

The Sixth Conference of CITU

THE Sixth All India Conference of the CITU met in the midst of an explosive economic and political situation. The years since the last conference saw the growth of these explosive elements and saw the CITU Unions carrying on a fight against the new challenging forces, the divisive and disintegrating forces and widespread economic distress arising from unemployment, closures and lack-outs.

Struggle Against the Divisive Forces

The General Secretary's report and the speeches of the delegates gave ample evidence of CITU's relentless fight against the divisive forces and against attacks on jobs and living standard.

So many of our comrades in Tripura, Assam, Punjab and the Darjeeling district fell fighting these forces and defending national unity. The murder of our young Comrade Dhawan from Punjab while the session was in progress warned the delegates that the old peaceful period in which problems of the nation could be taken at leisure was over once for all and the working class has to be in the fore front to defend unity.

This was the experience of several states while other unions and state committees were combating the growth of anti-national fissiparous tendencies in the old way. How some of our unions mobilised the people in the midst of the murderous attacks, is seen from the report of the Punjab CITU State Committee. Moving in face of widespread terrorist attacks and the orgies of murder "the Punjab State Committee of CITU conducted a state wide campaign

to expose and isolate the Khalistani terrorists, to prepare the industrial workers and people at large for waging a determined struggle for the preservation of the unity and integrity of the country and to mount a massive offensive against communalism of whatever variety. In the course of this campaign travelling the length and breadth of the state the CITU jathas covered 41 small and big towns and the CITU leaders addressed sixty rallies, approaching in the process lakhs of people, industrial workers, employees and middle class people belonging to both the principal communities—Hindus and Sikhs. The CITU undertook this campaign in a grim situation of escalating terrorist violence in the state, with terrorist gangs armed to the teeth taking a heavy toll of human lives. This was the situation when the left, especially the CPI(M) has been singled out as a special target of the extremist fury, the two of its leaders having fallen to the terrorist bullet in the preceding weeks and few others having escaped by a whisker."

The CITU unions in the states mentioned above have been in the forefront of the struggle against the forces of national disruption. Many workers have sacrificed their lives in this sacred cause. This was the new situation after the Kanpur Conference and the Sixth Conference took full note of it.

In other states the CITU unions had to fight communal and chauvinist forces. In West Bengal and Kerala the working class and its unions under the guidance of CPI(M) were able to defeat the communal forces. In other states the unions have often intervened but their intervention was not effective.

Notable has been the fight put up by the Tamilnadu State Committee of the CITU against the attempts to rouse passions and chauvinism on the issue of Tamils in Srilanka and the dangerous slogan of military intervention. In 1982, "when attack on Tamils intensified to massacre in Srilanka and the arrival of refugees in India increased, Tamilnadu people were justifiably worried and even angry. Chauvinistic forces led by DMK started using it for their ends. Vying with the DMK was also a good number of AIADMK leaders. All of them including CPI and AITUC leaders demanded direct intervention of the Indian army. CITU and other fraternal organisations had to face this situation and go on an extensive campaign against the demand while condemning the inhuman attacks against the Tamils." The State CITU had also to conduct a wide campaign against linguistic fanaticism disrupting

the unity of the working class and the country.

It will be seen that the conference met in the background of the solid work to fight the divisive forces. Very few central trade union organisations and their unions can boast of this continuous fight for unity on the part of working class and unions and their leadership. And without the growing and effective intervention of this class national unity cannot be saved.

This provides a new picture of the working class intervention to solve national problems in contrast to the earlier situation when it confined itself wholly to its immediate demands.

Struggle for Peace

The conference took note of the international situation and the increased war danger. It praised the Soviet initiative for peace and noted the weakness of the peace movement in our country. It denounced US imperialist for its SDR project and their refusal to enter into meaningful negotiation for curbing the nuclear arms race. It praised the achievements of the Socialist countries—Soviet Union, People's China, GDR and others, and the new endeavours and steps to utilise the full advantages of the socialist system and the industrial, technological revolution.

Relations with Neighbouring Countries

But perhaps no previous session of the CITU conference had to devote such close attention to the developments concerning the countries in the subcontinent. The question of international solidarity of workers of the sub-continent and maintenance of peace and good neighbourly relations between the countries of the sub-continent has become an urgent issue in the recent times. The conference took note of it. Its resolution on Relations with Neighbouring Countries said, "The Sixth Conference of CITU expresses its grave concern over the deteriorating relations between India and her two neighbours—Pakistan and Srilanka. It warns the people of the three countries that US imperialism is out to exploit the situation to create further alienation in order to achieve its objective of dominating the countries of the sub-continent. Only the combined efforts of the working class and the people of these three countries can beat back the offensive and protect their freedom."

In connection with Sri Lanka it says, "The ensuing tension is being used by the imperialists and their allies to spread themselves in the Ireland kingdom under the guise of help to Sri Lankan Gov-

ernment. This creates the danger to the security of both the countries, Sri Lanka and India. It is urgent that the political solution is found to the Tamil problem to restore the atmosphere of friendship between the two countries and ensure their security."... "The CITU stands for a political solution of the Tamil problem within the framework of Sri Lanka's integrity and sovereignty."... "The conference sends its fraternal greetings to the people of Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It expresses confidence that working class solidarity will succeed in warding off the common danger."

Non-Aligned Foreign Policy

The conference also warned the working class about reactionary attempts against the country's foreign policy of non-alignment. The warning was necessary in view of increased pressure against non-alignment arising from the effect of the new economic policy and the machinations of the imperialists and their allies. The conference asked the unions to remain vigilant regarding the policy of non-alignment, checking official vacillations and fighting the design of India's reactionary political parties. It also emphasised the importance of Indo-Soviet treaty of friendship for the defence and security of India.

The two resolutions gave concrete guidance to the unions and workers on how to fight national chauvinism, protect international solidarity and defend independent foreign policy.

Significance of Victories in Kerala and West Bengal

The conference hailed the two electoral victories of Kerala and West Bengal and registered their political importance in the working class and people's struggle against the Congress(I) misrule. The two victories it said, were victories against the communal, anti-national forces and the assertion of class and national unity.

The fact that inspite of Muslim communal propaganda on Shah Bano issue, huge Muslim masses in West Bengal voted for the CPI(M) and the left front is not only a tribute to the performance of the Left front ministry but a powerful indication of class and national unity nurtured through common struggle. It at the same time warned that the dissatisfaction arising from Cong(I) mis-rule was being diverted into anti-national channels helping the destabilising conspiracies of the imperialists. It warned against the treacherous attitude of some bourgeois opposition parties who belittled the danger and objectively helped its plan for destabilising and disintegrating the country. The conference also noted that

the Cong(I) talks of destabilisation only when it is in danger of loosing the confidence of the people.

Serious Economic Situation

The Conference took note of the serious economic situation and the distressing conditions faced by the workers.

Lock outs closures, lay-offs, dismissals, massive unemployment, attacks on living standards, collapse of labour legislations, looting of workers' provident funds, repression of struggle, massive discriminatory attacks against working women and utterly helpless conditions of the unorganised workers—these are conditions against which the CITU unions have been fighting.

Their fights have been prolonged and their sacrifices have been immense. From police repression to goonda murder attacks—everything has been used to suppress the CITU unions. Sometimes units of fraternal organisations have joined against this police hunt against us. The CITU has grown. It has grown because it was guided by correct outlook and has the courage to defend the interests of workers at all costs. No other organisation can claim such a powerful and consistent record of unremitted struggle.

The trade union struggle conducted by the CITU in the rapidly changing situation is also now entering a new phase. The CITU has been repeatedly asking the trade union movement to overcome its exclusive concern with immediate economic demands and turn to questions of policy to anticipate attacks on the daily living condition. Now during the course of the last three years because of economic crisis, the closures and lockouts, the call for nationalisation of jute and cotton textile industries has become a live slogan of action for thousands of workers. Under stress of circumstances the slogan has been supported by almost by all trade union centres and in West Bengal it is supported by all political parties including the Cong(I).

The CITU was the first to raise the question of the defence of the public sector against the liquidationist policies of Rajiv Government. Once more seeing the imminent danger the workers came out in defence of the Public Sector and intervened to oppose official policy. The support to nationalisation of jute and textile industries and the defence of the public sector are the first steps which the working class is taking to wage a battle for a national policy. This is a result of the continuous fight waged by the CITU in the last three, four years.

On Trade Union Unity

The CITU unions not only individually fought for workers' interests but guided by the CITU they have been waging an unremitted struggle for growing trade union unity. The messages and speeches delivered at the CITU session by fraternal delegates from AITUC, HMS, BMS and UTUC also reflected the great desire for trade union unity which is now accepted by almost all important trade union centres. But whatever has been achieved today is to a large extent the result of the activities of the CITU unions, their initiatives, and their patient work to overcome the obstacles created by units of other organisations. The report of the General Secretary contains many complaints by the State Committees about the difficulties in trade union unity created by the constituents of some all India organisations. There were complaints that these constituents while not opposing the call for united action coming from the National Campaign Committee, at the same time refused to throw their mass in the common activities. This often restricted the sweep of the united action and obstructed its progress. The CITU unions therefore had to attach great importance to their independent initiative and action in the struggle for unity. Big results of course were produced where the CITU initiative was matched by equal initiative on the part of others. The tendency of many CITU unions to depend on initiative of others or to wait till the others move into action is harmful. The CITU conference called upon its unions to continue to develop initiatives for common united action.

Confederation

Assessing the results of its struggle for unity the conference appreciated the role of the National Campaign Committee, but expressed its opinion that achievements of unity fell far short of the needs of the movements. Its resolution on Trade Union Unity said : "The Conference is of the opinion that the achievements of the united struggle are far from being commensurate with the needs of the movement. They have not yet succeeded in creating an impact on official policies and the policies of the employing class... The present constitution of the NCC with its focus on few central organisations requires to be very much broadened to ensure equality and effective participation of industrial federations and others, so that mass activities at various levels in various industries can be coordinated."

Taking into consideration the fragmented character of the Indian trade union movement, the absence of one central organisation guiding the entire trade union activities and the existence of different outlook towards the aims and objective of the trade union movement the CITU reiterated its earlier call for a Confederation of all trade union centres and federations where decisions will be taken unanimously and free discussions on matters affecting labour and economic policies of the country can be carried on. This will ensure a continuous dialogue between all sections of the trade union movement and will help creating a cohesive outlook towards certain problems of immediate importance. This continuous dialogue and growth of cohesive outlook will immensely strengthen the capacity of the labour movement to influence the country's economic policy. At present there is no other way of gathering the various organisations of middle class employees, factory workers and others in a common organisation except the one proposed by the CITU. This is necessary today because the National Campaign Committee itself is unable to gather all the forces of trade union movement and therefore further steps need to be taken. A fight has to be carried out against all those individuals who seek to keep away the trade union organisations from the common stream.

On Working Women

But an important feature of this Conference was the attention it devoted to overcome the weaknesses in the functioning of the CITU unions which are becoming a big handicap in its struggle for mobilising the workers. The Session pinpointed some of its weaknesses and decided to take immediate steps to remedy them. For long the CITU has been asking its unions to take the question of working women, fight against discriminatory practice towards them and secure their effective participation in running the trade unions. But unfortunately though some State Committees like the Tamilnadu State Committee did take significant steps in this direction the major part of the CITU committees either ignored the problem or made some cosmetic changes in their practices. It was therefore decided by the working Committee to involve the entire conference in the discussion of the problem. A special report on the question of working women was presented to the conference. Apart from enumerating discriminatory policies of the employers and the government towards working women it also revealed step motherly treatment given by the trade union leadership to working

women and their problems. It also showed how this attitude led to ineffective participation of women in the activities of the trade unions and their failure to occupy important positions in the unions. Earlier the CITU Secretariat had asked all State Committees to increase the strength of women's delegation and this time the number of women delegates was much higher than before. An entire day was devoted to the discussion of the report and 19 women took part in the discussion. It is necessary to note that except for the State of Tamilnadu no male delegates participated in the discussion.

It was thought to be a concern only of women. The speeches of women delegates also were not always up to the mark. Some talked about women's problems in general and some gave account of work among women. There were enough delegates among the women who could have spoken on the working women's conditions in their industries, and also on the attitude of the trade unions. It seems that the state leaders did not give much attention while choosing the speakers. Another thing to be noted is that for the discussion on the General Secretary's report not one state thought it fit to put up a woman comrade though some of the states had four or five speakers. All this show that the attitude towards the working women requires a drastic change. Nonetheless, the one day discussion, the informations and points raised in the special report and the speeches of women comrades—all should activate our trade unions to move in the proper direction. During the last few years, some initiatives and steps have been taken by the State Committees, but they constitute only a conscious face saving change.

Unemployment, Unorganised Labour, Minorities in Trade Union

The other shortcomings related to the question of the unemployed, the neglect of unorganised workers, lack of democratic functioning and special efforts to draw into the trade unions workers from the minority communities and the Harijans. All these have become very urgent problems in recent years, but the CITU unions have failed to pay proper attention to them. Thereby they have unremotingly restricted trade union appeal and the scope of the trade union movement. Even now by and large the CITU unions like the rest of the trade unions in the country confine themselves mostly to the defence of the wages of the permanent workers leaving out the defence of the temporary and non-perma-

nent workers and other sections mentioned above. The CITU again warned the unions that in the present condition it will be fatal to the trade union movement if it continues to neglect the all important problems of the unemployed and neglect the defence of the temporary workers in unorganised industries.

Taking note of the situation, the resolution on Unemployment drew the attention of the State Committees and the unions to the "vital task of organising the unemployed labour force which is a part of the working class", and called for launching direct actions with direct demands for the unemployed. It said, "The Conference draws the attention of the State Committees and the unions to the urgent necessity of mobilising the army of both the urban and rural unemployed in action programmes as an essential part of the organised trade union movement. Raising direct demands for incorporating the right to work as a fundamental right in the Constitution and payment of relief to the unemployed will rouse the confidence of this vital section of the labour force to come into the main stream of the trade union movement and fight the Government's policies unitedly with the employed. The Conference asks the State Committees to convene conferences of the unemployed and demand on their behalf adequate unemployment relief and right to work as a fundamental right in the Constitution. The Conference further asks the unions and the State Committees to organise joint demonstrations of the employed and unemployed workers in support of these demands."

Alliance with the Peasantry and Agricultural Workers

Another area of major weakness which the conference noted was the indifference and callousness of the trade union movement towards the peasantry and agricultural workers. Noting this lack and calling for solidarity actions in their support, the resolution said, "It however points out that the trade union movement stands isolated from the mass of the peasantry and the agricultural workers and the solidarity actions have been only of a token nature. The Conference therefore calls upon the State Committees to take further initiatives to forge alliance with the peasantry and agricultural workers and lead the struggles championing their demands."

There is no doubt that the discussion in the conference and the important resolutions adopted will enable the CITU unions to break through their old practices and orient themselves in the new directions to mobilise the full strength of the working class and

achieve wider successes for trade union unity.

It is absolutely essential that these shortcomings are quickly overcome for it appears now that the working class is getting ready for another stormy period. The number of mandays lost in lock-outs and strikes has been decreasing since 1982. But it now appears that the working class is getting ready for another period of resistance which will require much greater organisation to ensure that its actions result in achievements. A reorientated trade union movement taking issues of national importance and issues of economic policy will definitely play a very big role in influencing national developments, if it is backed by widening trade union unity. The CITU Conference has therefore asked its unions to get ready to meet the responsibilities by overcoming the shortcomings.

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