

Concluding Speech

3rd Conference of CITU, Bombay,
May 21-25, 1975

Comrade,

We have had discussions for three days, four days I think. We discussed several topics, several resolutions and we discussed also the General Secretary's report. All of us would like to know in the end the results and the achievements of our deliberations. The first thing we have to learn and which we should learn through the resolutions we have passed, is in connection with the mighty victory of the people of Vietnam. What is the particular lesson to which I wish to draw your attention? It is one in mastering which all of us have shown a certain amount of weakness, because of much adverse propaganda.

Lesson of Vietnam Struggle

The success of Vietnam once again shows that socialist camp when united is irresistible and that no power on earth can defeat the United Socialist camp (Cheers). Whatever differences there might be today, in the end historical reality asserts itself. Last year when I was in Vietnam, I asked a Vietnamese leader where exactly the differences will lead. He said "Don't worry. So long as American imperialism is there, the Socialist camp will have to continually unite and unite and unite and fight"! (Cheers). That is the great confidence the people of Vietnam had. They made it clear at their last T.U. conference that they were emerging victorious because of the help given by the Socialist camp, because they were taking their stand on the offensive of the working class against imperialism and they had no doubt that this offensive will succeed. On that basis they said that their victory was ensured. That is real faith in

proletarian internationalism, in the victory of the world working class. We must master this lesson; we know there are fights, we know there are epithets hurled against each other; but we also know that history is more powerful than epithets, that Leninism is far more powerful than the epithets, far more powerful than the present day quarrels and that the unity of the world proletariat will be asserted again and again despite revisionism, despite dogmatism. That is the main lesson which we have to learn from the Vietnam struggle.

The next point that I want to refer to is that we wanted to assess at this conference the tremendous experience that the CITU has accumulated during the course of the last four years, during the course of united struggles that we have been successful in launching and leading.

First, I must tell you that the tremendous respect that the CITU today enjoys, the great influence that it exercises over wide masses of working class, the name it has earned as a fighting organisation, is not only due to our correct line but is much more due to the tremendous courage and self-sacrificing spirit of our CITU comrades, of the rank and file workers, of our union leaders who have been in the thick of struggles all these four years. If you look around, you will find that in this gathering we have comrades who are implicated in murder cases, have several criminal cases against them, comrades who have been sentenced to transportation for life and comrades who may be even sentenced to death tomorrow. And many have already fallen victims to the gangsters and bullets. It is these people and the fighting working class and the self sacrificing cadres of our unions who have made the CITU what it is today. And this courage and self-sacrifice, wedded to a correct policy of class struggle, to a policy of uniting our class and putting our entire strength against the government and against the employer, that has been the source of our achievement and we must go on record paying tributes to all our fighting comrades. It is they who have made the CITU what it is today.

CITU—Fulcrum of Struggle

Thanks to these, the CITU pursuing its policy has today become the main centre, fulcrum of the struggle for trade union unity in the country. Two years back when the UCTU was started the correlation of forces was quite different. We were one of the forces. To day we stand as the unifying force and large organisations which

are not affiliated to the CITU, which were not very favourable to the CITU only a couple of years back, organisations of working class and the employees, organisations of officers, all of them today see in the CITU the main fighter for the unity of the working class and the employees.

The role of the CITU has been enhanced by our struggle for railway workers' unity, our stand for struggles during the railway strike, our refusal to surrender before vacillation and our consistent support of the railway workers, before the strike, during the strike and after the strike. It is because of this today that wide sections of the employees are looking upon the CITU as fulcrum and defender of their unity and that casts great responsibility on our shoulders.

We are not just one of the central organisations, the coming together of which makes for unity. It is our responsibility to see that the other trade union organisations which are not affiliated to any central organisation are brought together. Our task is to see that once these organisations are brought together, all of them are activated, so that the struggle for unity is carried on. It is no joke and no exaggeration to say that it has come to be accepted by a number of trade union organisations that without the CITU, unity cannot be an active force. That makes us realise how every struggle of the working class has to be managed, has to be conducted with great vigilance, so that the entire struggle marches forward. Today a big set back for the CITU, loss of its influence through mistakes, is not only a disaster to our organisation, it brings disaster to the entire trade union movement in India, specially when the Government is out to crush us. That is why problems of conducting mass movements, problems of understanding the change in the moods of the masses, problems of understanding what exactly the masses want today, what they will want tomorrow, all these, assume supreme importance and that is why we tried to raise those questions in the General Secretary's Report.

These problems, as I have said, have been raised in the General Secretary's Report. Before I deal with them, I want to make one observation and that is that our prime task today is to see that we continue to maintain this position of the leading force in the struggle for unity and that we continue to throw our full weight in the struggle against recession. We should, therefore, try to develop as quickly as possible a broad front for fighting the consequences

of recession, we should see that the initiative for unity, that our recent activities and fights have given us, is maintained and expanded. That is essential if we have to carry on our fight for unity. Because, today, more than ever, an all-India united action, all India unity is necessary due to the all-pervading nature of the recession and the all-pervading nature of the problem posed by it.

Tactics of United Actions

What are the main points, comrades? We are summarising the situation after four years of united struggle activity. Comrade Ramamurti raised specific questions. In all these struggles we go forward, but sometimes it happens that in spite of betrayal, the reformists continue to maintain their influence. Why? No doubt, we are going forward. But in a situation in which the main framework for reformist sabotage is collapsing and the masses are going forward for action, are facing lathis and bullets and the worst types of brutality, how is it that after a strike, they return sometimes to the same old leadership, not perhaps in full strength, but at least in substantial strength? We as revolutionary Trade Unionists, what are we after? Do we or do we not want to change the correlation of forces between reformism and revolution in the trade union? And if we want to change it, then the test of any united struggle in the end is, how far we are able to change it? That is the specific point Com. Ramamurti has raised to which very few people gave answer. Betrayal by reformists in one or two struggle does not completely change the organisational affiliation of large numbers of workers. The political influence of the various bourgeois parties is not eliminated in one struggle. But these are the points that have been raised and these are the points that should have been answered. We do not know how we agitate and propagate in the course of a united struggle and how the reformists agitate.

We can no longer be satisfied with joint actions; we must be able to pin point the change in consciousness and organisation. What is required is more consciousness, more organisation, lessening the influence of the reformists; it requires countering of the reformists in different ways to see that the struggle is carried on in a militant manner in the present situation, which is a very difficult situation for the working class. What is our experience of the united struggle? Have we committed any mistakes—this was another question Com. Ramamurti raised.

Make Local Experience Known To All

If we had been able to exchange our experience, then our discussion would have been more fruitful. But it seems that while we do big things, we do not draw general conclusions from them. Therefore in the discussions we only go on narrating piece meal what we do, but do generalise the great experience that we gather. For instance, West Bengal. Tremendous experience. No other trade union movement has got such experience of fighting various battles under varied conditions, and no other section of the CITU has, in my opinion, successfully met these varied conditions of terror, of illegality, of formal legality. The experiences of the CITU section, which is a major section, of the trade union movement in the State of West Bengal is very important and require to be understood by the units which are just coming up. Otherwise, they also will go through all the earlier mistakes which we committed so many times. In our discussions we attempted to make a new departure, but did not succeed. Because till now we have not raised such problems, we have not asked people, our comrades, to give attention to these and generalise their own experiences. That was our failure, the failure of what we would call the central leadership of the CITU.

So, the problem of United Front tactics that has been raised is how to act now, when the reformist leaders are changing their tactics to sabotaging from within. Now they often do not oppose the strike in the beginning, they wait for the weakening of the struggle, for the opportune moment to sabotage. Take the railway strike, take the dock workers' strike, take the jute strike, take the Bombay Textile strike. They themselves initiated some of these strikes. The Dock workers' and Port workers' strike is an illuminating example. We are not there as a big force at all, even to pressurise them. But the radicalised working class is there. If the same compromise they had accepted without a strike, the workers would have repudiated them. But a two-day strike, half-day's negotiations and demonstration giving outlet to working class militancy, and they were able to betray. These are the things that we have to study, comrades. The reformist leaders are trying to adjust themselves to the rising anger and radicalisation of the working class and they are changing their tactics. How quickly we change our tactics to meet them and to save the workers from disruption—that is one of the points that is raised, which we should have

properly discussed.

Tasks During Recession

The next point I wish to deal with now is the main question which is dominating our mind, the question to which we have devoted some time here, the question of recession and the tactics of our struggle regarding recession.

Today what is the position? It is coming like an avalanche. And already thousands and thousands of workers are on the street. One can say that in the earlier part of the crisis a year back, what was attacked, directly or indirectly, was the wage and the earning capacity of the workers. But during the last year what is being directly attacked is the worker's job itself. The worker now is defending his job, his right to remain at his work, his right to earn. To lay the main emphasis on wage freeze was correct a year back. Today along with defence of wage, defence of job has become paramount. Today for thousands and lakhs of workers the rallying slogan is "defeat the conspiracy of the employers and the Government to deprive us of our jobs." Show us now the way to save our jobs. We are prepared to fight to the last. That is what the workers will say. And we have to admit that till now we have not been able to protect the jobs of the workers. We ourselves often accept the excuses of the ruling classes—electricity breakdown, lay-off, under-utilisation of capacity; every excuse the ruling class gave was half accepted by us and not connected with the developing crisis. Had we done so, we could have realised what was coming.

And now you find thousands on the streets, whether they are textile workers or jute workers; they are today on the street. The main brunt of the crisis is being borne by the working class. And the weakness of the Trade Union movement, including ours, is this that when an attack against jobs is made, we hold out and fight, but jobs are nonetheless attacked. The position that has been reached now is that a united resistance, except in factories where retrenchment notices are given, a united struggle against unemployment has hardly been put up. They declare lay-off, and it is accepted. As if there is no appeal against lay-off. It is precisely in this situation that we realise that during the period of such monstrous attack against jobs, only traditional methods of withholding work do not suffice. Various methods of fighting and bringing pressure on the employers are to be used.

It is absolutely correct that during recession when an attack

comes, the workers have to fight, they must forge proper weapons, including strike. In western countries sitting inside factories, not vacating despite lock-out notice, and such other forms are being resorted to. In West Bengal, our tea garden workers are running two gardens closed by the employers. What we have to ask is that in the situation when the masses will go through various moods, shall we restrict ourselves to one particular form of resistance? We have to fight no doubt, but the movement and the form must be of our choice.

So the main point we have to see is the protection of workers' job, along with the defence of his wage. By protecting and standing by the workers, we can launch our offensive. It is wrong to say that in recession only defensive demands are taken. That is a very wrong understanding. In accordance with your strength, you raise various demands and you organise various types of action. Today, even in Europe, they have to do it. Several forms of resistance are being developed, when they find that the employers are preparing to resort to closure. Under threat of lock-out, the organisation encourages only strategic sections of workers to go on strike, with the result that the entire factory comes to a standstill. The rest do not formally go on a strike and are legally prepared for work. It happened in France. The entire game of the employing class to throw out for a few weeks thousands of workers was frustrated. They supported those that were on strike, at the same time they said they were ready to work. This is a very serious and intensified form of class struggle. It is not attenuated class struggle. It is not a lesser form of class struggle. In the end, it will put the strongest pressure on the employers. Already the resourcefulness of workers had led in India to forms of struggle like work to rule, working according to designation, and so on. When a weaker section or a section which does not feel confident about immediately going on strike resorts to such forms, it results in bringing pressure on the employers. The only point is that the best form, in the interest of the working class and of bringing pressure on the capitalist class is utilised.

Prepare to Face Repression

The next point is that apart from the forms of struggle, we must realise that we are now entering a very difficult period of trade union resistance. What happens when the ruling class becomes more cruel, we have already seen in relation to West Bengal and if

that type of repression or even fifty percent of it is let loose in some other States, we must realise that it will be very difficult for our cadres and our unions to maintain their existence itself. Because the West Bengal working class and the West Bengal trade unions had a militant tradition of their own, a tenacity of their own, they were able to weather many a storm, and meet the challenge of repression. And it is really a tremendous achievement, to be able to keep our present strength and continue to fight. But this type of terror is likely to be unleashed all over India in some way or other, because the ruling classes want to solve forcibly the problem of recession at the expense of the working class and the people of India. That is why our earlier experience and achievement of united resistance will not be enough to meet the present situation. The problems that we are going to face are far more serious. First, we will be facing problem of defending the working class when 20% or 30% of it in an industry is already on the street. We will have to pay the price of our earlier weakness, which we have been trying to overcome since the foundation of CITU but which we have not overcome at all, namely, the lack of link, the absence of link, of the organised trade union movement with the unemployed mass. The unemployed mass does not look upon the organised trade union movement, including the CITU, as its champion. Because barring passing some resolutions, and perhaps some demonstrations, we have not been able to do much for the unemployed. A factor which has accentuated the Western capitalist crisis, is the fact that there is a strong link there between the unemployed and employed workers. And therefore, the bourgeois economists complain that the Phillip's curve does not operate. Phillip's curve means more unemployment should lead to a fall in the wage. But because the trade unions are organised and the unemployed are also organised, actually even during the crisis itself, sometimes wage concessions have to be made and this is accentuating the crisis. But in our country we will be entering a period in which those who were at work yesterday are on the street today. And in this condition we will have to carry on the fight for those who are employed.

New Possibilities of United Mass Actions

Definitely, it is going to be a very difficult situation, but the situation is certainly not favourable to the ruling classes; because they must continue the attack against the working class, and various other sections and perforce make it possible for them to

unite in common resistance. In spite of the adverse situation, in spite of today's lack of link between the employed and the unemployed, because the general drive of the Government and the capitalists is against the entire people, we will succeed in organising resistance of our entire class and of the people against each blow of Government. Sometimes we may be forced to retreat one step but our organisation and our counter-blow will grow stronger if we pursue proper tactics. And by that we mean wider type of mass actions.

Unemployment cannot be fought factory by factory, strikes will be there, but sufficient weight of public opinion, of economic pressure etc. cannot be fought factory by factory, it has to be gradually developed into a general struggle of the class. Wider and wider struggle against the economic policy from which this unemployment flows is necessary. Our resolutions properly put those demands in the forefront; we put forth the demands for right to work, and then we put the demands for certain basic changes. We know those basic changes are not going to come within the existing framework. The idea is to take the existing consciousness of the worker, of the common man and to make him see that basic issues of policy are involved, if his job is to be protected, if unemployment is to be fought. Our understanding of the recession and the fight against it is not that of simply a trade union fight. It cannot be only a trade union fight. The CITU will succeed in fighting against the recession, if it succeeds in converting the working class struggle against the recession, into a general popular democratic struggle against it.

Link with the Peasantry

We are lagging behind and the ruling class is going ahead. One of the weapons of the ruling class to corner the working class is to tell the peasantry, that the workers are earning much more than what the peasantry or the agricultural workers get. The basic weakness of our trade union movement including the CITU though the CITU is conscious of it, is its lack of link with the peasantry and the agrarian mass. You see in this city of Bombay how the ruling class plays the rural mass against the workers. In the name of giving employment to the rural unemployed, the ordinary textile workers, the engineering workers, the clerk, the middle class employee is being taxed instead of placing the entire burden on the landlords and capitalists. And you cannot fight against it. The person who has to fight against it along with you, is not there, the agrarian

workers. First they used the "sons of the soil" slogan. Now they use the "village versus the city" slogan.

Both these exploit the weaknesses of the trade union movement viz., first the lack of class consciousness of a large section of workers who feel that they are either Maharashtrians or Bengalis. Internationalism on May Day is alright, but otherwise I am either a Bengali or a Maharashtrian or an Assamese. In Assam, they will raise a few slogans against the Bengalis. The same thing is being done by Labour Minister Dr. Nag in West Bengal; every time there is a job the sons of the soil slogan is being put forward. The same course is being pursued here in Bombay.

The second weakness, divorce from the peasantry, is used to corner the workers.

You must bear wage-freeze, you must bear wagecut, the agricultural workers are turning into destitutes. You have no business to get more wage.

These are the two slogans with which the Government, and the ruling class are intending to fight you ideologically, when you carry on the fight against the recession. That is why we have to take serious note of the slogans and arm the working class with proper understanding and at the same time try to link ourselves with the agrarian masses, with whatever help we could get from the kisan organisations.

All these difficulties notwithstanding, we have got the confidence that our fight will be successfully carried on. The ruling classes will continue to attack the people and the people are bound to resist. The only point is, we must study the mood of the people, study the mood of the working class and see that we are able to give effective expression to the spirit of resistance that will be developing from time to time. We have to understand that a new type of conflict is developing, because the way out of the recession for the ruling class is politically connected with the drive for one party dictatorship. The tremendous repression directed against the CITU is a part of the drive for one party dictatorship. Various legislations that are being enforced like the wage freeze, the national wage commission, the method of dealing with strikes, all these if you gradually link them together, form part of the drive for one party dictatorship, about which we have already spoken in our resolution. Every step which the Indira Gandhi Government is taking in the trade union sphere is an integral part of this drive. We now find

it is being openly suggested that all unions except those favoured by the ruling party should be eliminated and industrial peace maintained, by completely suppressing the genuine working class organisations, and the workers' freedom to organise.

As part of the attempt to impose additional burdens and solve the recession at the expense of the people, democracy is being attacked; that democracy we have to save, and we have to fight for. That is why we attach great importance to the fight for civil liberties and democratic rights. We combine with all those who are prepared to fight for civil liberties. For us it is a question of life and death and that is why we have to bear in mind that our struggle against recession is a part of the people's struggle against one party dictatorship. In the measure that we succeed in our struggle for saving jobs, fighting for the wages of the workers, keeping our organisation intact, in that measure will we also succeed in saving Indian democracy and defeating the drive for one party dictatorship.

Towards United Struggles

Because the recession is an all-pervading phenomenon, the fight against recession is the fight of the entire working class and the people. In spite of all that has happened, the CITU has to repeatedly urge for unity of all the central organisations, for united action of all central organisations, because we know that the other central organisations carry influence over a considerable section of the working class, without whom a united fight, an effective class fight is not possible. That appeal for unity and a broader united front must continue simultaneously.

Because it is now becoming a broad struggle of the people against the capitalist path itself, against the path of capitalism imposed by the Government, we must, the CITU must, also develop links with all democratic protests which are developing against the Congress policy—protests which may be half hearted, protests which may have a lot of confusion in them, but nonetheless protests, which objectively fight the Congress Government. Take, for instance, the movement launched by J.P. There are two kinds of wrong understandings about the movement. Some are so much charmed by JP that they appear to think that JP can deliver India. There are others who say "We are confirmed Revolutionaries. We never look at movements like JPs." Both are wrong tendencies. The CITU, as the organisation of the fighting workers, must

show proper respect for the masses who fight. At the same time, it can never give up its own ideological positions. We, who yesterday passed a resolution on Vietnam saying that Vietnam way is our way, cannot say that JP's Total Revolution is also our way. We stand by class struggle, we have got a conception of class struggle, we have got a conception of worker and peasant alliance. Anything which deviates from these will not take us to the goal of revolution. Nor do we think that the ruling class will yield to the people peacefully. So, we say, we have got our own path, we have got our own concept of workers' and peasants' alliance, we have got our own objective to work for and we do not compromise on those basic principles, whoever comes and whoever asks us to compromise. (cheers).

All Sections In a Common Battle

That is one part of the truth. The other is that thousands of people are fighting, fighting the Congress Government; students are fighting, sometimes kisans are fighting, people are going to jail, why? Just because JP asked them to go to jail? No because of the tremendous discontent against the Congress rule. We are not able to focus it, the left parties are not able to focus it, and an old national leader becomes the centre of the discontent. Objectively these masses who are fighting, are fighting for a democratic cause, are fighting against the Indira Congress Government. Some of the demands are also correct demands. What should the working class do? Shall we tell them that until and unless you accept the path of VIETNAM, we have nothing to do with you? No. While we continue to have our own understanding and teach the people our own way, every democratic protest of the mass which leads forward the struggle, must be supported by the working class. The CITU has been giving support to those demands. YES, dissolution of the Bihar Assembly is a correct demand. Many of the demands which are put forward by JP are correct demands. Many of the demands they put forward in DELHMARCH were also correct demands. There is need-based wage also. We are supporting these demands, partial demands, as an advance in the democratic struggle, without accepting the ideology of JP or without accepting his conception of alliance. He gives certificate to the RSS saying that they are a patriotic organisation. So these are the differences. The hard reality is that certain sections of the masses are also involved. Their discontent is initially being roused on democratic demands;

there is also the danger of its getting diverted. A new kind of electoral front is emerging and the masses stand in the danger of being cheated. We believe that a real alternative to the Congress Government is an alternative developed on the basis of the unity of the Left and Democratic forces. While we support the democratic demands we look to the future also. The CITU as a working class organisation, has got its international outlook, it has got its understanding of the VIETNAM struggle, it has got its understanding of the revolution that is to come in India also. It does not surrender its ideology to anybody. Nor simply on the basis of its ideology does it neglect any mass movement. No mass movement, genuine movement of the mass, can be treated with contempt or indifference, just because this or that leader leads it. That thing we leave to the Right Communist Party and the AITUC. We, as a serious working class organisation, know that several potests against the ruling Congress Government are developing in this country and we want to gather all these streams into a common flood, so that New Delhi is overwhelmed. And therefore, we have utmost sympathy for the masses that are fighting; we support the demands raised by JP at the same time we maintain a critical attitude. We draw lines, we have got our own independent stand, we have something to tell to the working class. At the same time, every democratic movement, whatsoever leads it, will have our support, sometimes from outside, sometime from inside, whatever occasion is there. That is the stand of the CITU that we take towards every democratic protest, that is the stand we take towards the JP movement.

Period Of Tremendous Opportunities

Comrades, we must remember, therefore, that in spite of immediate difficulties, we are entering a period of tremendous opportunities. In spite of the fact that tremendous difficulties will be created by the ruling class and the Congress Government in our way, the entire trend of events, the entire minds of the masses will be oriented towards more and more furious struggles, towards more and more fighting the policies of the Congress Government. It is not simply an economic battle and it is developing into a political battle. With the lines clearly drawn, with the slogans clearly given, the fight against the Congress Government is inevitable. Therefore, we will be entering a new period in which championing the cause of trade union unity and championing the cause of the working class will be directly linked with championing the

cause of Indian democracy, and ousting the Congress Government. The link will more and more get direct and we have the privilege to carry on, enforce and strengthen the link still further. I only want to tell you that we, who have gathered here represent the trade union movement, represent the advanced section of the working class in India. The working class, as we have found from the experience of Vietnam, from the experience of all the previous successful socialist revolutions has to fulfil its mission as the real leader and organiser of the entire peoples' protest, of the democratic and socialist revolution. We are entering the period in which the success or defeat will be judged by how far we are able to organise these protests, how far we are able to centralise the popular discontent around us. To a certain extent it has happened, perhaps without our knowledge but because of our immense numbers. If you today look at the country, you will find that the movement which has really an all India character is the movement of the united trade union and the united working class, which is emerging as a big force. We should see that through our united activity it emerges as a great force, capable of leading the immediate popular discontent in India. That is the task which, we, as trade union leaders, leaders of the working class have to fulfil, if this entire recession and the battle that will emerge out of this recession is to lead to fruitful results, if the entire discontent is not to be frittered away, or side-tracked in some reactionary channels. We, the leaders of the CITU and our trade unions must be in a position to use our trade union strength to develop popular and people's protests, democratic protests; that is the task before us. I, therefore, expect and am confident that in the coming months when so many challenges will be thrown on us and once again we will be called to face increased repression, our CITU will come out successful, whether it is challenge thrown in West Bengal, whether it is challenge thrown in Kerala or Tamil Nadu. The same fighting spirit that has enabled us to build up the CITU, the same fighting spirit that has enabled our comrades to face the gangster death squads and transportation sentences, the same fighting spirit will guide us to develop the strength of the CITU, so that it becomes invincible and we are able to win the battle of the people against recession and turn the table against the ruling class and the Congress Government.