TRADE UNION EDUCATION

LECTURE NOTES

(Part III)

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PART III

PREFACE TO PART III

The themes covered in the 9 lessons printed here form Part III of the "Trade Union Education: Lecture Notes" brought out by the AITUC. Part I and II had been published together, at the time of the Vadodra Session in December 1986.

Trade union activities are varied and multifarious. Several aspects have not been dealt with in these lecture notes. Perhaps we can do so later, on the basis of our experiences and needs. The main thing is to go ahead with the work of Trade Union education in right earnest, at different levels, and at all centres.

Trade Union education has to impart the fundamentals of class-based theory to our activists. The groundings of Trade Union education are first acquired in the course of the Trade Union movement itself. The Movement as it goes ahead continues to educate the participants in it. The teaching of theory has therefore to be integrated with the practice of the TU Movement. That also determines the need of linking our education work with the demands and tasks of TU struggles, and of connecting it with the general class struggle of the proletariat.

The test of our educational work is, and should be, a marked improvement in our activities, in our practice, in raising the level of class consciousness of the worker-activists. Attention has also to be paid to the primary education of the rank and file trade union member,—of generalising the basic experience he acquires so as to give him a class outlook.

As our educational activities expand in volume and scope, we will have to face questions about *methods* and *techniques* of education, and so forth. The AITUC leadership to be sure, will tackle these questions at the proper time.

We hope 'teachers' as well as 'students' in TU classes, as also other leading trade unionists will let us know how far these lecture notes have been of help to them, and what changes or additions they would like to have so as to improve them.

1.8.87 A. B. Bardhan

Lesson 21

ORGANISE THE UNORGANISED: THE ORGANISED VERSUS THE UNORGANISED SECTOR

— The Bangalore Session of the AITUC (December 1983), gave the call to "Organise the Unorganised", as a priority task. This has been repeated at the Vadodra Session (December 1986). Some conscious attention has begun to be paid in a number of places to this task. There are a few achievements on record. But these are altogether too little compared with the magnitude of the task. First of all, let us digest a few facts about our work-force, the unorganised mass within it and commensurate with that the level of organisation so far achieved.

— As mentioned in Lesson 5, Part I, our country has a huge working population of about 260.9 million, of which the wage and salary earners are about 100.5 million, and the self-employed are 160.4 million. Among the self-employed are 128.1 million cultivators, and 32.3 million non-cultivators. Confining our attention to the wage and salary earners, we find the position as follows:

Organised Sector		Total
Public Sector:	15.0 million	24.8 million
Private Sector:	9.8 million	
Unorganised Sector		
Agricultural Workers:	58.3 million	
Non-agricultural Workers:	11.4 million	75.7 million
Others:	6.0 million	

Self-employed persons (largely accounted for by cultivators), are more than one and a half times the total wage and salary earners. But this is important: *employment in the unorganised sector. is three times that of the organised sector.* A little less than 10% of the working population is in the organised sector.

—We have looked at the problem from the point of view of organised and unorganised sectors as such. There are

sectors of employment, which are scattered, unlisted, unregistered, and therefore unorganised. Oviously, the task of organising the individuals working in such sectors of employment presents tremendous difficulties, compared to workers in organised industries and services. But there is another aspect to the question: what is the level of organisation (into trade unions) of the total labour force, and of the total non-agricultural work force? The 1981 Census gives the following data: (Here, the level of unionisation covers both the organised and unorganised sector, though mainly, of course, unionisation is in the organised sector):

Total Labour Force	244.6	million
Total Non-Agricultural Labour Force	66.8	"
Total Membership of Unions	7.7	"
—Unionised as percentage of total labour force :	3%	
—Unionised as percentage of non-agricultural labour force :	11.5%	

—The percentage of unionised, and therefore organised workers is very poor. This percentage is considerably lower in the unorganised sector than in the organised sector. In the city of Bombay for example, where unionisation is supposed to be higher than other places in the country, more than 45 per cent of the labour force is outside the folds of any union. These unorganised workers are generally from construction sites, industrial estates, shops and establishments, hotels etc. This estimate excludes the big mass of self-employed people, among whom there is no employer-employee relation.

—The bulk of workers in the unorganised sector, are the agricultural workers. To the existing figure of 58.3 million given above, nearly a million is added every year, not only due to natural increase, but also due to the growing pauperisation of the poor peasants. Absence of employment in the countryside drives tens of thousands—entire families, to abandon their hearth and home, whether periodically or for all times, and to go to the towns in search of jobs, or to other states where jobs are available in agriculture, as for example from Bihar to Punjab. And whenever there is any 'natural calamity' this migration turns into a veritable flood.

—*Agricultural workers* are the most exploited in the country. The minimum wage rates fixed by state governments are extremely miserable. In some states where the rates are somewhat higher these are not implemented in practice. In

fact, there is hardly any implementing machinery worth mentioning. The minimum rates remain on paper,—the actual wage being determined in each area by seasonal considerations, the relative demand, the level of local organisation if any, and above all, the tender mercies of the landlords and rich peasants. Even this has to be considered in the context, that except for a very small number which is employed on annual basis, the mass of agricultural workers do not find employment in agricultural operations for more than 120 to 150 days in the ylear. For the remaining days, they seek casual jobs for still worse wages. Those among them who have tiny holdings occupy themselves in the most unremunerative and uneconomic cultivation, in an effort to add to their miserable earnings. In the perenially irrigated areas of intensive cultivation, the wage rates are relatively better. But these areas are localised and limited.

—At present, minimum wages as notified by Government are the highest in Haryana (Rs. 19.25 a day) and the lowest in Maharashtra (Rs. 6/- a day). The central and state labour ministers recently met in a conference (May 20 and 21, 1987), to discuss the sssue of revising the minimum wages for unorganised workers, in particular of agricultural workers, and effective implementation of the same. After shedding a lot of tears on their plight and declaring pious intentions, the conference recommended that the minimum daily wage for unskilled agricultural worker be Rs. 11 a day in all states. As it is today, except the five states of Maharashtra (Rs. 6), Karnataka (Rs. 9.50), Bihar (Rs. 10/-), Orissa (Rs. 10/-), and Madhya Pradesh (Rs. 10.50), all other states have already a higher minimum. The proposed minimum rate is to be revised every two years or on a rise of 50 points in the Consumer Price Index, whichever is earlier. (Incidentally, the Consumer Price Index does not truly reflect the impact of rising prices on the budget of agricultural workers' family, wherein the food component is larger—See Lesson 13 in Part II).

—Back in 1981, the previous labour ministers' conference had recommended that the minimum wages be fixed above the poverty line. The conference itself had worked out that the minimum rate should accordingly be Rs. 19 per day, with a provision for variable DA linked to the CPI (agriculture). For skilled workers working in modern farms the wages should be higher. Six years later, and after announcing two editions of the "Twenty-Point Programme", the government has come upto Rs. 11 a day as the mini-

mum wage. Such is the distance covered in six years, and the outcome of the 'serious concern' about improving the lot of agricultural workers!

—What a tremendous measure of hold the landlords and rich peasants exercise over the state governments is evident from the following example: The 'enlightened' Maharashtra government declared at the Labour Ministers' Conference that in Maharashtra any able-bodied villager is entitled to work under the 'Employment Guarantee Scheme', and the combined earning of two members of the family (wife and the husband) works up to Rs. 12 a day. Even children, so it said, participate in the E. G. S. work, and their earnings are also added to this amount! The Central Labour Minister hastened to shower praise on the Maharashtra government, and also to certify that in effect this was more than the proposed minimum![1] The labour ministers did not even bother to think that the minimum wage rate is supposed to relate to one working person, and not to the combined earnings of the whole family. Further, according to the 1971 Census, there were two dependents for every working person, and this ratio was not expected to go down in the near future. And moreover, the claim that every able-bodied person, man and wife, earns Rs. 6/ a day each, is itself a myth.

—As to the enforcement machinery for getting the minimum wage rates implemented, as also to ensure the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act for female labour (who constitute 40 per cent of the work force), the less said the better. Out of 200 inspectors to be appointed for this purpose on a pilot basis in the states of M. P., Rajasthan, Orissa and Manipur, only 150 had been appointed by April 1987.

—It is not so much the actual figures of minimum wages fixed or earned, or the enforcement machinery that we are concerned, with, but the root causes behind this sorry state of affairs. What are these? Apart from the reluctance of the state machinery dominated as it is by the exploiting classes to do anything in this matter, *the main cause is the absence of organisation among the rural proletariat all over the country*. it is only the organised strength and the militant struggles of the agricultural workers that can bring about a general rise in the wages, compel government to fix reasonable rates not below the poverty line standard, ensure implementation of these rates and other related laws.

This alone can bring about the enactment of a central legislation on the lines of the Kerala legislation, which will provide (i) pension and a measure of other social security benefits; (ii) equal wages and maternity facilities to female labour; (iii) employment guarantee scheme based on payment of minimum wages to each worker; and (iv) trade union rights and protection against goonda attacks by private armies of landlords operating with the connivance of the administration and its police, etc. *Only such organisation can do away with the curse of bonded labour* prevailing in a number of remote and backward regions, and occasionally even in the periphery of metropolitan centres (working in brick kilns, quarries and so forth). Claims about rehabilitation of bonded labour made by the administration have been shown up to be false, and the 'freed' bonded labour have slipped back into bondage. There is not even an awareness among the authorities about the Supreme Court's recent ruling that anyone denied of minimum wages was to be presumed as bonded labour. District officials plead helplessness and inability in identifying bonded labour for want of evidence to establish their indebtedness, and about the denial of minimum wages to them.

—The foundation of the *Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union* in September 1968, was a positive step towards organising the agricultural workers. After its Sixth National Conference, it has today a membership in the neighbourhood of one million. Its local and state units are getting affiliated with the AITUC. Other central trade union organisations, like the CITU, HMS, INTUC have also set up agricultural workers' organisations. A few local unaffiliated organisations have sprang up here and there. Voluntary organisations of different hues (some of them,—but not all, with doubtful antecedents) are also operating in the prevailing vacuum. In the recent period, a few militant agitations and struggles have taken place at local and even state levels on their demands. The rural exploited masses have had to face brutal retaliation from the landlord sections and severe repression by the police. Caste conflicts have been fanned and utilised in order to break the unity and fighting spirit of the rural poor. Even so, the objective situation is driving them towards struggles. Central and state government have had to take note of these struggles, and announce a few measures, though they generally remain on paper. The task of organising the tens of millions of rural workers scattered all over our sprawling countryside so as to develop and consolidate these struggles is how-

ever a herculean task, and all that has taken place so far is no more than a small beginning.

—Next only to agriculture, is the traditional *handloom industry,* which provides livelihood to nearly 2.5 crores of the population. To this has been added the growing powerloom industry in the decentralised textile sector. The importance of handlooms and powerlooms is evidenced by the fact that they produce 60 per cent of the total cloth production in India.

—Handloom weavers have become the victims of merciless exploitation by the capitalist market mechanism. Speculative rise in yarn prices, their non-availability along with other inputs like dyes and chemicals at reasonable rates, as also difficulties of marketing of handloom products, have combined to cut down work on handlooms and push the weavers way below the poverty line. As to the powerloom workers, they have nothing like security of service, and are forced to toil ceaselessly without regard to such elementary rights as hours of work, rest intervals, leave or holidays etc. Minimum rates of wages are just not implemented, because of state governments succumbing to the pressures of the powerloom owners' lobby, behind whom stand the textile monopolists. Real life has belied the tall claim of government that its 'new textile policy', because of its 'integrated view of the industry' would directly benefit the millions of weavers in decentralised sector. On the contrary, it has handed them over to the tender mercies of the textile monopolists, the 'polyester lobby', the sharks in the yarn trade, and other exploiters.

—*Here too, the root cause is the lack of organisation among the weavers themselves,* which has made it difficult to ensure an average earning of Rs. 25/- per day and 30 days' work for the handloom weavers; or implement minimum wages and other service conditions for the powerloom weavers. Efforts have been initiated to build and activise the *'All India Weavers' Federation'* formed some years back, as also to set up unions of powerloom workers and constitute an all-India Coordination Committee of the same. These efforts have yet to gather strength.

—The lakhs of *bidi workers* are relatively better organised, with traditions of militant struggles, stable unions at several centres, and an *All India Federation.* Here too, the owners refuse with impunity to implement the minimum wages, and the provisions of the Bidi & Cigar Act. Because of the low technology involved in the industry, the bidi magnates are able to carry out with ease the abolition of employer-employee nexus

in many places and various ways with view to evade provisions of the law. *The level of organisation reached by the bidi workers is however not able to measure up to the task of frustrating and defeating all the manouevres of the owners.*

—Next only to agriculture and the handloom industry, comes the *construction and building activity.* Reliable statistics are lacking. But according to the 1981 Census, 35.65 lakh workers were employed in the construction industry. Of these, 10 per cent were women. 18.6 lakhs out of the 35.65 lakhs were working in urban areas. An estimated 4 lakh workers are added yearly to the work-force in the construction industry. Employment in this industry are through several agencies, viz. (i) government agencies, such as P.W.D., Irrigation and Power, etc. (ii) public sector agencies, like National Project Construction Corporation (NPCC), and others; (iii) big private firms, and (iv) contractors, sub-contractors, petty contractors, and so on.

—Broadly, the industry can be divided into two types,—building construction, and construction of projects. About 53 per cent of the work force employed in the industry is in building construction and maintenance. A good section of workers possess expertise and specialised skills. They are generally reemployed on new building and project sites, but without continuity of service and emoluments. A substantial number among these workers is migrant labour. The lowest categories of unskilled workers among them, due to their destitution, migrant character, rootlessness, insecurity of job, extremely low wages, loans and advances from the contractors and mukadams and intimidation by employers' rowdies, are reduced to the status of bonded labour or something approximating that. A small section,—those who are engaged on projects and are a little organised, have succeeded in getting temporary quarters and other benefits. The others generally put up huts and shacks near the sites, and once the construction is over, they are thrown out on the streets and compelled to seek refuse in slums in the urban jungle, or migrate to some other place.

—The vast majority of the construction workers, especially the contract labour, are unorganised. In Maharashtra for instance, the strength of construction labour in 1983-84 was 4.62 lakhs. But the claimed trade union membership was only 17,260 (3.7 per cent). New legislations may be passed (such as the "Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act", the "Contract Labour Act", the "Minimum Wages Act", etc.), inspectors may be appointed and so on. *But nothing can work unless the trade unions themselves act as the watchdog of the workers' interests.*

—Connected with the Construction Industry, is the group of construction material industries, such as the brick-kiln and tile industry, the stone quarries, sand-dredging, wood-cutting, saw mills and plywood factories, lime-stone and paints, glass making, etc. (not to speak of cement, steel and electrical goods, which are generally organised). Situation in the above-mentioned industries, is even more pitiful. There is complete absence of any survey and reliable data. Yet an approximate idea of the employment in these industries can be got from the statement of the All India Brick and Tile Manufacturers' Federation, which states that, there are 22,000 brick-kilns with more than 30 lakh workers—a large section being essentially agricultural labour, who migrate as family groups in search of jobs during the lean period. In Haryana alone, out of 26,471 workers, 13,775 were migrant workers from Rajasthan, Bihar, U.P., Punjab, M.P., Orissa, and even Nepal. Recruitment of these workers is generally through jamadars or agents, who take a cut from the earnings of the workers.

—Besides the above categories, there are hosiery and garment workers, forest workers, workers in iron-ore and other mineral mines,—good number of the latter two being from tribal sections.

The facts given here are enough to show the magnitude of unorganised workers in our work-force, the depth of exploitation which they suffer, and the nature of the problem which the trade union movement is faced with. In the next lesson, we shall discuss a few more aspects connected with the unorganised toiling masses in our country.

NOTES

1. Reacting sharply even to Rs. 11 being fixed as the minimum, *V. S. Page* former chairman of Maharashtra Legislative Council and at present chairman of the official State Employment Guarantee Scheme Board observed, "Maharashtra Government had suggested to the Centre to fix an amount just sufficient for survival, viz. Rs. 8 per day. Why then, has the Centre recommended Rs. 11? To fix an amount more than what is necessary for survival, is fraught with grave danger. Agriculture cannot bear this burden, and will have to do without hired labour". (*Maharashtra Times*: 26 May, 1987)

Need one comment further?

FURTHER READING

Report of the BKMU conference.

Lesson 22

ORGANISE THE UNORGANISED: CHILD AND WOMEN LABOUR

— Discussion about unorganised workers brings us to the question of Child Labour in our work force. What is the magnitude of this problem in India?

— The Planning Commission estimated it at 17.36 million, as on 1st March, 1983.

— The Operations Research Group, Baroda put the figure of children driven to work for a living, at 44 million.

—The Bangalore—based "Concerned for Working Children" Group, put the figure as high as over 100 million.

Working children constitute almost 26 per cent of the labour force in the country, contributing about as much to the families' earnings. About 80 per cent are from the scheduled castes and tribes,—the socially and economically oppressed sections of society. Nearly 87 per cent of the working children are engaged in agriculture, plantations, fisheries, etc. performing back-breaking toil, sometimes along with their parents.

Quite naturally, an overwhelming proportion are illiterate, deprived of any access to schools, since it is between the age of 6 and 14, that they are employed.

— The harshness and inhumanness of their exploitation defies description. One has only to point to:

— The match-making and fireworks industries at Shivakasi, where more than 45,000 children are employed in 224 registered match factories and about 2455 tiny units.

— The carpet-weaving industry in the Bhadohi-Mirzapur belt, as also in cities like Allahabad and Varanasi, where 75,000 children work.

— The glass-bangles, jars, beads and containers manufacturing industries in and around Ferozabad, where more than 50,000 children work near furnaces at a temperature of 1400° C.

— Besides, there are the million-strong rag-pickers, shoe shiners, and waifs who fend for themselves.

— Article 24 of the Indian Constitution prohibits the employment of children under 14 years in factories, mines or hazardous places.

Article 39, under the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' lays down that 'the tender age of children' is not abused, and that children 'are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner' and that 'childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment'.

Contrary to all such solemn proclamations, the realities on the ground are just the opposite. Over the years, since the Constitution came into force, the number of working children is rising. According to UN reports, of the 52 million child workers in the world, about 17 million (taking the conservative Planning Commission estimate), i.e. one-third, are in India.

— Indigence, destitution compels parents to drive their babies and children to work even for 12 or 14 hours, dragging them out of their beds in the early hours. The earnings of the children make all the difference between actual starvation and bare subsistence.

But that is one aspect.

—The other aspect is, that profit making capitalist slave-drivers, see in it a source of cheap labour, easy to abuse and exploit. The child is totally defenceless, voiceless and helpless, absolutely at the mercy of the master. He is easily intimidated, and has nowhere to turn to. Arguments about 'nimble fingers' are mischievous and cynical, since technology can always perform the work of the most 'nimble fingers'.

Child labour is not something inevitable, a 'necessary evil' about which one may sentimentalize, but nevertheless accept. It is a product of the prevailing exploitative and oppressive socio-economic system in a situation of extreme poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and backwardness and must be abolished along with the system that breeds it, and seeks to profit and thrive on it.

— True to its class character, the govenment has gone through the motions of passing several legislations, without really meaning to abolish child labour. There have been for instance, the "Children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933", the "employment of Children Act. 1938", the "Employment of Children (Amendment) Act, 1985", besides of course, the Factories Act, the Mines Act, the Apprentices Act, the Minimum Wages Act and so on, which include provisions on

child labour. Yet, with this plethora of acts, the legislative protection against child labour has hardly been enforced.

The ILO Convention on Child Labour, has also not been ratified by India.

— A new law, known as the "Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986" has now been adopted, replacing the earlier 1938 Act. It is nothing more than a refurbished edition of the old law. In effect, it legitimises child labour under certain conditions. It makes a distinction between industries that are hazardous to children, and those that are supposed to be not. (This distinction was also in the 1938 Act. The new law only adds 'construction work' to the list). In the first, child labour is prohibited. In the second, it is regulated, certain condtions being specified about wages, working hours, medicare and so on. The much-talked of idea about levying a cess on industries employing child labour so as to set up a Welfare Fund for the benefit of children, was later dropped,—leaving it to Government. Even this law brings under its purview no more than 10 to 20 per cent of children working in the semi-organised sector. The rest are left to their fate.

— The question remains: If the already existing legislations were hardly enforced, how will the employers be made to comply with the new law in the coming days? Who will take care of the collusion between the tens of thousands of employers using and abusing child labour, and the handful of inspectorial staff? There are no answers to these questions. The law is only a concession to public opinion, and an attempt to hoodwink the people and international organisations, such as the ILO. The Government can now claim that it is tackling the very serious problem of child labour, and intends to abolish it within 10 years! All this is glorified as a 'pragmatic approach', meaning that the country must live with this evil.

The National Child Labour Advisory Board set up recently, is as yet a paper organisation, mouthing platitudes. The real attitude within the Establishment, is revealed by the typical remark of the general manager of the "Handloom and Handicrafts Exports Corporation" (a Delhi-based government organisation), who while speaking in a Seminar at Varanasi had the temerity to vehemently oppose the banning of children as, "it would be suicidal for the carpet industry"!

— It is time that the Trade Unions do not leave the question of child labour only to philanthropists and sociologists.

They have to speak out. They have to reach out. They have to intervene, as elder brothers. The children at work may not be drawn into and organised into unions, but they are a precious 'trust' of the working class movement, since they will be the next generation of workers.

— The question and problems of *women's participation in economic activity*, of *working women* and women in general, are now being widely discussed. Apart from women's organisations, trade unions have also begun to focus attention on working women, overwhelming majority of whom are still unorganised. This is however most inadequate, and the efforts in this direction are themselves very sporadic and unorganised.

— Of the total labour force of 265 million in India, women constitute nearly 87 million i.e. about one-third. In the organised sector, the percentage of women employed, stood at 12.2 per cent in 1980-81. It rose to 12.9 per cent in 1984-85.

— The slight increase in the public sector can be attributed to more women taking up jobs as teachers, nurses, clerks and so on.

The primary sector (agriculture, forestry, livestock, fishing, plantations and allied activities) provides work for about 83 per cent of women (46 per cent of them work as agricultural labourers). Next to agriculture, handlooms handicrafts and rural industries play a pivotal role in providing work opportunities to women. Such industries also enable them to use their skills. Women are flocking in large number to the fast-growing garment industry, working at home or in closely-packed and poorly-ventilated premises, getting a pittance as piece-rates. Special legislation for women, and growing awareness about the benefits from such legislations, is sought to be evaded by the employers by converting some hitherto semi-organised industries into home-based production (bidi, coir, cashew), and by outright retrenchment of women (such as in textiles). Thus, in the last two decades, the number of women workers in cotton textiles, jute and mining has declined by 30 to 60 per cent. The axe of retrenchment in general claims women as the first victims.

— The long-term trend in the participation of women in economic activity shows general stagnation, and even decline in certain traditional industries. It has raised the question of what is called the 'marginalisation' of Indian women in the country's economy, compared to other developed countries where the participation of women in the total labour force

TABLE

Employment of Women in the Organised Sector (in '000s)

Year	Public Sector			Private Sector			Grand Total		
	Total	*Women*	*Percentage*	*Total*	*Women*	*Percentage*	*Total*	*Women*	
1980-81	15484	1499	9.7	7395	1294	17.5	22879	2793	12.2
1981-82	15946	1580	9.9	7547	1320	17.5	23493	2899	12.3
1982-83	16456	1691	10.3	7522	1305	17.3	23978	2996	12.5
1983-84	16869	1774	10.5	7345	1283	17.5	24214	3058	12.6
1984-85	17269	1864	10.8	7309	1298	17.7	24578	3162	12.9

Source: Ministry of Labour

ranges from 30 to 45 per cent. In recent years, in the urban areas, the number of women seeking jobs especially in the service industries, in informatics, in drug and pharmaceuticals, in electronics, is growing. This is a reflection of economic compulsions, of social change, of a change in the psychological outlook,—of women themselves in the first place. Today, when we speak of unemployment, we increasingly mean not only male unemployment, but also female unemployment. The live registers of employment exchanges have come to reflect this trend. Thus:

TABLE

(In '000s)

Year	*Number of job-seekers on live register (total)*	*Percentage increase over previous year*	*Number of women job-seekers*	*Percentage increase over previous year*	*Percentage of women job-seekrs to total*
1982	19753.0	10.7	3138.0	14.8	15.9
1983	21953.3	11.1	3581.6	14.1	16.3
1984	23546.8	7.3	4002.1	11.7	17.0
1985	26269.9	11.6	4447.5	11.7	16.9
1986	30131.2	14.7	5068.1	14.6	16.9

Source: Union Ministry of Labour

— A number of legislations seek to provide legal safeguards for women workers. Thus:

— The Factories Act 1948, Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 provide that in every plantation or industrial premises, wherein more than 50 women are ordinarily employed, there shall be provided and maintained a suitable room for the use of children under the age of 6 years, of such women. In the case of factories, the limit is 30. The Mines Act provides for no minimum limit. Each child in a creche is to be provided with milk and wholesome refreshments.

— The Factories, Mines and Plantations Acts provide for

separate latrines and urinals on prescribed scale for the use of women.

— These acts (as also the Beedi and Cigar Act), prohibit employment of women between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m., except for some relaxation under certain conditions by the state governments.

— The Factories Act prohibits employment of women in dangerous or heavy occupations. The Mines Act prohibits work by women in any part of a mine which is below ground.

— Despite these provisions, accessible functioning toilets, separate rest rooms, and even creche facilities are not available at all premises. Regular 15-minutes break for breast-feeding children are not given. Canteens are occupied by the men-workers, while women squat at their work-places and take their lunch.

— The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 has sought to do away with discrimination on the ground of sex. And yet, it is a fact of life, that the minimum wages notified or paid, are consistently lower for women who work the same hours as men. The rates for women workers in many categories of unskilled work, ranges from 65 to 75 per cent of the rates for men workers. The argument trotted out is that their work is lighter, or that productivity is lower, though in point of fact there are no comparable measures. Within the same industry, occupations which fetch lower remuneration are generally open to women.

The Act provides for advisory committees to be constituted by state governments. Half the members are to be women. Many states have not cared to set up such committees, though more than a decade has gone by. No state except UP has cared to report violations under the Act. The enforcement powers vary from state to state. It is interesting to note that the total number of prosecutions launched were 15 in 1982, 58 in 1983, and 67 in 1984, while the convictions were 8 in 1982, 25 in 1983 and 38 in 1984!

— This has been the performance during the International Decade for Women. Discrimination in recruiting to higher managerial and supervisory posts continues, since the idea persists that these are men's jobs. Unmarried women are preferred to married women for jobs. As to 'unmarried mothers' there is an unspoken but hardened prejudice. Hostels for single working women are extremely rare.

— The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, purport to give wide-ranging

benefits to women. The latter however covers only 12 per cent of women engaged in economic activity. But the qualifying clause of at least 160 days continuous work in a period of 12 months preceding the date of the delivery, deprives the majority of women who are casual or contract labourers from the benefits under this Act. They cannot fulfil the conditions, nor prove it if they have, since service books or even wage slips are not given to such workers. In the ESI Act, this qualifying provision has been amended in a retrograde direction.

— The callous and discriminatory attitude towards women employees is also seen in the recommendation of the Fourth Pay Commission. It says, "Presently there is no limit on the occasions on which maternity leave may be availed of by women government employees. We recommend that, in consonance with national objective of a small family, maternity leave may not be allowed to women employees having more than two children".

A small family is no doubt desirable. This is what we should propagate and strive for. But never yet has it been shown that the responsibility for bringing forth a third offspring rests solely on the woman, and that only she is liable to punishment for the 'crime'. That is what it would amount to, if the expectant mother is denied maternity leave, when perhaps she needs it more than ever, due to health and economic reasons. Meanwhile, what about the male partner in the 'crime'? Can such primitive measures directed against mothers, help achieve the national objective?

— Women's rights have been formally recognised as a result of prolonged struggle. The main problem remains of fighting actual discrimination and of ensuring the implementation of the rights recognised as also of the legal provisions contained in the Equal Remuneration Act, the Maternity Benefit Act, the Minimum Wages Act, etc. since women workers are mostly to be found in traditional and unorganised industries. The task includes securing social security benefits for women and the family under the provisions of the ESI Act, the EPF Act, the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, the Family Pension Act, or the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, following the death of the male bread-winner. Unions are increasingly raising the demand for providing employment to the widow of a deceased employee who has died of accident or under tragic circumstances. They are demanding that the comprehensive laws for agricultural labour or construction

workers, should make special provisions for women who are employed in large numbers in these occupations.

— The condition of self-employed women,—the 'dabba-batli walis', the 'bhajiwalis', the home-based 'bidi-rollers', the women who open and stitch gunny bags in the grain market, etc. is extremely woeful. They are at the mercy of money-lending sharks, market dalals and dadas, municipal officials and policemen on the beat. There are no laws to protect them. Government has appointed a "National Commission on Self-employed Women" to go into their condition. Trade Unions have to sit up and take notice of these self-employed women.

— All this brings us to the question of undertaking the organising of working women, as a specific task of the trade unions. What is the present situation in this regard? According to the figures collected from the annual returns submitted to the registrars of trade unions, women constitute no more than 6.2 per cent of the total membership. Their active participation in trade union activity is even less. There is only a sprinkling of women-delegates in trade union conferences at various levels. Even where women-workers are in overwhelming members, as for instance in the bidi, or coir industry, it is the men who represent them as delegates at conferences. Executive committees and office-bearers of trade unions rarely have women among them. And yet, it is the general experience that women are a tenacious and militant force whenever and wherever they are drawn into struggles. They stand like a rock at such times under the union banner.

— The activities of the National Federation of Indian Women, as also of other women's organisations, especially working women's organisations, have created a general awareness about the problems and conditions of working women. March 8, International Women's Day is widely observed in the country. The AITUC, in its Bangalore and Vadodara sessions has drawn special attention to the task of organising them. The WFTU, has drawn pointed attention to the fact, that, "women workers in several countries are not satisfied with the attention given by trade unions to their specific problems and in promoting women to leading positions in the trade union movement."

— This calls for a conscious change in the attitude of leading cadres of the trade union movement. It calls for a study of the specific problems of women workers in each industry. It calls for a change in the style of functioning, for instance, attention to such small details like fixing the time

and place of union meetings so as to enable women to attend them. Special classes for women trade unionists have also to be arranged. Work by trade unions among working women has to be coordinated in some respects with the local units of the NFIW. The big unions, and unions in establishments where women are in good numbers, have to constantly monitor the advance made in this sphere.

* * *

FURTHER READING

There is a growing volume of literature—reports, articles, etc. on the subject of child and women labour, which trade unionists must get acquainted with.

Lesson 23

ORGANISE THE UNORGANISED: THE ROLE OF ORGANISED WORKERS

— Dispersing semi-organised industries into home-based piece-rated work, and sub-contracting of work, are two methods that are being widely used by employers to counteract any move to organise the unorganised workers and foil attempts at improving their miserable conditions. In the seventies, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 had been passed, with the avowed intention of regulating and abolishing contract labour, as indicated in the title of the Act.

But in recent years, in the name of cutting costs, increasing efficiency, reducing over-heads, or implementing the fanciful concept of 'zero-budgeting', contract labour has begun to proliferate in several spheres of industrial and business activity. Work of a perennial nature, work of routine maintenance and operation which are integral parts of the industrial or buciness undertakings are being farmed out on contract. An army of contracting firms, of big contractors, sub-contractors, petty contractors, down to the labour mukadams has come up, displacing regular departmental workers, and even condemning existing workers to forced idleness or redundancy. As to cost reduction, it is a generally known fact that contract system gives birth to corruption at all levels. It creates a chain of "commission agents", a system whereby the contractor pilfers material and gets low quality work certified by offering cuts at every rung of the administrative leader upto the highest—each according to his price. The biggest scope for contract work is of course in the construction industry, where it is the rule rather than the exception.

— Employers regard contracting out of work, as a method of bypassing laws and regulations, saving wage and fringe benefit costs, avoiding social security payments, and denying regularity of employment to the workers. They consider it as a means to restrict unions and keep them weak.

— Apart from the Contract Labour Act and the Inter-state Migrant Act, 1979, which are supposed to provide legal pro-

tection to workmen, the mass of workers in the unorganised sector are mostly covered by the schedules to the Minimum Wages Act.

Responsibility for wages etc. is cast under the Act on the principal employer. And yet, in the famous Asiad case, the Supreme Court had to indict the Central Government itself for flouting its own laws. As to the enforcement machinery, the total number of contractors licensed by the Centre stood at 26,204 by 1985, whereas the annual average rate of inspections during the last three years was only around 2,500, i.e. less than 10 per cent. The Inter-state Migrant Act, has remained a non-starter.

—The misery, and consequently mounting discontent of the mass of unorganised workers is the denial of a minimum wage? We have seen how the wages notified are meagre; even these are not implemented, and government has no machinery worth the name to implement them. *What ought to be a reasonable minimum wage?*

Two years back the Planning Commission had calculated the poverty line at Rs. 7300 per annum for a family. At today's prices it will work out to above Rs. 8000 per annum i. e. in any case between Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 a day. In no state are the minimum wages anywhere near this. The unorganised workers are thus denied even a wage which is at the poverty line level.

The demand of the AITUC, and also of the recent NCC meeting is that: "No workers' wage should be less than the poverty line level." To have it otherwise, is to condemn the workers to an existence below the poverty line, to officially sanction it, notwithstanding tall promises about raising them above the poverty line. One cannot lay claims about raising large sections above the poverty line, while officially sanctioning a wage that keeps large masses below it. That is transparent hypocrisy and deceit. Considering the rising level of prices, the unions also demand that the wages should be protected from erosion by an adequate dearness allowance linked to the Consumer Price Index. Struggle for a minimum wage above the poverty line level, and for its implementation, is the central slogan for workers in the unorganised sector.

—But in addition to these general issues, each major unorganised sector calls for a special law, and measures to provide protection to the workers engaged in it. We have already spoken of a comprehensive law for agricultural workers. Workers in the construction and construction material industry also require a similar central legislation. Their

demands include provision of identity card and individual wage-slip, abolition of sub-contract and 'jamadari' system, a national wage for the industry and uniform service conditions, retaining allowance during off-season if any, implementation of equal pay for equal work, treating construction workers as industrial workers, and so on.

—A step forward has been taken by setting up a National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labourers (NCC-CL) under the chairmanship of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer. This Committee has presented the draft of a model bill to Parliament and a scheme thereunder, which provides for, (i) tripartite boards at the national, state and district levels; (ii) compulsory registration of workers category-wise, as also of employers, (iii) regulation of recruitment by rotation, (iv) welfare levy, and so on. A nation-wide campaign on the basis of this Model Bill, will be a useful method of drawing the lakhs of construction workers into the organised mainstream of trade union movement. All the same, let it be stated from experience, that new laws may be passed, boards set up and inspectors appointed etc, but nothing can work unless the trade union themeselves become the watchdog of labour's interests. The need is, "the will to organise."

—To say that the unorganised should be organised, is in a manner of speaking, to say the obvious. Yet as we see, the trade unions have remained confined, by and large, to the regular employees mostly in the organised sector. There has been a certain lateral expansion of trade unionism but not a determined drive right "into the masses" of unorganised workers. Only this would bring about a qualitative growth of the movement by organising the entire mass of workers as a *class,* by winning this mass for the general class struggle.

Not that the desire is lacking, but practical steps are indeed few, proving as always that good intentions are never enough.

—In the course of their movement, it is for the organised workers to always remember that the battle does not end with winning their own demands. In fact, such successes relate only to a minority section of the vast working masses, viz. those who are organised and are capable of waging a battle. These successes do not bring benefits to the big majority, except in an indirect way, by holding forth an example, provided of course, this example, this lesson, is carried to them.

Today, a stage has been reached when the gap between the organised minority and the unorganised majority would further widen, unless the organised workers themselves take

up the cause and raise their powerful voice in support of the latter. The widening gap is being utilised by the bourgeoisie and its propagandists, for pitting one section against another, for curbing the scope of collective bergaining for the organised workers themselves, while doing nothing more than shedding crocodile tears for the unorganised toilers. Even some well-meaning people are beginning to regard class divisions as irrelevant, and replacing it by a sort of division on the basis of the so-called poverty-line—those below, and those above it, lumping the organised workers who have managed to improve their living standards along with other affluent sections of society.

—The organised workers have therefore to undertake the task of drawing their weaker, unorganised brothers into the fold of organisation, in the interest of the entire class and of society. To ignore this task, is to hamper the further development of the general class and democratic struggle.

Again and again it has been shown that when the organised give the unorganised a lead, the latter will fight with the same courage and unity in demanding better conditions and justice. The fight does not consist merely in setting up minimum wage committee for this or that or that section. Rather, it is a campaign for mobilising the entire mass of workers for an assault on capital, for changing the whole system of exploitation.

—Writing as far back as 1866, in the resolution of the General Council of the International workingmen's Association, Marx defined the future tasks of the trade unions as follows:

"In addition to their original tasks, the trade unions must now learn to act consciously as focal points for organising the working class in the greater interest of its complete emancipation. They must support every social and political movement directed towards this aim. By considering themselves champions and representatives of the whole working class, and acting accordingly the trade unions must succeed in rallying round themselves all workers still outside their ranks. They must carefully safeguard the interests of the workers in the poorest-paid trades, as for example, the farm labourers who due to especially unfavourable circumstances have been deprived of their power of resistance. They must convince the whole world that their efforts are far from narrow and egoistic, but on the contrary, are directed towards the emancipation of the down-trodden masses".

—A few months before the Great October Revolution, Lenin elaborated the same theme in the specific situation prevailing in Russia, particularly in relation to the rural workers:

"All classes in Russia are organising. Only the class which is the most exploited and the poorest of all, the most disunited and downtrodden—the class of Russia's agricultural wage-labourers—seems to have been forgotten.

"It is the indisputable and paramount duty of the vanguard of Russia's proletariat, the industrial workers' trade unions, to come to the aid of their brothers, the rural workers...It is the more experienced, more developed, more class-conscious representatives of the proletariat who can and must issue a call to the rural workers, urging the latter to join them in the ranks of the independently organising workers, in the ranks of their trade unions. It is the wage-workers at the factories who must take the initiative and use the trade union cells, groups and branches scattered all over Russia to awaken the rural worker to independent action and to active participation in the struggle to improve his position and uphold his class interests...

"We hope that at this revolutionary moment..the TUs will not confine themselves to narrow craft interest and forget their weaker brethren, the rural workers, but will exert all their energy to help them by founding a union of Russia's rural workers."

Lenin then went on to outline some practical steps in this direction:

"All organised workers should give one day's wages to promote and strengthen the unity of town and country wage-workers. Let this fund be drawn on to cover the expenses of putting out a series of the most popular leaflets, of publishing a rural workers' newspaper—and of sending at least a few agitators and organisers to the countryside to *immediately set up* unions of agricultural labourers in the various localities.

(Lenin: Collected Works: Vol. 25, P. 122-24)

—Failure on the part of the leaders of organised trade unions to undertake this task, or to contribute to it one way or the other, is to convert themselves into a narrow sect whose horizons of vision are bounded by nothing more than their own trade union interests.

—As noted in the Report of the General Secretary to the 33rd Session of the AITUC at Vadodara, a good beginning

has been made. Some unions have come forward and contributed funds earmarked for organising the unorganised. Organisers have been sent among the mass of unorganised workers in some states. Judging from the response wherever this has been seriously undertaken, the possibilities are enormous. The struggle for revision and implementation of minimum wages and other benefits, is gathering strength among agricultural workers, construction workers, contract labour and so on. The situation is ripe. The efforts have only to be multiplied manifold. Publishing the result of her survey among the unorganised workers in Bombay, Dr. Shanta Vaidya concluded that the majority of workers were willing to join a union if only they were approached. If they were not members yet, it was because, "no union approached us". What is true of Bombay, is also true of other places, for mass communication has carried the "seeds of consciousness" almost everywhere.

—As a starting point, organisers venturing on this task have to undertake a study of the conditions of the particular section whom they approach. They have then to pick the issue around which the majority of that section can be mobilised, and to determine the tactics which can draw them into the movement and unionise them. A wide variety of situations would require a wide variety of solutions. The local organised unions, the district trade union councils, and the state committees have to provide the necessary financial help, guidance, and organisational support.

NOTES

1. An outstanding example is the Mahindra & Mahindra Employees' Union (AITUC), which has contributed nearly a lakh of rupees to this earmarked fund, in 1986.

FURTHER READING

1. Report of the AITUC & Information Material 33rd session.
2. Draft Bill on Construction Workers.

really be used for the supreme wellbeing of all members of the society.

— The STR has led to a gigantic leap forward in man's creative abilities, in the creative forces of society. At the same time, it has immeasurably increased the power of destruction, of destroying man himself and the planet he 'inhabits'.[1] The whole of mankind is appalled at the thought that, while the STR has tremendous potential for the good of man, it also looms like a threat to his existence. It is like the genii liberated from Aladdin's lamp. Is it a good thing or a bad thing? The answer to this depends on who holds power, and who controls scientific and technological progress. Is it a society, where social production is under social control and where the power of social labour is utilised solely for the good of all men? Or is it a society, where the fruits of social labour are appropriated by a handful of capitalists out for superprofits? Even the most sophisticated computer or robot cannot change the substance of capitalist production. To the capitalist it is immaterial whether he produces a tank or a toy, an atom bomb or atomic energy for peaceful use, so long as he can rake in profits.

In fact, the very magnitude of the power—both creative and destructive, that the STR bestows on man, makes it imperative that such power should not vest in any individual or corporate body bent on self-aggrandisement, but rather, in society as a whole. It underlines more than ever before, the need to do away with the contradiction between social character of production and the individual nature of appropriation inherent in the capitalist society.[2] The boundless possibilities opened up by the STR can be fully utilised for the good of all only under a different system, a system more just than capitalism, i.e. a socialist system. As Lenin said: "No forces of darkness can withstand an alliance of the scientists, the proletariat and the technologisis."[3]

— To sum up, it can be said that in their character and total effect the revolutionary technical advances of the present day (microtechnology, electronic data processing, robotics, etc.), differ qualitatively from earlier changes in the means and the mode of production. We have experienced in the past and tried to cope with rationalisation through conventional methods.[4] For instance, the substitution of one loom working by two looms, then by four looms and so on, till we come to the stage of automatic looms today. Sometimes it was straightaway an increase in the workload per worker, by a slight reorganisation of existing machines or by speeding up. At other

times, it was introduction of a conveyor belt system for mass production where each process is resolved into its constituent movements, with machines replacing the execution of certain movements previously done by the hands and feet of man. The instruments of production and along with them the organisation of the productive forces were however continually undergoing change till we have now come to the stage of *automation.*

— *Automation* may involve the automatic process of production with little or no handling of materials, as in the case of automatic looms in textile mills; or, automatic control and virtual self-regulation as in the case of modern power generation plant; or the use of electronic computers, where certain functions done by man's brain—storage of memory, data processing and numerical control, answers to questions and commands for execution, are transferred to a machine. Thus, automation is not just more advanced mechanisation. It is a new system, a new stage in the technological progress of production.

— What impact has the scientific and technological revolution on man, as a participant in the labour process? Marx had pointed out that—"Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls, the material reactions between himself and nature. He opposes himself to nature, as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By *thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.* He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway." (Italics added)

— Each stage of development of producive forces has led to a specific development of the working class and to its unit, the "collective labour".[5] Modern technological progress is thus forming a new type of worker who combines manual and mental work. While in certain cases the resultant combination tends to become routine and repetitive, in other cases the element of mental work constantly grows.

— Even the most advanced and sophisticated computer or robot cannot, however, replace man[6]. Scientists who visualise such an eventuality where man would be subordinate to an "intelligent" machine are nothing but misanthropes. "Man is the measure of all things", notwithstanding the most exciting

achievements of the STR. A soviet writer has beautifully expressed it in the following words:

"Man with his imperfect body, with his heart that may break with grief or happiness, with all his joys and sorrows, his imagination and creativity, his vision of the world, impossible for a computer, his sense of beauty and ability to enjoy it, to feel unhappy and even die because his spiritual and moral hopes are not realised, this modern man is still wonderful. *I don't know whether computers will ever be like him.*"

— Trade unionists struggling for the emancipation of the working class, for an end to exploitation and injustice, for putting a stop to anything that degrades man, cannot but adopt this humanist approach in relation to science and technology.

As trade union activists, we now proceed to study certain other aspects of this question.

NOTES

1. In imperialist countries huge funds are being spent for unproductive purposes. Astronomical sums are being diverted for this purpose. The most highly qualified researchers and engineers are concentrated in R&D for producing weapons that are a menace to the survival of mankind.

The application of scientific achievements in military production exceeds many times over its application in the civilian branches . UN experts calculate that nearly 40 per cent of the money spent since the Second World War on R&D has been directly on military purposes, and one quarter of all scientists of the world work on the further improvement of military technology and the development of new types of weapon. It might be argued that this technology is also of use for the civilian branches. Actually, according to the US department of Commerce, only 5 per cent of the technical and technological innovations are transferred from the war industry to the civilian industries. This underlines the importance of the several peace initiatives, emanating from the Soviet Union, for a reduction and the eventual destruction of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, so as to enter into a nuclear weapon-free world by the 21st Century, and utilise the tremendous resources thus freed, for improving the quality of human life.

2. Refer Report of *Ibrahim Zakaria* to the 11th WFTU Congress"...the problems created by new technology clearly reveal the sharp contradiction between the huge growth in productive forces and its social character on the one hand and the ownership and control exercised over these tremendous productive resources by tiny minorities composed of cartels and monopolies on the other..."

3. *Lenin*, Collected Works Vol. 30, p. 402

4. Writing more than a century and quarter back, Marx pointed out how modern industry by resolving each (production process into its constituent movements, without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man, created the new science of technology. He goes on to describe the negative side of this phenomenon, viz. "how this absolute contradiction between the technical necessities of modern industry and the social character inherent in the capitalist form, dispels all fixity and security in the situation of the labourer, how it constantly threatens, by taking away the instruments of labour, to snatch from his hands his means of subsistence and by suppressing his detail-function, to make him superfluous...how this antagonism vents its rage in the creation of that monstrosity, an industrial reserve army, kept in misery in order to be always at the disposal of capital: in the incessant human sacrifice from among the working class, in the most reckless squandering of labour power, and in the devastation caused by a social anarchy which turns every economical progress into a social calamity." (*Capital*, Vol. I, p. 486-487)

If this happened with the conventional changes in the instruments of production, how much more so, with the present-day STR?

Earlier, Marx had narrated that with time and experience the workers have learnt to distinguish between machinery and its employment by capital and, therefore, to divert their attacks, not against the material instruments of production, but against the mode in which they are used. This is true in the present situation, too.

5. *Marx*: Capital, Vol. I, p. 348.

6. There is a good deal of talk everywhere about computers-their so-called "generation", application, user impact, hardware, software, etc. For an intelligent trade unionist's guide to some of these matters, we append here a chart and footnotes giving some elementary information. As we said above, it is not for us here to go into the complex technicalities.

GENERATION OF COMPUTERS

Era	*Time Period*	*Technology*	*Application*	*User Impact*
Iron Age	1951-1958	Vacuum Tube	Administrative	Accountants
Age of Expectation	1959-1963	Transistor	Mainstream	Controllers
Age of Proliferation	1964-1970	Integrated Circuit	Communications	Technocrats
The Renaissance	1971-1979	MSI/LSI*	Database	Middle Management
Golden Age	1980	VLSI*	Distributed/Date Ba	Strategic Management

* MSI—Medium Scale Integrated
LSI—Large Scale Integrated
VLSI—Very Large Scale Integrated

—Till now there have been four generations of computers. Attempts to create fifth generation computers are being made in the most developed countries, but without much success as yet. Fifth generation technology, among other things, aims at creation of "artificial intelligence" or approximating human intelligence in some ways, so that machine could be deployed to solve problems in specific areas as efficiently as human experts, but at a faster pace. The so-called 'super-computers' are not fifth generation computers in that sense. They are vastly improved, much faster versions of fourth generation computers—may be we can call them four and half generation. A name coined is also 'state-of-the-art' computer.

—Computer technology in its broader sense means both hardware and software, though usually the former.

—*Hardware* is the material configuration of the total machine/computer, e.g. the printers, the visual display screen and the central processing unit (CPU) which is the heart of the computer, and where all calculations are carried out, etc.

—*Software* is the sum-total of instructions, commands, programmes etc. which are fed into the computer and which makes the computer carry out any particular function.

Both hardware and software are integral parts of a computer.

Lesson 25

IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY—IN THE CONTEXT OF DiFFERENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

—*How real is the problem of 'new technology' in India?* should trade union activists bother themselves about it, or leave it to the dreamers,—at best to the planners? Already in the '60s, the trade union leadership had to come up against the plan for introduction of automation in the Life Insurance Corporation. A series of 'anti-automation conventions' were held and opposition mobilised against the threat to existing and potential employment. Sporadic resistance was also organised against the installation of computers in the main offices of the Reserve Bank of India. The drive for automation was substantially slowed down, if not actually halted, then and later, partly due to this resistance mounted by the trade unions. But among other important reasons for the slow down were the high investment costs involved, the reluctance of foreign suppliers to give the latest models, absence of infrastructural facilities for installing the new systems, and also a limited 'technological dynamism' arising from a restricted market and lack of sophistication which is the result of poverty of the broad masses. There have been more proclamations on the subject than actual implementation. Even the agreement on mechanisation/computerisation signed between the AIBEA and Indian Banks Association on 8-9-1983 remained unimplemented in several spheres.

—But *under the new Rajiv Gandhi regime, a new policy initiative was announced and a vigorous drive launched for 'computerisation'*, as a key factor of modernisation and growth. Thus, in November 1984, the government of India announced its New computer Policy, followed by a New Electronic Policy and an export-import policy in 1985. Computers of various dimensions and capacities began to be increasingly installed in several industries, offices, in the airlines, railways, telecommunication services, research institutes, banks, etc. Computerisation has become all the rage among certain official and business circles, including public sector executives. Its introduction in certain spheres is not distinguished either

by any priority needs or a careful weighing of the 'options'. What had started earlier as a trickle, is now swelling into a flood.

—As reported in *Business World*—

"In 1984, an estimated 1200 computer systems were sold in the country, and this figure (of sale) is projected to increase approximately to 10,000 systems per annum by 1990. According to a report submitted by a sub-committee of the Department of Electronics (Government of India), the governmental sector will require upto 1,35,000 micro-computers, 4,340 mini-computers, 632 midi-computers, 139 large computers and 16 super computers between 1985 and 1990."

—According to a reply in Parliament, 101 companies had been granted letters of intent/industrial licenses to manufacture computers, by the end of 1985. In addition, approvals were also given to the smallscale sector.

—The total production of electronics in India, which was worth Rs. 13,600 million in 1983, rose to Rs. 26,500 million in 1985. By 1990, in terms of the Seventh Plan, it is hoped to raise it to Rs. 100,000 million per annum.

—The purchase of technology from the West has also grown by leaps and bounds. In May 1985, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between India and the USA for transfer of high technology. Before the MOU, the value of the licenses issued was 500 million dollars. Since May 1985 this has jumped to 1200 million dollars. Agreement for sale of super computer and other high-tech items including some defence equipment, are being negotiated. Hearings in the Senate and House Committees, as well as statements by American spokesmen have repeatedly shown the arrogant and insulting attitude adopted by the US in the matter of the sale of super-computer to India, its attempt to fob off an inferior variety and the humiliating conditions it is seeking to impose on its location, use, etc. Yet, despite this affront to national dignity, the Government of India continues to plead for it.

—The compulsive computer craze that has overtaken the high echelons in government and administration, is further illustrated by the claim of the Department of Electronics that "India is on the threshold of a computer revolution." This department has also thought it fit to put forward a plan to robotise industry, in terms of what is called the 'Appropriate Automation Promotion Programme.' And all this, in a country of soaring unemployment!

—Note has also to be taken that the world production of electronics is expected to grow from Rs. 2,50,000 crores in 1980 to as much as Rs. 7,40,000 crores in 1990 according to authoritative estimates. Of this, about half is expected to be dumped mostly in the developing countries. India's doors have been thrown open invitingly for this purpose.

—It is evident that *the developing and the developed countries find themselves at different levels in the matter of 'technology'*. What are new technologies from the viewpoint of the former, are already existing and known technologies for the developed countries. Indeed, they may have gone much farther ahead, and the given technologies may have become even obsolete from their viewpoint. This brings up the question of *'technology transfer'* from the developed to the developing countries. As buyers of technology, these developing countries are sometimes manoeuvred into positions where they have to accept not what would be approprite to their economic development, but what the seller country wishes to dispose off. The difficult question whether 'to buy or to make' is sometimes taken out of the hand of the developing country in deciding its technological development policies.

—Technology transfer may take place through government buying of technologies for its public sector enterprises, or its own departmental or defence needs. It may take place within the framework of collaboration agreements. Besides, some of the main carriers of high technology in the Indian economy, as in the economy of other developing countries, are the multinational enterprises whose role calls for a searching inquiry for several reasons. Let us give a cursory glance at this phenomenon.

—*Technology transfer within the framework of colleboration agreements, is often found to be at the cost of indigenous processes and our own R&D.* The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in its "Status Report on Science and Technology in India, 1986" drew attention to the fact that, "While a large number of indigenous processes have remained fallow, the number of foreign collaborations has increased from 183 in 1970 to 389 in 1981, 678 in 1983 and to an estimated 700 in 1984." During 1985, this number has risen to 1024 (USA..0197; FRG..180; UK..147; Japan..108; and only 4 with the USSR). The same Report continues: "More than 75 per cent of electronic items, 70 per cent of agricultural machinery, 65 per cent of transport machinery and 35 per cent of drugs and pharmaceuticals made in the country, are products of foreign collaboration.

Furthemore, about 80 per cent of the foreign collaborations have been renewed between two and, five times and 20 per cent, six times or more." The Status Report says that "this is more a reflection of industry's lassitude to utilise indigenously developed technology."

If import of technology is not followed up by R&D for adaptation, assimilation and the creation of indigenous technologies, based on experience and needs, the result can be 'technological dependence' on the West.

—What is of greater concern is that *technological transfer from imperialist countries is subject to a number of 'conditionalities'*. Experience of other countries, including even Britain, shows that the use of US super-computers is hemmed in with restrictions which are an affront to sovereignty. We see this happening now in the case of India also. An analysis by the Reserve Bank of India shows that export restrictions are widespread in the sale of technology by the West to many of the developing countries. In India, out of 1285 agreements concluded by the Indian partners with Western companies, as many as 956 contained restrictions on the export of the product made by using the purchased technology. These are only a few aspects of what has come to be known as 'technological neocolonialism'.[2]

—*The question of all questions is, of course, the impact of new technology on the employment situation,* whether in a given industry or in the country as a whole. In India, the number of job-seekers registered with the employment exchanges well exceeds the figure of 30 million by now. If we add to this the number of rural unemployed, the total would exceed 75 million. In addition, there are 'closures' and 'retrenchment' to further aggravate the situation. In a country with such a magnitude of unemployment, a technology that leads to further displacement of labour and reduces the employment potential, can spell disaster. It is this which such a well-known bourgeois liberal economist as *John K. Galbraith* had in view when he wrote in his book *"Economic Development"* :

"Much of the technology of the more advanced countries represents an accommodation to labour shortages or reflects the other social requirements of the more advanced economy... This technology should not be taken over by countries in the earlier stages of development. To do so is to waste scarce resources and handicap development and much more than incidentally, to add to unemployment."

—The impact of new technology on the employment situa-

tion can not only be by reducing the labour force directly employed at the place where it is introduced, but also by cutting the employment potential in a situation of soaring unemployment. The job security of those in employment is seriously threatened, while the new additions to the work force find all openings barred, and thus swell the reserve army of unemployed.

—Further, in a country like India, traditional industries have a substantial place in the economy. They provide work and livelihood to tens of millions. The induction of hi-tech in certain selected areas of organised industry (and even in a few traditional sectors when it comes round to that), can seriously upset the traditional balance in the multi-structural economy of our country, depriving millions of their hard-earned bread. Our economy ranges from modern capital-intensive industries to labour-intensive, even pre-capitalist, traditional occupations which fulfil a social need at our present level of development. The question arises: Should induction of labour-saving micro-technologies be permitted to destroy the traditional sector and to cause mass displacement of labour ?

— Certain enthusiasts of 'new technology' start by denying this truth, and even going to the length of asserting that with fast growing development new jobs are created. All that happens is a change in the job profile of the work force, some structural changes in the composition of the working class. Is this true in the case of capitalist countries ? And more so, in the case of a developing country advancing along the capitalist path, such as India ? Let us examine this:

—Spokesmen of America's biggest bourgeois circles do not always feel the need to hide the truth. They can even afford to speak straight from the shoulder. Thus spake the President of the IBM Corporation, one of the world's biggest multinational corporations:

"Let us not be evasive or timid on this point. Let us be frank, honest and realistic. Let us not hide automation's greatest potential benefit—the elimination of labour."

According to the Massachusette Institute of Technology, automation 'devoured' two million jobs in the USA during 1980-83. The United Auto Workers (USA) forecasts that by 1990 robots will reduce the number of jobs at assembly lines by half.

The *Times of India* reported in its issue of 6th January, 1986:

"The old view that automation does not displace workers

is being given up even by experts. A University of Michigan study predicts that robots will displace 200,000 industrial workers by 1990, while robots manufacturing will create only 44,500 jobs."

Speaking in October, 1986, in the International Scientific Conference, *Gus Hall,* General Secretary, CP USA, observed:

"In the United States today there are 20 million unemployed. In addition to the permanently unemployed, 25 per cent of the total work force is now 'on call'—called when needed for a few days at the lowest wage. This is a new and growing trend. These on-call workers receive no unemployment benefits, health insurance or social security, no pensions, life insurance, vacation pay, sick leave or prospects for full-time work.

"There is a displacement of workers by robots and automation. And there is not enough growth in the industries producing automated equipment, or in the high-tech industries, to provide for the employment of more than a fraction of the workers displaced by new methods.

"The section of the displaced millions who do find jobs in the service and communications industry, are usually paid below the legal minimum wage, which is about a 60% cut in wages. This group is part of the 35 million Americans who live below the official poverty level. This describes graphically what is called downward mobility into poverty."

—A Round Table on new technologies organised in September 1985 in Budapest on the initiative of the WFTU, noted in its report that, "with the exception of some categories of salaried employees (and even then usually only limited periods), technological modernisation now going on in the industrialised capitalist countries is synonymous with deteriorating employment, growing unemployment, falling real wages, intensification of the pace of work, restrictions of workers' rights, greater trade union repression and fierce campaigns intended to throw the blame on the workers in order to better subdue them." Further on, it noted:

"...the capitalist restructuring of production, made possible by the new technologies, always and everywhere affects in the first place employment; elimination of work posts, closing down of production units, no replacement of retired workers, no new recruiting. This contributes to the substantial growth of unemployment seen in recent years in all the industrialised capitalist countries."

—Japan is a 'model' country, both as one of the initiators of new technology and one which has implemented it on a large

scale. The experience of Japan, therefore, is worth noting. Speaking from experience, the Japanese representative[4] at this Round Table also outlined certain other consequences of the introduction of new technologies. He pointed out that in Japan (as in the other industrialised countries), the development of microelectronics leads to a marked polarisation of the workers. Generally speaking, such traditional skilled jobs as tool-making, adjusting machinery and control of processing are now carried out entirely by the machine—the operator only presses buttons. Because of such developments we get, firstly, a handful of highly skilled workers (who are involved in the perfecting and programming of machines, as well as in policy making on some specific matters), and secondly, growing numbers of unskilled workers or workers with very narrow specialisation, whose only job is to supervise the machines. This polarisation of labour, a result of the introduction of new technologies, is used by the bosses to break workers' solidarity.

Simultaneously with the polarisation of labour we witness expansion of part-time work and work at home (less paid and without any rights). The big enterprises have made it clear that they intend to switch over, in a big way, to part-time work and temporary contracts to avoid dismissals which are costly because of the unemployment benefits that have to be paid. The number of enterprises resorting to part-time workers has increased from 25.7 per cent in 1979 to 73.5 per cent in 1983. Legal provision is also being made to "lend" or "lease out" workers from one enterprise to another.[5]

—The New Delhi Seminar of State/Public Sector Employees' Trade Unions of Asia and Pacific Region, held in December 1985, came to similar conclusions. It stressed in particular the negative consequences of indiscriminate introduction of modern technology in the developing countries. It pointed out that, apart from such direct adverse social consequences as mass unemployment, obsolescence of skills and work experiences gained over several years, the developing countries will have to resort to deficit and inflationary financing to generate resources for the very large investments required for the import of the new technologies from abroad. This will inevitably result in tremendous increase in prices in the countries of the region which will adversely affect not only workers but the community as a whole.

— In introducing robots and computers, the employers are tempted by other considerations too. Those mechanical 'mercenaries' never complain, call a strike or demand higher wages. One of the bosses of General Motors told *Walter*

Reuther, leader of the United Auto Workers, that robots did not need union cards, to which Reuther replied that they did not buy cars either.[6] They boost productivity, but make sales more difficult. Thus exposing a basic contradiction of the capitalist system.

— But what about the socialist countries, where a comprehensive programme of scientific and technology progress has been drawn up on the basis of electronisation of the national economy, comprehensive automation, development of nuclear power engineering, the development and mastering of new kinds of materials and the accelerated development of technology?[7]

—The socialist countries have carried out a programme of full employment. They have eliminated unemployment. The right to work is enshrined in their constitution. Modern technology of course, considerably reduces jobs, especially in spheres of material production. But none will become unemployed. They will be retrained and will be given alternate employment in other fields, such as the service sphere or at enterprises created in the course of the STR. This will be an essential part of the radical restructuring and reorganising being undertaken in the USSR and other socialist countries. It has been rightly claimed:

"As distinct from what is the case under capitalism, the realisation of a largescale transition to new generations of highly productive machinery and technology in socialist conditions is not accompanied by man's exploitation by man, competition, unemployment, professional downgrading, material privatisation of the working masses, social and national inequality."

— The advantages of the STR can thus be fully exploited only under a socialist system, where they can be utilised for the good of all, unlike under capitalism where the world economy is parcelled out to a few MNCs and where technology is put to use for greater profits of the capitalists. Socialist power corresponds to the requirements of the STR.

To a specific question: "Is unemployment an inevitable price for production modernisation?" by *L'Humanite* (the French Communist Party daily), on February 8, 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, replied as follows:

"In a plan based economy geared to meeting social needs as fully as possible such a connection does not exist. Even if some fundamental technology improvements make whole trades no longer necessary, we can and should in advance

not only foresee this but also take measures to retain workers and, if need be, to set up new production units. And this is just what we do in practice. Incidentally, since the reconstruction of enterprises is, as a rule, accompanied by their enlargement, the issue of new jobs is solved right at these same enterprises. But this question as yet is for us almost an academic one. Primarily because the problem for us is not a surplus but a shortage of manpower..."

—And what, if after all this, a disproportion develops, i.e. the number of workers exceeds the economy's total demand for them? In that case it would only mean less working hours and increased leisure, which would provide conditions for all-round development of man and society. In the socialist countries, the transitional problems arising out of the introduction of new technology are being solved painlessly, on the basis of guaranteed full employment, re-employment wherever necessary after retraining at state expense, and trade unions' participation and control at every step of the process.

—The socialist system does not give rise to 'redundancy', job insecurity, professional downgrading and other evils which are concomitants of the STR under the capitalist system. In the capitalist countries modern technology is creating a series of complex problems. No wonder, it is a hotly debated issue. Writing in January 1965, *Newsweek,* an internationally known US journal, had this to say:

..."Automation is becoming the most controversial economic concept of the age. Businessmen love it. Workers fear it. The government frets and investigates and wonders what to do about it."

—This was said about the most industrially developed capitalist country, which incidentally therefore set up commissions to study its all-sided impact. However, the new government of a developing country like India, with its multitude of social and economic problems, most of them of baffling magnitude, feels no need to 'fret' and 'investigate'. It does not 'wonder what to do about it' for it is cocksure what to do. Modernisation, automation or computerisation is held out as the means to raise India to the level of developed West. It is declared to be the high-road of advance into the 21st century.

—The effect of high technology is thus not neutral. It is specifically related to the socio-economic system prevalent in the country, and to the stage of development within each country.

Its introduction has different consequences in the capitalist and socialist countries, in the developed and the developing countries.

We, trade union activists, must, therefore, take a more informed stand on this question, keeping in view the interests of the country, the interests of the Indian working people.

NOTES:

1. The First Convention Against Automation, sponsored by the Insurance Employees' Association, took place in Delhi on December 7, and 8, 1965. It was attended by representatives of all central trade unions and a number of industrial federations.

2. The race for collaboration agreements and technology transfer from the West, is accompanied by the propaganda drive, that Soviet technology is obsolete, that it is inferior and unsuitable, that in its application to productive activities and social life, Soviet technology is lagging behind. Its falsehood is exposed by such examples as the continued advance of Soviet cosmonautics (exemplified by the test launch of the multi-purpose booster rocket called 'Energia'), its utilisation of laser technology, its development of a hyperprecision clock, which will make no more than a second's error in ten million years, whose record precision and stability stagger the human imagination.

Speaking before the 20th Congress of the Young Communist League on April 16, 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev announced that, full-scale production of super-computers which perform 125 million operations a second, has already been launched in the Soviet Union. Very soon they will develop a computer which performs over a billion operations a second, and then later a computer performing more than 10 billion operations a second! Soviet scientists are also working on a 'state-of-the-art' super-mini computer, with good results. He declared with confidence, "some in the West have been reckoning on a Soviet lag in technology, notably in super computers. Let them hear and heed this information from the rostrum".

3. For more details on the Budapest Round Table and the Delhi Seminar see "Information Materials: 33rd Session, AITUC", pages 84-94.

4. *Takeshi Kawashima,* Vice-President, National Federation of Civil and Public Service Workers (KOKKORORENI)

5. The few facts recited here demolish the picture of an idyllic, paternalistic life-long employer-employee relation in Japan, which our bourgeois propagandists miss no opportunity to glorify.

6. "Asia Technological Imperialism": S. A. Pavlov, p. 41.

7. For further details, refer 'Information Materials: 33rd Session, AITUC' pages 94-100.

Lesson 26

INDIAN TRADE UNIONS AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

— This brings us to the question: *Are the achievements of the Scientific and Technological Revolution, a boon or an evil? In relation to India's strategy for development, are we for acceptance or rejection of technology as such?* In answering these questions, we always take into account that the interests of the working class are not different from the interests of the country. Lenin emphasised this when he said, "the interests of social development are higher than the interests of the proletariat".[1]

— Development of modern technology is an irreversible process of history. Moreover, the achievements of science and technology are of universal application. Under conditions of internationalisation of production, one can neither completely seal oneself from its effect, nor oppose it in toto.

— India is relatively developed among the developing countries of the world. After independence, it was faced with the stupendous task of overcoming the colonial legacy of backwardness and underdevelopment, in a populous country but with vast and untapped resources. The course of development pursued since Freedom has brought about economic growth, modified the obsolete land relations, built up a strong and diversified public sector with a core of heavy industries, and laid the foundation for a self-reliant economy. The economy has been largely diversified. But the capitalist path followed has aggravated disparities and led to social polarisation.

— Only a top layer of the population—between 5 to 7 per cent, has attained a high degree of affluence, while the economic and social problems of the mass of working people are staggering. An estimated 300 million people, 250 million of them in the rural areas, live below the 'poverty line';

— More than 2,00,000 villages have still no access to clean drinking water. The coverage of sanitation through sewerage etc. is less than 30 per cent in urban areas, and below 1 per cent in rural areas;

— Housing shortage is more than 30 million units for the whole country according to conservative estimates;

— Only 36 per cent of the population is literate, and by 2000 A.D. the number of illiterates in India is expected to be more than half the world total;

— In 1981, landless agricultural workers in the country numbered 55 million. To this is added another 1 million every year from the ranks of the pauperised peasantry;

— Droughts and floods of growing intensity, alternatively and simultaneously, devastate increasingly larger areas;

— Due to import liberalisation, the deficit on foreign trade account has been Rs. 7,951 crores in 1985-86. As to foreign debt, the annual burden of debt servicing currently runs at approximately 15 per cent of our export earnings, and may touch 20 per cent within a few years, when the repayment of IMF loan starts.

— While it is true that the average annual compound rate of growth of the Gross Domestic Product has been around 3.5 per cent, trade union activists have to keep in mind some of the facts mentioned above about the Indian economy. In addition, the following relevant and specific characteristics of the Indian situation have also to be kept in view:

(1) Already there is a vast and growing number of unemployed—nearly 30 million job seekers on the registers of employment exchanges, and an estimated 4 times that number who are not registered. Of the registered job-seekers, half are educated (above matric); some are engineers, doctors and technicians.[2] The human resources of the developing countries like India, are already grossly under-utilised.

(2) At the end of December 1985, there were 1,19,510 'sick' industrial units in the country, locking up as much as Rs. 4,263.25 crores of bank funds. Since then the number has continued to swell. Jobs and job-security of lakhs of industrial workers and white-collar employees are being affected by closures, lock-outs, rationalisation, contracting-out of jobs and so-called 'voluntary' retirement schemes;

(3 Our economy is multistructural. It ranges from modern capital-intensive industries, to labour-intensive, even pre-capitalist traditional occupations which fulfil a social need at our present level of development. The traditional industries occupy a big place in the economy, and provide livelihood to millions.

— *In a developing country like ours, with all the features and problems indicated above, any strategy of development has got to inter-relate the goals of employment creation, tech-*

nological choice and self-reliance, for otherwise the indiscriminate introduction of high-technology, especially imported technology (through the MNC's and collaboration agreements) can turn into a disaster, rather than a boon. In the previous lesson we have already seen how under the capitalist system high technology can lead to negative consequences and give rise to serious problems. In a developing country pursuing the capitalist path, where the economy is weaker and is beset with many problems, the results can very well be catastrophic if priorities are not kept in mind, if a well-thought out 'selective' approach to technology is not adopted, if where importing of technology becomes necessary a careful selection of the appropriate technologies are not made, followed by their adaptation and improvement in accordance with the local requirements, and adequate and prompt steps are not taken to limit and overcome any negative consequences. Given our circumstances, we may be unable to cope with the social consequences of attempting to force the pace of development through heavy inputs of high technology.

— The real danger stems from the misuse of high technology under the present capitalist system, for serving the narrow profiteering interests of monopoly groups. What is essential first, is to carry out basic social changes such as immediate break-up of big landownership, creation of a vast employment potential and a wide internal market, enlarging and democratising the public sector, curbing the monopolists and the operation of the multinationals, strengthening and consolidating the traditional sectors by means of financial inputs, well organised market mechanism, and by organisation of cooperatives on a big scale, etc. New technology, together with indigenous support technologies can be of benefit under those circumstances. The priority task therefore is to struggle for these structural and institutional changes, along with all the democratic allies of the working class movement.

— Even the experience of the 'Green Revolution' in India, wherein basic agrarian reforms are given the go bye, and instead, massive doses of inputs—hybrid seeds, fertilizers, water, etc. are utilised in specified areas shows, that while it may lead to increase of food production, it at the same time aggravates social and regional disparities. The benefits are specific only to a few regions and crops. This is the result of a purely 'technological' approach to agriculture.

— Massive investments on high technology communication and service spheres which are of benefit to the affluent minority, as also in certain organised production sectors which cater

to the needs of a minority and yield profits for big business, while the resources required for meeting the elementary needs of the masses are allowed to atrophy and dry up, further aggravate the deep contradiction between the elite minority and the plebian majority.

— The trade unions therefore have to take a cautious and guarded approach in the matter of technologies. There can be no objection to computerisation of scientific research, data processing, complex control systems and the like. On the basis of concrete studies of the impact of new technology, sector by sector, our trade unions have to decide their attitude and course of action. But firm resistance must be put up against induction of foreign technologies which—

— are likely to result in loss of existing jobs and large scale displacement of labour without possibility of absorption in alternative jobs;

— are already available within the country, or can be developed by our own scientists and experts, appropriate to our requirements;

— are harmful to the interests of indigenous R&D; and

— can lead to ruin of small scale or domestic industries.

— Every proposed technological innovation has an impact on job security, employment potential, displacement of "surplus staff" who have to be deployed on new jobs after necessary training, working conditions and new health hazards, emoluments and living standards for new skills and occupations, etc. The attempts of the managements are almost always in the direction of introducing technological innovations unilaterally, in the name of achieving higher productivity and efficiency, better customer service and so on. They display no desire or initiative for consulting the trade unions or heeding their suggestions. Should the trade unions on their part, refuse to negotiate on the issue of computerisation and new technology?

— Strong resistance in general, as well as in particular instances, is of immense value in holding up and stalling the induction of new technology, cooling the ardour of the management and compelling it to be more selective and specific in the matter, and more considerate about the workers' hard won rights and privileges. Such resistance, if it is strong enough, may even force the management to give up the idea, for the time being or for a considerably long period, and make him consider other options. But an altogether negative approach

and a refusal to have "anything to do with it", while it may look 'militant' will exactly serve the interests of the management who any way do not on their own seek discussions with the trade unions. In the earlier period, all trade unions put up stiff resistance against 'rationalisation'. Prolonged strikes and other actions took place. These battles compelled the managements to negotiate, and what followed as 'rationalisation without tears' kept the trade union movement intact and even wrested significant concessions from the managements. The challenge posed by 'modernisation' is qualitatively different. But so are the trade unions stronger and more equipped to meet the challenge, both in the field of battle and also at the negotiating table. *An immediate result of such an integrated approach is to restrict the new technology only to certain well demarcated spheres, and for certain specific operations, while barring it for other spheres and operations so as to derive maximum benefits at no or little sacrifice.*

— We have noted the problems raised by introduction of new technology. Each one of these problems calls for collective bargaining with a view to defend the workers' rights and privileges,—such as preventing any retrenchment or job reduction, providing for expansion so as to keep up the employment potential, retraining and deployment so as to prevent any downgrading, loss of wages or other inconveniences of displacement, new allowances and working conditions, etc.

— Take the case of health hazards. As with every other technology, computing, robotics, bio-engineering etc. present new dangers for workers' health. For instance, visual display units (VDUs) expose people working on them to eye-strain, pregnancy complications, radiation emissions, posture problems, fatigue, etc. 72% of the workers interviewed in an inquiry in Japan feared that, "with the introduction of new technologies their health would be affected in an entirely different way than in the past".

Should this, and the other problems noted in the previous paragraph be left to the sweet will and mercy of the managements? Or, should the trade unions have a decisive say in the matter? Takeshi Kawashima, trade union leader of Japan observed, "If the rapid introduction of new technologies in Japan and in the other advanced capitalist countries will continue without adequate control, especially by trade unions, the life and health of workers will in all likelihood be exposed to new serious dangers". What is true of Japan or other advanced capitalist countries, is even more true of India, both in the matter of health and other problems.

— In India, the banking industry, including the RBI, and the commerical banks has been exposed to the biggest offensive of computerisation. This is for obvious reasons. Apart from its vastness and intricacies of operation, it provides the most vital support service to Big Business and commerce. Confident in its strength and unity, the All India Bank Employees' Association firmly resisted all attempts at indiscriminate computerisation, and at the same time took the bull by the horns to negotiate and settle on the issue keeping national and employees' interests in view. It would be idle and unrealistic to deny that computerisation would affect the employment potential, though the expanding banking industry would head off the effect considerably. But, as the General Secretary, AIBEA observed:

"The Settlement while taking care of legitimate needs of the expanding banking system in respect of customers' service and house-keeping, restricts the use of computers and machines to specified areas of banking operation, with displacement of staff, if any, kept to the barest minimum, that too with a proviso that they shall be absorbed in the same office.

"It is not out of place to mention here that the policy of the Central Government in attempting to make unrestricted use of 'High Technology' sophisticated machines in a service industry like banking, unmindful of labour displacement and growing unemployment, has been successfully thwarted, due to the determined and united stand of the bankmen of the country."[3]

— The attempt to introduce High Technology is not an isolated one. *It is part of the new economic policy drives of government.* It is accompanied by bourgeois economic theories which are obsolete even by 20th Century standards. It is backed up by fresh anti-labour legislations meant to curtail trade union and democratic rights, and restrict collective bargaining. A Trade union action on 'New Technology' has therefore to go hand in hand with trade union action against the anti-labour legislations, and an ideological drive against the latest bourgeois economic theories.

— This brings us to the question of *the change in the composition of the working class, and the need for new tactical approaches.*

First and foremost, the growing number of unemployeds and the ever recurring threat of job reduction, call for more trade union action against unemployment. Hitherto, trade unions have concerned themselves exclusively with workers who are

in employment, and more narrowly, with the regular employed workers. Now, in the interest of the class, they have to coordinate their struggle with the struggles of the part-time, casual, contract, "on-call" workers, as well as the totally unemployed. They must take the lead in organising these struggles.

Second, changing job profile shows a relative rise of workers in service and communication industries, as compared to workers directly engaged in material production. The number of white collar workers, technicians, etc. and the role they play are growing. A new type of worker in whose work the proportion of mental labour predominates is coming up. This section is rising to the ranks of the working class intelligentsia. Simultaneously, engineers and specialist with qualifications are participating increasingly in the sphere of material production or in scientific institutions closely linked with it. The two are drawing together. At the other end, the number of unskilled workers, without any specialities and required to perform the most routine job is also growing. Each of these sections requires specific trade union approach, so as to draw it within the common movement.

The ranks of the working class have actually swelled, not depleted, as a result of all this. New sections are joining the trade union movement, and participating in trade union struggles. The forums of struggle are inevitably getting diversified. The bourgeoisie of course tries to play off one section against another, and exploit the gaps among the ranks. Greater vigilance and attention by trade union leaderships on the question of forging unity therefore becomes necessary.

NOTES:

1. Lenin: Collected Works: Vol. 4: P. 236.

Refer, Arjun Sen Gupta Committee Report. The full Report has been published by the CITU. A fairly detailed summary has been reproduced in "Information Materials 33rd Session of the AITUC".

2. The flight of Indian talents, engineers, doctors, scientists, etc. to the Developed West,—USA, Great Britain, Canada and other countries, is a well-known phenomenon. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),

and other international agencies have repeatedly drawn attention towards this 'Brain Drain' from the third world to the developed countries. The annual 'contribution' thus made by the third world to the developed West, works up to a staggering figure. India is the largest 'contributer' in this respect. It is calculated that each year around 1,500 doctors and surgeons leave the country. The country spends on an average more than Rs. 3.5 lakhs for training a doctor. Of the engineers, above 6 per cent (nearly 25 per cent in the case of IIT graduates) migrate to the West. Naturally, these are among our best. The government spends about Rs. 10,000 per year on a B. Tech student at our IITs. They help develop the technology of the West, while their talents are lost to our country. It is a form of direct exploitaion of the human resources of the developing countries by imperialism. However, according to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, it is wrong to call this a 'Brain Drain'. Rather, it is like going into a 'Brain Bank', 'where they will have further training and experience and will return to the country when it has acquired the facilities to use their services

3. For details refer to the Agreement signed between Indian Banks Association and the AIBEA and NCBE, dated 29 March, 1987.

Lesson 27

STRUGGLE AGAINST 'PRIVATISATION': FOR DEFENCE AND EXPANSION OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

— Lesson 5 in Part I, has dealt with the genesis and growth of the public sector, its place in the Indian economy, and so on. To recapitulate briefly:

— The public sector came up in India and other developing countries especially after their liberation from the colonial shackles. This was due to several historical reasons. Burdened with the legacy of backwardness and under-development, our country undertook the building of the public sector, mainly with the objective of helping rapid economic growth and industrialisation, acquiring control over key financial and economic levers, creating the necessary infrastructure for economic development, building a core sector of heavy industries which can generate powers for development etc.,—objectives, which, in the prevailing state of the private sector, the enterpreneurs in these countries were neither able nor willing to undertake. A strong and expanding public sector became the engine for growth of a self-reliant and independent economy.

— In a capitalist system where the exploiting classes are holding the decisive position of power, the public sector is actually a state capitalist sector. But it has helped to strengthen the basic foundations of the economy, and to resist imperialist pressures. The assistance of the socialist countries in building the public sector has helped greatly in shoring up this resistance. The public sector's role in promoting regional development and creating employment opportunities has been very significant. Thus, it has played an objectively progressive role. The trade unions have rightly taken a positive attitude towards it despite all its deficiencies and shortcomings.

— But seizing upon these deficiencies and shortcomings, the ruling circles, egged on by Big Capital have now initiated a major reversal of policy,—one, which seeks to weaken, denigrate and privatise the public sector, to dismantle it step by step in the interests of monopoly capital,—both domestic and foreign. That this policy drive has not proceeded as far as it would have liked to go, is entirely due to the fact that

it has evoked the strongest resistance from the workers and their trade unions, as well as from other circles.

— Arguments about inefficiency, bureaucratism and top heavy management, drain on scarce resources, unsatisfactory returns on investments and continued losses, under-utilisation of capacity, low quality and unsatisfactory service to the community, etc. are all pressed into service, so as to denigrate the public sector, and in contrast extol the virtues of the private sector.

— Actually, the drive towards 'privatisation' has started with the so-called developed countries themselves. As described in the Report of the General Secretary, WFTU to its 11th Congress (Berlin: September, 1986),

"In its mad drive for profits, Big Capital has planned drastic restructuring, dislocation of whole industries and the large-scale destruction of jobs, causing millions to live in new poverty. They are victims of the recession and crisis which capitalist policies have aggravated. Not content with this, they are making a bid for total power for the monopolies in the economy and in society.

"These demands of the monopolies, articulated in policies of government under their influence, aim at totally dismantling state regulation and control by democratically elected bodies over the economy. Widely advertised as 'economic liberalism', these policies call for 'de-regulation' and 'de-nationalisation'. They want total power for the monopolies to strangulate the economy and the working people and to squeeze maximum profits.

"A spate of 'de-nationalisation' and 'privatisation' has unleashed in the OECs countries, as well as in some developing countries. The International Monetary Fund makes it a condition for loans to developing countries.

'Along with this ferocious economic offensive comes the ideological offensive claiming that only the private capitalist sector can succeed in managing the economy and that the public sector cannot deliver the goods. In actual fact, the practice is still to hand over to the private monopolies all sectors which bring high profits, and to leave to the state and public sector those industries which are in crisis—a crisis caused by downright plunder and theft by the private sector monopolies"....[1]

— Japanese trade unions have pointed out that the privatisation of the Japanese National Railways amounted to an outright

gift of over 1,000 billion dollars to the private investors. At the same time, more than fifty thousand workers were thrown out of work.

— The Indian government, egged on by the monopoly groups and their spokesmen, have similarly launched an offensive against the public sector in the country. International finance capital is stepping up its pressures on government so as to reverse the policy direction of its predecessors, by playing up on the dissatisfaction with the performance of the public sector. US official view is that international aid to debtor countries like India must be intended to encourage the private sector and contain and then dismantle the public sector. All this accounts for the calculated and concerted attack on the public sector and the drive towards 'privatisation', both by monopoly houses and government circles who have become ardent advocates of economic 'liberalisation'. It is not a coincidence that this approach goes hand in hand with a slanderous offensive against the workers in the public sector, and an all-out attack on trade union rights and privileges won through hard struggles. The Prime Minister is on record that the public sector workers in India are the most inefficient in the world. Instances are continually coming to light about this drive towards privatisation.[2]

— The drive towards 'privatisation' in different countries, assumes different forms based on the circumstances of each situation and each country. But there are several common features as listed below. These are by no means exhaustive. Most of them, severally or in combination, are being pressed into service in India:

FIRST, is *the outright sale or closure of state-owned enterprises.* The argument here is that the state cannot be burdened by chronic loss-making units and that the resources be better utilised elsewhere. But even where the state pioneered basic industries and their profitability was established, these were sold to the private sector on the ground that the funds so released can be used to pioneer other industries. In all cases, the private sector acquired the units at a fraction of their assets. Considerations about continued employment to the workers are ignored in all instances of closures and 'divestiture".

SECOND, managements of certain public sector establishments are handed over to captains of industry, who are glorified as the last word in efficient management. Private sector executives are being increasingly inducted into the

boards of directors of public sector enterprises. Private sector agencies are being set up for monitoring and supervising the management of public sector enterprises. Consultancy firms which are covers for foreign monopolists are being imposed on public sector industries. In our case they are thinly disguised as firms set up by NRIs. The nexus thus established. gives a handle to the monopolists,—both domestic and foreign to subordinate the public sector enterprises to their interests in several ways.

THIRD, areas exclusively reserved for the public sector so far, are thrown open to the private sector, on the plea that competitiveness acts as a stimulus for efficiency and innovation.

FOURTH, shares in public sector enterprises are thrown open to private parties, who are then invited to participate in the management.

FIFTH, joint ventures are pushed forward in place of the pubilc sector, with share participation not only by the general public, but also by private companies, who by acquiring only 25 per cent or a minority share in equity would take over the management of such ventures. The govenment goes all out to seek management contracts for the public sector from the private sector. Worthy of note is that, while the general argument used in the case of third, fourth and fifth, is the lack of resources with government, the private parties almost invariably obtain their resources from public sector financial institutions. Cases exist of private banks (in Bangladesh, for instance) being permitted to be set up with shares purchased by taking loans from the public sector banks!

SIXTH, in the name of importing high technology or acquiring technical know-how, collaboration agreements with the TNCs are encouraged in most of the countries, though on onerous terms. The TNCs are acquiring control on new sectors of the economy in these countries at minimum cost and for maximum gains. 'Import liberalisation' on the prescription of the IMF and World Bank is hitting the indigenous capital goods industrial units in the public sector,' compelling them to face the problems of idle capacities and shrinking orders, and also adversely affecting the technologies which have been locally developed, and which are available within the countries. The danger of a technological sell-out of the public sector to the TNCs has become real.

SEVENTH, in some countries the public sector enterprises are brought under the control of the private sector, by setting up 'holding companies', which have equity shares from private enterpreneurs, and which are under their management.

EIGHTH, components and supplies hitherto produced by the public sector enterprises, are being given over to the private sector under schemes of 'licensed production'. This is being done even with regard to sensitive items of defence production. Similarly, certain services are being contracted out to private sector. This sort of 'franchising' is being undertaken specially in the sphere of utilities and communication.

NINTH, maintenance and several other categories of jobs in the public sector are being handed over to private contractors. This is assuming very serious proportions.[3]

— The workers and their trade unions in India, as also in other countries have taken up the challenge posed by 'privatisation', no matter in what form. They have understood the drive towards 'privatisation' as an attempt to give dangerous new concessions to the monopoly houses and to allow them unrestricted entry into new fields, as an attempt to woo the foreign multinationals, to cut down the so-called 'surplus' labour force and peg wages with productivity—all, in the name of efficiency, competitiveness, quality of goods and services, modernisation, and what not. The working class regards this as a danger posed not only to its livelihood, but also to the very future, and economic and social progress of their countries. In opposing privatisation the working class fights not so much for itself, as for the whole country. Trade unions, irrespective of their ideological predilection and organisational affiliations, have forcefully expressed their opposition, and come together in common mass actions demanding a halt to 'privatisation'. As the above-quoted Report of the WFTU General Secretary points out,

"...further economic and social progress cannot be contemplated without workers' and peoples' participation and democratic intervention. The trade unions must therefore be able to exercise their countervailing power in favour of a democratic orientation of economic management and against the autocratic profit-centred orientation of Big Capital.

"Fortunately, this is now the main trend within the different component of the trade union movement.

"...the struggles which are developing in each country on the basis of national demands are being backed up, are joining together and are meeting on an international level, to present a front of solidarity against the almost identical attacks and retrograde measures which the employers and governments instigate in almost all the capitalist countries".

— Typical of the sweep of working class actions against

privatisation, is the January 21, 1987 strike by not less than 2 million public sector workers in India. This is being followed up by further stages of a sustained and joint campaign. Local and immediate actions, industry-wide actions, are constantly going on. Protest strikes against proposed holding companies and sell-out to private sector has taken place on a nationwide scale in Bangladesh on April 28, 1987 and on an even higher political level later on. There are instances of similar actions in many other countries.

—Does this mean that the workers and their trade unions do not bother about the deficiencies and shortcomings in the working of the public sector? They in fact, do. They have persistently called for putting a curb on bureaucratism in management, and democratising it through workers' participation in decision-making processes at all levels. Given such a sense of participation as equal partners, they have pointed out, workers' cooperation would be consciously forthcoming for improving productivity and service norms. The workers and their organisations have vigorously exposed corruption in the public sector and called for greater accountability. They have demanded a pricing policy which ensures profitability and prevents the public sector from being milked by the private sector for the latter's super-profits. They have shown an alternative path of development based on strengthening and expanding the public sector, purging it of its ills. They have carried on an ideological and practical struggle against the theory of economic liberalisation advocated by the ruling classes. Above all, they have gone into action.

—Of great significance is the fact that not only the workers, but also engineers, technicians, officers and even executives of public sector enterprises have come out openly in opposition to the government's anti-public sector stance. Economists and public figures, several political parties and groups have spoken out against the 'privatisation' drive and the philosophy of 'liberalisation'.

—Confronted by opposition from several democratic quarters as also stiff resistance from the trade unions, and unnerved by the political and economic crisis which its own shortsighted policies have aggravated, even the Prime Minister sometimes back-tracks on his anti-public sector pronouncements. Confused and often conflicting noises issue forth from government quarters. The open drive for privatisation gets stalled and delayed, since government circles sometimes come to regard discretion the better part of valour. But the basic policy direction dictated by the interests of

Big Capital, is neither given up, nor reversed. In the light of all this, there are immense and extremely favourable prospects for the widest possible front of struggle on this issue, with the trade unions playing a leading role. At the same time, from a purely trade union affair it can be raised to a political programatic struggle.

NOTES

1. Refer "Reports and Documents',', 11th World Trade Union Congress (Berlin: September 1986).

2. Refer, Arjun Sen Gupta Committee Report. The full Report has been published by the CITU. A fairly detailed summary has been reproduced in "Information Materials 33rd Session of the AITUC".

3. Capitalising on the 'debt crisis' in the developing countries, a novel form of penetration and increased control over the public sector is being suggested as a sort of 'solution' to mounting debts. This is called the "debt-equity swap".

This allows a prospective investor to buy at a discount the whole or part of the debt of a country from a given money-centre bank. Converting the money into local currency, the investor swaps it for existing state-run enterprises. Writing in the US Journal *'Business Week'* (Jan. 19, 1987), an American author commented: "This means that poor nations should sell state-run enterprises, swear off economic planning, allow US banks full access to local financial markets, and generally get rid of laws or regulations that limit foreign investments". India is too tough a customer for such form of penetration. But one has to keenly watch the manoeuvres of the so-called 'Non-Resident Indians' (NRIs), who are being encouraged in every way to acquire assets in India, "invest" in India, and also float 'consultancy firms' abroad. It is obligatory for the public sector undertakings to obtain consultancy service from these firms. This 'NRI-sation', is a thin veil for a form of penetration by TNCs and foreign banks, mentioned already in this lesson.

Lesson 28

STRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION UNITY

—"Unity is infinitely precious, and infinitely important for the working class. Disunited, the workers are nothing. United, they are everything!"[1]

—Trade unions in our country, as also elsewhere, arose out of the need to *unite* the workere in a *factory, an industry*, at the *local, provincial* and then *national* level, so as to resist the attacks of the employers and secure humane conditions of work. The AITUC was born in 1920, out of this need, as the *first* and one united *all India centre* of trade unions. Even then, some unions kept out, as for instance the Majur Mahajan of Ahmedabad founded by Gandhiji. Political considerations,—the 'politics' of not allowing the workers to unite as a class on a national plane, came in the way. Nevertheless, the association of different political groups and individuals in the work of the AITUC in the initial years, gave rise to hopes and became a lever for the rapid development of the trade union movement all over the country. However, as narrated in an earlier lesson, due to several historical reasons, the trade union movement in India is sharply divided and fragmented. From rival organisations and multiplicity of unions at the plant or local level, we come to several central trade union organisations at the national level. The split at the top reaches right down to the bottom. The division is both horizontal and vertical. This has encouraged the rise of so-called 'independent' unions and fedefations which maintain a distance from all central trade unions. At the level of industrial federations, we have both rival federations affiliated to different centres, as well as unaffiliated federations. The total membership of such independent federations, is also considerable.

—Rivalry at the plant level often induces a sort of competition in 'economism'. It leads to attempts at undercutting each other, sometimes to the point of physical violence and needless industrial actions. At major industrial centres, trade union bosses and 'dadas' have sprung up. Inter-union rivalry greatly hampers the ability of the workers to organise effective and

broad actions against management and the government. The most distressing picture is where rival unions—each of them flying the Red Flag, and swearing by socialist ideology, each of them calling for trade union unity, in actual practice keep the workers divided in plants and industries. This only confuses the workers, and delays their consolidation as a 'class'. It affects their loyalty to the Red Flag with all that it symbolises. Some sections then move away and flock under other banners. It is an undeniable fact that the strength of the trade union movement, and its influence on social life, would have been many times more than what it is today, had division and rivalry not bedevilled the trade unions at all levels.

—The demands of the situation are however compelling. The crisis factors in the national and international situation have become more complicated and dangerous than ever before. New challenges are coming up before the working class:

—It has to take the lead in the struggle for world peace and freedom.

—It has to come forward as a major social force in defending national unity and integrity, against all divisive forces, external and internal.

—As a stable, united force embracing all castes and communities and experienced in class battles, it has to stand up against communalism and communal riots, in defence of secularism and harmony.

—It has to be in the forefront of the struggle against the economic policies that are anti-people and harmful to the national interests.

—It has to oppose the opportunist bourgeois politics, defend democratic rights, resist and defeat the attacks on job security, wages, working conditions and trade union rights.

—Without this the country cannot emerge from the present crisis, and advance along the road of social progress. The working class can neither defend itself nor advance, unless it consciously makes the above efforts. This calls for closing the ranks of the workers, consolidating working class unity and united action. There is no question about trade unions 'keeping aloof' from 'politics', and confining themselves to the day to day problems. Even reformist trade union leaders are recognising this objective reality.

—The AITUC as the first and oldest central trade union organisation has always stood for trade union unity, and has tried to overcome the effect of splits in the movement. With this in view several moves were initiated, including the moves

for setting up a National Campaign Committee during 1978, and then again in 1981; as also for joint actions at industrial and other levels, and on other forums.

—The joint actions that have taken place in this period, have emphasised the *new mood* of the workers, a mood which desires—nay, *demands* unity and united actions, and is prepared for the most militant and widespread actions on trade union, political and mass issues, wherever and whenever such unity is forged. This itself is further accelerating the process of unity and united action.

—The growing trends of unity and united action are reflected in the following:

—The NCC has emerged as a broad, united platform of trade unions—of central organisations as well as national industrial federations, for action on agreed issues, despite several ideological, political and practical differences.

—A joint committee of public sector unions has come up, which squarely opposes all moves for 'privatisation', and stands for the defence and further expansion of the public sector, and for the defence of public sector workers' interests.

—A joint forum including the INTUC has been constituted, on the issues of world peace and disarmament, support to the anti-apartheid struggle, for national integration and against separatist and communal forces. True, this forum has yet to activate itself as required by the situation. But activisation on these urgent issues will not come 'by itself', by leaving it to spontaneity. It requires conscious and determined efforts by the leaderships of the major T.U. centres.

—Of special significance is the fact that the AITUC and the CITU have moved together, both in bringing about the above developments, as well as on several issues which help consolidate the class consciousness of the workers and enhance the role of the working class in Indian polity. Thus, the AITUC and CITU jointly gave a call for observance of the May Day centenary, as also May Day the following year. Both organisations observe the call of the WFTU for Anti-War Day on September 1. Barring some exceptions, the rallies and demonstrations are organised jointly by the two centres.

—The initiating role played by the AITUC and the CITU, has been a decisive factor in the development towards trade union unity. This is not to underestimate the positive stand taken by other trade union centres and organisations even though some of them (the BMS for example), have serious reservations on several issues. But experience shows that it is mainly

the efforts of the AITUC and the CITU backed by other left-led centres, that gave a direction to the unity moves, imparted militancy and driving force, and helped to lift the trade union movement to the heights of political and mass actions on issues of policy and national life. The perceptions of both on most of the issues and policy questions have come closer to each other. They share a more or less common outlook. There is today greater objective basis than ever before, for the two organisations to work together. Certain differences do persist. Occasionally, they even grow into sharp conflicts. Whether in relation to these two organisations, or to the others, the prejudices and rivalries of the past often carried into the present, do not and will not disappear automatically. They have to be consciously overcome. In any case, it is not the differences and conflicts that are primary.

—Following from this objective basis and understanding, the AITUC while welcoming the growing favourable pro-unity conditions, has stated that, "the time has come to project a qualitatively higher level of class and political consciousness based on the closer unity of all left-minded and socially progressive trade unions which share a common ideology. And this, first and foremost, should mean a deeper understanding and alliance between the AITUC and CITU, at different levels." The aim is to move towards closer cohesion of purpose and action, forge closer organisational unity, eventually leading to one powerful trade union centre.

—The acceptance of the following principles (put forward by the AITUC) can form the basis for the unity of all unions and federations:

(1) Class struggle, as opposed to class collaboration
(2) Secularism and national unity
(3) Peace and anti-imperialism
(4) Defence of the gains of socialism, and international working class solidarity.

—The CITU on its part, has put forward the proposal of a Confederation. In the quest for unity, there is no 'last word', no inflexible, or cut and dried formula. As the General Secretary of the AITUC said in his Report to the Vadodra Session, "We are prepared to sit down and discuss, in a fraternal spirit, all concrete suggestions for advancing the cause of trade union unity between the like-minded forces".

The main thing is to take the initiative, come to an understanding about the best possible and realisable steps which will initiate the process of unification, and carry it forward so as

to put an end to the organisational schism within the trade union movement,—in the first place, the division within the left-led trade unions.

—The unity of the left-led TU centres, the CITU and the AITUC in particular, is not and should not be counterposed to the broader unity of the TU movement. Rather, it has to be seen as a means to accelerate the process of unity, and exercise the due influence and leadership of the left in this proccess. Meanwhile therefore, all-sided efforts for stepping up broader unity and united actions, for consolidating the several united platforms have to continue.

—The NCC has to be activated on all issues affecting the workers. The association of industrial federations with the decision-making and implementation processes within the NCC, has to be strengthened, so that there is no feeling that they are being taken for granted.

—The NCC calls have to be fully implemented. The Committee of Public Sector Unions has to be consolidated. Wherever necessary, local or regional coordination committee of trade unions, and joint action committees have to be set up.

—Where specific issues so demand, broader joint forum and joint action with the inclusion of INTUC and independent unions or centres, have to be organised.

—The key to the successful discharge of the above tasks, lies in building strong unions which function democratically,—in the sense of involving more and more workers in trade union activity, and strengthening the AITUC. There is no question of counterposing 'independent actions' to 'joint actions', or of counterposing the task of 'strengthening the AITUC' to that of 'forging unity' among several trade union centres. The two tasks do not mutually exclude each other. They are interrelated. They have to be integrated.

—While it is necessary to develop common actions even with reformist-led unions on issues, reformism as a trend has to be fought politically and ideologically, and on the basis of practical experience. Only that would enable the workers behind them to grasp what revolutionary trade unionism is, and make them support it. In fighting reformism, we must avoid sectarian errors, adopt a friendly attitude towards 'leaders' who continue to enjoy the confidence of the masses, never confuse 'leaders' with the rank-and-file, and have the necessary patience to convince the rank-and-file through the experience of life.

—An important step towards unity, is the bringing together of unions at the national industrial level, on the basis of the

slogan: "One National Federation for One Industry". This reflects the urge among workers within one industry who are faced with common problems, and who ardently wish for common standard in working and service conditions. Efforts have to be undertaken to bring together in common actions, and eventually to merge, some of the present rival industrial federations, starting with the ones where success may perhaps be easier to achieve. Even today, despite multiplicity of central trade unions, many forces do work together in a number of common federations and unions. There is thus enough of experience in this matter.

—The slogan of 'one union in one undertaking' has to be popularised as the goal of trade union unity at the grass-root level, even if this does not appear to be immediately realisable. The fact cannot be ignored that workers are fed up with the existence of multiple unions. Besides, there is something to be learnt from the traditions of several unions, where all trends work together, and elections are democratically and regularly held. In such places we find no multiplicity of unions.

—Discussions have to be initiated to work out a Code of Conduct for eliminating rivalries, doing away with attempts to undercut each other and for ensuring democratic functioning. Also, for removing irritants in joint work, and for putting a stop to physical clashes.

—Forging trade union unity does not merely mean bringing together certain existing unions on a comon platform of action or within a common fold. It means moving the mass of workers into action, as a force of social progress and change. This requires intense all-round efforts—ideological, social, political and cultural against divisive caste, community, religion and ethnic factors, and for raising the workers' consciousness as a class.

—The international dimensions of trade union unity and class solidarity, in the struggle for defence of peace, against the operations of TNCs and imperialism, for Freedom and Socialism, have also to be constantly kept in view.

—The struggle for unity is thus a complex task. It calls for patience and perseverance. It proceeds along a zig-zag path, with several twists and turns. In real life, one finds that sometimes the loudest 'talk' about unity is accompanied by actual 'act' of disruption; unity achieved at the 'top level' goes along with bitter hostility and disruption at the 'local levels'. Even in the field of joint actions, efforts are often made to 'outsmart' each other and appear to be on top. As long as the present situation continues, it is difficult to rule out completely attempts

at 'capturing' unions or setting up one's 'own union' where others already exist.

AITUC unions and cadres, if they mean business, have to exercise vigilance and caution, ward off all attempts at disruption and petty manoeuvres, and always, under all circumstances keep the objective of forging unity at the centre of their attention and activities. Everything has to be done to overcome the situation of disunity and work for changes in favour of unity and united action. The call for trade union unity is not a routine slogan. It is not a "tactical manoeuvre", meant to score points over others. It is of vital interest for the working class.

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NOTES

1. Lenin: Collected Works: Vol. XIX P.

FURTHER READING

1. General Secretary's Report : 33rd Session, AITUC
2. Report of Commission on T.U. Unity:
3. Report of General Secretary, WFTU: 11th Congress.

Lesson 29

THE ROLE OF THE WORKING CLASS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

—In a previous lesson we have traced the history and growth of the International Trade Union Movement.

—The century and a half of the working class movement has changed the course of history, reshaped the world, brought into existence a new world of working class power, where the ideas, the aims, the hopes of all preceding and following generations of fighters for social progress, peace and justice, for an end to exploitation, have been and are being realised in practice. Powerful trade union and political organisations of workers have come up in all countries of the world. The influence and role of the working class in the social life of these countries extend much beyond its numerical strength.

Again and again this revolutionary truth has been demonstrated that the working class is the leading force, the key element which determines the main direction of social progress in the modern world. Every time efforts have been made to denigrate its role, to deny its historical mission. But every time events themselves have refuted this. And yet again, as we are nearing the end of the 20th century, and are preparing to enter the 21st, questions are being raised: Does the working class continue to be the most revolutionary force? Has it any role to play in the new situation? What is its historical destiny in the era of the scientific and technological revolution?

To answer these questions, one must briefly recapitulate its role through the earlier decades.

—In March 1871, the first proletarian state was ushered into history with the Paris Commune. The Parisian workers combined their class outlook with the truly patriotic demand of the French people against German militarism and the treason of the French bourgeoisie. This is not a historical fiction. On March 18, 1871 the "Jurnal official de la Commune" published the following:

"The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck

for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs'. . ".

—The Commune was drowned in blood. Yet after a few years, the International Labour Congress in Paris, on July 14, 1889, called for world-wide observance of May 1, beginning from May 1, 1890. This directive immortalised the May 1886 Chicago demonstrations, and made it into a day of international working class solidarity.

—In 1917, the foundation of the first victorious proletarian state was laid by the Great October Revolution led by Lenin. The Programme of the CPSU adopted at its 27th Congress, sums up the event in the following words:

"...In October 1917 the working class took political power into its hands. A state of workers and peasants came into being for the first time in history. *The creation of a new world* began". (Emphasis in original).

We are now on the eve of celebrating its 70th Anniversary.

—Assessing the role of the working class in the Vietnamese Revolution, Ho Chi Minh wrote,

"The *working class* is the most courageous and revolutionary class, which unflinchingly and fearlessly stands up to the imperialists and colonialists. Armed with a vanguard revolutionary doctrine and the experience of the international proletarian movement, our working class has proved itself to be the most deserving and trustworthy leader of the Vietnamese people".

—Writing about the Chinese Revolution in December 1939, Mao Zedung pointed out,

"Inspite of certain unavoidable weaknesses, for instance, its smallness (as compared with the peasantry), its youth (as compared with the proletariat in the capitalist countries) and its low educational level (as compared with the bourgeoisie), the Chinese proletariat is nonetheless the basic motive force of the Chinese revolution".

Later, after its victory, Liu Shao Chi reported to the 8th CPC Congress in 1956,

"If without the leadership of the proletariat, our peasants and national bourgeoisie were not able to gain victory even in the stage of bourgeois-democratic revolution, then what social force other than the proletariat can take up the responsibility of such leadership in the stage of socialist revolution?..."

— And how does Fidel Castro sum up the historical experience of the Cuban Revolution? Here is what he says:

"Only with the invincible strength of the international working class was our small country able to counter the mortal

danger which stemmed from the political, economic and military might of the United States, and only thanks to the strategy, principles and ideology of the working class, and with that class in the van, was our Revolution capable of advancing to the country's final national liberation and social emancipation....

"As a revolutionary class allied with the peasantry and the other poor sections of the people, it was to become the undisputed vanguard of this process" (i.e., the socialist transformation of the revolution.).

— These are the authoritative voices of the revolution carried out in these countries. In each case the revolution was unique in form' and character. It attained victory through different paths, adopting forms and tactics arising from the national peculiarities of each country, from its own historical conditions. Yet, without exception, its success lay in the role played by the working class.

— So much for the past. But what about now? Is not the working class itself disintegrating, shrinking, declining? Is it not being replaced by other forces, which are playing decisive roles in social advance? Let us first look at the figure about the numerical strength of the working class, which is the core of the working population, of the wage-labour army, during the last few decades:

	From 1950s	*to 1980s*	*Percentage Rise*
Socialist Countries	66 million	202 million	206%
Industrially Capitalist Countries	137 "	241 "	76%
Liberated Countries	79 "	217 "	174.7%
	282 million	660 million	134%

What we are witnessing is not a 'decline' but a 'growth' in each group of countries, but especially pronounced in the socialist countries and the liberated countries which have taken to the path of development. The less developed countries of the third world have vast human and natural resources. But, due to the low level of economic and development, those working for a wage make up no more than 40 per cent of the working population of the Third World as a whole. The employment problem is also most acute.

The working class forces are distributed among all the principal areas of the world, in all continents. Thus, figures relating to midseventies reveal the following distribution:

[4]Socialist Countries		160	million
W. Europe		105	"
North America	about	70	"
Japan &Oceania	about	35	"
Australia & New Zealand	about	5	"
Latin America	about	50	"
Asia (non-Socialist)	over	100	"
Africa	about	20	"
		545	"

— During this period, especially the last decade, the level of organisation of the working class in the newly liberated countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America has gone up. Trade unions and associations have come up, and national and regional centres have been consolidated. This growth, along with the rapid growth of the working class and its organisation in the socialist countries, has found reflection in the phenomenal rise in affiliated membership of the WFTU from about 67 million workers from 56 countries at the time of its Founding Congress in 1945, to more than 214 million workers from 138 countries embracing all continents and social systems at its 11th Congress in 1986. Present at the 11th Congress were participants representing 296 million members from 432 trade union organisations, irrespective of affiliation. This itself is a vivid proof of the growing strength of the International Army of Labour.

— What then is the basis of the propaganda, that the working class is 'declining'? Firstly, it is based on a most unwarranted assumption that only industrial workers, and that too those engaged in mostly manual labour, belong to the working class proper. True, there is a *relative decline* in their strength, especially with the introduction of new technology. But the asumption itself is totally wrong. The changing composition of the working class under the impact of the technological revolution has brought to the fore, engineers, scientists and technicians with high qualifications and skill. They directly participate in the production process, while at the same time some of them perform certain supervisory and even managerial

functions. From the ranks of the workers at shop-floor level, there have come up highly skilled functionaries and operators, —"a special kind of wage labour"[5] who are elements of the rising working class technical intelligentsia. The gulf dividing the engineers and technicians from the workers is becoming narrow, and increasingly they are adopting forms of organisation and struggle which are peculiar to the trade union movement. There are of course opposing pulls and tendencies in the social psychology of the engineering strata. Subjectively, some individuals dream of climbing to the top and becoming one among the properties class, and a few even succeed in doing so. But in the mass they are driven to the path of struggle against the capitalist management and state. The process does not move along a straight line, and we therefore do not find them identifying themselves everywhere with the proletarian outlook and movement. Lenin had referred to them as the "engineering proletariat". That way, as Lenin pointed out even the working class is "divided into more developed and less developed strata", and under conditions of capitalism, it is "surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types".[6] But can this fact justify the conclusion that the working class is "declining" ?

— The STR, and the growth in service and communication industries and commerce has also thrown up a mass of so-called 'white collar' emplòyees, as against the 'blue collar' workers. Sociologists out to look for a 'decline' in the working class, tend to lok upon them as a special 'new middle class', an 'intermediate strata', standing apart from the workng class. But is there any justification for this? True, there are sectarian tendencies, both among the workers attending and operating machines, as also among some 'white collar' sections to regard them as something apart, as "baboos' who are alien to the working class. But in our own Indian experience, this barrier was demolished long back, thanks to the powerful and rapidly-growing organisation and movement of bank and insurance employees, central and state government employees, commercial employees, etc. By their militant actions, strikes, demonstrations and so on. and their close indentification with the general trade union movement, these sections have already 'declared' as it were that they are a part of the working class.

— In brief, although the working class has changed in several respects, its *essence* has not.

— But the question may be asked: Are not these sections getting "deproletarianised", and concerned more with improv-

ing and protecting their own economic conditions? Facts show that the trade union and working class movement is more and more speaking up for the whole community and nation, espousing causes which are of concern for the future of mankind. This is also our Indian experience, though for a time, due to its inner weaknesses, the trade union movement could not pull its entire weight in the matter. To give a few examples:

* The workers organised in their trade unions play a major role in the struggle for World Peace, for Nuclear Disarmament, and an end to the Arms Race. In India, apart from joining in the broad peace movement, workers have started to move on their own on this issue—witness the September 1 'Anti-War Day' mobilisation by trade unions all over the country. This needs to be carried forward further, linking the workers' struggle for a better life with the struggle for Peace and Disarmament.

* The working class is actively supporting the national liberation movements, and the struggle against apartheid. In India, central trade unions (including the INTUC) are beginning to move on this issue, and are even raising funds as contribution in the struggle against the apartheid regime.

* The trade unions are actively involved in the struggle for defence of democratic rights everywhere. This holds true for the Indian trade union movement.

* The trade unions are fighting against the 'neo-colonial' offensive of imperialism, the impositions by the IMF and the World Bank on developing countries, and the activities of TNCs. Indian trade unions have launched actions against the drive for 'privatisation' and the policies of 'economic liberalisation' which weaken 'self-reliant' economic development.

* The trade unions are firmly resisting the attempts by Big Business and the Capitalist State to utilise the achievements of the STR for their own aggrandisement and superprofits, while adding to the miseries of the common masses. The working class is having an increasing say about the strategy of development of the country.

* In India, the trade unions are standing up in defence of national unity and integrity. A shining example is the role of the trade unions in Punjab against separatism and terrorism, and for communal amity.

— Undoubtedly much more has to be done than is being done at present. There are no grounds for self-satisfied complacence, or for exaggeration in this matter, especially when

the working class, as we know, continues to be divided. Even so, the working class and its organisations are the most consistent social force playing a major role in the struggle for social progress. This derives from the place it occupies in social production and life, its organised numbers and strength, its consciousness and activity, which gives it great political and moral prestige in society. The several united actions launched by it under the banner of the NCC and other joint forums have vividly demonstrated this. If the split in the ranks of the working class is overcome through the experience of common and joint actions, then the working class would surely be able to assert its leading and revolutionary role in the coming days.

— Demagogic references are frequently made to 'youth power'. The youth are flattered as the most revolutionary force, a supra-class power as it were, which would make a clean sweep of the so-called 'Establishment'. and the all-round crisis, the moral decay, corruption and so on, that it breeds. The late Sanjay Gandhi gave a 'practical manifestation' of this 'youth power' and tried to institutionalise it. The victory of the student boys in Assam gave this theory a fresh boost. It derives sustenance, from the disgusting tenacity with which the 'old guard' seems to stick on to chairs, while leading the country from one disaster to another. The presumption is that the youth, irrespective of their social origin and motivation, are energetic, dynamic and even 'clean'. This non-class approach has not stood the test of time. Youth is the builder of the future. But experience shows, when youth is not rooted firmly among the toiling masses, when it is not oriented towards the working class and wedded to its ideology of scientific socialism, it can even become a tool in the hands of the worst reaction. It can be used and manipulated by international reaction and internal divisive forces.

— Assertions are also being made that with new technological development, the complexities of economic life and administration now call for the leadership of an 'elite corps', of 'technocrats'. It is said, that the working class itself is undergoing radical change in structure, educational and technical skill, in behaviourial attitudes and social outlook, and therefore old class divisions and class struggles have no relevance in the present context. Actually of course, we are seeing a further sharpening of the class struggle, an upsurge in mass struggles by different sections of workers and working people as a whole, creating a real basis for forging the worker-peasant alliance and winning the leading role of

the working class in social struggles. The ranks of the workers' allies are growing, the vista of struggle is expanding, and the task of winning over and consolidating new sections of working people, of evolving suitable approach and tactics oriented towards them is assuming great importance.

The various contingents of the working class in different countries have to face a diversity of economic, social and political conditions. The problems facing them in the developing countries are different from those in the developed capitalist countries, and certainly different from those in the socialist countries. But for all the changes in its make-up and composition, the working class remains the most revolutionary class of our times. And why is it so?

Firstly because, it is the only force which is capable of organising and fighting collectively, of acting as a unifying force of large masses irrespective of diversities, like caste, religion, language and other factors, of subordinating individual and group interests to the common interest and so on.

Second, it occupies a strategic position in production, and all the vital processes of social life.

Third, it is the most forward looking social force, arising from the fact that it is closely bound up with the most advanced forms of social production.

Fourth, the very logic of class struggle compels it to confront the exploiters of all breeds, and become the champion of the ideals of equality, social justice, democratic and human rights.

The working class has changed in several respects, and this was inevitable. But its essence remains the same. Whether white-collared or blue-collared, manual or mental labourer, a worker on the bench or a 'technocrat',—all those who are engaged in the production of surplus value as wage-earners, form part of the working class, and are sooner or later driven to adopt working class positions. That is why the role of the working class is actually expanding, rather than declining, in the contemporary world.

—As in the earlier decades, so also now, the working class continues to be the leading force of social progress, the most revolutionary force in society, the standard bearer of the socialist alternative to the present system. The Indian trade union movement has to advance keeping this historical mission in view.

NOTES

1. *Lesson* 8: Part I: Trade Union Education.

2. Article in New Age: "Historical Destiny of Working Class Then & Now" (May Day Issue, 1986)—A. B. Bardhan.

3. Source: The Rising Class by Vadim Zagladin in journal "Socialism, Principles, Practice, Prospects". The figures for the capitalist and liberated countries, include registered unemployed.

4. Source: "The Working Class and Social Progress."
T. Timofeyev.

5. Karl Marx: Capital: Vol. I: P. 332.

6. Lenin: "Left Wing Communism", Collected Works, Vol. 31, P. 74.

7. For a detailed discussion, refer "Generalists, Specialist and the Working Class" (by A. B. Bardhan.)