

Concluding Speech

General Council Meeting,
Calcutta, March 31-April, 1986

I close the session. I want to say, on behalf of all of you, we convey our thanks to the West Bengal CITU, our comrades here and our volunteers who have provided you with a place of our own to hold the meeting and also made excellent arrangements about the rest. Of course you need not expect anything else in West Bengal. So they will perhaps think that the thanks are also superfluous. But thanks are also an investment. So we thank them again. That is the first part.

Now, our discussions have been fruitful in this sense that comrades are not losing the habit of making extempore speeches. When you have nothing to say you, say with greater force. But when you have something to say you say with proper balance and prepared argumentation. So to a certain extent discussion produced some results because people have thought about the subject that they are speaking and secondly because some earlier work has been put in. Now to start with you all must understand that our movement, CITU, has not yet adjusted itself to the new situation that has been developing in our country in the last few years. You were not taking it seriously, that our main CITU activities are confined to defending the wage emoluments of permanent workers. One of the reasons perhaps, and I am only guessing, perhaps why your membership does not reflect the influence you are wielding is precisely because that your main activity is confined to meeting the needs of a certain important section, that during the

last few years from your own report you find that more and more, larger and larger number of workers are in the category of non-permanent workers, either contract labourers or hired labourers or workers treated as casual workers who have been denied of a lot of concessions and legitimate dues, and these are the workers who do not have the close relationship with the trade unions which the permanent workers have. When we have repeatedly said that the composition of the working class is changing in the sense that the permanent workers are becoming a smaller force compared with the earlier days and the non permanent or casual workers are becoming a bigger and bigger force. This is part of the crisis. The crisis, one part of passing the burden on the working class is to deprive it of its legitimate rights without violation of any legal status. So if you put them in the casual category, non-permanent category, contract labour category, so many concessions which have been won ever since independence are lost. This is the same thing that is happening in Western countries. In Western countries now as we have seen here in the USA itself, there are now unlicensed industries operating, underground industries, secret industries, industries which therefore have nothing to pay except the minimum wages that they are paying, and neither the worker complains nor the owner wants to complain. The worker does not complain because he has job. That is the thing, This exactly is the particular method of passing on the burden to the workers by removing his status as a permanent worker by denying many of his legal rights. This has been going on for so many years. But our old method of trade unionism confines itself mainly in the permanent workers and their emoluments. It is because this was the earlier tradition of the British days. During the British days there was virtually no law protecting the workers, no ESI, no leave with pay, no provident fund, not even the statutory regulation of wage. The only wage regulation they made was the cutting of wage for 8 days for one day's strike, under the Payments of Wages Act. Therefore every trade union struggle was essentially centered on the wage question. That was in the colonial condition. Later on things have changed, legislation has come, permanent workers developed, industries developed, a new section of working class also developed. But as the crisis came, just you find in the case of women workers, in order to avoid maternity benefits thousands of women were retrenched. In the coal mines, women were finished. In the

Bombay textile industry I do not know whether there are any women now. Very few are there. For the simple thing to avoid maternity benefits, a massacre of women's jobs has been made. Then the question of on permanent youth worker. In Bombay, I was repeatedly pointing out, Dutta Samant's success depended on this, exactly this non-permanent youth worker. Now this particular thing we are not addressing ourselves. Therefore, we are finding that the trade union movement is repeatedly coming to halt. Second point, most of you have never seen such an economic crisis. We have seen it in 1930, when at one time 40 per cent of the textile workers in Bombay were unemployed. Out of 1,20,000 workers nearly 50 thousands or 60 thousands were unemployed. There was a general feeling of despondency, at the same time the feeling of despondency again and again combined with militancy, so much so that the Govt, British Govt. of India was completely misled. In 1934 when this was the position, of 40 per cent workers unemployed, we had to give a call for All India Textile strike. The Government of India asked the Govt. of Bombay not to arrest the communist leaders. They said no strike will come and they will be discredited. The Govt. of Bombay reported to the Govt. of India, we do not think so. We want to arrest them. They said don't touch them, let them be discredited and in two days there was a big strike. Still it has come to this thing that the workers knew that we cannot resist. But after all we have to resist. So today we will go on strike and in another 24 hours go back to work.

It is going to be a still more difficult period. Still more difficult because if they succeed, and most probably they will succeed in introducing lot of modernisation and computerisation even if the economic situation takes a better turn from the present, major part of the unemployed will not be absorbed as it is happening in the United States of America and other countries. Therefore the situation we are facing is a very difficult situation and if you go along with it I think that was happening earlier—some face saving device, some success here, tomorrow you can boast of a little victory—that is not coming, a very grim struggle is coming. One very dangerous situation which I have been repeatedly drawing your attention to but you are not at all responding to this is that the dangerous situation is this that there is not a huge block of unemployed workers who have nothing to do with the trade union movement. In 1934 when we said 40 per cent of the workers are on

the street unemployed, but they were our members at one time, they had that loyalty to the trade unions. So even though they were starving for days and months when the textile strike was on, not one of them would go back because they were unemployed. But this is the mass of workers who stands alienated from the trade union movement, a large part of which never had any job. A large part of which even if it had some job had never had any relationship with the trade union and it does not look upon the trade union as its protector. On the other hand it looks upon with jealousy for those who have got jobs. Four years back in the city of Ahmedabad the unemployed workers were used to give a thorough beating to the bank employees. When these fellows demand overtime and kill our jobs, finish them, they said. This is likely to happen if the trade union movement does not develop close ties with the unemployed workers. If the unemployed workers do not feel that even today if anybody who is talking in his name, if anybody who is prepared to help him or get some temporary relief for him, it is this organised movement of the trade union, if that confidence is not created, and that link is not created, then the future of the trade union movement is very dark. Unfortunately you do not seem to realise. The way in which problem of unemployment is talked about here, the way in which resolution are passed in our conferences, at Kanpur and even before that, repeatedly drawing attention to the danger of the unemployment situation, no State Committees, nobody does anything serious about it. It is the sign of worst type of reformism. This type of reformism demarcated the Social Democratic Labour Party reformists in Europe from the Communists. In my speech I have already tried to tell you what it means, that the trade union movement and the capitalist class joined together in passing on the burdens of the crisis on the unemployed. That the trade union movement and the capitalist class joined together in passing on the burdens of the crisis on the unemployed. That the trade union movement and the employed workers joined together in making the unemployed the scapegoat of the economic crisis. If this situation continue, day by day you will find that the permanent workers are going out, his place is not being taken up by anybody and then you will come to realise that your circle is narrowing everyday, and a hostile unemployed class becoming an instrument of the worst kind of divisive forces. If it is not tied with the working class and its class struggle, if its consciousness is not elevated by the

ideology of class struggle, if you are not able to foster the spirit of class unity among it, it goes eventually to anything. One simple instance is what happened in Ahmedabad for months together with 14 factories closed, the untouchable and touchable workers fighting each other for reservation. This question of reservation came, why? Lack of jobs. The unemployed can be mobilised against the jobs being taken by the untouchables and the untouchables can be mobilised when the jobs are taken by others. The CITU has been blaming the government for everything about unemployment. We quote the figures from First Five Year Plan to 7th Plan. You may be able to quote the same figures up to the Tenth Plan. But by the Tenth Plan nothing would remain of the trade union movement.

These have to be taken very seriously. In no country the revolutionary trade union or militant trade union movement neglects the problem of the unemployed. That is, the reformist idea of not treating the unemployed as part of our class continues and therefore this danger. This is one point. Now during this May Day Celebration when you talk about the right to work, it is not simply a question of addressing some factory gate meetings and talking to the employed workers about the right to work. The message of right to work must reach the unemployed workers, that the trade unions are fighting that the right should be there and they have a right to work and that right should be embodied in the constitution. You must take steps to see that a beginning should be made to call conferences of the unemployed, to prepare their charter of demands, to see that some immediate relief is given, so that atleast a section of the unemployed got attracted towards the trade union movement, towards the organised trade union movement. They are a very important section of our class. We cannot neglect them. The trade union movement must turn towards them. Then we can neglect them only at our own peril.

Second question comrades, which is of equal importance is the question of working women. I had just met the comrades—the Working women. We called a meeting of the members of the co-ordination committees at Trivandrum. One young comrade said she could not attend that meeting because there was a dispute in Tamil Nadu as to who should pay her fare. The total neglect is there. Though some improvement is there, much more has to be done. Really no serious attempt is made by any state committee to take it as a real problem of the CITU of uniting the working class.

What does it mean. It means a reformist or feudal attitude in which you see only one third of the aspect of the whole. When you look at a woman she has three aspects. One, she is a woman, second she is a citizen, third she is a part of the working class. You want to neglect the citizen part and the working class part and reduce her to a woman. And once you reduce her to a woman, you say, she is to be in the house, why does she come out. There were people in Kerala. I do not know now if they are there, when our union or the women suggested that they should not be employed in night shift, they objected to it. Kerala is a state of contradictions. On the one hand advance some thing, tremendous anti-caste movement etc., but all castes, all religions agree on one thing, that women should have inferior status. Whether it is Hindu, Muslim, Christians, Ezhavas, Nairs, Namboodiris everybody. On, I forget, our communists, what is happening you understand. We heard it in Madras that the splitters of the working class movement are not keeping quiet. they have already started their activities among women and also among working women. There is every chance that in the coming few months or years you will see attempts being made of separate organisations women's unions, because the trade unions do not take up their questions at all. Recently in a deputations. I think in Delhi when some women's organisations saw one officials. and pointed about some immediate problems of working women, the officer laughed. He said, Yes yes this is a question but no trade unions approached him for this. In this building of trade union unity and unity of the working class we have not said it should be minus the working women. This weakness has to be overcome. Repeatedly we are pointing out but not much headway has been made.

Thirdly, comrades, some kind of understanding and estimation of our united front activities has been made by the comrades. But it is not enough. The question remains that in spite of our united front activities and in spite of our following a correct line, taking initiative, the following of other organisations does not change much, and the co-relation of forces does not change. Their followers go there and our followers remain with us. this perhaps is the position in a large number of cases. Why? It has also been told, earlier, that this will remain the position because the days are gone when trade unions belonging or controlled by other parties or other organisations were foolish enough to openly oppose strikes. It is quite clear

when some union openly oppose a strike, it becomes a Strike Breaker. The days are over when by-passing the left trade unions these other fellows could do something. No they must move with them. If the ordinary workers see that the other trade unions are moving with you on a number of issues, sometimes lasting through strikes, not exposing themselves, then why should they change the allegiance. What is the snag here. The snag is that in the present day conditions of the tactics of trade union reformists, trade union reformism cannot be exposed in terms of trade union tactics or trade union criticism, unless there is political explanation and political exposure, of the ideology etc. which takes some time. This was pointed out 10 years earlier that in earlier days the reformism meant opposition to militant trade unionism, meant you only oppose strike. Now they are clever. So the idea of unity and struggle, when only unity remains and the ideological struggle, the ideological demarcation on various issues lag behind. We have not declared truce with all the ideological luggage which these people carry. But nonetheless the struggle must go on. In our resolution there was a phrase which you have passed. The phrase now the INTUC is forced to join hands with us. When the INTUC is joining hands why do you use the word forced. The main point is that when you are examining the results of your united front activities in terms of our trade union struggle for trade union unity, you must put before us, put before yourselves all the aspects of our struggles for trade union unity, that the struggle for trade union unity does not mean freezing the existing relations between various organisations as they are but that struggle for unity means day by day changing the co-relation of forces with the revolutionary line getting better preponderance over workers and the other line gradually receding. This thing cannot be achieved only on the basis of correct trade union tactics. Correct trade union tactics are required, they must be supplemented and aided and re-inforced by a running demarcation on several issues so that in the course of the struggle by the partners of the trade union front, the limitations of others are seen by the workers. The earlier process of awakening was on the question of strike itself. When some preparations came the others deserted. then we say, yes, one told you they are Dalals and everybody accepts. Situation is not so simple today. The situation requires a demarcation and explanation of the politics in the course of the struggle, The CITU had to do it in connection with

the DMK on the question of Sri Lanka. I am still to come across a proper review of our trade union activity, of big struggles, which estimate our activity, which estimate our success in uniting the workers. We have at the same time to estimate our success in advancing our ideology and making the other ideology recede. You have to take into consideration that all the aspects of the struggle for trade union unity is not simply a gathering of members, is not simply a gathering of various organisations for general effect, but it is a question of changing the class consciousness of the workers themselves so that those who are under reformism gradually come under our revolutionary line. This have to be remembered.

It is a hard battle but unless it is done you will not be in a position to change the co-relation of forces. In this connection another thing is to be observed. It is in the resolution. It seems if the govt's statistics are correct, very big number of strike actions of working class are conducted by unions and organisation which are not affiliated to any central organisation. The other day I saw the figures. The strikes conducted by the INTUC are perhaps 2.1%, the strike conducted by AITUC 1.5%, those conducted by HMS 0.5%, our number is not given. perhaps bigger than theirs, then something like 29% or 30 % strikes, they did not ascribe to any particular organisation, but a number of organisations jointly conducting it, perhaps AITUC, INTUC, perhaps ours whatever it is. But the largest number of strikes according to them is conducted by organisations with no affiliation to any organisations. It shows you see, the class is active and we are unable to reach it. We are unable to intervene and we are not conscious also. Now we understand that if all our partners in the National Campaign Committee are taken, together, all together conducted even less than 40% or 50% of the strikes and the rest are conducted by unions affiliated to nobody. Then even our united activity through the National Campaign Committee, etc. has limited scope, though important they are. Unless you think in terms of the entire class and its unity, this lacunae, this weakness can never be overcome. But we do not examine whatever is not in our hand, nothing in our hand, So it will be a really illusory thing if we really think that the National Campaign Committee really represents the entire working class. We have to reach to working class yet.

We have repeatedly said that the National Campaign Com-

mittee has lost its earlier momentum, That is true. Why? If the mass is on the move they reflect the mood of the mass, if the mass is little depressed they reflect the depressed mood of the mass. With so much massacre of jobs with so much attack on the working class, so much unemployment, the constituents of the National Campaign Committee feel, including the AITUC, that direct action by the working class is no answer to the present situation. Therefore, there is hesitation in sanctioning direct actions. What is happening now is that the hesitation is now seen in two different ways. On recent occasions whenever a meeting of the political parties was there, generally the hesitation is now seen in two different ways. On recent occasions whenever a meeting of the political parties was there, generally the hesitation among the opposition parties was to sanction any action, and when they don't decide what action to sanction then they say we are for it, but ask the National Campaign Committee. Again in the National Campaign Committee the constituents generally take a stand of avoiding action. It is natural. there is nothing surprising about it when you are working in co-operation with a number of unions which have not the same outlook in times of economic attacks. in times of economic depression, they should not be very enthusiastic about actions, Therefore, they are suggesting ineffective ways, expressing some kind of actions like some dharna. All these have got their use if in the end you are working for some mass action, otherwise they become a substitute for mass action.

At present they are moving more or less like that. It all amounts to this that unless you are in a position to give a better push, create some condition, create some atmosphere that things are moving, they won't get the confidence that things will really be moved, That with the tremendous attack of the economic crisis and the existing condition of the workers, some trade union organisations feel lack of confidence in saying that the working class will move forward. Now inspite of all these things if we take the statistics, the same working class is going in for direct action. Some up and down is there. But for the last 10 years, only perhaps last year's figures shows that more than one million workers have gone on strike. Inspite of all the difficulties, more than a million workers striking work is what the working class is supposed to do as an advanced class. It cannot rest like that, If every year more than a million workers have struck work, how much of them we have led

all over India? Because jobs are difficult to get, so even among the workers there is certain amount of hesitation which is bound to be. But they cannot escape it also and therefore the strikes come out. The proper mood of the workers we must know. We should give them the slogans in advance. The pot is boiling. It just boiled once, again it gets a little low, again it will boil over. The situation is going to be worsen. It will appear as if nothing can be done in the situation. But nonetheless the working class will be putting up a fight but because it has no alternative. The trade union movement, our movement has to estimate these things, take these into consideration. In many cases it happened that in factories where we have got a union, the union itself does not know what is happening and suddenly the workers want strike. Spontaneous developments. So this particular thing has to be taken into consideration when we talk about our independent activity, initiative etc., we have to take both these into consideration. On one hand a section of the workers is circumspect about going into any direct action, at the same time the attacks also are multifarious and the workers are pushed forward. These things we have to lead with consistent independent initiative. Independent initiative is not meant to expose the other partners. The independent initiative is meant to see that the vacillating partner gets some additional confidence so that they also join and broaden the movement, and see that all the more larger sections are coming forward with the alliance. The crisis is affecting all trade unions. It has affected the INTUC also. Perhaps there are groups in it now on question of policy also. One section of leadership even want to join hands with us. Once it joined hand with us in coal also. A very important thing. INTUC was founded to fight us. Sardar Patel's soul will get disturbed if he finds that the same INTUC joining hand with us. But this is what is happening. But this also we said that unity of trade unions is not our trick, is not our tactics. It is the urgent class demand which is already there and day by day the working class is going ahead with this is what is wanted. Since the CITU was founded the situation has changed. When the CITU was founded there was every danger that our CITU comrades and leaders would consider the AITUC and Dange being their only class enemies. So immediately we gave a call for unity week. We wanted to tell comrades that this will not be reformism, but we will have to have unity with them to fight the class enemy. After that they did not want to have anything to do with us, we

were shunt back but for after all since we have separated from them we will not respond. Since Dange issued the call for all trade union meeting Dange though we will not go. We went. P. Ramamurthi, Mahanand Desai and Satish Lamba were appointed as convenors of the committee to further the call. And then they sabotaged the whole thing. Then we continued. Then again when we gave the call for unity and from very unexpected sources our hands were strengthened. United Council of Trade Unions, in which George Fernandes was also there, P & T struggles were there. Actually it enabled us to take part in that Railway struggle. So AITUC was also on the border. They could not join us. We persisted. It is through persistence like this, because it was the need of the working class we have come to the present stage in which the basic change is this that, our strength has increased and therefore unless we take the initiative nothing moves. And if anybody wants any action they cannot by-pass us. We have become a very vital and effective element in any kind of effective trade union unity and effective trade union activity. This is the position won by us through continuous struggle for trade union unity responding to the situation inside the working class. Having come to this stage we cannot forget that our partners have got tremendous limitations and unless we act as the motive power to take them forward, if we simply say now everything is over and we will wait on others to set the pace, you lost the game. Therefore, if the momentum has gone, we can see that the momentum can come back. But more and more depends on our activity, our understanding of the situation and our being comprehensive of what is the mood existing among the workers. Now the other problems which are there, comrades, the National Campaign Committees problems which are there. Comrades, on the National Campaign Committee problems, we have move very carefully. There was a time in the course of the National Campaign Committee when if we had fallen victims to the AITUC's offer—that time they said let the two move together—AITUC, CITU. We had to tell them you will simply bring into existence an anti-communist camp. Everyone in the National Campaign Committee, except the AITUC for its own reason betrayed us on the question of verification. They all passed the resolution, we will not accept verification except without secret ballot and one day they gave their signature. Betrayal. What can be done. But these are the limitations etc. which we have to take into consideration, at the

same time we have to move forward.

Now, the other aspect which is very serious is that, partly our fault, that inside the working class and inside the trade union movement and inside our CITU we have not created a challenging attitude towards the divisive forces. We have been on the defensive. The rise of the divisive forces is a political challenge to the country a political challenge to us. We have to take it seriously into consideration. The INTUC has made some offer. We have to make use of every offer to isolate the divisive forces. Com. Sansgiri moved a resolution on divisive forces and he explained to you that the opinion of our people, is that the divisive force is not the main enemy, but the Cong(I) is the main enemy. This is what happens, imperialism is forgotten, the divisive forces themselves are forgotten. We point to congress But the main thing that is the divisive force is backed by imperialism. The third point is, now we talk of peace struggle, struggle for peace. Now of course everybody realises though very few self critically, that we have not yet done much. Many lacunae will be there but we are getting conscious that we have to do and we must do it. But one part of the peace struggle, the essential part, if we see, then we find that we are drawing a zero. What did Marx say "The maturity of a working class is estimated by the interest it takes in the foreign policy of the Govt. of its country. The working class which is indifferent to the foreign policy of the Govt. of its country is not a mature working class at all because it is not interfering in a vital sphere of class policy which determines the very shape and existence of the policies of the particular government".

Here is a govt which now stands for non-alignment. It takes a stand, sometimes criticises US imperialism. Of late it has started talking about two super powers. If the working class is not conscious that the present policy of non-alignment must be maintained, it is the part of our anti-imperialist fight, then it is not easy for us to fight the anti-imperialist battle. The battle for peace is a part of this policy.

Why I am talking about this, today when we are talking about our international duty, May Day Centenary, the struggle for peace, the root of the weakness lies in the fact that we have not taught the working class to take any interest in the foreign policy of the govt. The word non-alignment, that non-alignment is a good policy, is rarely uttered in the gathering of the CITU trade unions. The most

that is uttered in these things especially is when the govt. commit some mistake or departs from this, then you say they are betraying. Only when there is betrayal it is mentioned otherwise it is not mentioned. It is a serious thing, you see in the present situation when things are moving like this, the working class, serious working class movement, without which we in our country will be in a soup. But that is an integral part of our fight for international peace and discharging our responsibilities. These are some of the things on which we have to change our tactics and outlook.

The other thing that remains is this that the CITU actually is not functioning as an united all India organisation of the workers. Some things have already been explained to you, that what is the meaning that some State Committees do not reply to the circulars of the CITU. Total lack of All India outlook, parochialism, federalism, lack of class consciousness. Now you see what happens. When the CITU unions are developing this attitude, the working class out of its own instinct, where it is not bothered by top leaders, where it is free from the grip of top leaders, is developing its own industrial federation and developing an all India outlook regarding its industry. A number of federations, leave aside ours, these federations which we have, a number of federations, have been organised with the various unions of the workers, many of them are not affiliated to the CITU, they meet regularly, they discharge this jobs regularly, much more regularly than what the CITU unions do with regard to the same. The class instinct plays true and they are doing, but they are doing it at an economic plain. These fertiliser federation, food corporation federation, so many federations are there, not at our initiative. They perhaps act more coherently, more unitedly, in a more centralised manner than the CITU central office is able to act and the CITU State Committees are acting. These are so as a part of the earlier heritage which still continues. The working class does not care what foreign policy is followed by the Govt. Our mass of workers do not care to what central organisation the union gets affiliated. This is the case in many places. Long ago, many years back, in the days of the Communist International when to overcome this stage they suggested that whenever conferences take place, whether district conference, state conference all India conference, delegates should be elected by calling the general body meeting of unions or factory gate meetings and the whole.....purpose, the agenda of the confer-

ence should be explained.

It has constantly been reiterated so that the rank and file of the workers feel that they are determining the policies of the trade union movement. This is not happening. That is why as many weaknesses coming, without that the revolutionary surge is not possible. Both politically regarding the understanding of the trade union situation, regarding the understanding of the unemployment problem and finally regarding our present organisational practice, unless on all these issues, there is a radical change in our outlook, we will not be able to meet the problems which are going to face in the near future. All I wish to convey to you is that we have decided to hold our 6th conference most probably in Kerala. We have decided that before holding the conference we should work on the lines for some months so that we would report to the conference that some progress has been made. Unless that is done we will be in a difficult position.

And lastly what I want to tell you is that a number of comrades made speeches which could have been made without reading Samar Mukherjee's report. Some points are there. Serious discussions is wanted.