

Presidential Address

Working Committee Meeting

July 23-25, 1982, Bangalore

Comrades, almost immediately after our last session of the General Council we suffered a grievous loss in the passing away of Comrade Balasubramaniam, one of the foremost leader of our organisation and one of its founders and a leader who had played an outstanding role in building the trade union movement in Tamilnadu over the last few decades.

Comrades, A.B. was a member of the working committee of C.I.T.U. since its inception and was one of the foremost leader of C.P.I.(M) and a member of Polit Bureau. His loss is a great loss to the working class movement of our country.

Dimitrov Centenary

This year the advanced sections of the working class the world over are observing the birth centenary of the great fighter and leader of international proletariat, General Secretary of Communist International founded by Lenin, Georgi Dimitrov. This printing worker from Bulgaria, loyal to Marxism and Leninism and proletarian internationalism, rose to the leadership of the international movement when Fascism had become a world danger and was intent on launching a World War. Guided by the council of Stalin whose name reformists of all shades dread, he succeeded in leading the International movement to unite and build up resistance to war and Fascism. Earlier he had distinguished himself by his indomitable courage while facing a Nazi Court. Facing a death sentence he defended the principles of Communism against Nazi

slander, stating that he was not interested in his personal defence, but the defence of the party and the ideology for which Communism stood.

The heritage left by Dimitrov is of intestimable value to us who are facing the danger of authoritarianism. To fight such danger, Dimitrov called for trade union unity, unity of the working class and backed by it, the united resistance of all progressive forces to stem the tide of Fascism.

The heritage of proletarian internationalism gets added significance today when the world is facing the danger of a nuclear war, the organisation of genocidal war by the hated U.S. Imperialism, a war directed against the Soviet Union.

U.S. Preparations for Nuclear War

To prepare for the War the U.S. Imperialists have been spending billions and billions of dollars on production of weapons of mass destruction. They now intends to place these weapons in the space so that death and destruction can rain on any country which dares contradict the wishes of this homicidal power.

The danger of Nuclear war threatening loss of millions of lives hangs over the world because of the criminal policies of US Imperialism which is intent on a war against the Soviet Union and its aim of global domination.

Comrades, Proletarian Internationalism, responsibility to our people and the people of the world demand that the entire working class of India, the entire trade union movement should actively intervene to expose and isolate the war mongers and join their voice with the working class and people of the world to prevent a nuclear war. There have been huge peace marches in Europe and the U.S.A., there have been wide protests and demonstrations from the working class pointing their accusing finger at the Imperialist.

Soviet Proposals

The forces of peace, of opposition to war, have been tremendously helped by the concrete proposals made by the U.S.S.R. to stop the armament race and gradually eliminate the production of nuclear weapons. The unilateral declaration by the U.S.S.R. that it will not be the first to use the nuclear weapons has been hailed by the International Working Class and all the peace loving forces. The Reagan administration has to reckon with it though it is trying to belittle its importance.

India's Trade Unions & Struggle Against War

Comrades, where does the Indian Trade Union Movement stand in this gigantic struggle, in this struggle against the human genocide? It has to be recognised that the trade union movement of our country under the influence of diverse ideologies is hardly playing a rôle in this international struggle and lowering banner of proletarian internationalism. No doubt, the CITU Unions all over the country did raise their protest against the war on this May Day and joined their voices with the International protest. The unions affiliated to the AITUC and perhaps some other organisations also protested against the war on May Day. But for the rest, the vast masses of workers and the trade union movement remained ignorant of this danger and their international responsibility. The narrow outlook which abjures internationalism and concentrates only on immediate demands disintegrates the proletarian consciousness.

Comrades, it is besides to be noted that even the CITU and AITUC were unable to combine their forces on May Day, when the AITUC leaders wanted to club China alongwith the U.S.A.

It is our task to see that the entire trade union movement moves alongwith the path of International Solidarity and struggles against the war.

We must act as the spearhead and in the coming months activate the working class resistance to war. The World Federation of Trade Unions has given a call to observe 1st September as an anti-War Day. We must warmly respond to this call. The CITU and its unions should take lead everywhere in mobilising the widest sections of trade unions for this anti-war International Day. We should be prepared to join hands with all those who regard US Imperialism as the source of war and do not indulge in the criticism of any socialist country and do not resort to the bogus talk about two Super Powers.

Israeli Aggression

Comrades, the entire progressive world, the working class movement, the Governments of all Socialist countries, Governments of Non-aligned countries have condemned the USA-directed Israeli aggression against Lebanon—an aggression accompanied with brutalities and massacres to destroy the PLO and its heroic resistance. The CITU denounces this aggression and raises its voice of protest against this act of US treachery and double

dealing. It acclaims the resistance put up by the Palestine Liberation Organisation, its union at several places have demonstrated their support for the PLO and protested against the U.S. attack. Much more, of course, remains to be done to save a fighting people. The CITU unions must continue to unite the working class, expose Israel and the Reagan Administration and support the PLO.

Comrades, it is surprising that in the face of this US directed aggression India's Prime Minister would not directly condemn US Imperialism and contended herself only with expressing sympathy for the Lebanese and Palestinians and condemning the Israeli Government.

The Israeli attack has also revealed that thoroughly treacherous character of a number of muslim regimes which proclaim themselves as defenders of Islam.

The advocates of Islamic fundamentalism stand exposed when they betray the Palestinian people openly and callously. The Islamic fundamentalism reveals itself as a reactionary weapon to divide the democratic and revolutionary force movement in each country to stabilise the reactionary class regimes in these countries. It acts as an imperialist tool to stabilise the regimes which play second fiddle to the USA.

Israeli Workers Uphold International Solidarity

In contrast to the reactionary stands of these Govts. stand the shines of the action of the Israeli working class who has openly denounced the Israeli aggression and demanded justice and freedom for the people of Palestine. The bond of International solidarity, of proletarian internationalism is recognised by the Israeli working class and progressive forces who despite great difficulties have shown courage, condemned their own Govt. and demanded withdrawal of military forces from Lebanon.

Betrayed by these reactionary regimes the struggle for the Palestinian Liberation enters a more difficult phase. The spark of freedom once lit however will not be extinguished. After the great fight of the Vietnamese people, no other people, has shown such heroic resistance and capacity for sacrifice in the cause of freedom as the people of Palestine. What can we offer to this heroic people. We can only tell them in the words of Pablo Neruda :

"Not the dead hands of a thousand nights of oppression.

Stifle your living hope for the desired day that we throughout the world, so many of us are yearning towards, the final day of

suffering the day of justice won through bitter struggle."

Growing Breakdown

Comrades, last year saw further intensification of the authoritarian drive against the democratic liberties of the people. The election of a person, who openly admired Hitler on the floor of the Parliament, to the post of India's President does not augur well for the democracy and democratic rights.

The left forces of which our CITU forms a substantial part have addressed a rebuff to the authoritarian party in West Bengal and Kerala in the recent elections. But elsewhere the requisite unity was lacking. The trade union movement should support all the efforts for broad resistance to checkmate the authoritarian party.

At the same time, the working class must note that the entire bourgeois landlord order is collapsing. The law and order has collapsed where the Congress(I) party heads the administration in the States. The degeneration of the ruling party seen in the corruption of individual members, links of the leaders with anti-socials, surrender before the dacoits, policemen indulging in gang rape against peasant women mark the growing collapse of the order. It is further seen in the collapse of Parliamentary values. The Governor appointed by the ruling party smuggles the ruling party to power as in Haryana. The Governor appointed by the ruling party is described as a thief by the legislators of the same party in West Bengal. Inside legislatures and the Parliament erosion of norms is becoming the order of the day. The entire opposition is expelled from the assembly in Bihar. The ruling party is unable to protect the constitution. It is unable to protect the unity of the people and the integrity of the country. It is unable to control the secessionist movement in Assam. It is unable to check the reactionary forces in Punjab. It is afraid of exposing US role in the developments in Assam or exposing the disruption which it carries through foreign church missions or Islamic Fundamentalism. The Government is presiding over a process of national disintegration. Unless a powerful working class movement backed by the peasantry, uniting all the left and democratic force comes forward as the alternative, the country cannot be saved from disintegration and the basic and fundamental problems of the people cannot be solved. While organising the widest possible resistance to the authoritarian party, the trade union movement must continue more towards its goal of basic democratic change in society leading to the goal of the

socialism.

Policing the Wages

Comrades, authoritarian drive against the people is first of all seen in the drive against the freedom and liberties of the working class. The ESMA is followed by 3 new bills to suppress the trade union movement. This is preceded by unleashing of terror against the trade union struggles in U.P. and Haryana.

Behind this stand the calculated design to attack the existing standards of workers, to lower the wage bill, to pass on the burden of the crisis on them. The Government forcibly propagates that the wage standards in organised industry in India are very high.

It is in this background that the Government has started its attack on working class wages. It has started policing the wages. It has declared Section 144—declaring that wage increase above 10% is illegal.

The Bureau of Public Enterprises has issued the following directions to the Public Sector managements; obviously they will be followed in the Private Sector also.

They comprise.

1. No wage increase can be given at the existing level of productivity. All future wage increases must be linked with corresponding increase in productivity.

2. There will be no retrospective effect in future wage agreements. Hence all agreements will be effective from the date of signing of the agreement.

3. The effective period of the agreement should be 4 years.

4. No more than 10% of the wage bill can be increased as a result of the agreement and this includes fringe benefits.

5. The rate of D.A. will not exceed Rs. 1.30 per point.

This is a virtual lathi charge. It means that in the best possible agreement for 4 years to come the workers will have to be satisfied with 10% increase on the present wage. That too if a corresponding increase in productivity takes place and there is absolutely no provision against erosion through a rise in the cost of living except the fixed miserable Rs. 1-30 per point.

Besides there is no retrospective effect. This is to make a provision for cheating by indefinitely prolonging the existing agreement. All that the management has to do is to refuse to come to a new agreement so that the old continues and when a new agreement is reached, there is no provision for asking the management

to compensate for the loss. Trade Unions are fully aware how negotiations and disputes are prolonged for years and the only check against it is provision for retrospective effect. Now that is to be removed.

The trade union movement denounces this proposal to link increase in wages with productivity. It reveals the real face of the much advertised wages and incomes policies of the Govt. which can be now described as a policy to deflate the wages of the workers and inflate the profits of the employers.

This means that despite increased productivity the real wage of the workers will continue to go down.

Gains of Production

The workers have increased their productivity in the past but the gainers have been the employers. The loss has been entirely of the workers. Despite increased productivity an inevitable law of capitalist society presses down the workers' wages to the barest minimum. This has been the experience of India also.

The National Labour Commission (Labour) found that production per worker went up by 63% between 1952 and 1964. But the real wages of the workers in the same period remained either static or declined. The prices of essential commodities also went up in the same period. The gains of the productivity went into the pockets of the employers.

It was recently admitted in the Parliament by the Government that between 1960 and 1970 productivity in India went up by 28% while the real wages declined in the same period. Let it be further remembered that increased production by workers has led to loss of jobs in many industries. The statistics of Tea, Jute, Cotton Textiles and Engg. Industries show reduced employment following increased productivity.

The productivity year unilaterally announced by the Prime Minister has this meaning. It demands forcible extraction of more work from the workers in the interest of capitalists. It is also part of the drive to attract Multi-Nationals and other foreign concerns in India with the offer of cheap labour, carrying out part of the assurances given to the I.M.F.

That increased productivity is to be extracted from an unwilling working class and not secured through its willing consent is clear from the way the Labour Minister called a Conference on Productivity without caring to secure the participation of the majority of

the trade union centres.

All major trade union Central Organisations except the INTUC boycotted the 15th June Meet. But the Labour Minister refused to discuss with them and he is satisfied with the co-operation offered by the management and the INTUC. This certainly fits in with official design.

Ideological Propaganda

This call for greater productivity, this appeal to the Central Trade Union Organisation and workers' participation in the management, it should not be forgotten, is part of the Government's ideological propaganda to isolate the trade unions and workers from the rest of the society, at a time when the workers are forced to fight for their demands and are in need of public support. Having unleashed inflation through deficit financing, the Government is now falsely propagating—that only if the workers were to work more, prices will come down and society will get relief. But the Govt. is unable to explain why sugar prices have not fallen despite record production of sugar this year and why there is no relief for the common man.

The Trade Union movement must answer this propaganda and take the people into confidence. The trade union movement and the working class do not shirk their responsibilities to run the wheels of production and serve the needs of society. They have repeatedly declared their desire to accept joint participation on terms of equality, with full rights to the workers' representatives to examine the balance sheets and the finances of the concern, to examine the supply of the raw material, their quality and with equal powers to take decision on the question of production and discipline inside the concern. The trade Unions are prepared to discuss norms of production and payments and give the agreed norms of production for agreed wage settlements.

Our experience however teaches us that the management in public and private sectors are not only opposed to genuine participation of workers in running the factories and solving the problems of productivity, they victimise workers when they expose corrupt practices of officials, use of substandard materials, which rapidly impair the capacity of machinery. Management's call for production drive is only a call for greater exploitation of workers to inflate the profits of the employers. The workers are prepared to serve the society. But the employers and the Government want

them to serve the interest of capitalists.

Strikes & Lockouts

The year that has passed since our General Council meeting has seen a big tussle between the trade unions and the employers and the anti-labour policy of the Govt. By 1981, the influence of Indira Govt. began to wear out and the strike struggles of the working class showed a rising curve.

The number of mandays lost in 1981 went beyond 25 millions, 4 millions above the 1980 figure, though it was lower than the 35 millions figure of 1979. The number of mandays lost in the public sectors almost doubled in 1981. Official reports admit that in these struggles, our CITU was in the fore front and led more actions than any other organisation.

End of 1981 and the first half of 1982 saw some of the most prolonged and bitterly fought actions of recent times.

The Bombay Textile Strike which has lasted for nearly 6 months takes the lead in these prolonged battles. But besides it there have been prolonged strike of State Govt. employees, of electricity workers (Rajasthan, UP), Hinustan Ferodo in Bombay and others.

The following figures about mandays lost through strikes and official lockouts are significant :

Year	Man Days lost (in 000)	
	Due to strikes	Due to lockouts
1978	15,423	12,917
1979	35,804	8,050
1980	12,018	9,907
1981	15,658	10,806

Except in 1979 atleast 40% of the total man days lost are due to lockouts. But the Govt. and its spokesmen generally talk about man days loss due to strikes only. In the last 3 years, the percentage of man days lost due to official lockouts is increasing. This is a counter offensive of the employing class to bring the workers into submission.

The trade union movement must devise new methods to fight this lock out offensive. In West Bengal 17 Jute Mills are already closed. It is estimated that 65,000 badli workers have also been thrown out of work. We must devise proper means in consultation with other organisations to meet this attack which threatens to increase.

Badli Workers

Notwithstanding plethora of legislations and boastful signing of ILO Conventions, lakhs of workers in factories and concerns are treated as temporary workers, badli workers with no right, no job security whatsoever.

The Bombay Textile strike is partly due to this question of Badli workers. Thousands of young workers working in textile mills have absolutely no security and they took a prominent part in organising the strike.

The CITU must give prior attention to this problem as it affects thousands of workers who come fresh into the labour market.

All this enables the employers to escape their legal obligations, cut down wages and gather enormous surplus from the labour of temporary workers. This can happen only in an ex-colonial country set on the path of capitalism with pre-capitalist survivals in tact.

Violation of Conventions

The Government of India has been violating ILO Conventions one after another. To earn the certificate of progressivism abroad, it signs conventions which it takes no time in breaking. It attacks freedom of organisation. It indulges in unfair labour practices when it itself victimises office bearers of trade unions or permits private employers to do it. No wonder the Labour Minister Tiwari asked for freedom to repudiate ILO Conventions recently. He made this plea on behalf of underdeveloped countries.

Unemployment

The registered unemployment is apporaching the two crores figure. The educated unemployed constitute a substantial part of the army of the unemployed. Has the Government any policy to arrest the growth of unemployment? No. On the contrary its policy contributes to the growth of unemployment driving lakhs to streets without jobs and tens of thousands to seek the shelter of gulf countries.

Under its rule hundreds of concerns have been closed throwing out of work tens of thousands of people. Its drive for productivity has led to direct retrenchment, of suppression of new recruitment oncé again contributing to the growth of unemployment.

Besides in the hunt for cheap exports at competitive prices and increased production, electronic computers and job killing devices are being introduced on a massive scale.

Health of the Working Class

The health of the working class is another casualty under the present rule. Legal provisions are violated. Surveys of villages where Mining Workers live reveal undescrivable conditions which cause disease and ill health among these workers. There is hardly any provision for giving them medical relief, though vast sums have accumulated in the coal mines welfare fund. The advertised ESI scheme is also proved to be a scandal. Tall claims are made on behalf of the scheme but facts reveal that it ill serves the needs of the employees.

Social security has to be all embracing. It must (a) cover medical care (b) sickness benefit, (c) maternity benefit, (d) invalidating benefit, (e) old age benefit, (f) survivors' benefit, (g) benefit in respect of occupational injuries and diseases (h) unemployment benefit, (i) family benefit.

But the ESI Act covers only a very small part of social security and that too in the most niggardly way.

Working Women

Comrades, it is a matter of some satisfaction that some of our unions are giving earnest attention to the problems of women workers.

Our Trade Unions must fully support the women's struggles against traditions and customs dowry etc., and protest against crimes committed against them—sexual and other crimes. Similarly, it is a responsibility of our union to champion the demands of women workers and enable them to participate in the policy making bodies of the trade unions. We must realise that the working class itself is not free from feudal attitude towards women and our trade unions must fight against it.

19th January Strike

Last year has no doubt seen a revival of the urge for trade union unity for united mass action for which the CITU has been working patiently. The developments show both the potentialities of trade union unity as well as present weakness.

The 19th January Strike not only showed unprecedented trade union unity, it showed the power of a United Working Class, of a united trade union movement to unleash mass democratic action of other sections and contribute to greater unity of the people in the struggle against authoritarianism.

The decision of the organised trade union movement for united

action, the certainty that the call will be responded to by lakhs of workers, evoked support from the opposition political parties and led to the participation of wide sections of the people including the peasantry. The strike became a complete bandh in many places drawing into the common action tens of thousands of shopkeepers, hoteliers, teachers, students, lawyers and other professionals.

The demands raised by the strike were significant and conformed to be international trend of merging of the working class demands with the demands of democracy and the demands to maintain the living standards of all sections of the downtrodden.

By combining the demands of the working class with the pressing needs of the peasants and the agricultural workers, with the demands of the suffering people against fleecing prices, the trade unions took initiative to unite all sections of people who are facing a miserable existence under the bourgeois landlord rule.

This consciousness has to be carried forward—the process of trade union demands merging with the general democratic demands, the process of trade unions coming out as champions of the peasantry and the agricultural workers has to be carried forward. If carried forward consistently. It will result in an important political developments, placing initiative in the fight against authoritarianism, with the working class.

The strike also revealed the weak side of trade union unity. It did not get response from the Railway and Central Govt. organisations including Defence Organisations. The reformist leaders of these organisations could not make up their mind to join the strike though many of them had earlier supported the call and also decided to join it. In West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala these sections by and large joined the common action.

It is necessary that the Central Unions and Federations hold a dialogue with the leaders of these organisations making them aware of the great harm done to the trade union movement by their policies. Above all, it is necessary to make an ardent appeal for unity and common action to the mass of the Central Government, State Governments, Railway and Defence employees to fight the authorities shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the working class, to fight unitedly for the common demands of the workers and the people.

The existence of several trade union organisations and their differences reflect the inner struggle in the trade union movement for

a line based on class struggle, a militant line of trade union unity, a line of alliance with other democratic forces to fight the bourgeois-landlord class rule. The formation of the CITU reflected this struggle.

It will be found that two contradictory currents have been influencing the trade union movement. The separatist current, isolationist current, officially patronised and sustained by illusions spread by reformist leaders; the current of growing unity arising from the experience of the working class and maturity of the trade union movement.

The growing strength of the latter has led to a great degree of cooperation between several central organisations including at some times the INTUC in negotiations and protests. This change has been taking place in the last ten years.

The emergency period openly divided the working class. The INTUC and AITUC leadership fell in line with the ruling party while the other trade unions opposed the attacks launched by it against the working class. They demanded the withdrawal of the CDS Scheme, the banning of strikes and other anti-working class measures.

The situation again changed and all the trade union centres combined to oppose the Industrial Relations Bill of the Janata Government. Since then though the INTUC has again returned to its policy of supporting the Government, all other trade unions centres and federations are coming together showing a greater urge for unity. This is due to several factors. The crisis of the economic system has exposed all sections of workers to attacks. The inflation, the policy of deficit financing, the uncontrollable rise in prices again are common issues which can be fought only by the united struggle of the working class and cannot be settled by a single central organisation, without support from others. The Government did try to split the ranks of the workers by announcing productivity-linked bonus to railway workers and others, thus undermining the claim to bonus as deferred wage. But the effect of this manoeuvre cannot last long. The Government now demands a moratorium on strike and demands for three years in exchange for some fringe benefits.

Comrades, all these show that despite the vacillations and hesitations of section of trade union leadership the economic situation calls upon the working class and its organisations to unite and fight the offensive against it. The CITU works on the basis of this

economic reality and endeavours to overcome the temporary obstacles created by the reformist action. The CITU at the same time notes that the struggle for unity must lead to the acceptance of class struggle in practice and giving up of the ideology of class collaboration. This internal struggle is helped by the growing experience of unity and the practical measures that have to be adopted to meet the present offensive. There will be greater need of trade union unity in the coming days in view of the Government's anti-labour policy and the need of the capitalist class to pass on the burden of the crisis to the shoulders of the workers.

Comrades, the urge for the trade union unity and the united struggle is shaking today reformist strongholds. Many of you perhaps are not aware that everything is not well with the INTUC and that a section had split away from the parent organisation disapproving its policies and joining hands with CITU and other members of the National Campaign Committee. Though the existing top leadership of the INTUC is committed to loyally supporting the official policy, still there cannot be any unanimity because at the base, there is lot of discontent and disillusionment with the official policy.

Considering the need for greater unity in the existing situation, our CITU must again reiterate its call for a Confederation of Central Trade Union Organisations where the policy decisions will be taken unanimously and which will function as a forum of continuous discussion of problems facing the trade union movement. It is only through constant discussion and mass action that the desired unity can be achieved. The CITU should now make some concrete proposals regarding Confederation and hold consultation with the leadership of other organisations.

Comrades, the coming days will be the days of great stress and storm for our own movement. We are living in the midst of a world wide crisis of the capitalist system accompanied by the inflationary rise in prices and unprecedented unemployment. In the United States of America unemployment now exceeds 10 millions, a figure not reached even in the 1930 recession. In the advanced capitalist countries of Europe also millions are unemployed. The condition of the employed and the unemployed gets worse every day because of continued inflation which defies control. The economic crisis in our country is deepened by our dependence on the western world.

The Government denies that there is any recession. But the closure of industries, sickness in industry, as it is called, mounting unemployment and the narrowing of market, all point out that our country is passing through economic recession. To get out of the situation the Government of India is borrowing one loan after another from the western countries and the International Monetary Fund. As a price of these loans India has to accept imports from these recession hit countries and also invite investment of their capital with promise of high returns of profits. This means that the Government of India is being forced to place cheap Indian labour at the disposal of foreign capital and Multinationals accompanied by imports from these countries though they may threaten the existence of our industries and the jobs of thousands of our workers. Let us hope that our trade union movement and the leaders of trade union organisations will realise the common danger and respond to our call for urgent unity.

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