Board; enhancement of benefits such as accident insurance, death benefit, education, maternity benefit, including raise in pension from Rs. 500 to Rs. 3000 including medical facilities equivalent to ESI, housing subsidy, crèche facilities and implementation of Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana; lowering the age of eligibility for pension from 60 to 55 years for women workers and ensuring representation of women. The Front also demands a transparent, democratic, worker-friendly, tripartite Labour Welfare Board, one which ensures autonomy from political interference and workers right to participate in the process of decision making.

Struggle for a Right to Minimum Wage and Democratic Rights of TUs in Tea Plantations: The tripartite negotiation in the Tea industry in West Bengal, that began with the lapse of the previous industry wage agreement on 31 March 2011, entered a deadlock after 6 rounds of negotiation when the Consultative Committee of Plantation Association (CCPA) refused to accept the demand of the Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers for an increase in daily wages from Rs.67 to Rs.165 and a re-introduction of Variable Dearness Allowance (VDA). The Coordination Committee comprises of 32 unions including the Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union, an affiliate of NTUI. This demand has also been supported by the Defense Committee for Plantation Workers Rights and other unions including the AICCTU, which are not constituents of the two committees.

The CCPA has offered a wage increase of Rs 24 spread over three years at Rs. 8 each year to Rs. 91 in three years time. This means that the employers are offering a wage increase, even with the additional

component of wage in kind, that would keep wages below the national floor wage and also below the state agricultural minimum wage.

With the tripartite negotiations hitting a dead end, the Coordination Committee along with the Defence Committee and other unions called for a month long programme of a daily hour long gate meeting at every plantation culminating in an industrial strike action on 7 August 2011.

The newly formed government adopted a dual strategy to break the unity of the workers. In response to the joint strike call by the unions, the new Chief Minister of the state declared that, if necessary, her government would legislate to ban strikes, in complete violation of the right to strike of trade unions. In addition, the government initiated a parallel wage negotiation with the Progressive Tea Workers' Union (PTWU) that is neither a member of the Coordination Committee nor the Defense Committee which together are the recognized collective bargaining agents for workers in the tripartite negotiation.

The PTWU initially swayed a large following by demanding a daily wage of Rs 250 against the Coordination Committee's demand of Rs. 165 plus VDA. With the CCPA refusing to even pay Rs. 165, the PTWU gave its support to the joint trade union call for strike on 7 August 2011. But the union withdrew its support following a bilateral meeting on 10 August 2011 with the state ministers for Industries, Development and Labour and announced their decision to strike if the wage for plantation workers is not increased to a minimum of Rs 90. This decision not just diluted the wage demand but also attempted to drive a wedge in the existing united movement of tea workers. This parallel negotiation by the government has seriously undermined the ongoing tripartite negotiation.

Unions of unorganized workers come together in West Bengal: Two weeks ahead of the state elections, over 15,000 working people from 43 organisations marched to Subodh Mullick Square in Kolkata on 9 April as part of the *Shramajibi Adhikar Yatra* calling upon all political parties to address issues of rights of the working class and pursuing policies that will promote inclusive development. Forest workers, fisherfolk, agricultural workers, hawkers, entertainment workers and contract workers came together to form a people's alliance that called for 'No New Laws, Implement Existing Laws'.

The *Daabi Manch*, a platform formed by AICCTU, AIUTUC, INTUC, TUCI and NTUI in West Bengal held a dharna on 24 June on the issue of Minimum wage. Several hundred workers participated in this dharna and demanded for a revision of the existing state Minimum Wages in line with the recommendation of ILC and subsequent Supreme Court directives, inclusion of new sectors/industries in the Schedule, removal of court injunctions served on Minimum wage declared for several industries, strict implementation of the Act by creating infrastructure at block level, increasing the number of Labour Courts/tribunals in concurrence with the number of total workforce in the state. A delegation met with the Minister of Labour and presented a charter of demands.

22 unions of unorganized workers represented by two platforms—the *Asangathit Kshetra Shramik Sangrami Manch* and the *Shramajivi Swikriti Manch* - organised a 3-day dharna in Kolkata on 6-8 September demanding recognition of their work and implementation of minimum wages. The unions represent agricultural workers, bidi workers, brick kiln workers, construction workers, fish and forest workers, domestic workers, sex workers, hosiery workers, shop employees, contract workers in government employment. The AITUC, AICCTU, AIUTUC, HMS, TUCC, AIFTU and the NTUI extended their solidarity to this struggle. The dharna concluded with a mass meeting on 8 September attended by over 15,000 members of these unions. Over the three days, delegations met with the state ministers for industries, labour, Backward Classes Welfare and Fisheries.

May Day 2011: Thousands of workers participated in the May Day celebrations of the New Trade Union Initiative in different states across the country. Through these demonstrations and protest meetings, NTUI calls for building Union Power together to win:

- An 8-hour Workday
- A Living Wage indexed to Inflation for all
- Equal Value for Equal Work
- A Right to Association
- Recognition of Trade Unions as Collective Bargaining Agent
- A Right to Democratic Dissent

Maharashtra: Mumbai: About 500 contract workers of Reliance Energy and Safai Municipal workers joined a joint rally in the morning in front of the REL Receiving Station, MIDC Andheri. The

meeting was addressed by Comrades A.P. Kulkarni, N. Vasudevan, Milind Ranade, M M Abhyankar apart from many REL workers. In the evening, the Trade Union Joint Action Committee held a rally from Dadar station to Matunga Central Railway Canteen Hall where a public meeting was held. Comrade M A Patil represented NTUI in this meeting.

Nagpur: A dharna and demonstration was organized by NTUI at the Reserve Bank Chowk in Nagpur. Large number of activists of the Wan Kamgar Sangathana, Koyla Udyog Kamgar Sangathana and the Gondwana Club Karamachari Union participated in this programme along with many student activists who came together to stand in solidarity with the Air India strike and protest against the de-recognition of the union. Comrade V Chandra spoke at this demonstration against the various anti-labour policies of the government.

Chhattisgarh: Bhilai: An industrial strike was held in the entire industrial area of Bhilai in solidarity with the struggle of contract workers in ACC-Holcim, who have been sitting on a dharna for the last one month demanding regularization. The demands for the strike were:

- No to Contract Labour
- The Right to Organize
- A Living Wage
- Safety at work-site
- 8 hour work day

A rally and public meeting was held of workers and peasants affected by the cement plants in Baloda Bazar Area.

Uttar Pradesh: Lakhimpur Kheri: Vijay Diwas was organised by the Tharu Adivasi Mahila Mazdoor Kisan Manch, Terai Kshetra Mahila Mazdoor Kisan Manch, Wantangia Samiti at Surma village in the Dudhwa tiger reserve under the banner of NFFPFW celebrating their victory after a long struggle for recognition under the Forest Rights Act 2006 in the Surma, Golbojhi and Devipur village.

Rajasthan: Jaipur: Workers at the Jothwara Industrial Area marked May Day, with a public meeting at the Kamani Chowk, for an uninterrupted 43rd year. The meeting was addressed by the leadership of several progressive unions including Comrade Gautam Mody, NTUI. Employers sought to disrupt the meeting by intimidating the contract workers. Photographers and Private Security Guards sent by the employer encircled the meeting with the objective of obtaining names and photographs of

contract workers in order to intimidate them. The Kamani Employees' Union lodged FIRs at the local police station and led a delegation to the Rajasthan Chief Minister's residence demanding the right to peaceful assembly.



Jodhpur: Workers and their families affected by Silicosis have been sitting on a hunger strike since 12 April demanding compensation as per the NHRC directive. Activists of the Rajasthan Rajya Khan Mazdoor Union joined the dharna and held a rally on May Day to express their solidarity

Haryana: Gurgaon: Garment and Allied Workers Union organized a street play and a public meeting in Dundahera village, near Gurgaon focusing on the attack on the right to association in the state.

Gujarat: Baroda: A rally was organized by the Chemical Mazdoor Panchayat for the first time in the Wagodia Industrial Area in Baroda to celebrate May Day. Contract workers from Munjal Auto led this rally.

Kerala: NTUI Kerala unit observed May Day 2011 upholding the importance of Proletarian Internationalism in the world wide struggle for democracy. May Day programmes were held in all district headquarters in the state by district committees of the NTUI. The meetings focused on the need for strengthening democracy and for building solidarity for the democratic struggles that are gaining ground in internationally, especially in West Asia and North Africa.

Tamil Nadu: The TMKTS celebrated May Day in all the district headquarters of the state. Comrade M Subbu addressed a large rally of construction workers in Anna Nagar in Chennai city.

The Garment and Fashion Workers Union along with Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam held a meeting of organizers at Pallavaram near Chennai on May Day. The meeting was attended by 25 worker activists who organize garment workers in and around Guindy, Ambattur and Thirukazhikundram. Com. V Devi flagged off the meeting by speaking on the historic struggle for an 8 hour work day and its relevance today. Com. Meghna, Organising Secretary, GAFWU highlighted the need for social security of women workers, especially those who work in the special industrial enclaves. She stressed on the need for ESI benefits for these workers as well as dispensaries where they can access it.

Working People's Trade Union Council celebrated its 126th May Day with around 300 delegates assembling in Chennai. After the flag hoisting by Com R Kuchelan, a meeting was held, where Com. D Durairajan emphasized the necessity of the unity of the working class. Com Kuchelan gave a call for 'One union – One factory' and democracy in unions.

West Bengal: Kolkata: Entertainment workers marched together in a torch rally in Kolkata under the banner of Binodini Shramik Union on the eve of May Day demanding that their profession be legalized. With the state elections on, Jamuna, a worker in Sonagachi, speaking on the occasion said: "We have been fighting for long for legalisation of our trade, to have a secure social existence. We have been running from pillar to post to achieve this, but to no avail. The politicians promise every time that they will do something, but nothing happens". A large percentage of the over 5,000 workers in Sonagachi are eligible to vote. During every election they pin their hopes that their elected representatives would do something to legalise their work. This time too they cast their votes, hoping that they will be called "workers" without "sex" as a prefix.

Domestic workers march in Mumbai for Recognition: In 1995, the Maharashtra government appointed a high level committee to study the issue of conditions of work and wages for unorganised workers. The committee made recommendations for domestic workers, which took the form of Maharashtra Government Resolution in the year 2000. These resolutions remained only on paper and fell short of minimum wage, and due to regular protests by Domestic Worker unions, in 2002, the government came out with a wage and welfare scheme for workers, which provided an outline, taking into regard both the issues. But, ignoring this

outline, Maharashtra government enacted 'The Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act' in December 2008. The government passed this legislation which directs them to provide several financial and welfare benefits, but the board has virtually no fiscal support. Further, under the Act, the government constituted district-wise welfare boards with equal representation from the government, non-governmental organisations, workers and employers, but it has yet to formalise the stated benefits.

Demanding the implementation of the provisions under the 2008 Act, and need to regulate wages, conditions of work and access to social security, the 'Maharashtra Rajya Gharkamgar Kriti Samiti', organised a protest rally on 16 March 2011. Over 8000 domestic workers marched to Mantralaya in Mumbai under the banner of, 'Maharashtra Rajya Gharkamgar Kriti Samiti' demanding recognition as workers. The Kriti Samiti, is a joint platform of domestic workers unions affiliated to AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS, INTUC and NTUI formed on 3 February 2011 to raise issues of wages, conditions of work and access to social security.

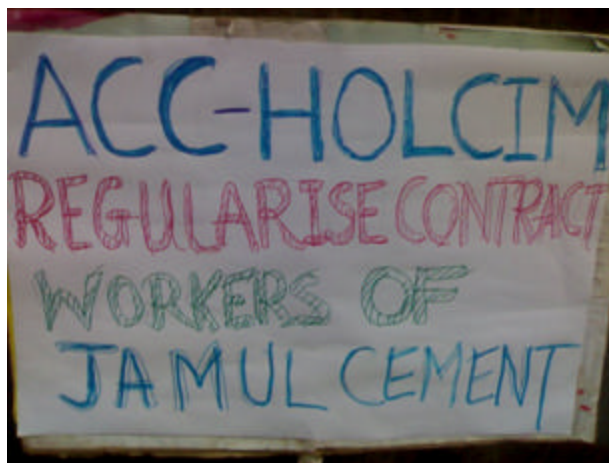
The *Kriti Samiti* is demanding for fixation of price indexed minimum wage for domestic workers; access to PDS at BPL rates; weekly offs and holidays on festivals and national holidays; health insurance and pension and registration of all domestic workers under the Welfare Board.

Pragatisheel Cement Shramik Sangh continue their struggle for regularisation of contract workers at Holcim in Chhattisgarh: The Pragatisheel Cement Shramik Sangh (PCSS) in 1990, filed a case for regularization of 573 contract workers in the Jamul plant. These workers were employees of ACC but were shown in the records as contract workers to deny them the benefits of permanent workers. The case reached the Industrial court in 2000 and by then over 200 workers had been forced to resign by the Company. In 2006, the Industrial Court held that "all the workers under reference are the company's employees and the company has entered into fake and sham contracts to make it believe it is the contractor's employees" and directed the company to regularise the workers.

Holcim, owning majority stakes at ACC, immediately filed a writ petition against the Industrial Tribunal order in the High Court and requested for a stay on the award. While granting the stay, the High Court directed the company to pay, during the pendency of

the appeal, 'full wages last drawn' to workers whose re-instatement was being stayed. Holcim defied the High Court direction by paying only 2-5 days salary per month as this was the number of days the contract workers were allowed to work when they filed the case. Challenging the company's interpretation of 'full wages last drawn' as violating the spirit of the Act, the Union filed a writ petition in the High Court. However, neither the Single Judge nor the Division Bench in the High Court have been able to offer any interpretation of this crucial phrase "full wages last drawn" till now. The appeal before the Supreme Court is still pending.

On 21 March 2011, the Bilaspur High Court once again ruled that the paper arrangements between contract workers and Holcim are "sham and bogus" and directed the Company to immediately regularize those workers who can establish their union membership. This ruling though gave some relief but did not to recognise the rights of over 200 workers who were coerced into submitting voluntary resignations. The union tried to negotiate for these workers with the management but the company refused to negotiate and also to implement the Bhilai HC order.



The PCSS launched an indefinite dharna at Bhilai from 4 April demanding implementation of the High Court order. The management finally met the union on 20 April, under pressure from the local administration, but it was unrelenting and did not indicate any inclination nor give any commitment to implement the court orders. The management insisted that there should be a certified list of workers to be regularized from the court, which was not possible since the membership receipts were not exhibited. The union maintained that the management should show its respect for the Judgment by initiating the

process of regularisation with the 75 undisputed workers. On 25 April the company again filed a writ appeal in the High Court.

On 28 April, 1000 out of the 1200 workers of the company voluntarily abstained from work to express their support for the 20 year long struggle for the reinstatement and regularization of the contract workers. On 4 May, the NTUI along with the Trade Union Solidarity Committee, Sarva Shramik Sangh and Kachra Vahatuk Shramik Sangh held a demonstration in solidarity in front of the ACC Corporate office in Mumbai demanding implementation of the High Court order.

Meanwhile false criminal cases have also been filed by the management against union activists and their bail applications rejected at the High Court. The union will now move the Supreme Court for bail as well as file a counter writ appeal to the one filed by the company in the High Court.

Struggle against Recruitment policy of Voltas:

Voltas, a TATA group company, with an annual business turnover of over US\$ 1 Billion and one of India's leading air-conditioning, refrigeration and engineering services companies, has stopped recruitment of permanent workers for the last 15 years. The Company has been recruiting workers only on contract. Voltas's policy of recruiting contract workers through companies like Team Lease and Kelly in the 'worker' category has resulted in more than half of the employees falling under the category of temporary and contract workers. At present, Voltas employs 8000 contract workers, 3000 management staff and only 600 permanent workers. This policy severely undermines the collective bargaining capacity of the workers. Of the 3000 workers given appointment as management staff, more than half of them perform the responsibilities of 'workers' but are paid a salary 3 times higher than a worker performing the same work, thereby violating the basic principal of 'equal pay for equal work'.

Voltas, in the meanwhile has also sold its Material Handling business division at the Thane Factory to a Joint Venture for Rs. 110 crore, putting the employment of around 120 workers working at that division at stake. The company is refusing to take responsibility regarding their job security.

The wage agreement signed five years ago between the union and the Company has not yet been implemented by the Company. The Company has

also not yet made the bonus payment for the financial year of 2009-10. However, salaries of management staff has been regularly revised along with paying them performance linked awards for performing their normal duties.

On 9 April 2011, from 6.30 pm, nearly 300 workers of the company, gathered outside Blue Hill Hotel on the outskirts of Thane where the Management had organized a dinner for 'employees'. The workers decided to boycott this event in protest against the management's refusal to sign the new wage agreement. Members of the Voltas Employees Union carrying placards with their demands braved a heavy and intimidating police presence and made sure that the dinner tasted bad for the management. They protested against the huge "performance linked awards" given to the management staff while freezing the wages of the workers. They were also protesting against the suspension of Union activists.



The Voltas Employees Union has been sitting on a relay hunger strike since 1 March 2011 at the Corporate office in Mumbai. The company has resorted to arm twisting the union by bringing in the police to intimidate and physically remove the peaceful protestors. When the activists resisted the police, the leadership of the union as well as other activists were suspended.

22 July marked the 100th day of the relay hunger strike of workers of Voltas. To mark this occasion, a meeting was held at the gate of the corporate headquarters of this Tata owned company in Mumbai in which hundreds of workers participated. The gate meeting was addressed by Comrades D B Nalge, ex President of Voltas Union, N Vasudevan of Blue Star Employees Union, Franklin D Souza of Hindustan Lever Employees Union, Milind Ranade of Sarva

Shramik Sangh and many others. They expressed their solidarity with the continuing struggle of the Voltas workers.

On 16 August, hundreds of workers from different parts of the country from all the divisions of the company marched to the Annual General Body Meeting of Voltas Ltd to voice their protest. The union has stepped up their agitation and extended their relay hunger strike from 12 hours to 24 hours every day. They also *sat on a one day dharna at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on 26 September 2011.*

Women workers fight for Equal Wages for Equal Work in Punjab



Mid-day meal workers struggle for better wages:

The members of the Mid-day Meal Workers Union burnt effigies of ministers on 16 January in Ludhiana demanding higher wages and regularization of their employment. The union is demanding that the mid day meal workers who deliver a crucial government service be recognized as government employees and be provided all employment benefits of such service.

The mid-day meal workers presently earn a monthly salary of Rs 1,000 for 6 hours of daily work. This is far below the minimum wage in the state. The union is demanding a monthly wage of Rs.10,000 plus provident fund, a life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh, and a six-month paid maternity leave.

The union is also protesting against the effort of the government to outsource provision of mid-day meals to schools to private companies, thereby relinquishing its dual responsibility of service delivery as well as to the workers.

The Union held its delegate convention in Jalandhar on 12 June attended by about 800 mid day meal

workers from various districts of Punjab. The conference was addressed by Comrades Bhag Mal Rana, the NTUI State President, along with Lakhwinder Kaur, State Convener of Mid-Day-Meal Workers Union and Germanjit Singh, General Secretary of Mulazim Manch. The delegates elected a state committee with Comrade Lakhwinder Kaur from Faridkot as State President, Mamta Sharma from Amritsar as the General Secretary, Harwinder Kaur from Jalandhar as the Treasurer, Karamjit Kaur from Bathinda as Senior Vice-President, Paramjit Kaur from Mohali and Manjit Kaur from Tarantaran as Vice-President, Darshna Devi from Sangrur as Joint Secretary, Virpal Kaur from Muktsar as Press Secretary and Jasbir Kaur from Mansa as Organizing Secretary.

Health workers in Punjab demand permanent status:

The Contract Multipurpose Health Workers (Female) Union organised a meeting at Desh Bhagat Yadgar Hall in Jalandhar on the occasion of the International Nurses Day on 12 May demanding that the contract workers employed as Multi-purpose health workers be regularised immediately. The union is also demanding that those workers working under the slum area development scheme be absorbed in the vacant positions according to seniority. The underlying demand has been for implementing the principle of equal wage for equal work in all employments. Comrade Harinder Dosanjh, Secretary, NTUI Punjab State council along with Comrades Kiranjeet Kaur, President and Sarbjeet Kaur, General Secretary of the union spoke at the meeting.



On 19 June, 500 members of the union demonstrated before the civil hospital in Ludhiana demanding regularisation. The state Health Minister, reached the dharna and assured the union that their demands will be considered. Despite his assurance, no steps were taken by the government to address the demands. The Union continued its dharna and began a hunger strike before the Ludhiana civil hospital and then on 22

September several members of the union were severely beaten up and dragged by the police to the police station when they demonstrated before the residence of the Health Minister, Mr. Satpal Gosain in Ludhiana. The District President of the union, Com. Surjeet Pradhan could not move when taken to the Police Station.

ASHA workers in Punjab demand Minimum wages: A conference of the ASHA Workers Union was held on 7-8 May 2011 in Anantpur Sahib. It was inaugurated by Comrade Harinder Dosanjh of Mulazim Manch. The organizational report was presented by the General Secretary Paramjit Kaur Mann and the proposed Constitution was presented before the delegates by Com Sarabjit Kaur, which was then discussed and approved. The conference was also attended by Comrades Germanjit Singh, Parkash Singh, Gurdip Singh and Ajitpal Singh. The delegates elected Comrade Amarjit Kaur Kamana as the President, Paramjit Kaur Mann as the General Secretary and Kuldeep Kaur Moga as the Treasurer. Apart from them, district representatives were also elected.



On 24 July, thousands of members of the ASHA Workers Union, Punjab marched in Ludhiana demanding minimum wages, hike in incentives, promotion as per seniority and implementation of granted notifications. The rally was addressed by the State President Amarjit Kaur, along with State General Secretary Paramjit Kaur Maan, Ranjit Kaur, Sukhjit Kaur, NTUI State President Com. Bhagmal Rana, Dinesh Parsad, Mulazim Munch leader Germanjit Singh, Harinder Dosanjh, Sukhdev Singh Faridkot.

Assam Unions to launch Campaign for a Just Wage in Tea Plantations: The Bagisa Shramik Santha (BSS) and Asom Majuri Shramik Union (AMSU), launched a campaign in two tea producing districts of Sibsagar and Golaghat in Assam

demanding a monthly wage of Rs 240 in the tea gardens of Assam calculated on the basis of the 15th ILC norms and subsequent Supreme Court orders. The unions represent over one lakh members across the state.

The Unions are demanding that the government immediately sets up a minimum wage board for the tea industry. Wages in the tea plantation sector have always been set through tripartite agreements which have been infrequent and skewed in favour of the plantation owners. With the sustained crisis in the plantations and the recent Supreme Court directive for invoking the Tea Act, it has become critical to set up such a wage board in this industry. The union is also demanding that the government should evolve a mechanism in which negotiations on any issue affecting workers should be done with all registered unions representing workers in the industry and not just the recognised unions.

NFFPFW wins land titles for taungyas and forest villages in National Park under the FRA: Years of struggle of the NFFPFW forced the Uttar Pradesh government to grant land titles under the FRA to 289 Tharu families in Surma and 58 families in Golbojhi in the Dudhwa National Park, in Palia block of Lakhimpur Khiri district in April 2011. Over 700 acres of land was distributed. The District Magistrate assured that the adivasi families will soon also get community rights over forest land to use forest produce for their livelihood. The two villages have also been given the status of Ambedkar village, which means that now Surma and Golbojhi will have roads connecting them to the nearest city in addition to schools, primary health centre, community centre, drinking water facility, power supply and telecommunication. They will now also be entitled to benefits under various welfare schemes of the government.

NFFPFW also won a historic victory in winning land titles for 651 families in six Taungya villages in the three districts of Gonda, Gorakhpur and Mahrajganj and in two forest villages of two districts in Lakhimpur Kheri and Bhaich. Around 700 acres of the forestland has been distributed among the tribals with each family getting up to four acres. The government has also declared them to be Ambedkar villages. This struggle has marked a decisive point in defining the rights under the FRA. Under the FRA, adivasis and other traditional forest dwellers are entitled to individual and community ownership of forest land if they can prove 75 years of residence in

a forest land. The taungyas by their very nature failed to meet this criterion.



The taungyas were created in the 1920s by British forest officers by bringing in bonded labourers, mostly dalits, other backward castes and backward Muslims, for forestation in regions where it had been plundered for timber. These workers and their families were given a piece of land for five years for plantation and then shifted to another place for the same job. They were not paid for their service, but allowed to grow crops in the allotted piece of land for livelihood. This practice continued till 1978, when the adivasis were declared encroachers in their own land after the area was declared a national park. Out of 37 Tharu villages in the area, 35 were relocated. Villagers of Surma and Golbojhi refused to evacuate their land. They approached the high court in 1980 but lost the legal battle in 2003.

With threat of eviction looming large, Tharu women formed the Tharu Adivasi Mahila Mazdoor Kisan Manch to launch a peaceful agitation supported by the NFFPFW to demand their rights. This victory marks a culmination of their long and difficult struggle.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Nation protests for Release of Dr. Binayak Sen: *Delhi, 30 January 2011:* Widespread protests were held across the nation for the Release of Dr. Binayak Sen. The Raipur sessions court last month sentenced Binayak to life imprisonment. Marches were organised in Kolkata, Jaipur, Baroda attended by large number of activists, students, artists, intellectuals demanding immediate and unconditional

release of Binayak. The Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha Labourer's Committee organised a protest rally in Raipur demanding his release.



In Delhi, the *Free Binayak Sen Campaign* committee organised a march from Red Fort to Shaheedi Park, demanding scrapping of draconian laws and release of all democratic rights activists held under them. Activists representing the All India Democratic Students' Union, All India Student's Association, AITUC, New Socialist Initiative, PUCL, PUDR and NTUI joined the march along with students and academicians. Public meeting with songs, poems, slogans and speeches followed after the march.

CAMPAIGN ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH



Workers affected by Silicosis in stone quarries paid compensation in Rajasthan: The families of 21 silicosis victims in Jodhpur were given an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 2 lakh as Fixed Deposits in compliance with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recommendations. This is the

first time that a State government has been forced to pay compensation to informal workers for occupational health hazard. The struggle for the workers had been led by Silicosis Sangarsh Samiti, a platform of workers affected by silicosis and their families along with the Rajasthan Rajya Khan Mazdoor Union, an affiliate of the NTUI.

In May 2007, after reports of occurrence of silicosis in Jodhpur, the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) conducted tests on 164 people from Jhadole and Devgarh, to ascertain whether they are afflicted by silicosis. The report was not shared with any of the workers, even after an RTI application. Failing to get a reply, the workers filed an appeal to the Central Information Commission (CIC), which then directed the NIOH to immediately file affidavits with all available medical records of the 126 mine workers.

The affected workers and their families first sat on a dharna before the SDM office in Jhadole, Udaipur where the SDM assured his personal intervention to resolve the issue. With no solution forthcoming, the workers were forced to sit on another dharna, this time before the NIOH in January 2011 demanding the medical reports. These medical reports were critical to not just access free medical treatment as per a Supreme Court ruling but also to file for compensation. In May 2011, the workers and their families again sat on a 28 day dharna before the Jodhpur collectorate demanding compensation.

A complaint was also lodged with the National Human Rights Commission stating that over 40,000 workers were employed in about 7000 sand stone quarries in Jodhpur without being provided any identity cards to claim compensation under the Workman Compensation Act. The NHRC conducted an investigation and on its basis directed the state government to compensate the families of the deceased and provide rehabilitation and medical relief to the affected workers. With hundreds of mine workers afflicted with silicosis marching with black flags to the District Collector's Office in Jodhpur on the Chief Minister's birthday along with continuing pressure of the NHRC to implement its recommendations, the Rajasthan state government finally in April 2011 earmarked a sum of Rs 25.60 crore for medical and other facilities for silicosis affected workers and paid compensation to the affected workers and families of the deceased workers.

CAMPAIGN ON CLIMATE JUSTICE

Haripur nuclear plant scrapped: During his visit to Russia in December 2009, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed an agreement for collaboration on setting up nuclear plants, including one at Haripur. The project was given an environment clearance in January 2010 and the land in Haripur was allotted to a Russian company, Rosatom, for developing a nuclear park for 6 of its 1000 MW atomic power plants. Around 650-700 hectares of land would be acquired for the park.



The Haripur Parmanu Chulli Birodhi Jeevan Jeevika O Bheete Bachao Committee (Committee Against Nuclear Plant and to Save, Life, Livelihood and Land), of which PBKMS has been an active constituent, has been protesting against the unilateral and undemocratic decision of the Government of India since November 2006. There have been road blockades since then to prevent land acquisition.

In the light of the Fukushima disaster in Japan and struggle going on against nuclear power in different parts of the country, particularly in Jaitapur, a public meeting along with a demonstration was held on 16 March 2011 by the Committee in Haripur. The single and simple demand of the event was the scrapping of the Haripur nuclear plant and ending of nuclear based energy in the country.

Meanwhile following the brutal attack of police on villagers protesting against the nuclear plant at Sakhrinate village in Jaitapur on 18 April that led to the death of one person and several others were injured, a *yatra* was launched on 23 April at Mumbai in solidarity with the struggle in Jaitapur and against nuclear energy. The *Tarapore to Jaitapur Yatra* saw the participation of about 100 people from across the country, including social activists, academics, students, all coming together to express solidarity

with the people in Jaitapur who have been fighting against the nuclear project also for the last five years. The struggle acquired urgency after the Fukushima disaster which has highlighted the magnitude of dangers associated with nuclear energy. The meeting at Tarapore, Mumbai was addressed by many prominent activists and scientists. 135 activists were detained after the meeting and released only at night. The rally was again interrupted by the police the next morning in Pen and the yatrias detained for violating prohibitory orders imposed the previous night. Many of the activists were arrested under Section 68 of the Bombay Police Act. The yatra continued and on the next day 13 activists were again arrested under Section 37 (3) of the Bombay Police Act (prohibiting assembly or procession). Despite several obstructions, 10 activists reached Jaitapur finally on 25 April. Activists from the Haripur Committee also joined this *yatra*.

On 17 August 2011, the newly formed West Bengal government announced that it shall not allow any nuclear power plant in the state including at Haripur.

CAMPAIGN ON TRADE

Report of the AWBSRU and NTUI workshop on the EU-India FTA and the Pharmaceutical Industry: The All West Bengal Sales Representative Union (AWBSRU) and the NTUI organised a two-day workshop on the proposed Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India (EU-India FTA) and the Pharmaceutical Industry in Kolkata on 23-24 September 2011.

Since 2007, the European Union and India are engaged in negotiating the terms of a comprehensive agreement. Negotiations hit a roadblock over EU's demands on liberalisation of automobiles imports, and government procurement along with demands regarding intellectual property rights and investment on the availability of affordable medicines in India and in the Global South and India's demand on investors' protection.

The workshop was attended by over 40 participants, including P K Roy, General Secretary of National Federation of Sales Representatives Union (NFSRU); Ashis Sengupta, General Secretary, AWBSRU; Bharati Dey, General Secretary, Binodini Shramik Union and Ashim Roy and Gautam Mody. It was also attended by economist Nirmal Chandra, IIM Professors Sudip Chaudhury and Mritunjay Mohanty, activists from Durbar Mahila Samanwaya

Committee (DMSC), Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors without borders), Medico Friend Circle (MFC), and students. The United Nations Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Anand Grover, also addressed the workshop.

The workshop aimed to bring together in discussion health movement activists and researchers and academics looking at the industry, with trade unions in order to better understand the effect of the EU-India FTA on the restructuring of the drug industry, on the price of medicines and on public health policy and delivery services, as well as explore a trade union framework for engagement on those issues and arrive at conclusions on the role of the pharmaceutical sector in national development, from a trade union perspective.

It was felt that the proposed EU-India FTA is a crucial and benchmark FTA on which AWBSRU and NTUI need to be politically active and it was proposed that the immediate next step is to educate the membership on its impacts, including impacts on livelihoods. It was agreed that an industry framework for unionizing and shaping industrial policy needed to be developed, with a view to overcome the apparent contradiction between the interest of the industry and universal access to health care. It was proposed that procurement policy could be used as an entry point for dialogue between SMEs and trade unions. Reviving Hindustan Anti-biotic Limited (HAL) was seen as an opportunity for trade unions and health groups to come together.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Joint CGT-NTUI Seminar on Cooperation of Branches and National Centres: A joint seminar was organised by the CGT (Confederation Generale des Travailleurs) of France and NTUI between 1-3 March 2011 in Chennai on *Cooperation of Branches and national Centres*. This was organised to develop concrete cooperation between NTUI and CGT both as national centres and also between affiliates. The seminar was also a step towards creating a framework for exchange between the two centres to build a common strategy for joint trade union actions.

The CGT was represented by Comrades Mariannick Le Bris; Christian Pilichowski from the Metal workers branch, Yves Audvard from Renault, Laurence Carette from Areva, Philippe Meillac from Schneider; and Jean-Michel Dupire from Sodexo.

The NTUI was represented by NTUI Vice-President and president of WPTUC, R Kuchelan; NTUI Treasurer and General Secretary of TMKTS, M Subbu; NTUI Secretary and President of All India Blue Star Employees' Federation, N Vasudevan; NTUI Secretary and General Secretary of KEU; NTUI Joint Secretary and President of PTS and GAFWU, Sujata Mody; Franklin D' Souza from Hindustan Lever Employees Union; M Seshadri from Simpson group workers and staff union; K Sankar Babu from Areva Employees' Progressive Union; K Muruga Preman and R Sathish Kumar from Ashok Leyland Employees' Union; M Vignesh and A Sivakumar from Amalgamations Valeo and Meghna Sukumar from Garment and Fashion Workers Union.



The panel discussions focussed broadly on: TNCs and National Development; Trade Union Rights and Social Development; and Environment and Sustainable Development. The participants also broke in sectoral and company groups to discuss sectoral concerns and strategies to build union to union collaboration in companies and sectors. The two company groups were Areva and Sodexo and a sectoral group for Auto – unions from Renault, Ashok Leyland and Valeo joined this.

The Seminar was a step towards understanding the differences and commonalities between the working conditions in the two countries. It concluded with expression of the need to build deeper understanding between national trade union centres, so that they are able to find collective militant strategies against imperialist globalisation.

NTUI extends Solidarity with UE on their 72nd National Convention: 25 May 2011: The NTUI extended solidarity to the membership of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America

on the UE's 72nd National Convention and hailed the critical role played by UE in defending and strengthening the democratic trade union movement in the United States of America through its persistent emphasis on increasing rank-and-file democracy. The united and militant struggle that UE provided leadership to in the last year to fight and defeat a global firms' discriminatory pay practices and lowering of retiral and healthcare benefits has been an inspiration to the NTUI. The NTUI recognises that the UE has consistently championed equity of rights, pay and benefits are the workplace, which is an inalienable right in a civilised society.

NTUI recognises the commonality of our understanding with the UE in building an international alliance of the democratic working class movement and other social and political movements, in order to advance the struggle of the working class for democratic rights, the right to association and collective bargaining.

At the 72nd National Convention UE strove to bring together young organisers from every continent in the understanding that it is the young that must and will build unions in the days ahead. NTUI was represented at the Youth Convergence and at the 72nd National Convention by Com. Meghna Sukumar, Organising Secretary of the Garment and Fashion Workers' Union.

PRESS STATEMENT



Asia One returns from Gaza: Delhi, 7 January 2011: The first ever aid convoy from the southern hemisphere – the Asia to Gaza Solidarity Caravan, *Asia One*, reached the Gaza strip on the early hours of 3 January 2011 after a month of travel across Pakistan, Iran, Turkey Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. 170 human rights activists from 19 Asian countries were

part of the Caravan. The caravan collected \$1 million worth of aid supplies including four ambulances, medicines from Spain and urgently required surgical and other medical equipments. The caravan had also collected hundreds of letters, paintings and messages of love and solidarity, dolls and toys from children in Iran, Turkey and Syria to be delivered to the children of Palestine.

“The Asian caravan was conceived with the objective of contributing to the lifting of the siege on Gaza imposed to collectively punish the people of Gaza for exercising their democratic freedom. It aims to contribute to the restoration of democratic unity of the all the peoples of Palestine, of all political affiliations, as well as building a global solidarity for the Palestinian struggle” said Ashim Roy, General Secretary of the New Trade Union Initiative, the only trade union in the caravan.

The Caravan travelled over 7000 km from Rajghat, New Delhi and crossed many hurdles to reach Gaza, with the first being from the Government of India. The Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi refused permission to the caravan to cross the Wagah border on foot on 3 December despite valid visas to enter Pakistan. This denial of permission brought out the duplicity in India’s foreign policy. While India continues to stick to its historical position of support to the Palestinian state, it deploys opportunism in pursuing closer military and economic relation with Israel. Pakistan, on the other hand, refused visa to 28 Indians and 1 Japanese delegate out of 54 who joined the India Lifeline to Gaza, to cross the Wagah border. Pakistan also refused visa to the Indian delegation to take the land route to Iran. The stated support for the Palestinian cause of both the states fell through when it came to addressing the larger issue of peoples of the two nations building a mass movement together on this cause. The underlying animosity between the two nations compounded by the fear of the ruling classes of a growing mass movement on a common cause thereby uniting the people of the region towards a South Asian identity was blatant in the reaction of the two nations.

In Lahore, the Indian delegation was given a very warm reception by a wide spectrum of activists, civil society organizations, students and journalists. In a show of solidarity, the Pakistani delegation went through Karachi and Quetta and crossed the border at Zahedan, Iran.

The caravan was received by thousands in the streets of Iran as it travelled through the cities of Zahedan,

Kerman, Ishfahan, Qom and Tabriz. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made an unexpected stop at a felicitation function held at the Tehran University. Speaking at the event, President Ahmadinejad said, *“Palestine is not a conflict between Arabs and Jews or between Muslims and Jews, but rather, it is a humanitarian issue that should concern the entire world.”* Thousands of students and activists attended the function. In a statement, 200 members of the Iranian parliament also expressed their support and solidarity with this humanitarian aid convoy to Gaza. They also donated part of their salary towards aiding the Palestinian people. A seven-member delegation of Iranian legislators also joined the caravan in Damascus.

In Turkey, the caravan was hosted by the IHH, the main organizer of the Freedom Flotilla in May 2010. Injured survivors of the Freedom Flotilla raid and families of those who were killed met Asia One delegates. Meetings were organized in several cities including Diyarbakir, the cultural capital of Turkish Kurdistan, and Gaziantip, near the Syrian border.

The caravan drove through Aleppo and reached Damascus on 20 December 2010. At Damascus hundreds of Syrians and Palestinian refugees participated in the colourful send off programme organised for Asia One. All Palestinian parties, groups and factions led by Khalid Abd al-Majid of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front were present. The caravan then reached the port town of Latakia, from where they were set to leave for Al-Arish, in Egypt. In Latakia, the caravan was welcomed by a school band playing the *Internationale*.



The caravan hit a deadlock with the Egyptian government when Iranian and Jordanian members were denied access citing “security and organisational reasons.” The over three-decade long Iran-Egypt diplomatic tension got in the way of the

caravan. The aid caravan remained stuck in Latakia, for more than a week awaiting Egypt’s permission. Finally, only 108 delegates were given permission to enter Egypt. 10 electric generators donated by Iran were also barred.

As the aid ship, Salam, set sail from the port of Latakia on 1 January 2011, with eight members of the caravan, it was tracked by an Israeli helicopter and two Navy warships in the international waters. The Egyptian authorities at Al-Arish did not allow the ship to dock for two days. Other members of the caravan proceeded to Gaza by land, taking the Rafah crossing to the Gaza Strip.



In Gaza, convoy members were received by the Hamas Prime Minister, Ismail Haniya, who said that this effort was unique because more than a hundred activists from all walks of life including trade unions and working peoples’ organisations from across Asian countries. After the meeting with Prime Minister Haniya, Ashim Roy, said, *“Palestine is the principal struggle for democracy and resistance to imperialism in our time and every struggle for democracy and against imperialism is a trade union struggle. As the only trade union in Asia One, the NTUI is committed to taking this forward and initiating a process for a global trade Union conference on Palestine and Resistance to Imperialism. We will also organise a global trade union solidarity caravan to Palestine.”*

We have been remiss in not publishing Union Power from January-August 2011. For this we apologise. We will make every endeavour to ensure that Union Power comes out on time hereafter – *Gautam Mody*

REMEMBERING BHARATI



COMRADE BHARATI ROYCHOUHURY
LAAL SALAAM

Active in the women’s movement since the 1970s, and relentlessly fighting for the rights of forest people across the country, Comrade Bharati had devoted herself to building peoples organizations and stood up for issues of justice and against exploitation, especially of women, with little concern for her failing health, defying every challenge that came in her way.

With a firm belief in collective and community leadership, she worked tirelessly to build a strong women’s rights movement in slums of urban Delhi, breaking caste and class barriers.

Comrade Bharati was also a founder member of the National Forum for Forest Workers and Forest People. She played an important role in the Forum in empowering women leadership at the community level.

She inspired many to choose the path of justice and equity. The NTUI salutes Comrade Bharati for her courage, determination, vision, and politics. We will keep drawing inspiration from her vision and work.