

For Trade Union Unity in India

We have received an appeal worked out at the end of 1933 by a group of participants in the Indian revolutionary trade union movement. Lately the followers of the class trade union movement have been correctly carrying out the tactic of united front, correctly putting forward the suggestion of electing strike committees by the workers themselves, etc. The appeal correctly puts the question in regard to the possibility of uniting parallel trade unions which exist separately. The conditions which can guarantee positive results of such an amalgamation are as follows:—

(1) Energetic defence of everyday needs of the workers of a given trade.

(2) Stubborn work of creating mass working-class organisations which follow the class point of view (trade unions, mill committees, etc.).

(3) Formation and strengthening of Communist fractions inside these mass proletarian organisations.

(4) Persistent and patient everyday revolutionary work among the workers in the mills, especially there where the influence of reformists and national-reformists is strong, building our Communist nuclei and our groups in the mills and workshops.

(5) Taking concrete examples, persistently and energetically explain to the workers the difference between revolutionary class policy and tactic from the reformist policy and tactic. Concrete material for such an agitation which would help to expose the reformists should be taken not only from day to day struggle, but should also include general questions—such as, for example, the attitude towards the struggle for independence, towards the policy of the National Congress, etc., etc.

The appeal clearly states that tactic of united front and even amalgamation of some parallel trade unions—of ours and the reformists—does not mean that armistice with reformism is accepted, it does not mean that peace with reformism is declared; on the contrary, if the Communist carry on good and energetic activity and work, if they ably carry on agitation at the same time, then there will be created favourable conditions for widening the influence of the Communists among the workers in the united trade unions.

In spite of the fact that the appeal was worked out more than six months ago, and possibly was published in a changed form (it was published in India with the request to the trade union people to express their opinion on it), the editorial board considers that it is worth while to publish it, because it touches the vital problems of the Indian labour movement.—Ed.

Working Men and Women of India,—

The working class of India is on the eve of new struggles for its existence. The British imperialists, spreading terror and oppression, have drained, with the aid of the landowners, princes, and usurers, two thousand million rupees of gold out of the country in the course of the last two years. All this gold drained is the result of the exploitation of the workers and the ruin of millions of peasants who have been driven off their land and are now dying of hunger.

The lot of the workers is no better. During the last few months of 1933 a further 30,000 textile workers of Bombay, 10,000 workers of Ahmedabad, 3,000 of Coimbatore, etc., have been thrown out from the mills into the streets.

There are over 200,000 unemployed textile workers in Bombay, Calcutta, and other places. It is the same all over the country, in the towns and in the villages. Not a day passes without new groups of workers being thrown out of the shops, mills and railways. And not only starvation and unemployment stalk through the country, but the wages of the workers are being cut by the employers. During the last few months of 1933 the beggarly wages of many textile workers of Bombay, which did not exceed 25 rupees a month, have been reduced by 20 to 40 per cent. A 25

per cent. wage cut was announced in Ahmedabad, a 14 per cent. reduction was put through in Nagpur, and the wages of women workers in the rice-husking mills in Toliganje were reduced by 20 per cent. for a 12-hour working day, and the same takes place everywhere.

Unemployment is growing, wages are being slashed, but the workers are compelled to work more. Weavers are forced to work on four looms instead of two, and the same is true all over the country.

There is no limit to the misery of the working class. The path of the workers is covered with sweat, hunger and blood. Every day conditions are getting worse. It is no surprise that new sections of formerly backward workers rise to the struggle against the damnable exploiters and national enslavers.

THE STRUGGLE FOR BREAD AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

The Indian workers suffer from the yoke of the British imperialism, which is the basis of the unbearable slavery and misery of the people. Not one worker should stand the foreign imperialist oppression and slavery.

The All-Indian Congress Committee of the National Congress called upon the workers not to fight against their own capitalists, but to support the bourgeois National Congress in a pseudo civil disobedience campaign against the imperialists.

Hundreds of thousands of workers believed the National Congress and went with it. They thought the National Congress would defend the interests of the people, would fight against the imperialists. They were told by Bose, Kandalkar, Ruikar, Roy, Karnik, and other similar leaders of the labour movement that the I.N.C. will fight for the toiling masses. In the summer of 1930 Kandalkar and Roy appealed during the notorious "Labour Week" campaign to the workers to stand by the common national front with the bourgeoisie and remain as "arms and feet of the Congress," i.e., to remain a submissive appendage to the capitalists, and not to fight against the bourgeoisie and not to organise strikes. However, the result proved to be bad. The workers were deceived. The leaders of the National Congress (Gandhi and Co.) went to London to negotiate with the imperialists. And now in 1933 the National Congress has called off the mass civil disobedience campaign, shamelessly throwing the blame on the people, claiming that the masses have no desire to fight. The National Congress disorganised the ranks of the toiling masses and prepared in this way the conditions for a new offensive on the part of the imperialists and the millowners against the workers and peasants. And now Karnik, Kandalkar, Ruikar and Alve, who joined their ranks, in order to divert the attention of the workers from the political struggle, state that they are prepared to fight only for wages, and call upon the workers to abandon for the time being the struggle for independence.

The advice of such leaders at the present time, just as before, only helps the enemies of the working class. The workers of India do not want to be slaves. The working class sees that the National Congress, headed by Gandhi and his helpers—Bose, Nehru, Kandalkar, Roy, Karnik, Ruikar, and others—has disrupted the struggle of the toiling masses. Many workers have lost faith in the National Congress. **But the working class did not and will not stop to fight for independence.** It knows very well that the conditions of life of the workers cannot be earnestly and seriously improved if the Indian people remain slaves of British imperialism. The workers have no bread, wages are falling, starvation and oppression are growing exactly because the imperialists own the country and hand in hand with the Indian capitalists, exploit and oppress the workers. The imperialists are oppressing the country and give support and preserve the landlord-feudal-usury system, which has completely ruined the peasantry and the whole people. The imperialists support the factory owners in crushing the strikes of the workers. Only by freeing the country from the yoke of the imperialists and landlords, and creating an independent workers' and peasants' republic, will the proletariat be able

successfully to solve the problem of bread. The class-conscious workers will not follow these reformists, who say: Fight for bread and don't mix up, don't join the struggle for independence. The workers will not follow the reformists, because the struggle for bread cannot be separated from the struggle for independence. The working class will reject with contempt the false statements of Karnik (see "Maharatta," October 15, 1933), that the working class is politically unconscious and that the masses "are not able to grasp big political issues . . . national independence . . ." etc.

The working class will fight for bread, for every pice, and at the same time help the peasantry to overthrow the yoke of landlords and usurers, and will gather its forces and, attracting alongside it the peasantry, will fight for independence. These tasks are inseparable. Only enemies of the proletariat, only national-reformists, the concealed assistants and liberal-assistants of British imperialism, can separate them.

Because of that, the present important task of the workers' movement is not only to fight for bread and wages, but develop at the same time a genuine mass struggle against the slave constitution worked out by British imperialism.

WHAT THE PAST EXPERIENCE OF WORKERS' STRIKES TEACHES US

During the last few years the workers have repeatedly offered resistance to the attacks of the employers. However, most of them met with defeat. The time has come when we should find out the cause for this, and determine the path we should choose to be successful.

The experience of the workers' strikes shows us that: The trouble is that most of the workers are not organised, not united, do not have a revolutionary Marxian proletarian Party and mass class trade unions, and quite a number of the workers follow the reformists and the national-reformists, who have split the ranks of the proletariat and, with the aid of reformist policy of arbitration and class collaboration, are carrying on harmful activity.

The results of this policy of the reformists can be easily seen from the experiences of the railway and textile workers.

In 1930 the workers of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway came out on strike. Ruikar and Co. insisted on arbitration and appealed to the Viceroy and to Gandhi for help. The Railwaymen's Federation, led by Giri and Mehta, instead of organising strikes on other railways in support of the G.I.P., joined hands with Ruikar and compelled the workers to submit to an agreement, the result of which was that thousands of workers were discharged and the strike was defeated.

They did the same thing in 1932 on the S.M. Railway, despite the fact that the workers throughout the country were demanding a general railway strike. A ballot taken among the railway workers by the reformist Railwaymen's Federation in 1932 showed that the great majority of the men voted in favour of a strike.

However, Mehta, Ruikar, Giri and Co., while adopting, under the pressure of the masses, a resolution for a general strike, sabotaged its being carried into effect. They kept on urging the workers to be patient and to continue for the fourth year to negotiate with the imperialist railway administration not to discharge or discriminate against the workers. The employers did not object to listen, to talk and continue to oppress the workers. The administration kept on dismissing workers, lowering wages, the offensive of the employers kept on increasing, and the resistance of the workers was hindered—that is the result of reformist policy. This is the result of the policy of Mehta, Giri, Ruikar, Khedikar and Co. on the railways.

Things are no better in the textile industry. In Nagpur the millowners announced a 20 per cent. reduction of the already miserable wages of the workers in the Model Factory. The reformist tactic of Ruikar and Co. was to make an agreement with the employers to reduce the workers' wages by 14 per cent. and then to describe this tremendous cut in wages as a workers' victory. This means to mock and sneer at the workers, whose material conditions of life are very often worse than imprisonment. This is the essence of the tactics of the national-reformists, who advocate arbitration. The same thing took place in Ahmedabad. The millowners of Ahmedabad and the leaders of the local trade union are known as followers of Gandhi. The capitalists and even the former governor of Bombay, Lord Sykes, have always told the workers of Bombay to follow the example

of Ahmedabad, and he used to say "how obedient the workers of Ahmedabad are and how peacefully they are getting along with the millowners." What is the result? During the strikes in Bombay in 1929 Gandhi and his followers succeeded in keeping the workers of Ahmedabad at work, and in that way kept them from helping the Bombay workers by going on a sympathy strike. When, as a result of this, as well as of the government terror, the disorganising work of the national-reformists and the absence of a revolutionary Marxian proletarian Party, the Bombay strike was defeated, the millowners of Ahmedabad in their turn, with the co-operation of Gandhi's arbitration, reduced in 1930 the wages of the workers in Ahmedabad. And now, in 1933, the millowners of Ahmedabad have commenced again to dismiss the workers and announced a new 25 per cent. cut in wages. Gandhi is again the arbitrator. He will once more cut the wages of the workers by 14 to 20 per cent., and will say to the workers: Be patient, and accept the cut, accept this in the interests of the nation, i.e., in the interests of the capitalists.

Working men and women, the policy of the national-reformists is the policy of arbitration and class-collaboration, covered up by phrases about the defence of the interests of the workers, leading to the defeat of the proletariat. It is time to finish with such a policy and oust such leaders out of the labour movement.

The only path of successful struggle, even for the partial demands of the workers is the path of class solidarity and mass struggle, the path of strikes and revolutionary actions, the path of a consistent class struggle. But to carry out this struggle the working class must form its militant class trade union organisations, that will be capable of defending the interests of the workers.

WHAT TRADE UNIONS DO WORKERS NEED?

Without an All-Indian revolutionary Marxian proletarian political Party, the leading organisation of the working class, able to work under any conditions, without concealing its face, and mass trade unions and other proletarian organisations, the working class cannot attain the independence of the country and the improvement of the workers' conditions.

Organisation—that is the only weapon in the hands of the proletariat in the struggle against the imperialists and their own capitalists.

It is time to form mass trade unions in every branch of industry, trade unions that will fight under the banner of the class struggle. The trade unions must base themselves upon the mill and shop committees. Mill committees, elected by the workers in every factory to defend the daily interests of the workers and protect their rights, must become the powerful base of the working-class movement.

"Every worker should join a class trade union."

"In every factory a factory committee, elected by all working men and women."

These are the slogans for everyday work among the workers. It is time to put through a determined struggle against the practice of forming bureaucratic, small trade unions, controlled by a handful of leaders, where the president and the secretary manage affairs against the interests of the workers and replace the organisation with themselves.

In every trade union it is necessary to elect a management committee mainly composed of the workers from the bench, a committee which will meet regularly and decide upon the business of the union. It is necessary to hold often regular meetings of the trade union membership to discuss and decide upon the most important trade union and political problems of the given industry, as well as problems that agitate the entire country.

It is necessary to observe the strictest financial discipline and accounts with regard to trade union money. The trade unions and the factory committees, without replacing by their functions a political party and without transforming themselves into one, must in their everyday work set themselves the task of raising the class-consciousness of the workers, training them in the spirit of devotion to the struggle against the capitalists, for the independence of the country, for the creation of a Workers' and Peasants' Republic. For that purpose and to carry out consistent and honest defence of the everyday interests of the workers, it is necessary to drive away from the trade unions all national-reformist leaders who represent the interests of Indian capitalism, and throw out

leaders like Joshi-Shiva Rao, who represent the interests of British imperialism, and replace them by class-conscious workers, who defend and represent the policy of consistent class struggle and are loyal to the interests of the world proletarian revolution.

STRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION UNITY

Unity in the ranks of the workers is a necessary condition for the successful struggle of the workers for their daily interests and for their total liberation from exploitation. The factory owners, the landowners and the imperialists fear this unity as they do death. Through their agents—the reformists—they split the ranks of the proletariat and disorganise its resistance to the capitalists, hinder the development of the strike movement and the workers' leading participation in the struggle for independence. During the past years the agents of the exploiting classes succeeded in splitting and disorganising the workers' movement in our country. Such a situation can no longer be tolerated. We must attain the unity of the ranks of the workers. It is necessary to eradicate the influence of the reformists. It is necessary to throw out from the ranks of the working-class movement all agents of the exploiting classes. Among the workers the movement for the unification of their ranks to fight the offensive of the imperialists and the millowners is growing. And that is one of the most important events at the present time.

Seeing the moods of the workers, the reformists are trying to utilise the slogan of unity in such a way as to strengthen their influence, isolate revolutionary workers, and retard the development of the strike movement.

Every working man and woman must understand that the question of unity cannot be separated from the question of the platform on which this unity can be realised. Unity is possible only on the basis of class demands that express the interests of the workers, only on the basis of struggle against the capitalists. Can there be any unity between strike-breakers and the strikers? Can there be unity between those who defend the interests of the workers and those who are agents of the imperialists and the bourgeoisie? No, this is impossible.

Last year many reformists, covering up with phrases about unity, split the trade unions. In 1929 Giri, Siva Rao and others split the trade union congress in Nagpur and created a separate reactionary trade union federation because the workers refused to co-operate with the imperialist Wheatley commission and demanded to carry on struggle against imperialism. And later, in 1931, Bose, Kandalkar, Roy, Ruikar, Karnik split the trade union congress in Calcutta and formed a separate trade union centre because, as Bose stated in the "Bombay Chronicle" of July 11, 1931, it was necessary to crush those trade unions that defended the interests of the working class, criticised and exposed the leaders of the bourgeois National Congress for their treacherous negotiations with the British imperialists, and demanded the organisation of a general strike on the railways.

Kandalkar, Ruikar, Roy and Co. split in 1931 the Bombay Unity Committee, which was organised to prepare the All-Indian Trades Union Congress. It included the Red Trade Unions and the representatives from the national-reformist trade unions. But the latter split this committee because the revolutionary workers came out for a class platform and policy and protested against the reformist proposal to allow affiliation with the Amsterdam International, in which there are labour organisations that support the bourgeoisie and the imperialists.

And so we see that the reformists and the national reformists, while using phrases about unity, in actual life split up the trade unions so as not to let the workers start a determined fight against the imperialists and millowners.

For this reason the workers must not simply believe the phrases about unity. They must compare the words and actual deeds of every trade union leader. The workers must create unity in the course of the actual struggles; the workers must demand that a clear programme of demands be put forward and see that a struggle should actually be carried on for these demands, for the interests of the workers. We must not permit the reformists to fool the workers once more under the cover of slogans of unity.

Unity among the workers must be achieved—unity for the defence of the workers' interests, for the organisation of strikes where it is necessary.

Such a unity must be created in the shortest possible time.

The supporters of class trade unions, seeing that during the last few years the conditions of life of the workers have been constantly becoming worse, have considered the steps that have to be taken to help the working class to organise resistance to the offensive of the imperialists and capitalists, and decided to appeal to all workers and trade union organisations to come together to organise and jointly carry out defence of the workers' interests.

The supporters of class trade unions propose to all the trade unions to organise a united front, on the basis of the following points taken from the platform of the class trade union movement:—

(1) To prepare, organise and carry out the resistance of the workers to the insolent and brutal attack of the owners and develop it into a fight to raise the wages and improve the labour conditions.

(2) To consolidate and organise the unemployed workers for the struggle against hunger, misery, and unemployment.

As part of the resistance of the workers against the capitalist offensive, the class trade unions propose besides organising and leading strikes there where conditions demand to start at once preparation to organise and then to carry out general strikes of the textile workers and the railwaymen, putting forward the following demands:—

(1) To reinstate the discharged workers with pay for all time lost.

(2) Repeal all wage reductions that took place since 1929.

(3) Eight-hour working day.

(4) A weekly rest with pay

(5) Recognition of the rights of the trade unions and the factory committees as organs of the working class to defend the interests of the workers.

(6) Repeal of all anti-labour laws and ordinances. Freedom of speech, press, organisation, and assembly. Immediate release of all political prisoners.

To add the following two demands for the railway workers:—

(1) To raise the minimum wages to 25 rupees.

(2) To restore all privileges (free passes on trains, etc.).

In order to organise the struggles of the unemployed, the supporters of the class trade unions propose to all trade unions to come together and jointly organise unemployed committees, linking up their work with the other workers' organisations. And start a widespread campaign by means of meetings, demonstrations, hunger marches, etc., and getting support of the employed workers, demand aid from the municipalities, millowners, and the government. To prepare and carry through the struggles of the unemployed under the following slogans:—

(1) Immediate payment of a grant to every unemployed worker to the amount of 50 rupees; free rent, heat, light, and free transportation on railways while looking for work.

(2) Introduction of State unemployment insurance at the expense of the government and the employers.

In order to carry out all these proposals directed to organise resistance to the employers, the supporters of the class trade unions appeal to all workers and trade union organisations who are ready to accept these proposals of united struggle against the employers, to come together and jointly form strike committees, elected by workers, and other organs to prepare for strikes and carry them through.

If the joint struggle assumes genuine forms and will be carried into practice, the supporters of the class trade unions are prepared to unite with other trade unions and form united trade unions by way of calling conferences of workers' delegates from the mills and workshops.

The supporters of the class trade union movement fought and will fight for the unity of the workers' ranks. The Giri-Kamgar and G.I.P. trade unions were split through no fault of the revolutionary trade union movement; the initiative of the split belongs to the national reformists. Our weakness—i.e., the supporters of the revolutionary trade union movement—was that we did not try energetically enough to prevent the split and did not succeed sufficiently enough to explain to the wide masses of the proletariat the essence of the splitting policy of the national reformists and liberal reformists.

The supporters of the class trade unions are prepared in the course of joint struggle to unite our class trade unions with the

parallel trade unions which split off, and form united trade unions, by way of calling joint conferences of worker-delegates elected from the mills for the purpose of uniting the trade unions and electing management committees.

The supporters of the class trade unions, emphasising that this unification does not mean peace with the policy of reformism, are ready for the sake of unity of the workers' ranks and their class education, to form joint trade unions. The supporters of the class trade unions preserve the right while working in such trade unions to put forward various proposals and openly defend them before the workers, explaining the difference between class proletarian policy and a national-reformist one. We, the supporters of the class trade union movement, propose to carry on a joint struggle against the offensive of the exploiters and hope that all workers will gladly give their support for proletarian unity and hope those trade union leaders who are prepared, not in words, but in deeds, to fight for the interests of the workers, will accept these proposals and show by their actions that they are prepared to fight for the unity of the proletariat. This will be unity of the workers for the struggle against the exploiters, and not the unity of the reformists, who try to disorganise the actual struggle of the workers, isolate the class-conscious workers and subordinate the proletariat to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The working class must fight against such disorganisers of the unity of the workers, who cover up their actions with phrases about unity.

Long live the fighting united front of the workers to defeat the attacks of the employers !

Forward to the creation of class mass trade unions !

Forward to the defence of the interests of the proletariat !

Long live the independence of India !