

Workers' Struggles in India

Women Workers' Convention

Friday 13 November 2009, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 1 November 2009).

A national Convention of women workers was held on October 9 at Bhilai, to facilitate ways in which to mobilize women workers to struggle for their rights.

The Convention, presided over by Sunita, Meena Pal, Dolly Dasgupta, was inaugurated by All India Agricultural Labour Association (AICCTU) National General Secretary Swapan Mukherjee.

All India Progressive Womens' Association (AIPWA) Secretary Kavita Krishnan presented a position paper challenging the myths that globalization has empowered women workers. Subsequently, many women workers shared their experiences.

Veena Devi, General Secretary, Bihar State ASHA Employees Association said that ASHA recruits are responsible for a range of pre and post natal care for a mere Rs. 600 honorarium - even that was not paid in full anywhere. We're demanding the status of govt employees and until then interim wage of Rs. 5000 per month."

Sangeeta Devi of Bihar said, "I used to work at a juice factory in Hajipur Industrial Area. This year when I participated in a May Day programme organized by AICCTU at the gate of JK Cotton Mill, my factory owner spotted me and called up my manager on the mobile directing him to terminate my employment. But I did not lose heart, and I began to organise construction workers." Baijayanti Devi, SAHIA worker from Pakhur, Jharkhand told much the same story.

Jaswinder Kaur from Punjab spoke of the agricultural workers' recent struggle for homestead land in which a large number of women had been jailed.

Savitri Ghatowal said the Assam Tea Plantation Labour Act 1852 is outdated and requires change. The Assam Sangrami Cha Shramik Sangh has been demanding a new Act even the rights enshrined in the old Act are being violated. Facilities provided earlier to tea plantation workers have been withdrawn - for instance the provision of houses. 90 days maternity leave, provided for by the existing Act, is denied often pregnant workers give birth while working on the plantation."

Thenmozhi spoke of bonded labour under the 'Sumangali scheme' in the powerloom sector, whereby unmarried young girls worked in virtual bondage to earn a lump-sum amount for their dowry. Most of these women are dalits, she said; they are often dismissed on flimsy charges before the allotted time is up, so the cash amount can be cut. Many who worked the entire period received cheques that bounced.

Shanti Sen, an agricultural worker from Raipur described how her 17 year old son was framed in a false case in order to harass villagers for challenging corruption; her son eventually committed suicide in custody.

Savitri Sahu, a cleaning worker from Bhilai spoke of being victimised by contractors, who laid those branded as 'leaders' for several weeks. Geeta Mandal, AIPWA leader from Jharkhand spoke of how Mid Day meal workers and SAHIA workers are underpaid and overworked.

The Convention resolved to form an AICCTU Women's Cell, and to take up a series of programmes designed to highlight women workers' rights and develop leaders among women.

P.S.

* From Liberation, November, 2009.