

# **FOR BROADER UNITY AND MIGHTIER STRUGGLES**



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*President CITU*

**( Concluding Speech in the General Council Meeting  
of the CITU held In Bombay December 27-30, 1972 )**

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*The General Council of the CITU met in Bombay from the 27th to 30th December 1972. The opening speech of Com. B. T. Ranadive President, was printed in the January 1973 issue of THE WORKING CLASS. This booklet contains the text of his concluding speech.*

We are coming to the end of our deliberations. You all know that the present session of the General Council is a delayed session. It should have been held at least six months back. You all know the reasons for the delay. The Working Committee had to postpone the meeting because of the various developments with which you are familiar.

Within four months from now, we will be meeting at Ernakulam for our full biennial session. The General Council will have to render account of its stewardship to the session, to the mass of delegates from all constituent unions. Can we say that we have achieved something to be proud of, can we report on our work with some satisfaction to the delegates at the session ?

It is clear from the General Secretary's Report, from the reports and speeches of comrades here, that our organisation has registered a remarkable advance. The story of struggles, of united actions, of prolonged strikes extending over months, strikes against retrenchment, victimisation, attack on wages and living conditions, the extension of these actions to weaker states and industries is an inspiring story. Our unions, workers, cadres and leaders have played a leading role in these developing struggles, worked for unity, fought and overcome the vacillations and half-heartedness of the reformists, faced governmental repression and secured important gains for the workers.

It is a fact to be noticed, comrades, that in the midst of economic anarchy due to recession, the intensified attacks, closures and mounting unemployment, the CITU often unitedly acting with others has been able to secure important gains for the workers in many industries.

The minimum wage secured for steel workers, the great advance in wages of Rs. 65 secured by the jute workers of W. Bengal and the advances in Kerala, Tamilnadu, Rajasthan, U.P. and Maharashtra stand testimony to the efficacy of our struggles.

We cannot forget in this connection the success in securing a statutory minimum bonus of 8.1/3% against the resistance of the employers and the Government. This was a victory of the united trade union movement. But it may be said at the same time in the strategic area of Maharashtra and Bombay, where the INTUC has a big hold, our initiative played a big role in setting the pace of the movement.

#### **Influence spreading to weaker states**

In the course of the expansion of our struggle the message of the CITU and its influence have now reached some of our weaker states. W. Bengal and Kerala have been our strongholds and they continue to remain so. Tamilnadu has been in the forefront for the last two years with its innumerable and heroically fought strikes. You all know the role played by the CITU in the heroic strike struggle by Simpson workers who fought against the attempt of the DMK Government. to impose a stooge leader on them. The CITU co-operated with the union leadership with all other organisations to support the workers and stood by them to the last.

During the last two years, Rajasthan and Maharashtra-Bombay have also emerged as important centres of CITU influence. The reports of Com. Poonamia on Rajasthan and of Com. Kurane on Maharashtra reveal the progress that has been achieved, how the CITU with its initiative, planning

and unity tactics is winning the confidence of the workers and becoming the symbol of their fighting spirit.

At the same time, it should be realised that all these activities and successes form only a part of the actual struggles of the working class and we have to travel a long way before we can say that we are playing an active role in the majority of the struggles that are being waged in all parts of the country.

Thanks to their struggles, the prestige of the CITU runs high ; its influence has increased. The membership and strength of many of its constituent unions have increased. These advances were registered in the teeth of constant repression in many states. I have already mentioned the brutal police firings and goonda attacks. The outstanding fact, our outstanding victory since our last session is the successful fight, the victorious fight put up by our W. Bengal CITU against the semi-fascist terror. Comrades, we all must pay our tribute to our fighting comrades, workers, cadres and leaders of unions who have successfully resisted the attempt to liquidate our organisations and defended our flag.

### **Unprecedented terror**

It seems incredible that we should withstand the onslaught of terror unprecedented in Indian history against the trade union movement. Its brutal character can be seen from the fact that not less than 70 activists of the CITU and other left and democratic organisations have been murdered in cold-blood since the installation of the Congress Government on the basis of rigged elections. You are all familiar with the earlier figures. Offices of more than two hundred unions affiliated to the CITU are under goonda occupation. We should also remember that offices and some unions affiliated to other militant central T.U. organisations are also under occupation. More than 700 members belonging to the CITU, CPI (M) and other left and democratic parties and organisations have

been murdered in the last two years. Women have been raped, the criminals flaunt their crime in face of the victims. More than 40,000 workers and others are forced to quit their places of residence. Hundreds are not allowed to return to their jobs. High Court orders in their favour are not executed because of lack of police protection. Those who try to assert their rights to jobs are mercilessly beaten by the goondas in the presence of the police. Threats of murder and physical assaults are held out to keep the mass of workers away from the CITU unions, and they are mercilessly belaboured if they are active or show sympathy for the CITU unions. Taking advantage of all this, the management is quick enough to deprive the CITU activists and workers of their jobs, and help the Congress-hired and Government-protected goondas and anti-socials in their war against the unions. The ruling Congress Party thought it more prudent to attack the trade unions by means of unofficial terror rather than pass a law to illegalise the movement.

It is against this terror that the workers of W. Bengal CITU unions have been fighting. To escape the threat of arson, of murder and physical assault, of victimisation and loss of jobs, it was enough to make a show of change of loyalties, and purchase peace and jobs. This is exactly what the mass of workers have refused to do. They have heroically stood by their organisations. Though unable to hold meetings, carry on day-to-day union activity or ventilate their grievances through their organisations in many places, they continue their support, join the meetings in other areas, collect funds, carry the message of the union on important occasions and above all, seize all opportunities to join hands with the followers of the INTUC and others on vital questions, foiling the game of the Congress Party on many an occasion to split the workers.

In spite of the fact that with wide areas of jute workers inhabited by thousands were out of bounds for union activists, the annual session of the Bengal Chatkal Mazdoor

Union became a smashing success. A large number of delegates came from the out-of-bound areas with their contributions and quotas. The union this year registered a membership of not less than 90,000. Comrades, inspiring is the story of the Jay Engineering Workers' Union whose workers were under armed attack for months, where murder lurked in every department and yet the workers carried on. Even now, under the benign rule of the Congress the office of the union cannot be opened. But the loyalty of the workers cannot be shaken. The same is the great story of Durgapur. Jay and Durgapur have become by-words in the classical resistance of the working class to semi-fascist terror.

Comrades, is it then surprising that almost all the unions in W. Bengal—more than 80 per cent—except those under occupation have fulfilled their obligations to the CITU, their affiliation dues? Compare the glorious record with your own in the matter of dues alone and you will find the qualitative difference.

#### **Factors behind success**

Comrades, how is it that we have been able to secure this outstanding success? There are many organisations in the country who have gone down and collapsed just under the threat of repression, or with mere arrests of a large number. This outstanding success has been achieved because the W. Bengal working class has developed a higher level of political consciousness and is highly politicalised. The CITU, you know, demands the creation of a high political consciousness through its daily struggles to reach the goal of socialism. The W. Bengal working class has been going through political activity for years. In recent years it has voted for left parties, for the united front; in the 1971 parliamentary elections it succeeded in electing a large number of CPI (M) leaders, a large number of whom are active leaders of the CITU. Above all, it has embarked upon a number of political actions and political protest strikes and other

mass actions in the recent period. It is the only section of the Indian working class which organised a complete bundh for Bangla Desh. It has been always active in demonstrating for Vietnam, to discharge its international obligations. Comrades, it is because of this politicalisations that the W. Bengal workers were able to withstand the unleashing of semi-fascist terror. This lesson must be fully mastered by all state units, by all unions, by all the members of the General Council. With the shadows of the terror hanging over the rest of the country, it is essential to do this.

Comrades, we have developed our strength in the face of great difficulties. Of course, we cannot say that we have developed sufficiently considering the needs of the situation and the opportunities that are open to us. There are many weaknesses and lacunae, many faulty and anti-working class practices. Yet we have no doubt registered good advances. The founding session directed us to pursue the line of united action, trade union unity for struggle. What are the achievements of this line? Have we pursued it faithfully?

We can say that we have endeavoured our best to pursue the line of unity and the working class has responded to it and many of our achievements and advances would not have been possible without it.

When we decided to separate ourselves from the revisionist leaders of the AITUC and, at the same time, raised the slogan of trade union unity, our critics thought that we were contradicting ourselves, that we were using the talk of unity to cover our separation. Events have proved otherwise. We separated because we knew that it was not possible to develop our independent initiative for mass action, for united action, remaining under the discipline of the revisionist leaders. Had we not taken the step the workers would not have been able to fight the disruption of the AITUC leaders. These treacherous leaders were planning to take the AITUC in the camp of the Congress, tone down struggles and support many anti-working class

measures of the Government. The formation of the National Council of Trade Unions, their desertion from the May 1971 conference were the culmination of this line.

Having freed ourselves from their disruptive discipline, we were free to take independent initiative for unity, for united action, or launch mass actions on our own. The freedom to struggle on our own, to develop initiative for unity and struggle, has enabled us to advance and lead many struggles independently, and many more in joint leadership with others.

### **Line of Unity and Struggle**

Our comrades have taken the line of united struggles seriously and have registered advances. The reports make it clear. But I must say that in some cases, the reports do not do justice to the great fight we carried on for unity in the most difficult circumstances. The comrades have not been able to generalise their great experiences and focus on their achievements. In Durgapur, under constant attack, we continue to hold on with our strength deeply rooted in the masses and developed correct approach to other organisations, taking into consideration the changed political situation, the terror, the many contradictions and saw to it that some kind of U.F. continued to develop. Had we continued our old approach, considering ourselves as the sole representative we would not have been able to secure new successes. Again what gave us strength was our unshakable independent strength among the masses. This was our base. Our tactics were successful because there was a great discontent among the ranks of other organisations over the economic situation, and we paid heed to it, sympathised with them and championed their cause.

Kerala saw many united actions. Thanks to these, we have now spread ourselves in the industrial area of Alwaye. Here, according to our strength, we have gone through

many phases of united front—all in the end leading to increased influence of the CITU.

United unions have also been formed and some of these are not yet affiliated to the CITU. Yet the CITU influence has grown.

Tamilnadu has of course seen many united actions and struggles and our unions had often to fight openly the vacillations and treachery of some reformist leaders, the workers and to repudiate betraying agreements. Important have been the successes achieved in Maharashtra and Rajasthan in the pursuit of united actions.

Comrades, it should be realised that these successes have not always been easy. They have not come just for the asking. In securing them, the CITU unions had often to fight against the vacillations, anti-struggle and sabotaging efforts of established leadership, overcome their class collaborating outlook and often call for action in opposition to them. The struggle for unity of the working class is also a struggle to overcome class collaboration, anti-struggle policies with the aid of mass of workers. This has been our universal experience. Only when the mass of workers begin to respond to our policy, the reformist and revisionist leaders agree for common action. This has been repeatedly demonstrated. The AITUC leadership dominated by the right C.P.I., pursuing its policy of alliance with the the Congress, has often been opposing common trade union action along with us. In Bombay they would not join for a common bonus action. And yet they have often to join us elsewhere and assure that they are not averse to join hands on immediate issues.

Feeling the pressure of the working class many of our opponents have changed their tactics. Of late, some of them have stopped opposing strike action or struggle openly. Sometimes, they advocated it also. But their practice often is to wait for the collapse of the action, do nothing to organise it but not to oppose it openly. These tactics

also have failed to curb the growing actions of their success. The workers have seen to that.

Comrade Ramamurti has referred in his speech to a certain change in the attitude of the AITUC and HMS leaders in connection with the proposed anti-working class legislation of the Central Government. They have denounced it. They have declared that they stand for recognition by ballot. We must welcome this change. We are fully desirous of having an understanding with them for common action. The CITU as well as the UTUC must do its best to get these organisations together for common action.

United actions, unity must lead to an effective defence of the interests of the workers. Reports reveal that they have produced this result. They must also lead to heightened class consciousness of the workers, their militancy, the release of the workers from the influence of erroneous reformist illusions. They must also lead to a changed correlation of strength between the class-collaborators and class struggle outlook and strengthen the latter. The increased strength of the CITU unions, its influence show that this also is happening. And yet reports show that in some places in Tamilnadu, despite repeated united actions, there is hardly any change in the organisational strength of the CITU. This is a matter which require immediat attention and serious review of the conduct of struggles by us.

Comrades, unless we understand the reasons why our line of unity and united actions is successful, we will not be able to consolidate and expand our gains, nor defend it.

Our slogan of united action got a response from the workers, because under conditions of recession and attacks on living conditions, this was the need of the working class itself. Our line represented the class need of the working class.

It was possible to secure successes because the working class had already started moving into action.

## **Independent strength**

It was possible to register quick advance because we had independent strength to develop our initiative. I meant that while we approached the reformist and revisionist leaders in all sincerity, we did not stop there. On the basis of our independent mobilising strength we carried the fight to the mass of workers and activated them. Even where we did not have enough mobilising strength of our own, we approached the mass of workers with the demand for action and unity and we could get a response.

We had also to struggle patiently against the half-heartedness, vacillations and the sabotage of the reformist and revisionist leaders—a fact which cannot be forgotten. Had we relied on their goodwill and acceptance, many of the united actions would never have been launched. It must be realised that where we had to await the goodwill of the leaders, action was often delayed beyond measure or did not take place.

The successes were further rendered possible because of the strength of the CITU, the strength shown by the West Bengal Committee of the CITU, and our unions of in withstanding the terror launched against it. The truth of this heroic fight has to some extent percolated to other States and the CITU is being regarded as a sure ally by a growing number of workers.

And lastly, this has been possible because of the consistent and left image of the CITU, again reinforced by the W. Bengal fight as an organisation that can successfully confront the authorities. The workers, themselves in a fighting mood, naturally felt attracted to the CITU all the more so since the AITUC and HMS were already rallying behind the Government.

How the fight of the CITU, its fighting role, its radical political image are all strengthening unity is seen from the report of Com. Dinkar Mehta. Our unions in Gujarat are very weak. And yet now in many united actions, meetings

and demonstrations, we are being called. It shows in the first place the spirit of unity pulsating the working class and secondly, the spirit of resistance (which they associate with the CITU) which they demand.

To consolidate and carry forward the fight for unity all these factors must be taken into account. They show how we can guard the unity that is achieved with the formation of the UCTU and develop it.

Com. Ramamurti has told you that a heavy responsibility rests on us in regard to the UCTU and we must discharge it. While building our unions and our strength, we must uphold the UCTU as the symbol and rallying point of wider unity and popularise it. We must seriously implement all its decisions, carry them to the masses.

The importance of this achievement of ours is that while the Government, and forces opposed to us ganged up to isolate us and other militant organisations, we counter-struck by forging an alliance to fight the Government's anti-working class policies. The emergence of the UCTU is a big gain arising from the line of united actions, and the sacrifice made for it. We must guard it at all costs. Past experience shows how to do that effectively.

### **Present Political Situation**

Comrades, you should understand the political situation in the context of which we have achieved the success and which led to the formation of the UCTU. Could we have imagined a couple of years back that so many central organisations and federations would come together and join hands with us, despite the boycott by the AITUC and HMS? Take for instance, the May 1971 Conference called by the AITUC leaders. Had we decided to stay away from it, how many would have joined us? But things have changed. These organisations—the AITUC and HMS—deserted the front, formed the National Council in co-operation with the INTUC. Their party leaders joined in a political alliance with the Congress Party. The result was that all others

came together in October despite the boycott of these organisations. A number of Federations also joined the meeting as observers—all because they felt that the others were not serious in taking up the cudgels against the Government. The collaborationist role of the AITUC and HMS was clearly seen.

This was seen when the central and state employees themselves were in need of action for bonus. The united demand of the trade union movement had forced the Government to accede to the demand of 8.1/3 per cent bonus. But the central and state employees were left in the lurch. Where else could they turn except to the fighting wing of the trade union movement? The UCTU has fully supported the demand and called upon all workers and unions to support it. The General Council of CITU has called upon all unions to help the central and state Government employees in the observation of the 19th January as Bonus Day. Let that day be a day of tremendous solidarity between the industrial workers and the Government employees. The ruling class has erected a barrier between the trade union movement and Govt. employees' movement. There is no justification for it. Let 19th January be a day to bring the two sections closer together, in a firm alliance. We must look forward to the day when all of us will be in a common central organisation.

Comrades, now let me turn to some of our weaknesses. Our organisation has inscribed socialism on its banner. While fighting for every pie of the workers' wage, his immediate conditions for immediate relief, we cannot forget our high aims. We therefore judge our activities in the final analysis by how far we are helping the working class to advance towards consciousness and realisation of the ideal. What have we to say about it? What have we to say about the political experience of the last couple of years, about the fight for democracy in which the working class and the people of our country are engaged? The

liberties and the rights of our trade union movement will be only on par with the liberties and democracy of the Indian people. You all know that democracy in our country is now under a vicious attack from the Congress Government. In W. Bengal, semi-fascist terror accompanied by wholesale rigging of elections has taken place. The threat of one-party dictatorship is rearing its head. The trade union movement and the working class has been the worst sufferers. And yet, can we say that our State Committees, our leaders and unions in other states have done their part in rousing the working class to this danger and preparing it to fight against it? Have we tried to rouse the consciousness of the working class in this respect when our advance guard in W. Bengal was waging a heroic fight against it?

This must be recognised as a big failure and must be rectified. No doubt, some states like Tamilnadu, Maharashtra sent handsome financial contributions for W. Bengal victims, but that is not anywhere near fulfilling your main political duty. In Kerala our unions called more than two lakhs of workers on a strike to protest against the terror. That of course is a very big step. The main thing is to make the working class aware of the coming danger and inspire it to fight against it.

### **Banner of Internationalism**

Comrades, we claim to adhere to the banner of internationalism. Have we done enough for the greatest international issue—the mighty battle of Vietnam? Can we go with a proud head to the next session of the CITU to say we have fulfilled our international obligations? Except in W. Bengal, nowhere has the issue been taken up with persistence and determination.

In my opening speech, I have already emphasized our duty to fight the machinations of American imperialism in our country. We must ever remember its global ambitions to subjugate all fighting nations. India's working class has yet to realise its responsibility in this respect and be

conscious of the great danger to our freedom and economic well-being represented by the USA.

Also our record in relation to the Bangla Desh struggle leaves much to be desired. Only W. Bengal organised a complete bndh in defence of the fighters of Bangla Desh. Everywhere else barring meetings, there was hardly any activity in protest against the genocidal massacres.

We share a responsibility in creating solidarity between the working class of Pakistan and India, the working class of the three countries of the sub-continent. Tension and enmity between the three is hampering the progress of democratic and socialist movements in the sub-continent. We must raise our voice to normalise relations between India and Pakistan, between Pakistan and Bangla Desh. Our resolution correctly sums up our tasks in this respect.

Comrades, our organisation regards the peasant masses, the poor peasants and agricultural workers as our firm allies in the fight for socialism, fight against poverty. Today famine threatens to kill tens of thousands from among them. A callous Government, spreads complacent reports and refuses even nationalise wholesale trade in foodgrains. And yet, the voice of our unions, of the working class in defence of the peasantry has yet to be raised. Famine may not threaten every state. Yet it is the duty of the working class in every state to rally to the defence of the peasantry—especially in view of the conditions in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and contribute their best for the relief of the peasant masses.

I must warn all of you that interested parties including the Government, are engaged in setting the rural masses against the industrial workers. Pointing to the disparity of wages between the two sections, they are making out a case for further attacks on working class incomes and confuse the rural masses. The latter will fall a victim to this manoeuvre if we fail to champion their cause in this period.

The growing bankruptcy of official policies, their incompetence to manage the economy is leading to the collapse of labour

legislation. The Provident Fund now provides only capital resources to the Government, or monetary resources to the employers. The needy worker finds it difficult to use it. His widow does not get it for years. The employers freely swallow it and the Government dares not punish them. The same is the case with the ESI with its chicanery, thefts of medicines, lack of hospital arrangements, bogus medicines and restrictions on doctors to spend a miserable amount per worker. The resentment of the workers against these is rising and bound to burst out.

Comrades, the volcanic discontent that is being generated through mounting unemployment is overwhelming the entire society. The CITU has been calling for a full mobilisation of the working class on this issue. The UCTU has taken up the slogan. We must demand work or unemployment relief immediately. We must demand that the right to work be inscribed as a fundamental right in the Constitution.

Comrades, finding the situation difficult the ruling class is resorting to utter demagoguery. It now poses to fight for socialism. How have we reacted to this? Have we utilised this opportunity to explain what proletarian socialism stands for, what it implies, to popularise our basic slogans? At best, we have made fun of the ruling class claim. But that is not enough. If we do not educate the working class in the spirit of proletarian socialism, we will be deprived of all political initiative.

### **CITU denied rightful place**

I have only one more point left. Notwithstanding our sacrifices, our heroism, and our increased influence, the Government is denying us the place due to us in negotiations and consultations. They want to give importance to their stooges only. We have shown our readiness to demonstrate our strength on the basis of workers' ballot, a proposal they dared not accept, for that will expose their stooges. Bent upon whittling down our strength, they use every weakness in submitting returns,

registration, affiliations, to reduce our strength. Some of our comrades and unions through sheer callousness help this game of our enemies. They thus betray our fighting workers of West Bengal who have played a major role in building the CITU. It is the minimum duty of all of you to fulfil your financial and other obligations to the CITU, to provide a correct record of membership, to so manage your office work that the detractors do not get any excuses.

I am confident you will rectify these weaknesses in the coming months and be in a position to report to the session that they now belong to the past.

There is no doubt that with our correct line, our devoted cadres, our high aims, and our struggle for unity, we are bound to register greater progress in the future. I thank you.

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