

## **"We are One" – Fighting Philips in India**

To take strike action against the giant Dutch multinational Philips is a step that workers in its factories in India do not take without some fear. In previous strikes at Philips plants strikers have had to face beatings by police and hired thugs. The company has starved workers back with lock outs, and used scab labour. Nevertheless workers at the Philips factory at Kalwa, producing lamps, tube lights and welding electrodes, are giving 100% support to their union's plans to strike if the company refuses to yield to their demands for an improvement in their conditions. After ten months of fruitless talks workers are on a work to rule

### The "Mahaunion"

Philips has seven plants in India, in Bombay, Pune, Madras, Calcutta and Delhi. Despite the huge distances between these sites the workers have formed a network linking the unions in all the plants. The workers call this coordinating body the Mahaunion (greater union). This form of co-ordination has emerged in the last few years out of the hard struggles that have had to be fought against the Philips management.

The Mahaunion first proved its effectiveness in 1981, when in support of workers locked out at the company's plant in Pune, it was able to organise demonstrations and strikes in all the other plants, and force the management to back down on new production levels it was trying to impose. Philips has since sought to destroy the Mahaunion. The plant at Pune has been seen as key to the strength of this inter-union co-ordination. Accordingly after the 1981 strike and lock out, the company replaced the personnel director at the Pune plant with a Mr D N Ghose. Ghose has been previously at ICI and has a reputation for being able to break union militancy. In June 1983 union leaders at Pune including S N Hadke, President of the Mahaunion were summarily dismissed. The Pune union immediately struck to defend its leaders.

### Lock-out

The management reacted with a five month lock-out. Strikers were arrested in their homes and many received police beatings. The Mahaunion organised solidarity actions and demonstrations with the Pune workers, but as the lock-out lasted and workers and their families grew short of food, the workers were eventually forced to go back, though only after having gained an agreement that the dismissed workers cases would be taken to court - where they are still pending - and that 150 suspended strikers be reinstated.

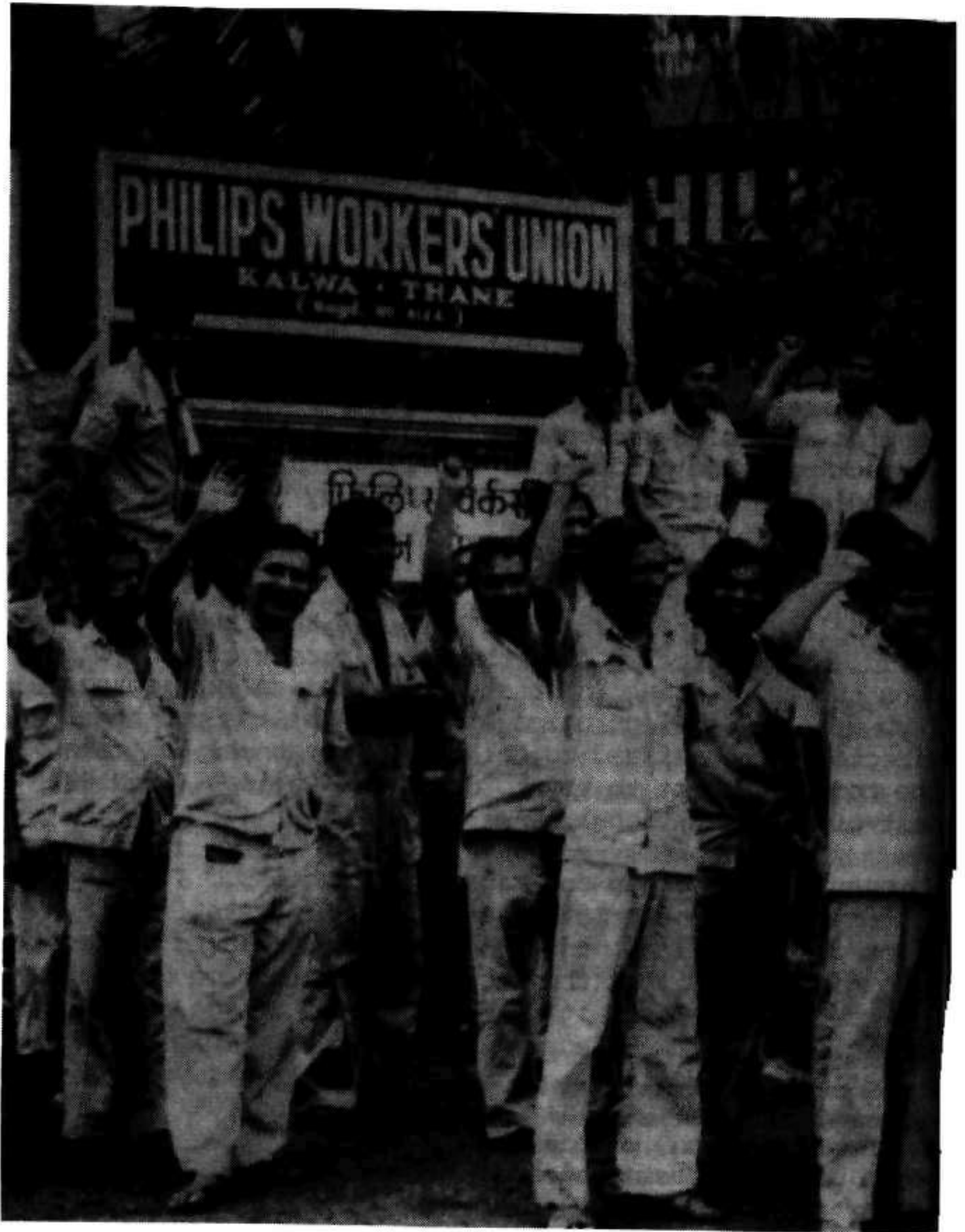
However, harrassment of workers continued in the plant when it re-opened. Philips have also widened their strategy for weakening the union by increasingly sub-contracting out parts of production. Nearly 50% of Philips radios in India are in fact now manufactured by other companies.

### Directed from Holland

The Philips workers Mahaunion believes that Philips labour policies are directed from the Dutch parent company which owns the controlling interest in the Indian subsidiary, (known as Piece Electronics Ltd). The Philips personnel director Ghose refused to talk about personnel policies of the company except to try to deny that Philips India was part of a multinational.

However, the chairman and managing director, C J Seelan and factory managers are Dutch, and all senior staff are appointed from Holland and given 6 months training there. The union claims that the lock out at Pune came only after direct communication with the Dutch head office and that subsequent management action has been taken in close consultation with Holland.

(Mike Jacobs, first published in International Labour Reports, Nov-Dec 1984)



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photo: Philips workers protest at Kalwa, September 1984