

Centre of Indian Trade Unions

Third Conference

Welcome Speech

By

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Comrades,

On behalf of the Reception Committee, I warmly welcome all the delegates who have come here from various States to participate in the deliberations of this third session of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. I particularly salute and greet the delegates from West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala who have braved semi-fascist terror and murderous goonda attacks on our comrades and our offices and yet carried on heroic united struggles against the offensive of the Government and the employers. I also greet the delegates from Tamilnadu, Rajasthan, Goa, Andhra and other States who have fought back police repression and reformist sabotage and carried high the C. I. T. U. banner of 'Unity and Struggle'. Our Committee considers it a great honour and privilege to have this opportunity to welcome all these delegates at this 3rd session of the C. I. T. U., which is going to take important decisions on the complex and difficult problems which are today facing the Indian working class.

The foundation session of the C. I. T. U. was held in May 1970 in Calcutta—a city in which the working class had fought many a glorious battle and constituted a serious political challenge to the ruling Congress Party. The second session of the C.I.T.U. was held in April 1973 at Ernakulam in Kerala State, where the movement of the working class and the toiling people had taken tremendous strides and struck fear in the hearts of our class enemies.

This third session of the C. I. T. U. is being held in Bombay, a city which had at one time been the cradle of the working class movement in the country. As far back as 1908, the textile workers of Bombay went on a political general strike for six days to protest against the savage sentence passed against Lokmanya Tilak by the Bombay High Court. This great action of the Bombay working class was hailed by Com. Lenin as the harbinger of the struggle for national emancipation against British Imperialism. It was again in Bombay that the Red Flag—the revolutionary banner of the Indian working class—was first unfurled on the 1st May Day celebrated in India in the year 1926.

Undaunted by the terror and repression launched by British Imperialist rulers against the working class movement, the working class of Bombay has risen again and again to organise great strike-

battles on issues of national importance. Thus we see that in the year 1939 when the 2nd world war started, the working class of Bombay, especially the textile workers, organised a big anti-war strike, the world's first anti-war strike, in which more than 80 thousand workers participated. Then again, at the end of the second world war in February 1946, when the Naval ratings raised the standard of revolt on Naval Ships in Bombay Harbour, there was a complete general strike and hartal in Bombay in support of the Naval Mutiny. Infuriated by this momentous solidarity action of the working class and citizens of Bombay, the British Imperialists handed over the city to the British army which went amuck and killed nearly 350 people in the course of three days of street battles between the army and the people. It was during these three days of butchery by the British forces that Com. Kamal Donde—wife of Com. P. B. Donde was killed by a bullet.

During the post-independence period, the Ruling Congress Party, representing the capitalists and landlords of the country, tried again and again to disrupt the ranks of the Bombay working class, by means of repression on the hand and reformist treachery through its henchmen in the INTUC and other organisations on the other.

Notwithstanding this two-pronged attack of repression and reformist disruption by the ruling classes, the working class of Bombay once again organised a mighty united general strike in 1955 to protest against the slaughter of Indian patriots who had marched into Goa to liberate the people from the rule of the Portuguese Imperialists. During the Samyukta Maharashtra struggle in 1956, the Bombay workers again came out on strike to protest against the brutal firing on peaceful Satyagrahis at the Flora Fountain.

These glorious traditions of the Bombay working class and its fighting spirit have always been a source of constant fear and anxiety in the minds of the ruling classes. Therefore, they have been always hatching new schemes and manoeuvres to divide the ranks of workers in order to prevent them from becoming a serious political force. Rank reformism, national chauvinism, language parochialism were the ideological weapons used by the bourgeoisie to confuse and divide the workers and the reformist leaders of INTUC and AITUC and the Shivsena gangsters were the agencies through which they operated.

As a consequence, we find that by the middle of 1970, when the C.I.T.U. was founded, the Bombay working class was divided and no unity of action was possible even on vital common issues affecting the entire working class. After the first Conference of the C.I.T.U. was held in Bombay in November 1970, we made repeated attempts to implement the C. I. T. U. policy of 'Unity and Struggle' on such important issues as the Black Trade Union Act enacted by Maharashtra Congress Government; for minimum bonus of 8.33%; Shivsena gangsterism against trade unions resulting in the attack on Bombay G. K. U. Office and the murder of Com. Krishna Desai; State Government employees' struggle, etc., but our call for united action did not evoke sufficient response from the other central T. U. organisations. This was because the C. I. T. U. in Maharashtra was then a small force and it had not yet made any big impact on the workers in Bombay through its independent struggles. Thus, during the years 1970, 1971 and a good part of 1972, the C. I. T. U. in Maharashtra had to conduct several independent movements and struggles in order to build up its image as a militant fighter for unity of the working class.

The solidarity strike of 25,000 engineering workers in support of the 18 months old Bombay Metal & Alloys strike, of 18,000 woollen textile workers' strike under C. I. T. U. leadership for 28 days for their urgent demands, the role played by Lal Bayta Mill Mazdoor Union (affiliated to C. I. T. U.) during Bombay textile workers strike in 1971 and 1972 for 8.33% bonus, CEAT Tyre workers' strike for 4½ months, and a powerful demonstration to protest against repression on Adiwasi peasants in Thana Dist. are some of the independent struggles led by the C. I. T. U. during this period. These struggles enabled the C. I. T. U. in Maharashtra to make fruitful efforts for united action of the workers on common issues during the subsequent period. Thus in July 1972 a united Trade Union Council along with representatives of H. M. P. and U. T. U. C. was formed in Maharashtra which paved the way for the formation of U. C. T. U. among C. I. T. U., H. M. P., U. T. U. C. (both wings) and others on an All-India basis in October 1972.

There was acute famine in Maharashtra in the year 1972-73 as a result of which the toiling peasantry and agricultural workers in rural areas were in the jaws of starvation and nearly 80 lakh people were employed in famine works without proper wages, food or other living

conditions. In order, therefore, to support the demands of the starving peasants and bring pressure on the State Congress Government to concede their demands, the C. I. T. U., A. I. T. U. C. and Lal Nishan jointly gave a call for a one day strike in Bombay on 15th May 1973 in which nearly 4 lakh workers participated. This was a very significant strike inasmuch as, for the first time workers came out on strike to support the demands of the toiling peasantry. On 16th May, 16 lakh agricultural workers went on a day's protest strike all over the State for the same demands. Further, by November 1973, a Conference of all Central T. U. organisations and Industrial Federations was held at which a united action committee of all central T. U. organisations was formed to discuss common questions affecting the working class and to take decisions regarding united action.

During this period, the Lal Bavta Mill Mazdoor Union, an affiliate of C. I. T. U., carried on a determined campaign for united struggle of textile workers to secure wage revision and other basic demands, as a result of which $2\frac{1}{2}$ lakh Bombay textile workers fought a militant and united strike for 42 days.

The Joint Action Committee of Trade Unions formed in November 1973 gave a call for Maharashtra Bundh on 2nd January 1974 which evoked a tremendous response from many towns and mofussil areas of the State. Then again on 3rd May 1974, this Action Committee gave a call for Bombay Bundh to protest against the arrest of Railway workers' leaders and the death of Com. Malgi, leader of Central Railway workers, in Police custody. During the great Railway strike from 8th May to 28th May, the C. I. T. U. and the T. U. Joint Action Committee were in the forefront of the struggle and a number of its leaders were arrested under MISA and DIR. On 15th May, the call for Bharat Bundh in support of Railway workers' strike also evoked a very good response on account of the efforts made by the T. U. Joint Action Committee.

The T. U. Joint Action Committee again called for a state-wide strike on 30th October 1974, to protest against the imposition of wage freeze through the C. D. S. Act. Recently, on 3rd April, 1975, when 30,000 Adivasi peasants and landless labourers organised a massive Morcha before the State Assembly, demanding land and adequate wages, hundreds of food-packets were collected by the workers

and thousands of them joined the morcha at the call of T. U. Joint Action Committee. Just now for the last 32 days, the State Government employees of Maharashtra, numbering about 4 lakhs are fighting a grim battle for D. A. at Central Government rates. The T. U. Joint Action Committee has drawn up a plan of sustained struggle in support of the strike.

This series of united actions in Bombay and Maharashtra during the last one and a half years would not have been possible but for the persistent struggle for unity waged by the C. I. T. U. in Maharashtra since its formation in 1970. By conducting a number of independent agitations and struggles, while repeatedly calling for united action by trade unions, by leading several dogged and prolonged strikes of workers in a number of factories like Bardai, Bombay Metal, CEAT Tyre, Calico Chemicals, Khira, of Powerloom workers, etc. by a determined fight against Shivsena strike-breakers and gangsters in almost every workers' strike; by participating most enthusiastically and impressively in every united demonstration and struggle, the C. I. T. U. in our State has emerged as a force to be reckoned with and has become a centre of attraction to newer sections of workers and employees. More; the workers have started looking to the C. I. T. U. as the most consistent and militant defender of their interests and a sincere fighter for unity of the working class. As a result, both the employers as well as the State Congress Government, despite their basically hostile attitude, have been compelled to recognise our existence.

No wonder therefore that like other states, in Maharashtra also, the C. I. T. U. and its affiliated unions have been made a special target of attack by the employers as well as the State Government. Hundreds of workers of C. I. T. U. unions are facing prosecutions, the leaders of Calico Chemical workers including Com. Pareira, General Secretary of the Union, are facing charges of murder and conspiracy and some are still languishing in prison since they have been refused bail. Similarly, the employers have victimised scores of militant workers in a number of factories during the strikes. However, despite this ferocious attack of repression and victimisation, the workers have everywhere kept flying high the fighting banner of the C. I. T. U.

Comrades, even though during the last 5 years we have been trying our utmost to increase the organised strength of the C. I. T. U.

by widely popularising its policy of 'Unity and Struggle' and even though we have succeeded in making the C. I. T. U. a virile and growing force among the workers of various industries in our State, our organisational strength today remains just over half a lakh members. We, therefore, suffer from a lack of cadre, as well as resources. Hence when we were called upon to undertake the responsibility of holding the 3rd session of the C. I. T. U., we accepted it with considerable hesitation, since we were not sure whether we would be able to mobilise the necessary financial and other resources as well as man-power, to hold the session.

Added to these were the difficulties created by power shortage high prices and also water shortage etc. Despite all this, with the help of our workers, who responded in a big way by donating one day's wages, and with the herculean efforts made by a small band of our active workers, we have endeavoured to make the necessary arrangements to make your stay here as comfortable as possible. We are keenly conscious of the fact that these arrangements suffer from various defects and I regret very much the serious inconvenience that may have been caused to all of you. I sincerely apologise to you for the same. However, I assure you that we shall even now try our best to remove all these short-comings and I hope and trust that you will co-operate with us in these efforts. I once again extend a hearty welcome to all of you and strongly hope that through your deliberations during the next four days, you will be able to show a way out of the present critical situation facing the Indian working class.