

Presidential Address

General Council Meeting,

4-7 April 1974, Vishakhapatnam

Comrades,

We are meeting a year after our Conference in Ernakulam. You know the reason for the delay. I do not therefore wish to deal with them.

At the outset on behalf of all of you, I offer my homage to the memory of our beloved Comrade Muzaffar Ahamad, the great pioneer of the Communist movement, member of the Central Committee of the CPI (M) and a builder of our trade union movement and founder of the kisan movement.

I offer my homage to the memory of all those who fell fighting for the working class in recent battles.

Comrades, The emergency is used to attack our movement. Thousands are being held in prison for years in Congress jails, under detention without trial or framed up criminal charges. Our organisation demands an end to the Emergency and release of all political prisoners.

On behalf of all of you, I raise my voice of protest against gangster attacks against our trade unions in W. Bengal. Our offices continue to be occupied, hundreds of workers are not allowed to attend to their jobs and earn their livelihood. The entire trade union movement must demand an end to the Government supported gangsterism and call for restoration of trade union liberties in West Bengal.

Comrades, you all know about the invitation extended to us by the Federation of Vietnamese Trade unions to attend their Third

Congress and that I was deputed to represent our organisation. I have written about the Conference in our "Working Class." I am also circulating a report of what I saw in Hanoi. I am sure the General Council will express its thanks for the invitation and send a warm fraternal message to the Federation wishing its success in its struggle for completely freeing Vietnam, for building the Socialist North, and fulfilling its leading role in the task of Socialist industrialisation.

New Situation

Comrades, the international picture since we met last in our Conference has considerably changed in favour of the working class. The Paris Agreement which was just signed then not only constituted a big defeat of American imperialism, but it came in the midst of explosive economic situation created by the deepening of the general crisis of capitalism. Devaluation of currencies and above all, dollar devaluations, currency war, piratical attempts to capture markets, balance of payments difficulties and finally mounting inflation in the midst of stagnation—these were already in evidence when the Americans had to retreat in Vietnam. They have been intensified in the last year exposing the instability and bankruptcy of the capitalist system and leading to widespread working class actions in the capitalist world.

Last year, the cost of living in Japan increased by nearly 20 per cent, in Britain, the inflation rate was 12 per cent. In 1974, the rate is expected to rise further to 15 per cent. The jump in food prices has been 20 per cent in the year with a record balance of trade deficit 234 million. In the USA, the cost of consumer goods rose by 9.4 per cent last year, the largest annual increase in two decades. For 1974, the food prices are expected to rise from 8 to 16 per cent in the year while the prices of cereals, bakery products and bread may mount up by 20 per cent.

Italy, West Germany etc. show similar trends. In West Germany, the price of bread rose by 8 per cent and vegetable by 16 per cent in January. The cost of living index went up by 10.3 per cent in the month. As a result, pay rise are reduced to nil. In France, the situation is no less worse. In March 21, the French Finance Minister had to announce a series of anti-inflation measures saying the economic situation "is much more difficult than is believed, much than is thought." He said that the country's national product rate would fall to 3.6 per cent, this year from last year's 6.6 per cent. The

balance of payments deficit it expected to be 3,600 million dollars. The annual rate of inflation in France is estimated to be 18 per cent. The French Prime Minister admitted that the new measures will have serious consequences on the French living standards.

Increasing Unemployment

In the U.S.A. industrial production has been declining in December and January—in the last month it fell by 8 per cent. Unemployment has been increasing and has been intensified further by the energy crisis. The number of unemployed exceeds five million.

The rate of unemployment had reached 5.2 per cent because of economic slow down and may increase by half a million because of the energy crisis according to Labour Department spokesmen.

Britain has now more than two and a half million people without any work at the end of December and the Finance Minister estimated that their number would further increase this year and that "it will be necessary to fight unemployment more than ever." The number of unemployed in Italy has topped the million mark and is also rising in Scandinavian countries.

The strike struggle in these countries have been inevitably rising. The heroic struggle of the British miners against wage freeze, against attempt to pass on the burden of the crisis to the workers toppled the Conservative Government in Britain. In February civil servants, postal workers, and railway men among them went on strike for the first time in the history of the F.R.G. Two lakh and fifty thousand workers confronted with the Government they had voted for and forced an increase of 11 per cent in wages from it. Twenty million workers went on strike in Italy in early part of last year. And in Paris, on March 21, this year strikers dislocated bank, railway, and air services, blacked out stores and offices and snarled traffic throughout Paris in widespread demands for higher wages to meet soaring prices. The new "anti-inflation" measures of the Govt. were denounced as "tantamount to a declaration of war against the workers" and "an anti-wages plan, not an anti-inflation plan."

This growing collapse brought about by the general crisis of capitalism, has revived memories of the Great depression of 1930 and produced the following comment from Irving Friedman, former Chief Economist at the World Bank, "I cannot logically dispute the view that the natural consequences of the present

process is a global price surge that causes all confidence to collapse, investment in production tools to shrink in favour of gold or food and the birth of a hideous world depression." (March 25)

Watergate

It is not only the credibility of the economic system that is cracking down. Its political credibility is also strained to utmost with the Nixon scandal in the USA, the citadel of capitalism.

Today the Centre of world attention is the Watergate scandal and crime in which the American President and his retinue appear as criminals, committing one crime after another. They invade individual freedom, organise burglaries to gather incriminating material against their critics, raid houses, send spies into opposition parties to gather blackmailing material, raise money for election purposes illegally and submit fraudulent accounts.

As if this list of crimes was not enough Nixon topped them by starting underhand war against Cambodia, concealed it from the Congress and submitted false returns about bombings which completely misled the House and the Senate. Thus under the American democracy neither the people nor the Congress have the real right to say yes or no to a war against another country. How correct was Lenin when he said : "Take any country from America to Switzerland...in these countries, the real business of 'State' is performed behind the scenes and is carried on by the departments, Chancellories and general staffs. Parliament is given up to talk for the special purpose of fooling the 'common people'". The Watergate scandal has further revealed that the General Staff was spying on the doings of the President and his foreign department.

Inner Conflicts

Sharp economic conflicts have broken out among the three Centres of imperialism—the EEC, USA and Japan. Contradictions have been developing among the EEC countries also.

The oil crisis accentuated contradictions among all the imperialist partners. This was particularly shown during the Oil Conference called by the USA. So sharp was the conflict between France and other EEC members that bourgeois journals feared the question facing the community is whether it can survive. But the American attempts to knock Europe into a block against the Middle East and block all bilateral deals between oil producing and oil consuming countries do not appear to have succeeded and a clause blocking such deals had to be abandoned.

The failure to make Europe toe the line led to Nixon's threatening outburst on 16th march cancelling his European visit. "The European cannot have it both ways. They cannot have the U.S. participation and co-operation on the security front and proceed to have confrontation and even hostility on the economic and political front."

While these developments lead to sharpening of class struggles in capitalist countries, the intensification of the national liberation movement (Arabs), upsetting of Govts. in capitalist countries (Britain), it also leads to manoeuvres on the part of American imperialists and others to keep their grip on the changing situation.

Detente

The growing economic rivalries are leading to contradictions over a wide field including foreign policy and each centre is trying to develop its own version of relationship with the Socialist countries. The detente between the USA and the USSR, between the former and the People's China are important developments understood as changes in imperialist manoeuvres born out of the increased strength of the Socialist world, rising national liberation struggles, weakness of the imperialist camp and its hope that it will enable imperialists to pursue its aggressive designs elsewhere and take advantages of differences in Socialist Camp. The agreement over Berlin, the acceptance of the frontiers created by last war, constitute important developments. But all talk that these developments introduce a new era of peace is misleading and objectively helps to conceal imperialist manoeuvres.

Nhan Dhan correctly wrote: "The imperialists pursue a policy of detente with some big countries in the world in order to have a free hand to consolidate their forces, oppose the revolutionary movements in the world, repress the revolution in their own countries and stampout national liberation movements while never giving up their preparations for a new war."

We must, therefore, guard against the false propaganda of revisionists like the AITUC leaders who propagate that we have entered a new period of international peaceful development.

If Chile showed the treacherous conspiracies of American imperialism while talking of detente, the October war between Israel and Arab Nations showed that it is compelled to manoeuvre before the irrespressible liberation urge of the people and yield ground while saving its client. It still continues to play an obstructive game

in Syria.

The oil war waged by the oil producing countries has introduced another element in the struggle against imperialism, effective use of natural resources by erstwhile colonies against the metropolitan powers, sending wave of crisis after crisis to the imperialist countries.

Correct Outlook

Comrades, it is necessary to understand these developments because without it we can neither discharge our international duty nor carry our own struggle with a correct outlook. There is a tendency in our movement to conduct our struggle without reference to the big economic achievements of the Socialist countries. Is it not a matter of pride to us that while the entire capitalist world is groaning under inflationary burden, the Socialist economies are free from price rise? There is also a tendency to forget that internationally our main enemy is American imperialism—the enemy who carries on massacres in Vietnam, who organises coup in Chile and massacres hundreds of revolutionaries. This international enemy has to be fought on our soil by concretely exposing and frustrating its designs.

American Imperialism At Work

American Imperialism has taken quick steps to regain its lost initiative on the Sub-Continent. By pouring aid in Bangladesh, by pretending to be very friendly and helpful it is trying to create a new image for itself and its agents are busy sowing enmity between India and Bangladesh. Some reactionaries in Bangladesh have become outspoken enough to attack the Govt. for keeping friendly relations with the Soviet Union and are also appealing to religious fanaticism.

Simultaneously, the USA Govt. is arming the Shah of Iran and other Gulf rulers feverishly, satisfying all their demands for phantom jets, and sophisticated weaponry. This is directed against Soviet influence, intended to counter the Arab democratic regimes and assume the reactionary military circles in Pakistan in their anti-Indian game. This old game of making Asians fight Asians is again on. Simultaneously, it is strengthening and completing a chain of military bases from the African Coast to Australian across the Indian Ocean, as in Diego Garcia Island, as well as new naval and air bases in Iran's Coast close to Pakistan.

All these constitute a danger to the freedom of the people of

India and the Sub-Continent. The base at Diego Garcia has raised wide protest from a number of countries, but our trade union movement has not seen the danger. In the interest of our people and the working class of the Sub-Continent we must sharply raise our voice against these American conspiracies and rouse our people against them.

Bangladesh Recognition

We are happy that the Pakistan Govt. has at last recognised Bangladesh. We send our fraternal greetings to the working class of Pakistan and Bangladesh and express confidence that the three proletarian wings will work unitedly for fraternal relations between the three peoples, for proletarian solidarity and for frustrating the American imperialist game to develop tensions in the Sub-Continent and make Asians fight Asians. Such common understanding and action are essential because the imperialists and reactionaries are already busy hunting out new issues to keep the plot boiling. It is our mutual duty to support each other's struggles for democracy and civil liberties, so that the voice of the people prevails in shaping the foreign policy of our countries.

Rising Struggle

The whole of last year, the working class, our CITU and the people have in one place or another been leading mass protests against the burden of high prices, unemployment, food shortages. Big bandhs against rising prices and unemployment in W. Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Tripura were organised in many States unitedly with other organisations. Behind the organised working class and employees are now rallying all sections of the people and the united protests become the starting point of wide democratic struggles. In some States, broad-based anti-price rise committees are being organised in which trade unions, political parties, employees', women's and students' organisations participate. In States where the left and the democratic parties are not strong, the initiative taken by the organised trade union movement co-ordinates popular protests against Govt. policies and gives them a democratic direction, preventing their distortion by the Right reactionary parties.

The militant struggle of the valiant people of Gujarat against Congress-imposed starvation, high prices and corruption, its unabated continuance for more than two months has not only written a glorious page of popular resistance to Congress rule but

has also underlined the transformation brought about by continued suffering of the people. Every effort was made to suppress it in cold blood. It was maligned as the design of reaction. All leaders were arrested. The leaders of the CITU were detained under the MISA.

Young boys and girls were beaten and tortured by the police. Men and women were beaten in their homes. All major towns were put under endless curfew. The Army was called to suppress the people. Nearly hundred people were massacred.

But the Indira Government reckoned without the new spirit of resistance. The students, the employees' organisations, the State employees all remained firm. The people directed their anger against seats of oppression and exploitation; against institutions which represent richness and exploitation and the Government called it looting.

Bloodbath having failed, and with indignant protests from all over the country against the repression in Gujarat, the Indira Government had to bow down and admit an ignoble defeat before the people. A legislature with an overwhelming Congress majority has to be dissolved because of popular struggle and withdrawal of the mandate. This is the first instance of its kind.

It is an important political victory, victory of a principle. A legislature completely out of tune with the people and wallowing in the cess-pool of corruption has no right to continue, whatever the Constitution might say. This principle has been asserted. The extra-parliamentary force has prevailed over parliamentary process. It is the popular method of asserting electorate's right to recall its representatives.

In March, in Bihar, once again under the auspices of same Students' Committees mass protests and demonstrations were organised leading to police firings and shooting down of 20 people. Once again, curfew was clamped on a number of cities including Patna and atrocities were perpetrated on the people. The people retaliated by attacking houses of ministers, Government offices and property and seats of oppression.

It is good to remember Lenin, "The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which ALL the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and

most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money; there were speculators and adventures, etc. But OBJECTIVELY, the mass movement was breaking the back of tsarism, and paving the way for democracy; for this reason, the class conscious workers led." (P. 356, Vol. 22)

In this background of the food and anti-price rise and anti-unemployment struggle developing into a popular movement embracing the widest spectrum of society, the organised trade union movement must play its role of initiator and guide and see that it is directed in democratic channels. Failure will mean handing over the movement to the spontaneous consciousness or to the demagogic reactionaries.

The New Budgets

Comrades, the budgets of the Central Govt. and the State Govts. show that there is to be no respite from price extortion and food shortages. The mismanagement of the economy in the interest of the capitalist landlord classes has brought the country near to economic disaster. The inflationary crisis in capitalist countries, to whom our economy remains tied, is accentuating the situation further. The rise in oil prices further accentuated the foreign exchange crisis. The high food prices in the world, —since we have to import food because of our failure to commandeer the stocks of the landlords—make huge demand on the dwindling foreign exchange resources and leading the country to beg for more and more foreign loans and more and more foreign dependence. The tall talk of self-reliance has vanished in thin air. The World Bank knowing India's plight has advertised her bankruptcy and announced that India would need foreign aid of not less than 12.1 billion dollars (12,100 million) in place of 5 billion estimated by the Planners for the five year period.

Thus not only high prices, food famine and mass unemployment will continue but the Congress regime has created the menace of further foreign loans and a danger of economic domination. This is what confronts the working class the people hitherto engaged in somehow defending their livelihood against price onslaught. Now the fight for more increased dearness allowance has become meaningless unless the workers are able to defeat the policies which create inflation and also are ready to fight against economic dependence.

Unemployment

Comrades, the struggle against inflation has also brought before the country the question of mass unemployment. Registered urban unemployment has reached the colossal figure of 82 lakhs. Rural unemployment is estimated to have reached more than 25 million. The number of educated unemployed is near 4 million. By June 1973, it was 35 lakhs. Between June 1972-1973, registered unemployment rose by 33.5 per cent. A whole nation is being reduced to the status of destitute.

There is no relief, no relaxation unless the right to work and pending it the right to unemployment wage is legally secured.

The official index of wholesale prices has registered an increase of 27 per cent in 1973 over the previous year, while the increase in the price of necessities of life in the retail market has ranged between 50 to 70 per cent and in a few cases even 100%.

Every necessity of life—foodgrains, sugar, oil, vegetables, fish, milk, fuel, has gone beyond the reach of the common man. Deliberate marching inflation combined with small and big shortages have placed the people's livelihood completely under the control of landlords, food speculators, blackmarketeers whom the Govt. dares not offend and who are among its patrons. In last two years, general price increased by 42 per cent and food prices by 47 per cent.

The 1974-75 budget estimates the deficit at Rs. 125 crores which is farcically low considering that several important items like food subsidy has been deliberately understated.

It is therefore not surprising in the least that according to a survey conducted by the All India Consumers' Council, within 10 days of the presentation of the budget, even before the new taxation proposals have come into effect, retail prices of mass consumption goods have risen between 20 to 50 per cent.

There is absolutely nothing in the budget which is anti-inflationary. It conceals the real extent of deficit financing; raises taxes on many articles of common consumption like kerosene; imposes imposts leading to increase in railway freight charges on almost all commodities including coal and passenger fares including third class fares—all of which is bound to move prices forward. Besides, the State Governments levy an additional taxation of Rs. 250 to 300 crores.

While fleecing the people through additional taxation and in-

creased price burdens, the budget grants relief to people with high incomes. It grants steep reduction in personal income-tax to top sections under the plea that it would stop tax evasion.

Appeasement of Landlords

Neither the state budgets nor the Central Budget make any attempt to levy any burden on the landlords who are fleecing the people.

Not only no fiscal measures are taken against the landlord incomes, there is complete failure to procure their surplus stocks and people are placed at their mercy. The pitifully low target of 6.5 million kharif grains could not be reached. Now wheat take over is being officially disbanded and the blackmarketing prices of Rs. 100 to 115 per quintal are being agreed to by the Government. The Govt. dares not commandeer the surplus stocks of the landlords to meet the needs of the people. The freedom to wholesale trade to speculate, the high prices sanctioned and the not so good rabi harvest all will intensify the misery of the people and take food beyond their reach.

It is this dependence on foreign loans that compels the Government to pay fantastic rates of compensation to foreign Companies like ESSO in the name of taking over.

It is necessary for the trade union movement to raise the demand for the nationalisation of foreign oil companies and other monopoly concerns without compensation.

The working class must also be made to understand that the food crisis is the direct result of landlord's monopoly of land and so long as the workers do not wage a relentless struggle for abolishing this monopoly and turns land to the landless and agricultural labourers, they will continue to starve and remain at the mercy of landlords and speculators. The present food crisis must lead to a powerful alliance of workers and peasants for ousting the entire land of all those who own wet land above ten acres and dry above 20 to 30 acres and distributing it to the landless and agricultural labourers.

Commandeer Stocks

At the same time it should be realised that there is absolutely no reason why lakhs should starve today. It is official policies of succumbing to the landlord and the wholesaler that is forcing high prices and starvation on the people. All surplus stocks of landlords should be commandeered, exorbitant prices should not be given

and the peasants should be given an extra incentive price. This will put sufficient stocks in the hands of the Government and it will enable supply of half a kilo of cereals per day for every adult.

Along with this we must raise the demands for need-based wage. As you have seen the inflationary measures have made a mockery of dearness allowance. Unless there is a firm guarantee of need based wage, the living condition of the working class cannot be protected. The Government and its henchmen make it appear that the demand is outrageous in present day Indian conditions, and pit the worker against the agricultural worker. The landlords make it a question of city vs village for they fully know that every advance of the working class in cities will encourage the agricultural workers to push forward their demands.

The need based wage is an elementary democratic right of the working class, it alone will protect him against the vagaries of inflation and the nearer the working class reaches it, the near will come of the collapse of this system whose economic standards are based on old colonial standards.

Against these conditions the workers have been waging one struggle after another from Kerala to Bengal, from Bengal to Bombay and Punjab. The textile strikes of Tamilnadu and Bombay, the jute strike of Calcutta, the strikes of agricultural workers of Kerala, Tamilnadu and other States, the strikes of loco and other railway men, show incessant activity of the working class.

An action of the loco workers in NFR against breach of promise by the management and of the Rly. Guards constitute the latest instances of the surge for struggle among the railway workers.

The movement against high prices, for assertion of minimum economic rights has become all embracing. NGOs, LIC employees, IAC employees Doctors, Engineers, Professors and Teachers have struck work, isolating the Govt. and often winning many victories and advances.

A new feature revealed in the course of these struggles has to be noted and the trade union movement must unitedly fight against it. The prolonged character of working class struggles and the loss of mandays often results from the vindictive use of lock-outs by the capitalists.

Dr. Nag, W. Bengal Labour Minister speaking in the State Assembly on 21st March on work stoppages in 1973 said that there was a rising tendency in the number of mandays lost and the major

percentages of such work stoppages were accounted for by "managements' aggressive action by way of lockout." He said as many as 345,480 mandays were lost owing to situation precipitated by non-implementation of settlements and awards by the managements.

Government Imitates Employers

A recent feature is that the Government has started imitating the worst employers and resorting to lockout to starve the workers into submission. The Lockout in the Indian Airlines Corporation with hundreds denied their earned wages was imposed in the style of the private employers. Under the pressure of starvation, the employees were compelled to surrender individually all trade union rights and accept managements' claims to deal arbitrarily with workers' living conditions as if the workers were chattel.

The same methods were tried in the LIC where hundreds were locked out and where services of the labour lieutenants of the Government like those from the revisionists were hired out to break the resistance of the workers.

The terms of settlement which the IAC authorities asked the Union to sign left nothing unsaid.

The memorandum of settlement demands that the workers agree to observe constitutional means and eschew agitational steps and/or concerted action or any other means which may have the effect of interrupting or disrupting the Corporation work, etc.

This is demanded when the fundamental rights are not yet abrogated under the Constitution. What remains of trade unionism if you cannot agitate, if you cannot take concerted decisions and action, cannot bargain concertedly. Since when agitational steps have become unconstitutional? This is a demand to agree to banning of all propaganda, agitation, strike, a demand that each individual worker may individually represent his case but not in union with his fellow workers.

Consistently with this outlook, the authorities claim arbitrary rights to alter the working conditions of the workers. The memorandum lays down "The workmen concede that there are certain fundamental management functions as enumerated below"—The management from time to time shall lay down the duties and responsibilities of each category of workmen and the workmen shall perform all such duties and all duties incidental and ancillary thereto—The establishment strength including both the number

and designation of posts in the various categories and grades shall be determined by the management—The management will promote employees only when it is necessary to fill up a vacancy in a higher cadre and that too, on the basis of suitability cum seniority.

No worker shall be entitled to take leave as matter of right unless it is sanctioned by a competent authority. Privileged leave shall be admissible on not more than three occasions in the financial year. Any workman may be required to avail such PL as the sanctioning authority may decide on giving him reasonable notice. If leave so offered, is not available of by the workman, he shall forfeit it and his leave account shall be debited accordingly.

What remains of trade unionism and collective bargaining after this?

The Government with nauseating hypocrisy utters phrases about labour's participation in management while their nominees are doing their best to illegalise all trade unions rights and organised movement.

The trade union movement cannot allow this onslaught to succeed. It will be soon extended to unions in the public sector undertakings and then to workers in the private sector.

New Bill

In the light of this, what importance can be attached to the promise of the New Labour Relations Bill whose copy the Labour Minister seems to have sent to all business executives, but not to the CITU.

If press reports are any indication, the Bill includes new provision for recognition, registration, arbitration and efforts to have one union in one industry. We must be quite clear what these slogans mean for the Government. They do not mean the same to them that they mean to us. The Government looks upon the labour question primarily as a law and order question—this is its basic concept. Everything else provides a facade for keeping labour in control. This aspect we daily see when DIR and MISA are applied to working class struggles and workers are killed during strikes.

When the Government and its spokesman talk of one union in one industry they virtually mean that no union other than that approved by them, or controlled by the ruling party or its allies should have any legal existence. This is seen in their obstinate refusal on the Railways till compelled by repeated strikes, to negotiate with any one except the Federation, recognised by them.

That is why they will not accept a genuine ballot of workers but will always claim powers of verification to tilt the balance in favour of their favourites. And having done so they will demand that no other union can now function or be recognised. One union in one industry has no meaning unless the union follows democratic process, is based on the free will of the workers and not on the patronage of the employers and the Government.

All attempts to put new restrictions on the trade union movement in the name of avoiding the evils of multiplicity of unions will fail. The discontent and anger of the workers at the denial of their basic organisational right, their right to forge a weapon of their choice to enforce their demands, will only multiply in reply to such devices. The honest way will be to deal with unions possessing genuine following, instead of using soft union leaders to create disruption among the workers. This will lead to a rapid process of all genuine organisations working democratically coming together and lead to the bargaining agent. It should be realised besides that in the present day conditions in India, where the basic principle like needbased wage is not accepted. when every workers is not guaranteed a certain minimum at least and differentials in wages worked on that basis, the pull of sectional, categorywise and local conditions is bound to be strong, leading to corresponding organisational forms.

New Struggles

Comrades, We are in the midst of great trade union struggles. On the 9th of April, 4 million State employees will embark upon a united one day strike to protest against State Government failure to do justice to their demands. The State employees' conditions are far worse than the Central employees and their demands including parity of conditions with Central employees are just and our CITU fully supports them. It is to be noted that the employees as part of the people have given prominence to the demand for regular supply of food to people at reasonable prices.

Railway Strike

Comrades, another important development is the proposed all-India railway strike. The strike when it materialises will be a historic landmark in the trade union struggle and will immensely strengthen the struggle of all sections of workers and give a push forward to the democratic movement.

The conditions of railway workers are so harrowing that a

strike would have been justified long ago. But the treacherous reformist leadership which hitherto dominated the Federation saw to it that no resistance was organised.

The railway workers have been discriminated against in the matter of pay and living conditions. Their railway wages have been far lower than in other industries. Various categories of skilled or semi-skilled or highly skilled staff do not get a wage corresponding to the minimum wage prevalent in many organised industries, private and public sector.

In spite of these discriminating conditions, with the real wage going down, the productivity of the railway workers has been rapidly increasing. The following figures from the official publication "Review of the Performance of Railways 1973-74" are eloquent:

	Traffic units (000) moved per employee on the open line
1950-51	122
1960-61	147
1970-71	186
1972-72	193
1972-73	200

In short, productivity has increased by 60 per cent since 1950-51. Each employee is contributing fifty per cent more in production effort than before. But his real wage has gone down. This is the meaning of his explanation, of the sweated Labour to which i.e., is subjected.

The same increased workload and sweated hours of work are to be found in workshop, imposed under the so-called incentive scheme. "Workshop repair output increased from about 335,000 equated broad gauge wagon units in 1957-58 to about 469,562 equated broad gauge wagon units in 1972-73, while staff strength came down from about 116,000 men in 1957-58 to about 111,634 men in 1972-73 of which 64,447 men are employed on other than rolling stock repairs...." It means with a reduction of 9 per cent in the staff, the workers are producing fifty per cent more than before.

The railway workers were chafing under these conditions of starvation wages and sweated labour. But the leaders of the recognised Federation refused to champion their cause and acted as a strike-breaking agency. But conditions became unbearable and large sections of workers began to break away from the two

Federations whose leadership was working hand in glove with the Railway Board..

The leadership of the two Railway Federations and the Railway Board united to malign and crush the rising discontent. But then the simmering discontent asserted inside the All India Railway men's Federation at its annual session in September. A demand came for a genuine call for strike action and one of the confirmed strike breaking leaders, Peter Alvares, President of the Federation was removed from the post and George Fernandes elected in his place.

A resolution for strike was passed and the delegates moved an amendment to the General Secretary's report calling that the AIRF should take initiative to call all railway organisations together.

There were prejudices and vacillations in other organisations also. Many of their leaders mindful of the past of the AIRF leaders, and some of them victims of narrow craft outlook wanted to hold off. But the urge for unity in the ranks broke down all resistance and all joined the historic convention of all Railway organisations called by the AIRF in Delhi on 27th February.

The Convention passed a resolution spelling out urgent demands including need-based wage, and immediate grant of a minimum of Rs. 260: It gave the 10th April as the time limit for negotiations. It appointed a co-ordinating committee of all organisations represented and a small executive Committee with two representatives from each organisations including the CITU (Com. Samar Mukherjee, Treasurer of CITU and Com. Nrisingha Chakraborty, Member of General Council represent us on the Committee.)

This unity which was eluding the railway workers for decades is an important and historic development. There is no doubt that much remains to be done to transform the unity achieved at the top into an impregnable unity at the bottom.

It is a matter of some satisfaction to us that our CITU comrades have played their part and an important and vital part in helping forward this unity, in fighting sectional prejudices and overcoming the reformist efforts to continue disruption.

Central Convention

The AIRF leaders also called a convention of all Central employees to explore the possibilities of co-ordinate action.

With the AIRF initiative a new impulse for action was given.

The general atmosphere was such that the revisionist wing of the Confederation and P & T also joined the convention and agreed to a unanimous resolution which though it has avoided the word "strike", calls upon all organisations to complete negotiations by 10th April—the time limit set by the AIRF. This unanimous resolution does help the Central employees though it is a moot question whether the reformist P & T wing will throw its full weight for common action.

However, Central employees' organisations and their leaders are earnestly endeavouring to co-ordinate their action with the railway workers and face the Government with the biggest working class action for need-based wage and other urgent demands.

This is one of the outstanding development that is taking place. The CITU and all its organisations are bound to throw their full strength in support of the struggle of the railway workers and Central employees. Our unions must help this vast section in daily propaganda and agitation, organise solidarity meetings and educate the public about the justness of their demands. It must call all sections of workers to stand solidly behind them and warn the Government against repressive measures.