

# Mechanization and women

**C**HATTISGARH is a predominantly mineral rich region abounding in iron, stone, coal,

dolomite, quartzite, uranium. The main industries here are all mineral based like the Bhilai Steel Plant, Korba Thermal Electric Power Station, Bharat Aluminium Corporation etc. The other important industries are the B.N.C. Cotton Mills, Raigarh Jute Industries, the Cement factories at Mandar and Jamul and the paper mills in Bilaspur.

Except for the old factories like B.N.C. Cotton Mills, all the newly launched and developed industries have been following the policy of mechanization right from the beginning. Heavy and expensive machinery is imported as most of these industries have been started with foreign collaboration. The recruitment policy therefore employs only the so called "skilled labour". The uneven and unequal rate of development in India, has made Chhattisgarh educationally backward. So the factories are full of skilled labour from other states. Pressures of social mores and

mines. In the mines where manual labour is needed women work alongside men. But only skilled male labour is engaged in the mechanized mines. Dalli Rajhara is a burning example of this discrimination. Not a single woman has found employment in the mechanized mines of Rajhara. The predominantly male workforce comes from mostly outside Chhattisgarh. In the mines of Dalli and Jharandalli the local labour (men and women) are continuing a struggle in the area of production. But the issue of mechanization has assumed serious proportions as the government policy of total mechanization has jeopardized their employment

rooted well-planned conspiracy of the ruling class. The wrong policies (which are detrimental to the country's interest) pursued by those in power has made public undertakings a failure. The government is now unable to handle many enterprises. In order to cover its own shortcomings it has launched a vilification campaign against women labour to lower their status in society. This discriminatory attitude again is the reason behind women getting less wages than men in agriculture and other areas for the same work done. This biased outlook has also resulted in women being deprived of education. This prejudice is the

when women workers retire these vacancies are systematically filled up by male workers. Women are replaced by men.

2) Under the voluntary retirement scheme women workers who have worked for more than 15 years are entitled to retire voluntarily. The management instigates them to give up work. For this 'voluntary' gesture, apart from Provident Fund and Gratuity the women are paid a lump sum. The problems of the women labour in the Hiri mines has its roots in this policy. For a long time the labourers were demanding permanent employment. The government was ultimately forced to concede this demand. But it has resorted to subtle malpractice. Wherever husband and wife were jointly employed the man was made permanent and transferred to a far off place like Bhilai or elsewhere.

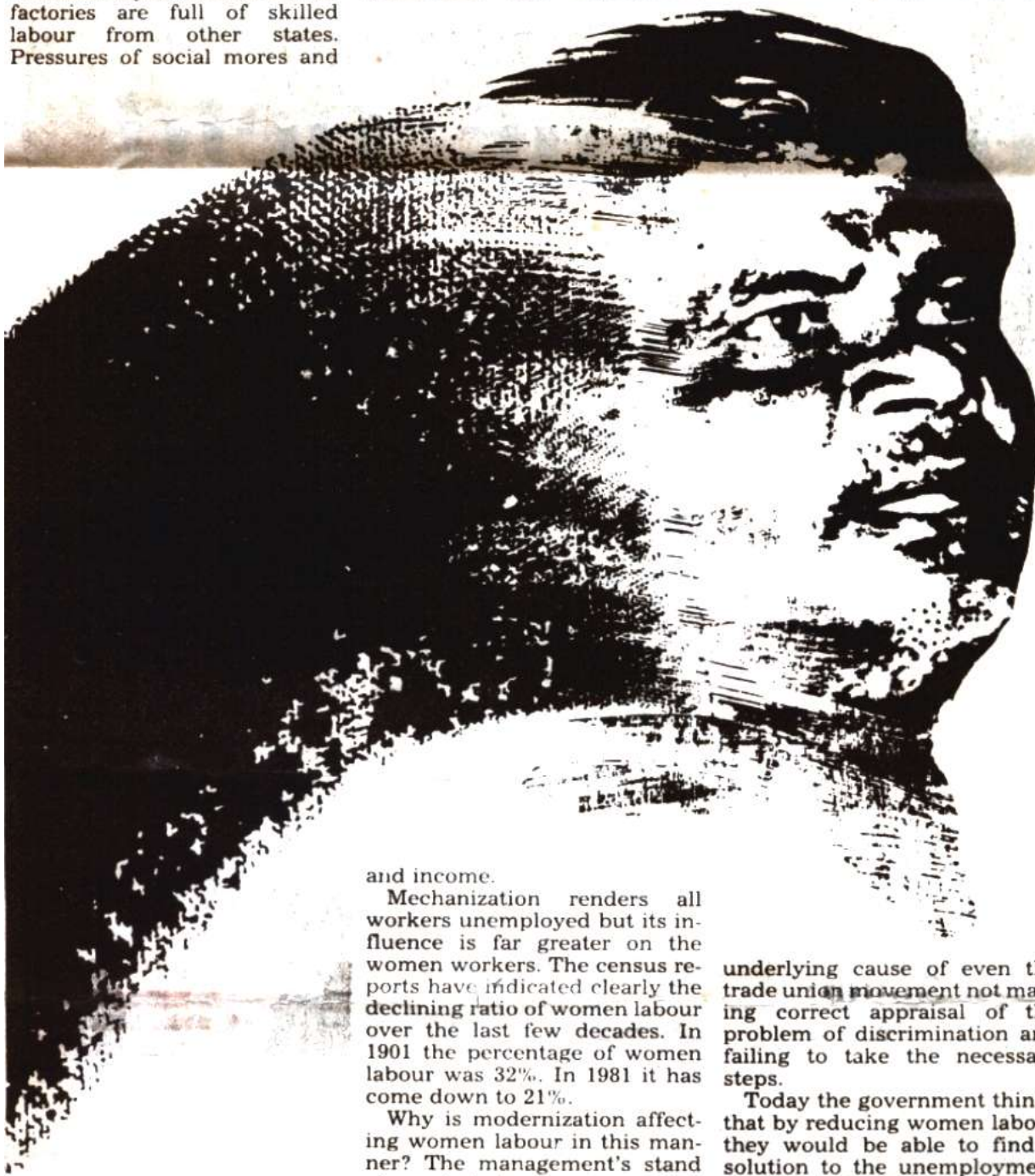
Under the circumstances he had no other way but to accept this 'lucrative' offer. The wife then had to give up her own job. 200 women workers of the Hiri mines have become the victims of this conspiracy by the management. Eight hundred women workers of the Manganese mines in Balaghat have been affected. The biggest blow has come down on the women workers in the coal industry. More than 50,000 women workers have lost their jobs as a result of the policies pursued by Coal India.

Mechanization and its corollary, the retrenchment of women labour has serious implications for the entire working class. This conspiracy of retrenchment of women workers has weakened the position of the working class as a whole and poses serious problems. The strength of 3,000 human beings can not match that of 6,000. In the interest of a powerful trade union movement, a strong resistance movement must be built up to protest against this discrimination faced by women labour. It is essential for keeping the movement alive.

The issue is also related to the women's movement and women's status as well. An economically independent woman has self respect. Sitting at home does not give her that dignity. In their struggle for rights and dignity women workers must form a joint front with other women. Since the issue of appropriate production methods for the development of the country is a vital one, this struggle and the joint front should be structured in such a manner so as to involve other comrades. Scientists, students and other intellectuals can also join this struggle. Their participation will strengthen and broaden the workers' and women's movement further.

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and income.

Mechanization renders all workers unemployed but its influence is far greater on the women workers. The census reports have indicated clearly the declining ratio of women labour over the last few decades. In 1901 the percentage of women labour was 32%. In 1981 it has come down to 21%.

Why is modernization affecting women labour in this manner? The management's stand always is that women are unable to operate expensive and complicated machinery. We would like to challenge the truth of this assumption. If that is so how is it that so many women are engaged in the watch and electronic industry which require very fine skills? The naked truth behind this process of depriving women labour of work is a deep

underlying cause of even the trade union movement not making correct appraisal of the problem of discrimination and failing to take the necessary steps.

Today the government thinks that by reducing women labour they would be able to find a solution to the unemployment problem. It has initiated certain methods to remove women from employment.

1) If a woman worker leaves her job on health grounds or any other reason and if there is a policy to employ the next of kin, the job invariably goes to the son or son-in-law, never to her daughter whether married or unmarried. In the same way

superstitions is responsible for the low education rate among women. So even in the government-run industries, the only areas where they are found are the high risk unskilled sections. There is hardly any recruitment of women in the other sections. The situation is slightly different in the B.N.C. Mills and the