

REPORT III

TRADE UNIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND UNITY.

The mass trade union movement in India is mainly the creation of the Communist Party. It is the Communist pioneers who first brought the class outlook to the trade unions. It is they who first united the workers irrespective of caste and communal divisions, irrespective of political creeds. It is they who first built the biggest trade unions in India, brought the outlook of international solidarity of the working class into the trade unions. The union as the instrument of militant struggles of the working class and of collective bargaining, run by the workers' own leadership came into the field through their work.

The British imperialists and their Indian partners tried their best to stop this growth. But they failed.

Offensive Against the Working Class

Since 1947, the Indian monopolists led by the National Congress have launched the most determined offensive against the working class organising itself with the outlook of its own class. The offensive took the form of dividing and disrupting the AITUC nationally, and internationally of directing the workers under the influence of Anglo-American leadership, of preaching class-collaboration and suppressing the strike struggles either by laws of compulsory arbitration or by direct state force.

In this, the big bourgeois monopolists are aided by the Right-wing Socialists. In recent days, the hand of the American Federation of Labour, the American C. I. O., the British T. U. C., Jugoslav Agencies in guiding, financing and staffing the Socialist leadership and the INTUC is directly and openly visible. Their main burden of attack is that the Communist Party has never built the T. U. movement as such, that it has always used the T. U. for its *party politics*, that internationally it puts the T. U.'s at the service of Russia. Hence they have to build a separate T. U. movement.

It is necessary that this Anglo-American offensive aided by the Congress Government, the INTUC and the Right Socialists is fought energetically, and the working class apprised of the role of the C. P. and other political parties in the T. U. movement.

Communist Pioneers

There were no Communists in India before 1921 and no Socialists in India before 1934, whether in group or party form. There were no trade unions in India before 1918 and no central organisation. The AITUC was founded in October 1920 not in order to coordinate T. U. activity but mainly in order to elect "workers' representatives" to the ILO which was founded in 1919. But once founded the AITUC tended to become the central mouthpiece of the Trade Unions.

It was the Communist group in Bombay that brought the "labour problem" before the National Congress. From 1921 to 1924, the Bombay Provincial Congress, the biggest Congress unit in those days and the AICC were constantly being moved to *establish committees to organise the working class*. Committees were established and funds allotted but never to work in the working class. The national bourgeoisie did not consider it seriously. They considered it safer not to encourage the worker to become organised, either in T. U.'s or in political parties.

"Principles" of Mazdoor Mahajan

Not that the bourgeois leadership had no ideas as to what the T. U.'s should be, if they did come up.

When the Ahmedabad workers struck for wages, Mahatma Gandhi took the lead and established the Mazdoor Mahajan, the union which for all these years since 1920 is being hailed as the model of trade unionism. Why is it a "model"? Some facts are worth noting in this respect.

The Mazdoor Mahajan's subscriptions from the workers were realised for it by the millowners at the pay counter. This practice continued till 1936.

The Ahmedabad Millowners' Association made donations to this "Union", to help its "social work".

The Mazdoor Mahajan preached that the capitalists were their trustees as they were more clever and the workers ignorant. The

capitalists were necessary for society. Capital and labour were two wheels of the social chariot, on which life moved.

Hence, it decided to solve all disputes by arbitration and not by strikes. It is recorded in the *Mahajan's* proceedings that one dispute had been pending in arbitration for 17 years.

The *Mahajan* never affiliated to or formed any central all-India body of trade unions. Even when Lajpat Rai and C. R. Das were presidents of the AITUC in 1920-22 or Nehru and Subhash Bose were presidents in 1929-30, the *Mahajan* declined to join the AITUC.

It was their principle that the workers should not look beyond their factory or their town.

The *Mahajan* was organised on a craft basis. It was their principle that the workers should not unite even on the basis of an industry as a whole. To unite on an all-India scale was dangerous.

Naturally the *Mahajan* never joined any international organisation. To combine internationally was still more dangerous.

The *Mahajan* would not participate in political actions, or conflict with any government, not even the British.

Such were the "model" principles on which the Mazdoor Mahajan was built.

Formation of INTUC

Anyone now looking into the "principles" on which the INTUC is run will be struck to find that on these essential matters, the INTUC has changed its Mahajan line.

The INTUC by its very formation now wants a national central body of trade unions. It now sits in the Anglo-American International, the ICFTU. It does not oppose forming unions on industrial basis. It puts its unions at the service of a political party and politics, that is, of the National Congress.

Thus Gandhian trade unionism has thrown overboard certain of its "principles". Why have they done so? They have done it because the working class refused to accept their line of division and disruption. Hence the bourgeoisie advises the INTUC to accept the workers' outlook on these matters, in order to disrupt it effectively. It is the Communists who adhered to and effectively brought the questions of national central organisation, of international solidarity, of political outlook to the workers. The others now accept it—only to use it against the working class.

As stated above the Communists tried their best to persuade the National Congress to organise the working class. But they failed. From 1921 to 1930, the national bourgeoisie under-estimated the role of the T. U.'s.

Communists Build Mass TUs

The pioneer Communist groups of 1920-28 led determined strike-struggles against wage-cuts and rationalisation, won big victories and built big mass trade unions. All these unions were in the AITUC. None of them preached class-collaboration. They fearlessly championed the demands of political freedom. They joined in international solidarity. They were industrial unions. They were bringing forward working-class leadership.

In the strikes of 1923-24 the Communists came forward with the slogan of working class as the creator of values, with slogans of socialist outlook. In 1927, they brought the question of international solidarity, through the defence of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, in which these two innocent workers were hanged by American imperialists on faked charges.

The great May Day celebrations were begun in India in 1927 by the Communist pioneers who made it a mighty movement during the strikes struggles of 1928-29.

On International Affiliation

But the Communists did not raise the question of international affiliation on their own in the AITUC. They did not think the movement was ripe for such an advanced step. Moreover they were sure the other groups, especially, the group of N. M. Joshi-Giri would not agree to affiliation with the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), the International of the militant working class. The Joshi-Giri group was with the British T.U.C. and the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). The IFTU had deserted the struggles of the working class and opposed the struggles of the colonial people for freedom. Hence, we did not support the IFTU neither did we move for affiliation with RILU.

Who forced the question on us first? It was the British TUC and the Joshi-Giri group. The British TUC sent Purcell and Halsworth, two Labour reactionaries, to India at the AITUC session in Kanpur in 1927 in order to secure the AITUC affiliation to the IFTU, because the Chinese movement had gone and affi-

liated to the RILU. On a world scale, the bourgeoisie had launched an offensive through the IFTU to divide and capture the working class for its schemes of war-mongering and suppression of the liberation struggles of the colonial people. The same game is being repeated now by the ICFTU.

The IFTU move was defeated by us at Kanpur and at the Delhi Executive meeting of the AITUC in 1928. We then proposed a countermove to affiliate with the RILU. As a result, the Joshi-Giri group with the consent of the others dropped the question of affiliation with the IFTU and we dropped our proposal.

What was the role of the Congress leadership in these moves? It may be noted here that C. F. Andrews and Lala Lajpat Rai who represented Congress ideology at these meetings and in the AITUC encouraged the IFTU and the British TUC though on national questions they expressed anti-British sentiments.

Another question of international solidarity that arose in this period was that of expressing friendship with the Soviet Union and China. The Communists frankly told the working class that the Soviet Union was a country of the working class and as such a friend to be defended. The question of the Chinese Revolution came when the British gunboats attacked Shanghai, Hongkong and Canton workers' strikes and the Revolution. We openly told the workers to support the worldwide "Hands off China" movement of that period.

But while doing this on the platform of the Party, we did not pose the questions as an issue on the TUC platform, if the others would not agree. *We never wanted to divide the AITUC on political questions.* But we also refused to keep the working class and TUC aloof from political questions as such.

Thus we built the T.U. movement in India from 1922 onwards.

Socialists Enter TUs

The Socialists came in 1934. But they were not yet in the T.U. movement. They entered it in company with the Royists in 1936. For what? Mainly in order to guide the working class into the fold of the National Congress. The Socialists were "Congress Socialists" then.

The tremendous growth of the T.U. movement and the leadership of the Communists therein had frightened both the big bourgeoisie and the British government. The British had attacked us

in 1924 and 1929, by launching the Kanpur and Meerut conspiracy cases and wholesale arrests of trade union workers. But the attack had failed to dislodge us.

The National Congress leadership refused to support any struggle of the workers. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had refused our offer to send 10,000 volunteers to the Bardoli Peasant Satyagraha in 1928 from the textile strikers of Bombay. Mahatma Gandhi refused to allow the Ahmedabad workers to give any relief to the Bombay workers, who were on strike for six months.

In 1937, the Communists entered the stronghold of the Mazdoor Mahajan in Ahmedabad and brought about a general strike of 36 mills. Sardar Patel was surprised, because the strike took place despite his ban. That set the bourgeoisie thinking. With the first share of power in the Ministries of 1937, the national bourgeoisie organised a determined offensive through their Hind Mazdoor Seva Sangh to capture the working class throughout India and suppress the militant T.U. movement.

The Socialist leadership along with the Royists controlled the AITUC. But they would not organise the workers against the offensive of the bourgeoisie and the Congress. We bore the brunt. Rajagopalachari and Munshi and Pant and all threatened us. Rajaji even made a statement that he carried a pistol in his hand against us if we dared to fight. We did not flinch. We have not become Rajaji's enemy No. 1 only today. We became so since we conducted the strikes of workers against the Harveys of Madura and Chettiars of Coimbatore despite Rajaji's threats in his first honeymoon days of Ministry and power.

That was how the big Congress bosses and the Socialist leaders behaved at the first taste of power.

In those days the T.U. movement spread far and wide, became all-India one. Former backward areas came swiftly to the forefront of struggles.

In 1947 with the mass backing that the Congress and Socialists had secured during 1942, they tried to capture the AITUC and TU movement through it. The Hind Mazdoor Seva Sangh of Sardar Patel allotted a lakh of rupees to enrol bogus membership of unions inside the AITUC run by Congressmen and Right Socialists.

They tried their best to capture the AITUC at the Calcutta session in February 1947. They measured their strength by proposing a resolution to support the Bills, brought forward by Con-

gress Ministries which banned strikes and imposed compulsory conciliation. The resolutions were defeated by overwhelming majority.

Soon after Sardar Patel established the INTUC in May '47. The Sardar was not ready to give the Socialists their price. The Socialists soon followed the Congress and split away from the AITUC and started the Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

Gandhian leadership had so far not worked an all-India central body for the working class. Now they had it—in order to support the anti-working class bourgeois state.

Who Split the AITUC and Why?

In 1950, though the INTUC and the Socialist HMS claimed to differ with each other, they agreed to join hands in affiliation with ICFTU, the Anglo-American International split-away from the WFTU.

Both the Congress and the Socialists accuse the Communists of having caused splits in the AITUC, of using T.U.'s for party politics, of joining with foreign countries like Soviet Union and China. What do the above facts show?

The Communists in the AITUC never committed the AITUC to any political resolution on the question of the war, about which so much is said. The Communists never pitched the AITUC and T. U.'s in the elections behind their party candidates.

The first split in the AITUC in 1929 was caused by the Joshi-Giri-Chamanlal Group because they wanted cooperation with the Royal Commission on Labour which the AITUC had disapproved. Even Nehru who was the President of the AITUC then had to admit it and criticise the tactics employed by these gentlemen.

In 1947, it was the Congressmen and Socialists who started new rival organisations and split from the AITUC.

The Communists never forced any political affiliation on the AITUC.

The INTUC asked its unions to support the Congress in the elections. The Bengal INTUC split on this issue from the Central body.

The HMS unions rallied behind the Socialist Party which openly wants affiliation of Trade Unions to the Socialist Party on

the model of the British where the TUC unions are affiliated to the Labour Party, and pay levy for Party funds.

It is only the Communists who do not want the unions to affiliate to any party. They did not want the unions to line up behind any party. Only if the overwhelming workers of a union demanded, the unions in some cases joined democratic fronts, formed from several progressive parties and groups.

Anglo-US TUs Quit WFTU

Internationally also, the British and the American T. U.'s who had first joined in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) wanted to commit the WFTU to accept the Marshall Plan, which was a plan of the American Government to enslave the European countries. The T. Us. of the Soviet Union, France, Italy, China, India etc. asked that the Anglo-Americans should not raise the question in the WFTU and demand a vote. They could in their national centres, if they liked, take their own decision. But the Anglo-US leaders insisted. The Soviet Trade Union Centre made the following statement on this issue, which is worth nothing:

“The AUCCTU considers that the international unity of of the working class in the World Federation of Trade Unions is based on the free and voluntary cooperation of trade unions which are non-party organisations of the workers and pursue the aims of improving the standard of living of the working class.

“The Soviet trade unions, therefore, consider that it is impossible to turn trade unions, which are non-political organisations, into an arena for political games and political machinations”. (February 1948).

But the Anglo-American T.U. leadership had lined up behind their imperialists. They lost in the vote and hence left the WFTU.

They agreed on walking out of the WFTU but could not agree for a long time on forming a united body of their own because of Anglo-American rivalries. Only latterly, a semblance of agreement on the ICFTU was arrived at and the INTUC and HMS joined them from India. They have lined up behind the Marshall Plan. Hence it is no wonder that the Socialist HMS has lined up behind the Five Year Plan and the American aid and community projects.

Who then put the trade unions at the service of foreign countries? The Communists, who refuse to divide the T.U. on political questions or the Congress and Socialists who divide the working class and line it up behind Anglo-American schemes of world domination?

The Communist Party has built the T.U. movement, fought its battles, made tremendous gains for the working class, organised it nationally and in solidarity with the international working class, has given it socialist ideology, class outlook and a revolutionary make-up.

It is difficult for the bourgeoisie to smash the organised working class from this position.

Working Class Unity

It is true that the Communists made mistakes and failed to establish the working class in India as the leader of the national revolutionary freedom movement and that this failure was used by the bourgeoisie to weaken the party and the working class.

But despite this the working class has been so well embedded in its class position that the bourgeoisie has been forced to launch an all-round offensive with the aid of the INTUC and the Right Socialists to prevent it from uniting, to keep it divided, to demoralise it ideologically and win it for the monopoly bourgeoisie and its Anglo-American helpers.

Hence it is our most important task to unite the working class and the T.U. movement. No amount of sacrifice should be spared for it.

The crisis of the colonial economy of the capitalist system and the successes of the socialist and democratic systems are making our task easier.

When the Congress Government in order to enrich the monopolists lifted controls in 1948, the working class led by the Socialists and Communists unitedly struck and forced the government to restore controls. In several towns and industries, even when the Trade Unions do not formally unite, the workers carry out united strike struggles, as in Bombay in 1950 and Nagpur in 1951. But the division in the leadership prevents the workers from reaping the benefits of their united action.

Among the working class a tremendous urge for unity exists. Wherever a united call goes, the workers and even the middle classes in sympathy with them, act unitedly and successfully.

Such unity halts the government in its offensive against the working class and enables it to protect its standards of living.

The AITUC has always proposed to the UTUC, the HMS and even the INTUC joint actions on agreed questions affecting the economic interests of the working class, even though the organisations may not agree politically or unite organisationally. But they have persistently refused our offers, the story of which need not be recounted here.

Unity cannot be achieved unless the AITUC unions work hard and lead the workers in struggles. We have to work for unity from below as well as from above. Where and in what conditions the one or the other or both should be the starting point depends on the state of the organisation, the mood of the masses and the make-up of the dissenting leaderships.

Unity has to be constantly worked for, setting aside Party political questions, or personal likes or dislikes and notions of false prestige. At the same time, we should not compromise on fundamentals or agree to surrender the working class to the leadership of the bourgeoisie and its agents.