

work that man is given. While the margin had narrowed from a 25% wage difference 150 years ago to 10% in the 1980s, blatant discrimination still exists. The wage is also dependent on the number of days worked during the month". [Atkin, 1995: 8]

Female illiteracy in the plantations is the highest for any sector and compares unfavorably with the literacy rates for other women. Moreover, men, as brothers, husbands and fathers exercise control over plantation women's income,

since the plantation runs as a system of social control:

The colonists designed the plantations on the basis of hierarchies which made use of other patterns of social control embedded at different levels of the social field, such as caste".

[Foster.1996: 4]

Women workers often do not have time to liaise with trade unions; the hegemonic CWC is basically a male enclave where women continue to serve male interests. Given the dynamics of the oversupply of labor, women's resistance to change gender power relations, transform existing hierarchies and develop alternative equitable development model will echo through their union activism. All in all, the social construction of gender, sexual division of labor and unequal power relations have been significant contributory factors to the low participation of women in unions.

Conclusion

The quest for class liberation historically had filtered through the existing patriarchal social structures. The workers movement could not move away from its essentialist focus on political economy to the larger issues of social marginalisation, violence, sexuality and exploitation.

The right to unionise and engage in organised democratic action has been the most contentious and intractable issue facing the trade union movement today. The democratic right to participate in worker agitations and make representations at the national level is

not seen in three most vital sectors of the economy - migrant workers, the agriculture sector and women in Industrial Zones. Migrant and peasant women have been worse affected as often their relative powerlessness has been perceived as a drawback which deterred them from addressing issues specific to them; from issues of sexual violence, to worker employer relations, the right to minimum wages, payment of cash at regular intervals, maximum hours of work and social security and welfare benefits. While the state proclaims itself as the moral protector and guardian of the citizens, its commitment to upholding domestic legislation and constitutional safeguards in conformity with international norms has been discriminatory. What is indeed necessary is progressive legislation that enjoys wide legitimacy and acceptability among workers, that can radically transform work relations, a reality that still eludes women.

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JAIL FOR PICKETTING

Comrade Ponsinahamy, a leading militant worker from Suduwella who has been in the forefront of many a working class struggle, goes to jail this week for three months. She was charged in connection with the last June strikes when she was picketing outside Liptons Ltd.

And this is not the first time either that she is going to jail. One year ago she was imprisoned for three months for a similar offence in connection with a strike at Brown & Co. Speaking at a Galle Face Rally held to greet her and 32 other comrades going to jail, she exhorted the workers not to be down-hearted but to strengthen their class organisations still further so that when the working class leaders came out of jail, they would be greeted by a powerful and united trade union movement in this country.

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