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B. T. RANADIVE

President CITU

**The Working Committee Meeting,
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CITU PUBLICATION

Comrades,

With feelings of sorrow and great loss I pay homage to the memory of Com. Hare Krishna Konar whose services to the cause of the revolution few can equal. A brilliant Marxist-Leninist, member of the Central Committee of the CPI (M), General Secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha, Hare Krishna Konar passed away leaving the revolutionary movement poorer by his loss.

I pay my homage to the memory of our fallen martyrs, the organisers of CITU and its unions who fell victims to the assassins' dagger in Kerala and West Bengal ; to the memory of those who fell victims to police firing. We must specially remember the Bharatpur martyrs who were the first to shed their blood in the struggle against the wage freeze Act.

We all must remember the services of Com. Rajan our devoted leader of Kerala plantation workers and member of our General Council who passed away last month. We send our condolences to his wife and children.

I pay homage to the memory of Comrade

Ramaswamy, our active worker at Madurai who showed indomitable courage in defying death when the railway engine overran him while protesting against the use of black-legs during the All India railway strike.

Comrades, you will join me in congratulating those of our comrades who narrowly escaped the assassins' dagger. One among them being Com. Shanti Ghatak, Member of our Working Committee. The repression and brutalities that our comrades, the CITU leaders and unions had to face during the past few months have no limits. Arrests, imprisonment, tortures and beatings, humiliation and insults at the hands of the police officials, police firings and gangster attacks—these have been our fare for conducting the struggle of the workers.

In Cannanore in Kerala, Comrade Kannan, President of Kerala CITU was assaulted by the police, the CITU office was raided and a number of other leaders including Com. Bharathan, were beaten and jailed. The police used gangsters to attack our workers and our MLA Com. Raghavan was insulted and beaten. It should be remembered that more than 130 people belonging to the CITU and other mass organisations have been murdered

in Kerala at the hands of gangsters in the last two years. This is the black record of the Achutha Menon Ministry—the unholy coalition of the Right Communist Party and Indira Congress—a coalition which the Right C.P. wants to expand in all States to spread its pestilential results.

In this background the 19th September united strike to protest against the wage freeze was a magnificent demonstration of working class unity for which our Kerala CITU and other central organisations deserve our congratulations. The strike was complete ; the All India Radio was also paralysed. Never before was the sweep of the strike so big and all-embracing. It drew within its ranks the AITUC and its workers and revealed how the unity of the working class is marching ahead despite the efforts to divide and suppress it.

The CITU hailed the victory of the Vietnamese people against American imperialism embodied in the Paris Agreement. But the treacherous American imperialists notwithstanding their honeyed talk of *detante* agreement on limitation of nuclear weapons with USSR, and professed friendly relations with Peoples' China, are sabotaging the Paris Agreement and encouraging military adventures

of Thieu and preparing for another intervention. They are also preparing for intervention in North Korea with the help of the South Korean stooge Government.

The CITU must denounce the moves and lend its full support to the fighting people of Vietnam and Korea in their struggle against American aggressors.

The Railway Strike

Comrades, you all know about the historic struggle of the Railway workers in May last and how the Indira Govt. made every effort to suppress it. The various unions of Rly. workers forgetting their differences, joined in a common battle to defend the interests of the railway workers. You all know how the CITU played its role in working for the unity.

With the workers braving police terror, invasion of the homes by armed CRP, with their women showing unexampled heroism in all parts of India, the railway workers' struggle inscribed a glorious chapter in the history of trade union resistance. This was the first All India strike and perhaps the longest in the world.

In spite of the steadfastness of the workers, some

leaders like the AITUC leaders and its Indian Railway Workers' Federation got cold feet and betrayed the workers to continue their line of collaboration with the Indira Congress.

Today, thousands of Rly. workers stand victimised and dismissed. The Rly. Minister quotes falsified figures to show that the Govt. is relenting in its attacks and is taking back the workers. More than 20,000 workers are deprived of their jobs. Many thousands have been punished with break in service. And the strike breakers are being rewarded with quick promotions. So manifestly urgent and arbitrary are some of these orders that a number of High Courts—The, Calcutta High Court, the Gujarat, Hyderabad and Kerala High Courts—declared these to be illegal and even mala fide. But the Govt. in its contempt for laws has refused to implement the High Court directives and do justice to the affected workers.

It is the duty of the CITU and the entire trade union movement to fight against this victimisation and not rest till all the Rly. workers are given back their jobs. The permanent as well as temporary and casual workers must be restored to their work and Mishra's victimisation campaign

must be defeated. We must assure the Rly. workers and their organisations that the CITU stands by them and will continue its efforts till justice is done to them. The report of our General Secretary deals with the work done by the CITU for relief and legal aid to the Rly. Workers and I need not say anything about it.

The brutalities perpetrated against the Rly. workers have become an international scandal and a number of workers' organisations in other countries are realising the real character of the Indira Government. It is because of this that the Government dared not allow a delegation of transport workers from abroad to visit the country. The Transport unions wanted to assess the post-strike situation on the railways and have first hand knowledge about how the authorities dealt with the strike. The CITU must emphatically protest against this ban on working class leaders while leaders of multi-national corporations are welcomed at State banquets.

New Problems

Comrades, the CITU must take note of the prevailing organisational situation on the railways and help the railway unions to overcome it. As

happens after any struggle accompanied by victimisation, despondency and despair seize hold of the weaker elements. Fissiparous tendencies quicken and the lesson of unity is easily forgotten. The bond of common sacrifice, sufferings and common cause gets loosened. This gives an opportunity to the authorities to create disruption.

It is a pity that the NCCRS has not yet met in a big representative convention, assessed the strike experience and taken steps to strengthen unity. The NCCRS, the embodiment of the Rly. Workers' unity, was considered an anathema by the Administration and now some of its agents are attempting to bury it.

Taking advantage of the present despondency and victimisation, craft and sectarian appeals are being made ; opportunist leaders seek to disrupt the unity of all organisations and return to the position before the strike. All this is encouraged by the Rly. Board which wants to see an end to unity.

The workers should remember that the unity is all the more needed to beat off the victimisation offensive. With regard to Loco Running Staff the authorities are sabotaging the agreement to intro-

duce the 10 hours' duty—an agreement reached after the heroic strike of LRSA workers. It is clear that the Rly. Board has no intention of fulfilling its promise made after the strike.

The CITU and its organisations must throw their full weight to protect and strengthen the unity of the Rly. workers and rouse the working class to defeat the victimisation drive of the Government.

Government's Labour Policy

Last eight months have revealed one ugly feature after another of Governments labour policy. At the Visakhaptnam session, I had occasion to refer to the virtual liquidation of all trade union rights in the IAC under the control of a retired military official. I may mention here that the Government is inducting more and more military officials to run industrial concerns—the aim being to introduce military barrack discipline in factories. This spells ruin for the trade union movement and this trend to be resisted. The trade union movement besides should take serious note of the fact that efforts are being made to train army personnel so that they can replace workers during strikes. The use of the

Territorial Army for purposes of breaking the May Rly. strike is known to all.

The brutal suppression of Rly. workers in May is followed by use of widespread repressive measures in the growing strike struggles. Hundreds have been arrested in bundhs, demonstrations and strikes and cases have been proceeding against thousands. Presecution and prolonged proceeding have become a weapon of systematic harassment of workers and cadres.

The use of goonda gangs against the workers with the police supporting them is becoming an all-India phenomenon. These goondas act as the storm-troopers of the employers or the Congress Party.

These attacks are a part of the general Congress onslaught on the democratic rights of the people and the growing erosion of all democratic norms. The scandalous ordinance issued to protect the Congress MPs and the Prime Minister from the effect of the Supreme Court judgement, the misuse of MISA and the detention of hundreds of political prisoners and the cruel treatment to the political prisoners in jails are part of this growing attack on the democratic rights of the people. The T. U.

movement has received its full share of this erosion of rights and must discharge its responsibility fighting against these policies of the Congress Govt.

Along with these attacks, the Govt. has been taking one measure after another to thrust the burdens of the crisis on the workers and enforce a reduced standard of living on them. While in the last few months it has sanctioned large price increases in foodgrains to benefit the landlords and to the capitalists, it has enforced wage freeze on the mass of workers and employees. Under it the Central and State employees have been denied a number of additional increases in their D. A. and in almost all industries, the Govt. is putting pressure to see that no further wage increase is granted to any section of the workers. Half the increased D. A. is spirited away in deposits, further wage increases have been frozen and in some cases, D.A. itself has been frozen, the total effect being a reduction in the real wage of the workers. Against this Act, the working class and the T. U. movement have started fighting and is starting building its unity to meet this offensive. The successful strike of 19th September in Kerala and the October 30 strike in Maharashtra reveal how the working

class is getting into direct action against the anti-labour measures of the Govt.

Not satisfied with the wage freeze Act, the Govt. agents have manipulated the recommendations of the Bonus Commission and have come out with reactionary suggestions. They have denied the right of the Rly. and other workers and employees to bonus and they have also laid arbitrary limitations on the source of relief to the hard-pressed workers. Two other measures attacking the interests of the workers are also in the offing. The Industrial Relations Bill which seeks to attack the right of the workers to strike, to enforce arbitration machinery on them is being canvassed in secret. The Govt. also intends to foist a new wage policy on the workers under which the minimum in organised industries will not be more than Rs. 200. Wage increases will be reduced to a farce, D. A. also will be drastically reduced, all in the name of reducing the inequalities in wages among the workers. The Sukhamoy Chakrabarty's report which is the basis of the so called wage policy is a weapon to divide different sections of the workers, fool the public with the claim to introduce a scientific system of wage payment. It resorts to

the usual trick of talking about the low income in the countryside and the income of the workers in unorganised industries and paints the workers in organised industries as a special favoured class whose emoluments must be curtailed and brought in line with the general level of Indian poverty. The report does not talk at all about controlling the incomes of the higher classes, but only about wage differentials. It thus constitutes yet another weapon in the armoury of the Govt. to attack the workers and may be enforced with vigour under the stress of the developing crisis of the economy.

The Sick Textile Undertakings (Nationalisation) Bill is a piece of legislation which will ultimately benefit the employers. Despite bungling, embezzlement of funds the Companies are being paid over Rs. 39 crores as compensation which will be premium for their fraudulent practices. The Bill further seeks to modernise the mills and retrench thousands of workers. It, therefore, does not give an assurance that all the workers employed in these mills prior to closure would be taken back on duty on same terms and service conditions. It also does not give any assurance on workers' arrears of wages

etc. prior to the take over of managements. The Bill shows how even the slogan of nationalisation is being used by the capitalist in their own class interests.

One can easily understand why the Govt., therefore, uses more and more direct force against the T. U. movement since it is bent upon pursuing a policy of drastically reducing the living standards of the working class and the gains that they have all accumulated through years of struggle, and sacrifices.

In West Bengal, the Government issued notification under DIR to water down the recommendations of the Expert Committee on consumer price index numbers which admitted the index fraud. As a result of this, the workers who would have received Rs. 60 to Rs. 100 per month in the form of additional dearness allowance will receive only Rs. 16 to 18. If the workers resort to strike action in protest against this they will be victims of DIR.

United Resistance

The General Secretary's report gives a detailed account of how a united movement of workers and employees is developing to fight the wage freeze

Act of the Government. In this movement, thousands of employees and workers are coming together in conventions, conferences, meetings, demonstrations and strike actions symbolising a new unity of all the affected sections. The CITU unions should realise that it is not only the employees and workers that are under attack, that the professionals like doctors, lawyers, upper and lower income groups are also bearing the strain of this Government effort to pass the burden of the inflationary crisis to the shoulders of the people. These sections also are compelled under the law to deposit part of their earnings with the Government and a number of them have been victims of officials raids by income tax and other officials. The wage freeze act and other accompanying measures affect a vast section of urban people who must be directly drawn into the movement and the entire struggle has to be turned into a huge democratic protest against official policies.

The Government passed off these measures as anti-inflationary measures intended to bring down prices. In actual fact, all that has happened is that while there is hardly any relief to the people in the shape of falling prices, there has been a direct re-

duction in the purchasing power of the people and their real incomes. The mass of people has to bear the burden of the inflationary crisis as well as official measures to counter the crisis. It is quite clear that inflation and counter-inflation in the way they operate are nothing but class measures to solve the economic difficulties of the capitalist-landlord economy at the expense of the common mass. The working class should not allow itself to be cheated by those who present inflation or counter-inflation measures as just measures flowing from an increase or decrease in the supply of money. This is not an impersonal phenomenon but a manipulation by the exploiting classes and their Government to transfer value from the mass of people into the hands of the exploiting classes. That is why we find that the people are suffering as much under the inflationary developments as under the supposed measures to counter them. In actual fact, these counter measures have not only attacked the earnings of the working class, they are also creating large-scale unemployment in small industries and leading to closures of a number of these small concerns. The measures to control credit in the name of fighting inflation has affected the holding capacity of small

industries which employ nearly 40 per cent of the workers in organised industries. The workers in organised units have to understand that tens of thousands of handloom weavers, powerloom workers and workers of smaller engineering concerns are virtually on the streets partly at least because of the way the Government intends to fight inflation and transfer the burden to the common people.

The working class has learnt to its own cost how the problem of food is being tackled by the Government. Repeated concessions to landlords, the denudation of the small peasants and the agricultural workers have now created a situation in which a few thousands have already died in the villages of India. Many more perhaps are going to die and hundreds of thousands are becoming the victims of slow starvation. A callous Government refuses to admit that hundreds are dying in our villages. But it is also a fact not honourable to the T. U. movement that when such is the condition in the villages, powerful protests from the organised T.U. movement in defence of the peasantry are not emerging in any T.U. Centre. It speaks of a very low class consciousness and a self-centred character of the movement which must be got rid of as early as possible

if the working class is to play its role in the struggle for Socialism and ending of class domination, for peoples' democracy and end of Indian poverty.

Political Repression

The weakness of the peasant movement in rural areas, the weakness of political consciousness of the working class have enabled the ruling party to deal with the democratic movement in a ruthless way and perpetrated every kind of atrocity on the fighting people. I have already referred to the large-scale repression against the T. U. movement which was also shared by all sections of the people including the students, the agricultural workers, the teachers and the mass of untouchables. A Government which is ruthless to them in their struggle is equally cruel to them when they are arrested and jailed. The treatment of political prisoners in India has become an international scandal and it is no surprise that the Government of India did not vote in the U. N. for a resolution demanding the release of all political prisoners kept by the Chilean fascist junta. Beatings, shooting, tortures—all have reached such a height that in the end the Supreme Court had to warn the Government that even prisoners in jails

possess certain fundamental rights which no bureaucracy could override. Add to this the statement made by responsible leaders in Bihar that in certain jails of Bihar, women prisoners are virtually kept naked, the authorities refusing to supply them with clothes, according to jail rules.

It is against this regime of starvation, high prices, and political suppression accompanied by the most widespread corruption that the people have started fighting, demanding immediate redress to their grievances. The movement in Bihar against corruption, for dissolution of the Bihar Assembly, for release of all arrested people, for electoral reform, forms part of this angry protest which people are trying to launch in several States. The electoral reform has come into the forefront because the utter corrupt character of bourgeois democracy is being exposed before the eyes of the people, under the Congress regime. As you know, in Bengal, there have been virtually no elections and the same attempt to spirit away the people's right to elect may be made in the forthcoming elections in many states. Against these legitimate demands raised in Bihar under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan, the Govt. has come down

with ruthless repression, arresting thousands and shooting many. Leaders of political parties have been externed from Bihar, those who led the movement they have been jailed and interned, a reign of terror has been established in Bihar.

There is no doubt that the association of reactionary parties like Jana Sangh with the movement not only supplies a handle to the Government and its ally, the Right C.P., but also befuddles the mind of the people and constitutes a source of danger to the advance of the democratic movement. For the whole purpose of the movement will be lost if those who are manifestly opposed to democracy and struggle against landlord and capitalist exploitation get the upper hand and get themselves elected in place of the Congress. This danger, the T.U. movement and the working class can never forget and in its vigilance, it must warn the people against it. At the same time, the organised T.U. movement must throw its weight behind the democratic demands and lend its support to them. The weakness of the T.U. movement in Bihar has so far prevented it from playing its due role in this democratic struggle from protesting against the repression directed against the people, from

actively endorsing the demand for the dissolution of the Assembly and the release of political prisoners. This weakness has to be overcome in the near future though the task is difficult because the CITU is weak in the State compared with the AITUC and the INTUC, who are opposed to this democratic struggle.

The World Capitalist Crisis

Comrades, this meeting of the Working Committee must take serious note of the world capitalist crisis that is developing fast and its repercussions on India and the livelihood of the working class and our people. The spokesmen of the leading capitalist nations who hitherto were proclaiming that a crisis of the old type could no longer shake up the world capitalist system are now thinking in terms of the economic recession of the 1929 when in the U. S. A., 25% of the working force was unemployed and production had fallen by 40 per cent. The fact that advanced capitalist countries are remembering those night-marish years itself shows how the situation has rapidly deteriorated.

In contrast the socialist economies are advancing rapidly and they neither show the inflationary price rise of the capitalist world nor its recession.

Capitalist newspapers have been recently remarking about the steadiness of prices in all Socialist countries coupled with rising growth rate. This is in contrast with the capitalist countries where till recently the growth rates could be kept up only by inflationary price rise at the expense of the working class. The conditions obtaining in Socialist countries are not accidental. There is no capitalist class there to use its monopoly of production or its control of State power in the interest of the exploiting classes. There is no exploiting interest to use the price mechanism to defraud the workers. That is why a continuous growth rate is possible and a rise in incomes is easily obtainable. The production gains of society are distributed among the producers apart from what is kept for socialist accumulation. It is, therefore, not surprising at all that every Socialist country is free from inflation, free from unemployment, free from a declining growth rate and shows a continuous rise in the real incomes of its people.

Inflation, rising unemployment and recession in advanced capitalist societies directly flow from the State monopoly capitalism that obtains in these countries. Since the end of the second world war,

the power of monopolies and now multi-national monopolies has grown immensely. They hold these countries completely in their grip and they manipulate the entire economy and the State apparatus in their own interests. When they cannot carry on genuine productive activity, they go in for huge military budgets, nuclear weapons, wars abroad like the war against Vietnam and artificially try to create a sense of prosperity and demand. This always means high prices and in the end the crash comes as it is coming now with the USA showing nearly 6 million unemployed and with the European countries also showing unemployed from half a million upto 2 millions.

The crisis is basically the result of the contradiction between the developing productive forces and their monopoly control which is reflected as the contradiction between the purchasing power of the working class and the people and the productive capacity of society. The monopoly domination prevents these societies from utilising the achievements of the scientific and technological revolution which consequently only leads to huge unemployment. Simultaneously, the rivalries between these imperialist countries have accentuated, leading to

further accentuation of the crisis. Existence of the Socialist world, the virtual collapse of the old colonial system, all have tremendously intensified the crisis besides making it difficult for the imperialist countries to transfer their burdens to the backward countries. It is because of the collapse of the old colonial system that 10 oil producing countries are able to create a first-rate oil crisis which further exacerbates the crisis of the system.

These developments are leading to a wave of working class struggle in all the western countries. Reactionaries in the USA are talking of a Red take-over in Western Europe. In Italy, the pro-fascist forces organise provocations. In England, the unstable situation saw two general elections in the recent period. In Italy, ministries are rapidly changing and American imperialists are intervening to prevent an alliance of democratic forces, in France, there is a huge strike wave of the working class affecting railways and communications also. In Japan, the working class has been carrying on persistent resistance to win its demands. This is just the beginning of the crisis and the future promises to be full of conflicts and struggles for the working class. One thing is quite clear in these countries it

is not easy for the capitalist class to pass on the burdens of the crisis to the shoulders of the working class.

Our economy is in a large measure linked up with the economy of the Western countries. Our export-import trade which is directly connected with our employment, with its ups and downs of the situation abroad and we have to understand how the situation is likely to affect us. During the last 2-3 years, when our own economy was stagnant and also the economy of the Western countries was showing rapid ups and downs, to a certain extent our economy and our employment was supported by the boom conditions obtaining abroad. You perhaps all have read in the papers how the Government have been advertising the rise in our exports and claiming credit for itself. In reality, the inflationary boom conditions obtaining abroad were giving us a temporary help. Even though the monetary value of our exports have been rising rapidly, there was not a proportionate rise in the quantity of our exports. But now these conditions are rapidly disappearing and there is a fall in the value of exports. If these tendencies continue and if some of our important industries like the

textiles and others lose their markets rapidly, then it is bound to affect our employment and our wage structure. Already there are signs that there is slackness in the demand for textile exports, there is a lowering down of the demand of our engineering and marine food exports, there is a lowering of the unit value of a number of our exports—all these create a situation of concern for us that might lead to a closure of a number of our factories some of whom will close because they have no orders, others might close because they cannot get imported raw materials and other accessories necessary for their production.

The latest Report of the Reserve Bank on Currency and Finance also refers to recessionary expectations in the economy. It talks about conditions of stagnant and declining demand in the case of capital and intermediate goods such as iron and steel, construction materials, machinery and transport and consumer goods.

Notwithstanding Mrs. Gandhi's denial the recessionary tendencies are already in evidence. As I have said the immediate burden is borne by the workers in small and unorganised industries. Thousands of powerlooms in Maharashtra, West Bengal,

have ceased to work. Thousands of handloom workers in Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu are without work.

Thousands of coir and other workers are working short time. Similarly thousands of workers in small engineering factories all over the country are thrown out of jobs or laid off without any compensation.

These lay offs or closures sometimes last for a few days only but they inflict intense sufferings nonetheless.

The big industries also are going in for temporary closures or cutting down of production. In October more than 25 cotton textile mills in Ahmedabad closed their third shift, throwing out 5000 workers. Some of them resumed working after reducing cloth prices and clearing stocks. But some have yet to reopen.

The RBI report says that the adjustment so far has been made in the reduction of stocks of finished goods and of trade dues, rather than in any significant cut back in production of prices. But how far the situation can last, how far they will continue production at the present level—none can tell.

In fact the situation is getting worse every day.

The Steel industry is also faced with accumulation of stocks. The Iron and Steel Controller stated in Bangalore in October that the Centre may have to think of decontrol or partial decontrol within two or three months. He said that the steel plants had accumulated stocks amounting to 3.5 lakh tonnes. Hindusthan Steel alone had piled up to one lakh tonnes against allocations. He said "Even when we make allocations, they are not lifted. In the light of these indications, the position of the steel sector is alarming".

Engineering factories in West Bengal and U. P. are throwing out thousands of workers—in many cases without any retrenchement compensation. Heavy Electrical Plant of Bhopal complains that State Electricity Boards are not lifting their orders with result that stocks valued at half the value of the total production, this year have accumulated in the factory.

The figures of unemployment are mounting high. The registered unemployment in August 1974 has reached a record level of 87 lakhs a rise of 10 per cent in a period of one year. The actual rise will be much more. The figures of educated unemplo-

ment have also reached a phenomenal level of over 40 lakhs.

This is the alarming situation that faces the working class and the trade union movement. It presages closures, loss of jobs and wage reduction.

It is a menace which faces the the entire working class and employees and it threatens all sections of our toilers—the agricultural labourers, poor peasants. It is due to the capitalist-landlord policies of the Government, the policies which protect the profits of the foreign and Indian monopolists, of the landlords and attacks the incomes of the workers and the toilers.

It calls the entire working class, all trade unions to unite to resist this offensive more all-pervading and pernicious than the wage freeze. The workers and employees have achieved unprecedented unity at the August convention in Delhi and carried forth the battle in various conventions and above all, strike, and bundhs. This unity in action has to be further strengthened to ward off the coming attack. Against the threat of unemployment, the workers must unitedly raise the demand for right to work, unemployment benefit. They must again raise their

voice against rising prices, wage freeze and demand drastic reduction in profits, nationalisation of monopoly concerns, confiscation of foodstocks of landlords to distribute them among the people at prices within their reach. Raising the demand for need-based wage they must demand better living conditions for the agricultural labourers, fair price to the peasant for his produce and drastic increase in taxation against the monopolists, big capitalists and the landlords. They must demand elimination of black market and its operations and confiscation of all wealth earned in blackmarket transactions.

It is only with this programme that the workers can fight the attempts of the capitalists and landlords to make them along with the people the scape goats of the crisis.

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