

# On the Policy and Strategy of the Trade Union Front of the Party

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*Parimal Dasgupta was a remarkable Indian communist and trade unionist. He was a critic of the developing reformist line in the CPI from 1953. Parimal Dasgupta analysed the 1964 draft programme of the CPI (M) which revealed its rupture with the Programme and Tactical Line of the CPI which had been elaborated after the discussions in Moscow of the party leadership with the CPSU(b) and Stalin. He also critiqued the pro-focoist Che Guevara tactics adopted in the countryside by the founder of the CPI (ML), Charu Majumdar. The formation of the CPI (ML) meant that effectively the industrial working class was given no role in the Indian revolution. Much the same was true of the understanding of the communist revolutionary trend headed by D.V. Rao which was opposed to the tactic of individual terrorism in town and country. Both these trends echoed the tactical line of the Andhra Committee which had been headed by Rajeswara Rao and Basavapunnaiiah. The severe shortcomings of the tactical line of the Andhra Committee led to its rejection by the CPI in 1951. The consequences of the revival of the discredited tactical line of the Andhra Committee may be seen half a century later as the industrial working class still plays little or no role in the parties which emerged from the tradition of the CPI (ML). Here we publish an article of Parimal Dasgupta which analysed the absence of a revolutionary trade union policy by the CPI. In a letter to this journal the Editor of Frontier, Timir Basu, writes: 'He could not elaborate his ideas further because the Naxalite leadership did not want to continue the debate. I worked with him very closely in his West Bengal State Electricity Board Workers' Union for long — it was the most radicalized labour union of the day'. Through his writings and his practical trade union activity Parimal Dasgupta elaborated a revolutionary trade union policy which has its relevant today.*

## **Vijay Singh.**

Overall, the policies of the trade union front of the Communist Party should be developed according to the core fundamentals. It cannot be based on provincial thoughts. The policies of the trade union are subject to the core political principles of the party. The provincial discourse merely portrays tendencies of local trade union members but that cannot be the basis for setting out of fundamental principles. Regrettably, since 1951 till today, no trade union policy has been adopted by the central leadership of the party. No review and analysis were made on the various workers' movements that have happened in this period. The trade unions have been left to act spontaneously. This is primarily because of the dissonance inside the party about political ideology and the strategy for the current situation in India. It has been evident recently. Due to differing political ideologies, a stalemate has been spawned inside the party. Naturally the repercussions of this are being felt in the class organisations.

## **Foundations of trade union policy**

The attitude to the bourgeois class at any particular time is the central affair of the trade union policy of a communist party. Therefore while drawing up the trade union policy, an analysis of the character of the bourgeoisie in a particular period and the objectives of their economic policies are indispensable. The Indian situation is no different. Methods, policies and strategies of the struggle against the bourgeoisie depend on this analysis.

## **Analysis of the Indian bourgeoisie**

In the party programme of 1950-51 a clear-cut and original analysis of the Indian bourgeoisie was formulated. It was settled in the Programme that the reactionary big bourgeoisie is occupying state power. On the basis of that analysis, the main political slogan of the party was developed. It was for the formation of a People's Democratic government. At the 1953 Congress, without changing the previous party programme, a new and intermediate political slogan was created. It was for the formation of a government of democratic unity. Through this the seed of revisionism was sown in the party. Two lines of thought emerged from the fierce debate on the topic. One line expressed suspicion and doubt about the stability and propagation of the government of democratic unity. The other line expressed the nationalist potential of that government. Though the party congress accepted a proposal for a compromise between the two lines, the tendency for the second line was getting stronger among the party leadership.

That tendency later infected the whole party. At the 1956 Congress the party got divided between two political lines namely those for the 'democratic front' and those who were for the 'national front'. The line which was for the 'national front' showed strong tendencies towards revisionism. Thus, a slow revisionist trend was seen inside the party. At the Amritsar Congress in 1958, the party argued for the primary objective of attaining power by participating in elections. At that Congress, the party abandoned the intent of forming a government under the hegemony of the working class. At that Congress the party withdrew its vision away from the working class and made it dependent on the middle class by making election its main objective. The Amritsar Congress introduced Labour Party politics inside the Communist Party. The fascination with parliamentary politics among the party leadership became a national political goal. And this became the main factor deciding our policy and outlook on the trade union front. The fact of the matter is that the basic analysis, slogan and activities adopted in the 1950-51 programme was completely extinguished by gradual revisionism and no clear analysis of the Indian bourgeoisie was maintained. This practice of party politics by obscuring the core analysis became the main scheme of the leadership. In reality, on this point, contradictory viewpoints existed between the party members and the leadership. Naturally its impact has been inevitable on the viewpoint of conducting class movements. It created serious complications in creating a clear policy and strategy of the movement. This situation is the main obstacle in the trade union movement. A solution is not possible with obscurity and confusion regarding the core matters. Trying to solve different organisational weaknesses without solving this only indicates opportunism.

### **Party ideology and the Indian economy**

An analysis of the Indian economy is necessary in order to set the policy and strategy of the trade union front. The present economic development in India did not happen through an industrial or capitalist revolution. The Indian bourgeoisie came to power based on compromise. After grabbing power, they pushed forward to increase their economic strength by reshuffling and reforming the feudal economic structure with the help of foreign capital. The First Five Year Plan expressed that thrust of Indian capitalism. The bourgeoisie in power went forward with two main objectives:

I. Gathering and organising capital.

II. Increasing the economic exploitation of the people in order to increase profits.

That is why the bourgeoisie made it their main objective to attempt to generate capital from the people for increasing production and build large enterprises. In the Second Five Year Plan they attempted to strengthen their economic power by organising a few large industrial projects. But a part of the reactionary bourgeoisie kept expressing their desire for private capital. In the Second Five Year Plan, in the name of industrial development, emphasis was put into some over centralised industrial systems. Full release of the productive forces cannot happen by this process. The revolutionary transformation (industrial revolution) of economic structure could not happen. This created a few lopsided systems in the industrial sector by increasing exploitation of the people. As a result, Indian capital is getting restricted in the hands of a certain group. Medium sized industries are not developing. The financial situation of the population is gradually declining. Taking advantage of this, foreign capital has increased. Among them British capital investments have doubled since independence. The bourgeoisie resorted to arrangements such as increasing tax, bond circulation, state insurance etc. for mobilizing capital for large enterprises. The big bourgeoisie took the initiative in taking in contracts and forming corporations at those enterprises which were built using capital gathered from the people. It is a noticeable aspect of the Indian economy. Thus, the Indian big bourgeoisie is increasing its strength. For this reason, the promise of economic prosperity of the population by the end of the five year plan was not fulfilled. Instead the opposite situation occurred. In this time period industrial production increased 50 to 60 percent. But purchasing power decreased a lot, unemployment increased, no substantial increase of wages took place, lifestyle costs increased, inflation adjusted wages actually decreased and the people are facing grinding economic crisis. This situation is creating intense dissatisfaction and an anti-Congress mentality amongst workers, farmers and the middle-class of India. What is the Party thinking in these circumstances? In the 1950-51 party programme, the strategy was announced for the formation of a front with the national bourgeoisie and for struggle against the big reactionary bourgeoisie. But no action was taken to implement that strategy. Our party took the policy of partly supporting the Five Year Plan which was proposed by the Congress in 1952. With the slogan of a government of democratic unity, the party practically abandoned the fight against that plan. During the Second Five Year Plan, the party supported it objecting only to the method of its implementation. But in reality, the support

remained total as the objections got lost in a smokescreen of speeches. During the Second Five Year Plan the bourgeoisie presented the slogan of national reformation and increasing production for themselves, and our party more or less accepted that. Comrade Dange as the trade union front leader took the position of abandoning the movement, even movements against the “highly painful” systems for the workers like the employee’s state insurance etc. In the interest of the Second Five Year Plan he sought total support towards it as the policy of the trade union front. He advised the AITUC to give full support towards the Second Five Year Plan. A coterie of bourgeoisie evolved in the Party politics by the strategy of joining in national reform and parliamentary politics. As a result, the movement of the trade union front lost its edge. The slogan of national reform was taken from a revisionist view point which extinguished the party mentality of organising powerful worker’s movements. The attempt to bypass the movement became primary. As a result, a mechanism of dragging the movements into tribunals, commissions and wage boards kept emerging. These tendencies become clear by analysing the party mentality on the worker’s movements of the last few years. Inactivity of the party on the recent strike of central government employees gave an extreme example of that. In general, these tendencies helped and are still helping the bourgeoisie.

Although in Britain the working class became powerful through the course of full industrialisation after the industrial revolution, a social democratic policy was introduced instead of a reactionary line and that helped preserve the power of the bourgeoisie. That is why the Indian bourgeoisie is trying to infiltrate that line in the worker’s movements of this region. For that reason, laws have been written to cripple the worker’s movements and after gaining support from leading figures of worker’s organisations, action is being applied heavy handedly upon the working class. This bourgeois attitude has been expressed at labour conferences. Though some rights of the workers and some regulations on the owners have been recognised formally, concretely working class movement has been abandoned. These strategies of the bourgeoisie have captured the leadership and crippled the party’s trade union. But the current Indian economy did not go through an industrial revolution and full industrialisation. On top of that capitalism is facing an international crisis. In this situation the Indian bourgeoisie cannot deploy facilities for the working class as Britain does. For that reason, the Indian bourgeoisie is resorting to repression and force against the worker’s movements every time. This created a lot of anger among us but due to agreeing with the bourgeoisie on its main policies everything is falling into despair. We are circling in a roundabout. As a result, the working class is taking severe hits and movements are being thwarted. Without realising these situations and being free from the bourgeois deception, it is not possible for the party to direct a strong worker’s movement. This matter is vital for deciding the core policies of the trade union front.

It is true that some changes in the economic situations have happened due to the industrial initiative taken in those Five-Year programmes though those are not fundamental. The village economy will be influenced as electricity has spread to the villages. Small industries will rise in the village and will spawn new classes. The big bourgeoisie is also trying to mobilise capital in the rural areas. This is a notable situation for the worker’s movement. Apart from that a counter attack of labour laws are coming upon the worker’s movements. So, awareness is needed about the potential use of these laws and defence against them.

The overall core point is: deciding the present tactics and strategy by analysing the nature of the Indian economy.

### **Government labour policy**

The Communist Party analyses every government as a representation of class interest and it does not differentiate the government from the class. The class character of the Indian government cannot be denied just because of having a Nehru or some other person at its helm. Undoubtedly the big bourgeoisie is in control of state power in India. So the state is bound to protect their special interest. That class is strengthening their grip on the state mechanism and under current economic policy people like Nehru are mere tools. It has been proven during the strike of the employees of the central government. The labour policy of the government is nothing but a class policy. So, it is necessary to study the government labour policy.

Since coming to power the Indian bourgeoisie tried to prevent strikes and confine movements within the boundaries of courts and laws. For this purpose, the Industrial Disputes Act was passed in 1947. The main target of the government is to push the movement into tribunals and commissions. Initially tribunals provided some opportunities to increase the worker’s wages. Even the first pay commission expressed tendencies to increase wages nominally along with the formal declaration of having a ‘living wage’ in the Indian constitution. But the economic policy of the government gradually moved strongly towards denying economic benefits to workers and employees.

After 1951 tribunals gradually began refusing the demand for increased wages. The government did not properly implement the recommendations of the first pay commission.

That meant the government just ignored the policies of that pay commission. At the time of the Second Five Year Plan the government began to announce that the demand to increase wages was absurd. The bourgeoisie got especially assured and encouraged by this. They began to specifically resist the demand of wage increase. In some cases, the bourgeoisie even tried to decrease the wages and other benefits which had earlier been accepted. On top of that the government began to impose various regulations and punishments against those who demanded an increase on the pretext of industrial discipline. The second pay commission took the opposite view of the first and in the name of national reform increased the workload, and refused economic facilitation. This is the current real policy of the bourgeois government.

With all this it is seen that the state mechanism is used nakedly to help the owners to halt the economic demands of the workers. To suppress the struggle of the workers the government took up the strategy of illegalising strikes, planning mischief and applying direct force. Clearly demanding economic benefits and movements in isolated factories has become nearly impossible without gaining strength in struggling against the government. Building struggles against the government has to be seen as a stage of economic struggle against the bourgeoisie. This new situation of the worker's movement has to be thoroughly analysed and realised.

Government economic policy is becoming reactionary due to the grip of the reactionary big bourgeoisie on the state mechanism and it is ultimately being applied against the working class. The recent reactionary repressive policy of the government during the strike of central government employees is the ultimate expression of it. Even with increased strength, the Indian big bourgeoisie is now facing crisis. Their desire to expand to South East Asia and the Middle East has not been fulfilled. Foreign capital in the domestic market has reduced the rate of their expansion. They are putting the burden of this crisis onto the shoulders of the people. That is why it is inevitable that their policies on domestic matters will be reactionary. They are cooking up many absurd crises such as a border problem, nationalism, provincialism etc. The worker's movements should be extremely alert about these. The main weapons for keeping the working class away from the toxic effects of these are intensifying worker's movements and revealing the bourgeois tactics. Presently, the party policy on bourgeois actions is defensive. It has completely abandoned any strategy of countering it. As a result, the party could not protect the working class from the confusion. So, a new approach and understanding is needed.

### **Attitude of the working class**

Analysing the movements of recent years it has been seen that the workers are firmly building up long lasting movements despite severe attacks. Workers are not reduced to hopelessness even after losing in movements. They are bravely leading movements and strikes even after the strikes are made illegal and ordinances were declared. These are the main important characteristics of the worker's movement.

Second characteristic: the influence of reactionary trade union organisations has decreased a lot on the workers and movements cannot be stopped by their pressure anymore. Even all the influences from the National Congress and requests from persons like Nehru cannot prevent the workers. The strike of central government employees demonstrated this.

Third characteristic: the illusions of tribunals and commissions have mostly been broken (from the minds of the workers) and distrust about them has increased.

Fourth characteristic: the workers are not depending on any mainstream political parties directing movements; they are moving forward and organising their own.

Political parties are having to trail behind their movements instead of leading them.

Fifth characteristic: the movements of the workers are gradually shaping up into continuous and long term instead of being sporadic.

Despite many weaknesses, the above mentioned characteristics are an indication of the strength of the movement and they stir hope. The form and activities of the future movements should be settled by studying these carefully.

### **Duties of the party**

In the above mentioned situations the strategy and actions of the trade union front should be taken by firm decision on the basic crisis.

The principal objective of the movement is: setting the viewpoint of the movement and attitude about the

bourgeoisie. Most necessary are considering big bourgeoisie as the main enemy and strengthening the movement by abandoning parliamentary politics.

Complementary to this fundamental concept, the below mentioned points should be actively taken up or looked into:

1. Giving the utmost priority towards creating a central movement; mainly for trade union rights and wage increases.
2. Emphasising on forming unions and gathering strength in big industries.
3. Creating powerful coalition organisations with other like-minded organisations.
4. Creating an alliance between the unions of electric power projects and other public interest projects which are spread to rural areas.
5. Organising rural workers and establishing connections between worker's unions and peasant organisations.
6. Propagating awareness about character and objectives of government tribunals and commissions. Creating opposition against them among workers.
7. Resisting regulations that are against the interest of the workers and starting movements against the exploitative provisions of the labour laws.
8. Explaining the character of the bourgeoisie and their role in Indian economy to the workers.
9. Increasing the number of ~~the~~ party cadre in the trade union front. Giving emphasis on recruiting party members from the workers. Building strong party committees in industrial areas.
10. Providing information to trade union offices about current laws and systems.
11. Keeping the operation of the trade union democratic.

*Translated from the Bengali by Sudipta Arka Das.*