

A FEW days ago, Edna d'souza of the Institute Nossa Senhora de Fiedade, Panjim, Goa, was in Delhi to pressurize central government authorities to intervene in the long drawn out struggle over this women's institute. She is still determinedly fighting to prevent the institute from being demolished and a multistoreyed commercial complex being constructed in its place. As she says: "An institution started 80 years ago for women will be lost if women don't protest now. If the building is to be reconstructed, let it be done by the government for women. If they want shops, women can run them, if they want a counselling service, it can be for women. The project should be controlled by women."

As reported in **Manushi** No. 4, the archbishop had, in 1978, wrongly claimed ownership of the institute building, and got a demolition order on the basis of this false claim. In actual fact, the institution had been established by the Portuguese government for the benefit of women of all communities. Its management had been entrusted to the Catholic Church, but not the ownership. The archbishop was not even asked to produce documentary evidence of his ownership. He arbitrarily ordered the girls living in the institute hostel to vacate their rooms within three months, and transferred the nuns who were working there, to other places.

Edna, who was warden of the hostel, as well as involved in other women's welfare programmes in the institute, felt this was unjust, and that those affected should have been consulted before such decisions were taken. A conflict developed, and the girls resisted the pressure to vacate the hostel. Instead, they formed a trust and independently ran the hostel for a year. The archbishop continued to harass them in various ways, by keeping employees in the institute to terrorize them, filing legal cases against them, and publicly defaming them.

The women fought back, conducted a signature campaign and gained support for their right to live in, and have control of, the institute. However, the archbishop, who is influential in the region, and also has the support of local businessmen who

A Four Year Long Struggle

would profit by the setting up of a commercial complex, managed to have Edna dismissed from the congregation. This was done even though the case was still under consideration in Rome, the church headquarters. Subsequently, Edna was declared a trespasser and evicted from the hostel premises. Though she had worked there unpaid as a nun for 16 years, she was not given the compensation due to her.

It is difficult for her today to continue this battle in Panjim as people are afraid to rent accommodation to her, because of the archbishop's campaign against her.

Edna says that the archbishop always raises the cry of "minority rights in danger" when the women object to his plans. However, in the name of minority rights, he is snatching away these rights of women in Panjim, the majority of whom are themselves Catholics.

The women are demanding that the government take over the institution, and

that it be by women for women. The women's hostel, creche and other women's programmes should again be started, but should be open to women of all communities.

At present the cases are still being fought in court, and the institute building is lying unused, though hundreds of working women and students in Panjim are badly in need of hostel accommodation. Edna and others involved in the four year long struggle are bravely continuing the battle because they believe in the justice of their cause and feel responsible to see it through to a conclusion. They are facing a great deal of harassment and defamation, and badly need the support of women's organizations, so that this institution established for women, is not handed over to the profit making interests of businessmen. Those of you who would like to help, can send letters of protest to the chief minister, Goa.

Medical Students Rape Woman Patient

ON the night of July 4, a group of medical students in Rohtak medical college, Hissar, Haryana, raped an 18 year old girl who was recovering in the hospital after delivering a stillborn baby a few days earlier. At about 1.30 am., two chowkidars, Sukhbir Singh and Chhotu Ram, on duty outside the boys' hostel, heard a woman's screams. They saw a girl being dragged out of the boys' hostel by three or four male students who were beating her. The girl appeared hysterical and kept repeating one sentence: "*Main Kharak Milakpur jana.*" The students left her outside the hostel gate, and fled. She was bruised and battered, half naked and bleeding. The chowkidars tried to locate the hostel superintendent and assistant

superintendent but neither of them was available. Some other students came out, and went for the police. While the girl was being taken to the police station, her old aunt who had been alarmed when she found her missing from the ward, appeared and took her back to the ward.

The girl was in a trauma, and became aggressive if questioned. She only kept repeating the same sentence over and over again. According to the police, the medical report gives as good as substantive evidence of rape, and also lists other injuries. The girl's lips were swollen; she was bleeding from the nose and had haematoma on the jaw; there were bruises and scratches on her abdomen and chest, and abrasions on knees and elbows. She

was put under sedation and examined by a psychiatrist the next evening. He diagnosed a grief reaction and advised that she be sent to the psychiatry department. Instead, the girl was discharged from the hospital.

The police registered a case of rape, and a first year MBBS student who has been in college for four years, was mentioned as a suspect. However, instead of arresting any of the suspected students, the police picked up the two chowkidars from their villages on the evening of July 5. They allege that they were beaten up by the police, and Sukhbir Singh is now in hospital undergoing treatment for the injuries inflicted on him. Another student who had helped the chowkidars to call the police,

was also beaten up by two students who threatened to kill him if he gave evidence against them. No action has been taken against these assailants either. The police claim that they are unable to arrest the rape suspects because they cannot recognize them, and no one is ready to identify them. However, on the campus, people say that they were seen freely roaming around a few days after the incident.

The senior doctors and nurses are silent, and too terrified even to issue a statement condemning the incident. Class IV employees are on strike, demanding removal of the principal, dismissal of the constable who beat up the chowkidars, and punishment of the guilty.

Women on the campus, whether students, nurses or doctors, live in a state of fear and insecurity. A group of girls who were molested during Holi revelry, gheraoed the principal in protest, but no action was taken against the culprits. The authorities did not even report the matter to the police. The girls were instead told that if they raise their voices frequently, they are likely to be raped. Student nurses told me that when they complain to the warden about the catcalls and lewd remarks which are common in the institution, they are asked why they put themselves in a position to be harassed by boys.

—Neerja Chowdhury

Sanya & Chandralekha



Regal and resplendent, the crowing cock sits on his garbage heap !

THE largest antiwar march in US history took place on June 12 when 800,000 people demonstrated in New York against Reagan's nuclear stance, and his general political policy—economic as well as military, foreign as well as internal, anti-women's rights stance as well as the renewed drive to draft youth into the army. "Make jobs, "not war" was the slogan of many middle class people as well as factory workers.

The reality of Reaganomics today is: ten and a half million unemployed; unemployment rate of 60 per cent among blacks in industrial centres; women still holding their jobs only because they are the lowest paid in all professions. Since

1975, the average rate of industrial growth in USA has been one per cent. Yet the US government is obsessed with military expansion.

The people of the US have a long history of opposition to these war-mongering policies. The US government was forced to "lose" Vietnam, which was never theirs, not just because Vietnam defeated US imperialism on the battlefield, but also because there was a strong anti-war youth movement within the US, which had been preceded by the black movement and the emergence of the women's movement in the sixties. Over the last few years, women have held a yearly protest at the Pentagon, and there have been many smaller protests in various cities, but the June 12 march was historic in its massive and militant character.

The demonstrators made it clear that they were against both the US and the USSR's drive to war. They protested outside the so-called disarmament conference at the UN, and also at the embassies of all the nuclear powers—Russian, US, British, Chinese, French, Israeli, South African.

A few days earlier, a quarter of a million anti-nuclear protesters in Germany had forced Reagan, then visiting Europe, to hypocritically declare: "I would march at your head if..." Yet, in the face of visible opposition from the masses of people he is supposed to represent, Reagan has just signed a secret 125 page Pentagon document which projects a strategy for the next five years. In other words, the Reagan government is now preparing for a five year prolonged nuclear war.

The protest coincided with widespread and large demonstrations in western Europe, in which women were active participants. In Netherlands, women set up a peace camp outside the USA air transporter base near Utrecht, on international women's day for disarmament, May 24, 1982. About 500,000 people rallied in Bonn, West Germany, where Reagan was speaking. Women in England set up peace camps outside Waddington air force base where a tornado bomber capable of carrying many nuclear missiles, is being built at a cost of 10,000 million pounds. □