

KERALA

Migrant workers join trade union



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Special Correspondent KOTTAYAM

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First State meet of union held in Kottayam

It was a unique experience for the political leaders and media persons who had assembled there: here was CPI State secretary Kanam Rajendran speaking in his inimitable Malayalam only to be translated into Hindi at a meeting in a hall in the heart of the town. And the issues he took up too appeared to be strange for an average Malayali: minimum wages for workers; exploitation by contractors; lack of proper living space; and proper service conditions, including health and shelter.

This was the first State conference of the Kerala Migrant Workers' Union affiliated to the AITUC. And with representatives from Kashmir, Punjab, Bihar, Manipur, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, the crowd was a microcosm of the nation.

The team from Ernakulam came as a group wearing red caps. And there were the women and also children who spoke Malayalam.

State once. Now, their successors have gone to other countries and are sending back their earnings. Our brothers from other States are also doing the same,” he said.

However, in spite of the State being built by earnings from other States and countries, the migrant labourer in Kerala lives an isolated life, Mr. Rajendran pointed out. This has created a situation where in they are exploited.

Call for legislation

“Not only by contractors and agents, but also by the police who have found an easy prey in them,” he said. The only way out of the current situation was to integrate them to the mainstream social life through the enactment of a comprehensive legislation, he said. “We should assure an option for them to cast their votes wherever they like –either in their home village or in Kerala,” he said. The crowd burst into a thumping applause. A few other trade unions had tried their hand earlier in organising the migrant labour. But this is the first time they have taken the journey this far, said Binu Bose the newly elected general secretary of the union.

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