

Left Movement in India and Task of the Students

A question that agitated the people, students and youth in particular, in the early seventies was why no effective mass movements were building up in West Bengal, the citadel of left movement, even as in many other parts of the country people's resentment burst forth against the rule of exploitation and fascist terror of the Congress government led by Indira Gandhi at the Centre. Delivering this address at a meeting of the West Bengal State Committee of the AIDSO (All India Democratic Students' Organization) in Calcutta in 1974, Comrade Ghosh analysed the main weaknesses of the left movement which led to this failure at a vital hour. He discussed the social responsibility of students and the task before them, and emphasized, in particular, the role of higher ethics and morality in the communist movement, a point never to be missed in organizing students' movements.

Comrades and Friends,

In this students' gathering today organized by the West Bengal State Committee of the AIDSO to observe the 20th year of its foundation, I have been requested to discuss the present situation and the task of the students. The situation obtaining in India today is, to say, in one word, extremely critical and of utmost concern for any well-meaning and thinking person. This is true from several angles. The way misery and privation of the people of the country is increasing, the prices of essential commodities are continuously soaring as the inevitable fallout of inflation and over and above that, hard-pressed by exploitation of capitalism, especially by that of Indian capitalism with its specific features and characteristics — under its pressure the economic condition of the people has almost reached the peak of distress and wretchedness.

But what a contrast you see in this very country when misery and suffering had not assumed such a proportion, when the situation all around had not been so bad, still then the people of the country, the youth and the students used to burst out in protest against injustice, against any act of injustice whatsoever. Whatever might have been their strength, the political parties, as representatives of the people, courageously stepped forward if the situation so demanded to voice their protest against injustice. Despite commercial outlook, the newspapers till the other day did not so shamelessly come out in defence of injustice or wrongdoing and did not try to shield their perpetrators or conspire to shun the printing of news about the forces of movement against injustice and not to bring them into public view. But all these things are happening today. Due to all these, the country is now faced with a severe crisis.

Crisis of ethics and morality is the most serious problem of the day

Now, if judged in the context of this all pervading crisis in the country and from the perspective of organizing an effective movement of the people — the students, workers-peasants and exploited people at large against all this injustice and misery, then, according to my view,

the crisis and degradation of culture and morality in society is posing a problem far greater than economic distress and other severe problems. I do not say that this is the main problem with respect to everything. But from the point of view of developing movement, this indeed poses the most serious problem for building up movement. Because, not to speak of building up movement based on correct theory, even for developing any purposeful movement with firm determination and resolve, courageous planning and preparedness for sacrifice, the question of moral and cultural standard of the people of the country assumes utmost importance. The saying that “people will invariably rise up if oppressed” turns out to be an empty phrase if there is downfall of ethical-moral standard. It doesn’t ever happen. “If crisis crops up, movement will gather momentum as a natural consequence” — such theories are also in circulation in this country. You should bear it in mind that it is not so at all. In a situation when someone suffers from acute penury, or starvation death stares in his face, a person has two options. If he has a minimum moral standard, he can take to the path of movement. But if he lacks a minimum moral standard, he might turn into a beggar or a wagon-breaker, become immoral and unscrupulous but can never be a movement-maker. It is not true that a person automatically becomes a fighter if he faces starvation, or is in the grip of severe wants or undergoes tortures and assaults. Hence neither I nor our party subscribe to the theory that an effective movement of the students and youth, workers and peasants, will surge forth if there is poverty or eruption of crisis. Marxism-Leninism does not subscribe to such views, nor do Marxist-Leninists have any faith in such a theory of spontaneous movement. So I want to emphasize the point that if all problems are examined with the objective of building up movement, then the question of moral degeneration and lowering of cultural standard which are eating into the very vitals of our morals, destroying the very essence of political principles and morality and spelling disaster from behind, becomes extremely important.

Opportunistic argument of CPI(M) on the question of not developing movement

So, you see, despite the crisis being so acute, today there is no movement in West Bengal. The CPI(M) which as the biggest left party ought to shoulder the main responsibility of organizing movement is, according to information from different places, despite loud drumbeating about movement in reality averse to tread the path of movement. But you see when the very same CPI(M) was in power – I am talking about 1969-70 — and was having police-backing, their cadres pretended to be so militant, so revolutionary as if they would snatch victory by fighting. All their talk centred round but the slogan that one must fight to live. Of course, they do not raise such slogans at present. Now they have invented a strange theory. They say that this is not the time for any movement. If the cadres and particularly the youth within their party who, one would think, are fighting for an ideology and hence have joined the party – if they have really done so from ideological conviction, then it is to be presumed that having accepted Marxism-Leninism and revolutionary ideology, they have joined the party organization surely in order to struggle and if necessary to lay down their life. Again the very leader who is to provide leadership to them and who is to raise the morale in the movement, on the one hand is proclaiming they want revolution, they are Marxist-Leninists — though, whether they really understand the significance of such words is a different question altogether — and in the same breath is saying that there can be no movement in West Bengal at present. Because they are saying that if there is movement today, that will trigger bloodshed, heavy loss of life. So, what this boils down to is that there will be movements then only or they will develop movement in such a way that no one will die as a result of it. Or, even if someone dies, that will be on the side

of the opponent, not on their side. So long such a situation is not created, there cannot be, according to them, any movement in West Bengal. Only such big leaders know what such views have got to do with revolutionary ideology, with Marxism-Leninism. You see, I am neither so big like them nor do I have that much intelligence. I am at a loss to understand all this.

I understand the simple fact that those who build up revolutionary movement and battle, initiate the struggle against injustice, at the outset they need to give more, they need to make more sacrifices, bear more casualties — they cannot initiate the struggle with the mindset: “We will fight only in order to attack and hit ; if we cannot hit out, we will quit and run away” — they join the struggle prepared to sacrifice their lives, if need be. Their attitude is, they will fight against injustice even if they are to die, still they will fight against injustice, under no circumstances will they give up the struggle. It is on the basis of such mentality alone that the soil was prepared for fighting injustice and building up revolutionary struggles in one and all countries. Likewise the revolutionaries, brick by brick, established the foundation for revolution and then only revolution could come about. And here, you see the source of all their courage clearly is the police protection. Without police protection, they cannot fight. Whereas those who have rudimentary understanding of revolution know very well that what to speak of the police, the ultimate revolutionary battle has to be fought against the armed military, the state apparatus. Compared to this mighty state machine, the police is nothing. Those who lack this much of common sense ought not to even think of revolution. Revolution is an unceasing, protracted, conscious, organized, armed struggle of the people against a well-knit force of state armed to the teeth. So long as the armed capitalist state does exist, the ruling class will not yield to revolution without fighting, without offering resistance. This is the most fundamental, essential, elementary and simple understanding of revolution, only after this comes the question of the very complex revolutionary theory and the question of analysing it in details.

Yet they are saying that the situation is not conducive to movement now. If properly analysed this boils down to — let their government be formed first, then there will be movement. In other words, if, by any means, by working out a compromise with the owners, the capitalist class, by striking a deal with those who, for whatsoever reason, are dissidents within the present government, they once again return to power through elections in future, or are in the government and have the police under their control, then even if they do something they do not have the fear of being jailed or harassed by the police — then only, if considered necessary, they will have no problem in reappearing as revolutionaries. Of course, whether there will be any occasion for them to feel that necessity is a separate issue. But if they feel the need, then only will they show once again what struggle is all about. As the situation is not like that at present because launching a struggle now would entail bloodshed, killings, resulting in more casualties on their own side, they do not find the situation conducive to movement. So they will not launch any movement now. To put it simply, the cat is out of the bag. I think those who have intelligence and analytical ability, will be able to detect the truth. Jyotibabu¹ thought that he had made a very clever comment like a shrewd politician. But by this very statement that he made in his eagerness to offhand address the press, he conveyed the message to whom he wanted to convey it — to those who matter — what kind of revolutionaries they are, what kind of revolution they will deliver, whatever his party may go on speaking about Marxism-Leninism.

The bourgeoisie try to destroy the revolutionary forces by resorting to various means and bringing down torture on them

So this is the real face of the left parties and forces — barring us — who are considered as opponents and opposition parties in the government circles and intelligence department. Since we are still relatively a smaller party than the CPI(M), they do not take our strength much into consideration. Even if they do not take us into account, remember, that they are observing with grave apprehension all our movements, activities and rise in strength most carefully. Because they too have taken lesson from the experience of history. Earlier the bourgeoisie used to think that if a small party was posing a threat, do not create a stir about it and thereby provide some publicity for it — just avoid it, sidestep it and dismiss it as being an insignificant force. Because the bourgeoisie know very well that if something is commented about such a party, or even if there is an attempt to oppose it, it would simply receive some publicity and come into the limelight. So if they consider the party to be of such a character, their attitude was to simply ignore it, to assign no importance to it and dismissively reiterate its insignificance, so as to make it non-existent from public view. Such have been the tactics adopted all through by the bourgeois class in respect of a party which it considers dangerous for being revolutionary even if that party is small. On the other hand, you must remember that when the bourgeoisie thinks that some smaller parties could be used to serve its class interest, it gives them enough indulgence to make them appear as big. But normally it seeks to wipe out the small party posing a danger to it by ignoring that party. But history has taught the bourgeoisie one more lesson. It has seen that by ignoring in this way it is not possible to vanquish a revolutionary force — its strength goes on increasing. And when it grows on its own, it does pose danger. The bourgeoisie has observed it happening in many countries. Those whom it looked down upon as insignificant, those whom it considered to have no strength in terms of manpower to speak of, who could achieve nothing, had nothing, only talked big — it was found that since that very party's theory was correct, its political line was correct, in other words, since they tell the truth and possess the ability to correctly determine and show the true path for fulfilling the real necessity of the people, solely on its basis, that is to say, on the basis of correct ideology and political line, that tiny force, despite being ignored by the bourgeoisie, in the course of time grows into a massive force — when it becomes impossible to resist it. The bourgeoisie have drawn this lesson from history.

As a result, they are now on guard a bit. So, they do not dismiss, do not ignore such a force, even if tiny, which they consider dangerous, or in their parlance, extremists or dangerous meaning thereby the revolutionary party that causes fear and panic in them; they do not ridicule it as insignificant and they do not pose as if they are seeing nothing in it. Maybe they do not step forward to give it publicity and increase its importance. But they keep it under close surveillance, very critically watch its every move and in spite of apparently not giving any importance to its political campaign, harass it through police and local administration and such other machineries at the first available opportunity and try to destroy it by continuous oppression. We are feeling the pinch of such tactics of theirs through and through, and have been able to detect it. No doubt, the bourgeoisie considers itself much more intelligent than the revolutionaries but it moves with a fanciful theory while the revolutionaries base themselves on science. Hence, there is a wide difference in this regard. What it considers as very shrewd moves become crystal clear to the revolutionaries in the light of science, and all such crafty manoeuvres get exposed to the revolutionaries. Therefore, we can detect them. But it is not enough to detect. What is of utmost importance is whether we can after detection adopt appropriate measures to guard against these tricks and crafty manoeuvres and gain necessary strength well in time to

implement such measures. Otherwise, it will be wrong to think that since our ideology is correct, we shall win. If we fail to quickly take appropriate steps to mobilize necessary strength for materializing the ideology, it would pose a grave problem.

Extreme unscrupulousness has penetrated even leftist movement like a poisonous insect

However, the point I was discussing before I entered this subject, is that excluding us this is the real face of the other left parties, particularly the CPI(M) and its students' front, SFI who till the other day created in many parts of the country a widespread confusion among the common people with its air of being a very militant, a great revolutionary force. And keep in mind that such serious confusion about them is still prevalent in places where SUCI has not been able to reach as yet. It will be a grave mistake if you assume that the entire people of India have understood that such parties will do nothing of this sort. There is a lot of confusion among the people from different walks of life about these Leftists or Leftism in general. And amidst all these confusions, there is a common notion prevalent almost everywhere that, after all, the CPI(M) is a left party opposed to the Congress or the Indira Congress. Hence, wherever anti-Indira Congress or anti-Congress mentality is growing among the people, there is a swing, a tilt towards the CPI(M) as the alternative because of its larger strength. But such a party enjoying moral and emotional support of the majority of the left minded people — just look at its own morale ! It is not true either that this party never enters the arena of movement, never participates in the various struggles at different points of time. They remain intermingled with the peasants' and workers' struggles and sometimes do build up movements over economic demands. But you have seen from the discussion made just now, how their courage to fight and the very foundation of their character got eroded from the days of the last United Front. They cannot think of any movement today unless there is police backing though apparently their militant cadres and all such things continue to be there.

Then what is being found? It is being found that their courage, their bravado is sustained only when backed by government and police. If that is behind, then only is their wielding of revolutionism, their strength to fight. These things they have learnt now. It means that, despite all limitations and shortcomings of the Indian left movement, whatever grit to fight, firmness of character, courage of the cadres, mental make-up to confront the police, resist onslaught and, if need be, readiness to go to jail and die, had existed even fifteen to twentyfive years back in the CPI-CPI (M), who were not genuine Marxist-Leninists as we are, or had existed even in the Lefts who were yet more moderate than them, have all vanished today. And up to which level has it disappeared? Such mental make-up has disappeared not only among the moderates, but even among the rank and file of the CPI(M). This is the result of what? What does it prove? It proves that the very base of ideology and ethics-morality at the various layers of the society has been eroded.

On the other hand, have a look at the students and youth community of the country. They all observe the birth and death anniversaries of Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Netaji Subhas, Rabindranath, Saratchandra, Nazrul. I do not know whether they understand the meaning of all these. The teachers also deliver lectures on all these. But I do not know as to what they understand by all this. Because, one thing strikes me in this connection. Those who have understood Rabindranath, Saratchandra, Nazrul — whether they have understood like us is not an issue — yet if they had understood even a little of the great men like Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Kshudiram, Netaji Subhas and others, they ought to realize at least one thing, that if as a human being I lack the courage to rise in protest against injustice, then I am not fit to be

called man. At least this minimum ethical standard should grow in a person first then only comes the question of whether one has duly acquired the ability to judge right and wrong. Because, to correctly determine right or wrong is a complex task, which requires adequate knowledge and education. But if I lack the courage to protest against what I consider unjust out of fear of being arrested by the police or losing my job or if I do not feel any twinge of conscience in committing an act of injustice myself, then I am not worth being called man. But you see, anyone who likes to move with this understanding of human life and existence today is perceived to be foolish even by his own parents. He who refuses to tell a lie, cannot give or take bribe or build up his career by indulging in any kind of wrongful act — people consider him a fool. Not only other people, even his own father, who has given birth to him, thinks that he is foolish — he could have prospered had he buttered up but he did not; he could have made personal gains by bartering away his human values but he did not. Because he is foolish. And I am very clever because I have sold myself. Again the same parents display the books of Vidyasagar, Rabindranath, and Saratchandra in their library at home. Society has come to such a pass. Even during the pre-independence days, the sense of right and wrong, attachment to religious values, concept of ethics and morality had not fallen to such a low level at various levels of society and family – do not forget these words of mine. When the struggle against the British rulers had not yet assumed that proportion in this country — then also there was a standard of ethical and moral behaviour in the society which people used to abide by. But that edifice of ethics, morality and culture is no more in existence. And because it exists no more, those political parties talking of ideology and intending to initiate a political movement, who are nowhere in respect to such ethics and morality, they, too, themselves are infested with the germs and deadly virus of extreme amorality.

That is why way back in 1966 when the Leftists were not yet saddled in governmental power in West Bengal, I had made an observation in this very University Institute Hall. The leaders of other left parties had taken umbrage at it. I was saying that the left parties were delivering speeches on the corruption of the Congress and rightly so. As such I had nothing to say about it. Because, after assuming power the character of the Congress leadership became like that. Since the Congress has been trying to establish and consolidate capitalism, this is the inevitable outcome in the present era. There is nothing surprising in it. During the freedom movement, we who were supposed to provide alternative leadership, the working class leadership, the radical forces and others had together either committed a mistake in charting out the right path or indulged in petty squabbles among ourselves at that time or fostered mutual ill-feeling or resorted to armed clashes from sectarian party interest born out of the circle mindedness centring round small pocket-based activities. Because of various such reasons, we could not provide that alternative leadership during the freedom struggle. As a result, we fought, so did the people but the leadership went to the rich people and their political custodian, the Congress. The political representatives of the bourgeoisie emerged as the national leaders in those days. Not that a handful among the Leftists as well did not emerge as leaders. But owing to the newspapers, the propaganda machinery of the foreign rulers, as well as the particular conduct and tactics of the bourgeois leaders, the political representatives of the bourgeoisie caught the imagination of the people as god-like personalities. With absolute faith, the people took them to be very good persons. The people thought: since they are doing so much for the country's freedom they will also do a lot for us. Only a few could realize in those days that they would do nothing, that they were political agents of the capitalist class and would exploit the whole country and, for that matter, usurp the fruits arising out of the immense sacrifice of the people in the freedom struggle

in order to consolidate Indian capitalism. But this realization could not be brought home to the broader sections of the masses. Neither could it be disseminated even among a large section of the intellectuals. In the context of the freedom movement in such a vast country as India, this realization remained confined within a very small circle. So, it was the political representatives of the bourgeoisie who rose to power through the freedom struggle and being in power in the present era, have done what they came for to do within the confines of the bourgeois state structure.

Without correct process, simply by pious wish and honesty, no problem can be solved

Though one thing, I think, needs to be borne in mind in this regard. That is: even among the bourgeois politicians also there were some persons who, no matter what was their political outlook, had a certain base of honesty, foundation of education and culture. If the question of class-conflict or class-struggle is kept aside, then they had a dream of nation- building, of service to the nation, as per their own understanding of nationalism and patriotism. They tried to build the nation in their own way. But that was a fanciful dream of theirs. No doubt, they wanted to build the nation but they did not consider it necessary to judge which was the correct path to do that. They thought that since they intended to bring about the welfare of the nation, they would be able to do so by any idea or plan that came out of their contemplation. But they failed to understand that it can never be so. It does not depend only on the mere intention of someone. Science does not approve it to be the way to achieve anything. Science states that every event that takes place is law-governed, every action is determined by the law of causality. This law-governance is not only operative in the realm of natural science. The truth arrived at today by integrating the theories accumulating from all branches of science indicate that it is the law operative in every sphere including a subject or incident about which one knows nothing. If something is unknown, then it is incumbent on one to get to know the same. Hence if anyone thinks something to be correct or just with respect to a plan, programme, mental make-up, politics or ideology and thinks that since he wants to achieve it on that basis, why shall he not succeed, then he should remember that he cannot achieve it simply because he desires or thinks so. Because I have already said that every phenomenon, every action is law-governed, follows a definite methodology. No one can avoid that law. Remember that to recognize and operate within the bounds of this given law is the mark of our intelligence, consummate knowledge and restraint. As in trying to disregard the law we lose self-control in our day-to-day life, so also we fall victim to utopia in the field of knowledge.

So the utopians among the bourgeois politicians who in their own way might have thought of welfare of the common people, individually even those whose heart truly ached for the people, in reality also served the interest of the bourgeoisie because of having failed to follow the correct scientific course. Because their line was wrong. They never wanted to critically examine the fact that the line pursued by them would only build up capitalism. What is more they could not develop the right attitude towards those who tried to make them aware of this truth. They thought that since they were honest, making so much sacrifice, seriously desiring to do good to the people — how could they possibly be accused of subserving capitalism? Did not their mind ache for the people? But they failed to appreciate that all these were less important and immaterial in the perspective of realizing what they longed for. They could not understand that howsoever honest a person might be, he can never achieve what he wants merely by dint of that honesty alone. No doubt the question of honesty and dishonesty is fundamental in doing anything. Because a person bereft of scruple, determination and honesty can do nothing. It is a

primary condition that if anyone intends to do something, he must possess honesty, grit and dream for doing that. He cannot but have all these. But can he accomplish his objective only by having these? No, despite possessing all these, if he treads the wrong path, then his creative faculty may be led astray, destroyed. So for doing anything, it is very important to determine the correct path. Because, as there is a law, a causal relation governing every phenomenon, or in other words as every phenomenon is law-governed, there is also a law operative behind social development. Without grasping this law, if anybody thinks that since he is honest, has the capacity to undertake fast, can court death by starvation, has the strength to sacrifice his life, can renounce everything for the sake of the people, he is in a position to turn back the society as he wishes, take it back to the hermitage age, the age when society was divided into 'four caste' system, or can shape or reshape society through his fanciful formulation, then he should know that if this could be achieved it might be satisfactory to him, but such never happens, there is no way that it can happen. It is simply out of question. Hence, even those among the bourgeois politicians who were honest also failed because they could not determine the correct course and at the cost of their endeavour, capitalism only has been consolidated.

Lefts enmeshed in corruption before assuming power

Be that as it may, this has been the story of the Congress. But let me revert back from where started my discussion. I told the Leftists at that time that they were eloquent about the corruption of the Congress, calling every Congressman corrupt, saying that the Congress was practising corruption, indulging in theft, swindling, deceit, that there was no honest person in the Congress, everyone had become rotten — all these were true. But the Congress had degenerated, got mired in corruption only after being saddled in power. Prior to that, during the freedom movement, they also participated in the struggle, the Congress workers were very much in the struggle. At that time, all of us were within the Congress. These Congress workers, Gandhite workers, had made lots of sacrifices then. At that time they had the mettle to sacrifice. But now after being in power, they are all running after their share in the booty. However, I had asked the Leftists way back in 1966 whether they were looking at themselves in the mirror. Till then, they had not assumed power. But could they detect that before being in the seat of power, corruption had surged into their house like flood waters? Already they were plunged in corruption. Then let them fight against the corruption which, I said, had made its way into their own house. I said, those who were so sunk in corruption before assuming power, what would they do if they came to power? They would invariably bring about total ruination and disaster. They would take the country to doom by waving the red flag. But on hearing me, the leftist leaders got furious. I had said this at that time having observed many incidents — let me not go into all these now. I remarked that the leftist movement has become a haven for the worst self-seekers. They say something but do something else. They have no scruple at all. Even the common norm of "word of honour" that had been evident in bourgeois politics — to that also they attach no value at all. If anybody asks them, "You had said like this earlier, then why are you doing otherwise now?" Unperturbed, they would promptly reply with a smile, "Did we say so? If we said this, so what? This is quite usual." Or immediately they would allude to Marxist theory to say, "Truth is subject to change". Their pet argument runs, what is the meaning on insisting that as because we said like this, we shall have to keep to it, even if necessity of revolution is felt to be otherwise. So you see, their conduct is something like the proverbial *arso proyog* which means whatever is said by a sage is by itself right — and similar to that whatever they say is by itself right. To suit their own convenience, they have no doubt understood this much from Marxism-Leninism or

dialectical materialism that since there is no God, there is no question of sin or reward for virtue, or condemnation to hell in the religious sense, so what is there to fear ! So, to them it is a matter of saying or doing at any given time whatever suits their convenience, in other words, they do not care at all for any principle.

SUCI alone is trying to provide the tune of ethics, morality and culture to political movement

Remember that as against the influence of the debased ethics and morality which has eaten into the very vitals of the left movement, our party, SUCI is trying its very best, and all alone, to build up the left movement on the edifice of a higher ethics and morality. It is true that it will be a mistake to claim what we are not. But we can firmly say that this party, its students' front and other mass organizations alone are trying at least to make everyone understand that simply by slogan shouting, chanting 'there is no rice and pulses', it is possible to incite the people. But unless an ethical and moral base can be built up in society conducive to such movements, rather those who want to build up such a movement, if they lack such an ethical and moral base, the whole movement would become instrumental for having privilege; instead of being a weapon for struggle, it would be reduced to a means to gain such privilege. Although I know that continued endeavour to maintain the base of ethics and morality in the movement for transforming such movements into instruments of struggle, does not automatically ensure that such ethical and moral standard is always being glowingly reflected in the conduct of each and every leader and cadre. This is unreal, this does not happen. So I do not harbour any such utopia. But what is of decisive importance is whether a party is conducting a living, intense, all-out struggle to build up this ethical and moral base in the movement. It is to be observed if a party while initiating a political movement, raising slogan to end exploitation, talking of fighting against oppression – whether it is striving for correctly setting in the process the cultural tune, slogan and content of the movement in order to duly maintain the standard of ethics and morality of the leaders and cadres in the movement and also to maintain the ethical, moral and cultural standard of the people, and whether this struggle of the party is real and genuine. Remember that if it proceeds on the correct line then that very party will one day provide leadership to the revolution. If it correctly conducts this struggle today for developing higher ethical and cultural standard, then even if it suffers from some defects and shortcomings that it is unable to remove notwithstanding all efforts, yet, because its struggle is living and is in pursuance of a correct objective and correct line, it will one day overcome all these difficulties and ultimately emerge as a bulwark of revolution in this country. Only the SUCI is striving to achieve that in this country. It is not merely raising some slogans or organizing political movement but is trying utmost to provide ethical and cultural tuning to the political movements.

Without higher ethics and morality, revolutionary movement cannot be built up

So far, through my discussion I have tried to bring home to you that revolution cannot be accomplished nor can organizational strength of revolution and revolutionary mental make-up be developed by mere slogan shouting and by agitating people simply because they are starving. If that could be, then there was no necessity of all these. I tried to show, whatever was the standard of ethics and morality that prevailed in social life during the freedom movement — how even that has been eroded. And thereafter how the courage, mental strength, ethics, morality of the rank and file of even a party like the CPI(M), claiming itself to be revolutionary, have been destroyed after assumption of power by the Leftists in 1967. As a result, they are now

manufacturing strange theories to justify why they are not capable to launch any movement today. Actually they are failing or proving incapable to build up any movement because either they — whether they admit it or not — believe in a theory that revolutionary characters will develop spontaneously if people are just drawn into the field of struggle simply by alluring them with slogans of movement, or they have not been able to grasp the phenomenon that if cultural degradation engulfs the entire society in a big way and if the revolutionary movement through its revolutionary process does not try to raise and uphold this cultural standard — revolution cannot make any stride at all. It is of utmost importance to develop the mental preparedness for revolution alongside all other preparations for revolution. And this aspect of building mental preparedness is directly linked with ethics, morality and culture. Lenin said that cultural revolution precedes technical revolution. This means before organizing revolution, it is necessary to develop a conducive mentality, ideological and cultural mindset. For that, a painstaking ideological struggle has to be developed encompassing cultural sphere which will set the cultural tune of the political movement. Even if the cultural movement does not grow directly — because it is a matter of discussion conducted in minute detail as to how and when it is to be developed and in how many branches — yet this ideological struggle has to be released. Neglecting this vital task, if anyone starts revolutionary activities simply basing on his wish : ‘I will accomplish revolution’, then one day this avoidance will come to light and he himself will become a victim of that avoidance. As a result, he will lose the valuable qualities of character and the power that he once had for conducting struggles. Among all problems of India, this particular problem concerning ethics and morality, according to me, has at present emerged as the main problem.

I also call upon you to judge this contention of mine from another angle. There have been a lot of struggles, people have made many sacrifices in this country but that has not helped revolutionary movement, movement for emancipation of the people, to move an inch forward. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that given the present condition, the starving masses might explode violently tomorrow, and in their agitation resort to extreme actions for a day or two — in their fury uproot railway tracks and tear apart the telegraph wires — from extreme resentment they may indulge in extreme acts creating an uproar in Calcutta and other cities for a few days, as a result of which there may be massive lathi charge and indiscriminate firing. But remember, that will not bring about revolution. As you know, earlier also I have repeatedly stressed that revolution and bursting out in acts of anger are not one and the same. Revolution is the organized, united, armed uprising of the politically conscious people with the objective of conducting protracted struggle on the edifice of higher ethics and morality, based on correct ideology and correct political line. Revolution is accomplished only if this armed uprising develops with the mental make-up of undertaking protracted battle on the strength of higher ethics and morality and correct ideology and political line. If revolutionary movement is not conducted in this way, it is only a mockery of revolution and not revolution which occurs in the country. Rather it destroys the inherent strength within the masses to bring about revolution, their potentiality, whatever ability to fight is left with them whatever remnants of humanity, or quintessence of a noble human life, is still present in them.

If attempts are made, it is still possible to arouse people on the basis of higher ethics and culture

I believe whatever remnants of ethics and morality are still present in the masses — if that is aroused, they can still fight against injustice. If attempts are made, it is possible to create that

mental disposition which will prevent a man from siding with injustice even if one has tears rolling down for having not been able to provide sustenance to his father. This is how we used to think earlier. Many of us, many people had to face such a situation in the bygone days. The situation had come to such a pass that the only son who knew his old father had no other alternative but to depend on his income and would starve otherwise, might have seen his father starving. Yet the son had not lost his sense of judgement. It was not that he did not have a good relationship with his father. In that event, it could be easy to understand that way. But he had a very good relationship with his father and had a deep bond of affection with his mother. His parents had reared him with all warmth and care despite acute penury and he too had profound respect and love for them from the core of his heart. Still he did not confuse his sense of judgement. Often the appeal came from the father, “If you do not look after me, how can I sustain myself? Shall I die out of starvation in my old age?” Tears rolled down the cheeks of the son but he remained firm in his judgement. Without faltering he could reply with eyes full of tears, “You are not alone. Such is the condition of every parent in the country today. If I succeed in my mission, then no parents in their old age would have to look to their son for subsistence as you have to; or even if the son provides for them in their old age, in that case also this would be free from the humiliation which the hapless parents are compelled to suffer so often today at the hands of the son and daughter-in-law providing for them. Then there will be marked improvement in the relationship between father and son, mother and son. Otherwise, you find in today’s society though the parents have such good relation with the son when he is young, rear him in the best possible way, they find their son failing to give them due respect once he grows up because he gets degraded due to various factors or under the pressure of the wife he brings home after marriage or getting entangled in various complexities. In the house of the son, in the household of the daughter-in-law, the mother almost assumes the status of a maid. She needs to appease her daughter-in-law for bare subsistence. Had there not been this economic dependence of the parents on the son, they could have been spared of this humiliation at the hands of the daughter-in-law and son. That is why I am fighting for establishment of a society where aged parents would not have to depend on anybody, no parent would die out of starvation. Why do you dissuade me? If I were thinking only of myself and kept you starving, or after marriage, if I moved to a much better and comfortable house with my wife and children leaving you in the lurch, then you could say so. Tell me, am I doing a wrong thing? On the other hand, why don’t you look at it in this way – what if I were dead? No one can prevent a typhoid-caused death in this country. Similarly, no one can save a person from dying on account of snake bite or cholera². Then if I, your only son would have succumbed to death, who would have looked after you?” In this way the youth then reasoned in the family. And after such reasoning, because of joining the freedom struggle, they might not have been able to provide sustenance to their parents. But in their wildest of dreams also, they could never think of showing any disrespect to their parents. They never did that. They had never shown any disrespect to their parents though they could not provide for them. But today, the wife of the very son who may be providing for his parents might insult the mother. The father might be compelled to suffer humiliation for the food he eats. The youth that day fought to stave off such a situation.

Develop the concept of ethics and morality conducive to today’s movement

Was not this moral strength prevalent in the society then? Otherwise, how could the sons so easily find the answer? Who gave them the cue? Though it is not that the children do not come out with replies also nowadays but they argue in the reverse way. As we find that in the case of

CPI(M) leaders who in the absence of this moral strength are found to be arguing that they cannot launch the movement because the police is backing the opponents and might come down heavily on them in case of a movement, so there can be no movement now. How easily, you see, is coming the CPI(M)'s rationalization. Could not this argument have come from them instead that the police is bound to come down on them and it is the police against whom the battle has to be fought ultimately — if we cannot face that battle, then how are we claiming to have real manhood? How are we thinking of ourselves as true human beings? Some consciousness should dawn on one first, only then comes the question of being a revolutionary, then comes the question of being a Marxist-Leninist! Otherwise we are not worth of being called man. Whereas you see, they cannot even protest against injustice for fear of having to endure torture and oppression — again, you see, they happen to be the self-styled commanders of the people, leaders of political movements, Marxist-Leninists and revolutionaries. On the other hand, it will be seen on careful observation that they are sometimes passing off this reason for not launching any movement as a tactics. I ask them, does tactical retreat mean cowardice? During a battle, there may be a necessity for tactical retreat but that is not out of cowardice. But what they are doing is pure and simple a cowardly act.

Remember, nothing is achieved by cowardice. If there is physical assault during the movement, let it be. Have not the fascists tried to annihilate the forces of revolution by indiscriminate, brutal use of force? Could they succeed in doing so? If the students and youth cannot think like this, do not get accustomed to thinking like this, and if those joining the struggle cannot acquire a definite ethical, moral and cultural tuning within themselves and disseminate it in the country, then how would genuine movement develop?

So, those who genuinely desire to build up movement will definitely have to try to develop a conducive ethical and moral standard in the country. At the same time you will have to bear it in mind that the concept of this ethics and morality is in no way similar to the concept of ethics and morality which were prevalent in the past. The concept of this ethics and morality must conduce to the movement we are trying to develop today, must be in consonance with it, supplementary and complementary to each other. That can never become opportunistic. At the same time we do require ethical and moral concept that is conducive to movement because, no real, meaningful movement can be developed without an ethical and moral base. So, what is needed is a concept of ethics and morality conducive to movement, a higher ethical and cultural standard. Again remember that the struggles which have grown in this country centering round various demands spawning from the attitude of “we shall simply fight” — this type of struggles will not yield something significant. I do not have that much faith in such struggles. I know many such movements had developed in the past and many more will be built up in the future. It will grow, then fizzle out, grow again and die out. But that through all these movements revolution automatically comes about — this never happens. Revolution does not come about automatically through such movements, nor is it that if the people are starving, they will bring about revolution. I have said earlier that a man, simply because he is starving — he can become a wagon breaker, a thief, a cheat or dacoit or a beggar but not a revolutionary. In order to accomplish revolution, ideology, ethics, morality and correct base political line have to be integrated with the struggles that would develop centering round economic demands, to start with, and in protest against various social injustices.

Capitalist system is the root of all problems

Remember, the movement which is currently going on in Bihar — in regard to that movement the same question is involved. How you will carry out these tasks, on behalf of the DSO, from within that movement is a tactical question. But you will have to carry out these tasks. First of all, where the people are fighting against corruption or for the fulfilment of various demands — you will have to show that it is capitalism which is breeding all these problems. All these problems are inseparably linked with capitalism, the capitalist system. Apart from that, in the process of conducting the movement on various demands, a new demand has been raised there — the demand for dissolution of the Assembly and for holding fresh elections. Do bear in mind that this is also a demand of democratic movement. Because a government is not working for the people, hence there must be a movement to bring down that government. But while fighting for dissolution of the Assembly and removal of a particular government, you yourselves must understand and show to others that these demands are incidental — this is not the main problem. If through elections there is a change of government, a new government is formed, this will not fulfil all the demands of the people. Because, the question of fundamental solution of all their problems is not linked to dissolution or fresh constitution of the Assembly but to smashing capitalism and establishing a new order. For example, during the British rule when an English officer did commit excessive torture, attempts were made, plans chalked out, to forcefully drive him away. From this, many people began to think that the British would quit India if some such officers were forcibly driven away. This gave birth to terrorism. But would there be an end to British rule if a few such officers were shot dead? No, there would not. Because, the main problem then was the British rule, subjugation, or in other words, a system that needed to be smashed. Similarly, today the main problem is capitalism, the capitalist system. So long this capitalist system exists, whoever comes to governmental power, however honest they might be, whatever might be their dreams, their plans — they cannot bring about a fundamental solution of any problem.

For example, once Jawaharlal also had a dream, a planning. It can scarcely be said that he had not. But what could he do? Were there not a few honest persons in the Congress? What could they do? Rather, with the passage of time, they themselves have been isolated or have become egocentric, confused — becoming totally changed they began to utter completely erroneous views as a result of rationalizing fanciful ideas. They have completely forgotten the dream they had one day. Remember that this self-rationalization in a man starts in a very subtle manner and through that a man begins to change unconsciously to become a totally different person one day. He cannot make out at all that, being estranged from the dream with which he once began his journey, he has been transformed into a completely changed person today. So, more important than what somebody aspires for is whether he has been able to correctly diagnose the problem and determine the correct remedial course in order to translate his aspiration into reality. If he fails to do that, then he cannot solve the problem merely by wishing it ; similarly those who have taken to the field of movement today over various demands must also understand the nature of the main problem while conducting the movement for realizing those demands. They must realize that all problems of people's life are related to capitalism today. So we must examine whether those conducting the movement, the leadership of that movement, has any programme of changing the capitalist system. We must see if the leadership has such an ideology. Otherwise, it will not suffice to raise the slogan — unite with the workers-peasants and fight.

Mass movement must be freed from all erroneous ideas and views and be based on correct principles

One more thing you need to keep in mind in this connection. A movement does not become progressive simply if workers and peasants participate in it. As in respect of Bihar movement some people are raising the question that since there is no workers' participation, so it is not at all a progressive movement. Those who have put forth such an argument have confused the basic issue. Even the INTUC brings workers in a movement. Does it become a progressive movement by that? Does not Jana Sangh rally peasants? With the masses unorganized, suffering from so many wants and lacking necessary political consciousness, anybody can draw them into a movement by inciting and organizing them. So the participation of workers and peasants alone does not make a movement progressive and revolutionary. On the other hand, another kind of confusion can be noticed in regard to the Bihar movement. There people have joined the movement en masse. They are struggling on the basis of some legitimate demands. But the leadership is in the hands of reactionaries. Since the reactionaries are in the leadership, a section is saying that this is no movement at all and hence one should stay away from it. My opinion is, those who are saying like this are wrong. Both these understandings are incorrect. The correct understanding is that if people are stirred into a movement over legitimate demands, even centering round an economic demand, then irrespective of who is in the leadership, even if the leadership is in the hands of misguiding forces, reactionaries, the task before the revolutionaries is : first of all, while remaining in the movement with the masses and drawing upon the fervour of the movement, they must try to see how they can change the course and the tuning of the movement and remove the reactionaries from the leadership. But those who seriously want movement and do not just pay it lip service, they cannot stay away from a movement on the pretext that the reactionaries are in it. Secondly, they will join the movement not merely with the objective of just drawing the workers into the movement or raising the demands of the workers from within the movements. Their task will be to strive for adequately developing political consciousness in the struggle that is being waged by workers and peasants over their various demands. In other words, how these struggles are in reality related to the anti-capitalist revolution and how all the problems are inseparably linked to the capitalist system — that must be shown to the peasants and workers from the experience of such movements. And from that perspective, people must be helped to judge precisely who within the movement are the Rightists, moderates, pseudo-revolutionaries, or which one is the sham Marxist-Leninist leadership. These are the essential tasks of the revolutionaries.

DSO workers must cultivate three things simultaneously

Now the question is: who can shoulder this responsibility in India today? Who are that force? This force is the SUCI and among the student organizations it is the DSO. You, the workers of the DSO will have to cultivate three things simultaneously to carry out this task. First of all, you will have to deeply study Marxism-Leninism, not in the ordinary way. You must remember that the grasping of Marxism-Leninism does not mean acquiring an informative knowledge of the general principles enunciated by Marx, Engels or Lenin. You should realize what ought to be the process of concretizing Marxism-Leninism in the particular political situation of India and where Marxism-Leninism needs to be particularly enriched, elaborated and concretized and to what extent. And how and where genuine Marxism-Leninism differs with pseudo-Marxism, sham-Marxism or revisionism; what are the differences between the genuine revolutionaries and pseudo-Marxists over the question of angularity, approach and tactics within

the ambit of a particular movement, a united movement, despite apparent similarity in regard to slogans and programmes — all this you should separately understand and learn. This is the first thing you have to accomplish. You must remember that the aspect of adhering to the ideology and maintaining the revolutionary base political line of a movement also falls in this category. Secondly, you have to be courageous and determined, ready for supreme sacrifice. Thirdly, you have to take the political initiative, and that too before anyone else, and keep this initiative of yours always living. It means, you never lag behind in taking the initiative. For example, if an issue of movement has come up, or if it is found that people would accept an issue if it is brought forth in such a situation, then you must raise the issue among the people so that you can move ahead by organizing people before anyone else can do it — such ought to be your initiative. You do not have to sit idle till somebody calls you, asks you, sends you or provides you with any ready contact. Besides that, what for do you need to be provided with any such contacts? You don't live in isolation and all alone; you have millions of people around you. So why would you need to be provided with ready contacts ? If ready contacts are available, this no doubt facilitates the task. But why should it be that you remain inactive if there is no ready contact available and cannot work because there is no contact?

Correct revolutionary ideology and base political line must be determined on the anvil of correct understanding of Marxism-Leninism

So you have to conduct struggle using three things as your weapon. First of all, you will have to learn and re-learn, educate and re-educate yourself, which is to say, you have to read again and again; learn again and again and you have to know the same thing over and again. Because the more you read and learn, the more developed, profound and deeper will be your realization. A notion is found to prevail among many that once something is read, it is understood and hence there is no need to read it again. That is to say, if one has read something once, what is the necessity of going through it again? This is a wrong notion. Let me relate my own experience. After several readings of the same literature, same works of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao I had a newer grasp, newer realization compared to the understanding I derived initially. I do not say my initial understanding was wrong. But what I grasped after several readings was certainly a higher realization than the earlier one. So the more often you read, the more you improve your understanding. Alongside, you need to understand the ideology of the party, ideology of the DSO, and over and above even when talking of Marxism-Leninism in general, what is its concrete manifestation in the particular condition of India, what is the base political line of revolution. At the same time, you must also realize what is the difference between ourselves and the pseudo-revolutionaries over the questions concerning the base political line. In this connection, it will not suffice if you simply understand the difference with those who say that the revolution in India is a people's democratic revolution. You should also have a clear understanding as to how we are distinctly different from the others who, besides us, also hold that the Indian revolution will be a socialist revolution. Because, it is not that we only talk of anti-capitalist socialist revolution, a few other small parties also say so. Hence, some may think that since the vocabulary remains the same, there is no difference between them and us. Those who think like this must know that this is not the case. It is not that both they and we are referring to the same socialist movement. So the difference we have with them must be understood. On the other hand, it will be erroneous, I say, if someone glosses over this issue by presuming that since these parties are small there is no need to be concerned about them; and there has only to be a struggle against the politics of the CPI(M). Because, we too were once

small. Besides, you must also bear in mind that one understands one's own politics well only when one understands one's opponents' politics very well. These two are interlinked. That is to say, correctly grasping one's own politics means correctly realizing the politics of others. On the other hand, one develops a proper understanding of others' politics only when one has a proper grasp of one's own politics. If one does not understand others' politics well, it proves that there is a gap in the proper understanding of one's own politics. The better someone understands his own politics the more capable and thorough he is in detecting and understanding the lacuna and lapses of others' politics. An inadequate perception of others' politics inevitably leads to wrong and convoluted understanding of one's own politics. Then you see that the first duty incumbent upon you is to determine the correct ideology and base political line of movement and along with that where lies the difference with other parties.

Develop ethical, moral and cultural tune conducive to revolutionary movement

The second task before you while determining the correct ideology and base political line is to evolve the ethical, moral and cultural tuning conducive to developing movement on its basis. As a primary condition for this, you need to have the mental preparedness to give everything, even your life, in your struggle against all odds. It is true that if there is a movement, a clash, there will be a few casualties among the opponents. But your objective should not be that you are in the struggle only to deal a heavy blow to the opponents. Your mentality should be that you have come prepared to die, if need be. It is also not correct if someone thinks that since he has come prepared to die, he will become a big revolutionary simply by embracing death through hotheadedness. That is to say, if anyone guided by such thinking and without taking into consideration all aspects starts telling others, "Why are you fleeing? Come along right now, let us fight and die because our motto is to die", then I say, such an idea is also equally erroneous. I am not asking you to be like that, like a mental patient. Because, sacrificing life in a struggle for revolution does not mean giving away life like a mad, incensed person. But it is true that those of you who have come forward to struggle — if right at the outset your attitude is not one of very firm commitment to embrace death if need be, and you cannot adapt to this mentality calmly, then struggle, revolution will all reduce to some jargons devoid of any meaning. And if you do have such a mentality, you have nothing to fear. Maybe, while engaged in the struggle, you may have to retreat at times due to tactical reasons, you may have to temporarily suspend the struggle. But it is not because you are afraid or have shelved the fight out of fear of death or imprisonment. You have really suspended the fight for some other reasons. There is a different reason for your retreat. But, if necessary, you are ready to embrace death right now — nothing can make you budge an inch. Every cadre must have this mental grit and determination.

Increase individual and collective political initiative

Thirdly, along with this is needed your political initiative. This political initiative should be such that each one of you, according to your own planning, is doing some work or other — you are having mass contact with your own initiative, maintaining contact with the students, or if you cannot do anything else, at least you are maintaining contact with your numerous friends staying in various centres, institutions and hostels, who admire and love you because of your honesty and sweetness of character. Even if you can accomplish this much, remember that from the point of view of developing movement this also is much effective. On the other hand, in this connection you will have to bear in mind another important point. You might have done some work but that exclusively in your own way. Your style of work should not be like that.

“Individual initiative of each one is needed” does not mean that everyone does some work in their individual way and there is no interconnection or centralism among all these individual activities. To sum up, the real meaning of enhancing individual initiative, of further strengthening the democratic process of activities, is to simultaneously strengthen centralism. These are not to counterpose or weaken centralism. Rather it is required to free centralism from mechanical approach and bureaucratic tendency to raise the work efficiency of all party workers and properly utilize all the resources in hand. Its ultimate objective is, on the one hand, to increase the overall strength of the party by increasing the work efficiency of each worker, and, on the other hand, go on strengthening centralism by conducting a ceaseless struggle against bureaucratic tendencies. Remember that it is one of the prime conditions for successful accomplishment of revolution. That is why your slogan should be to improve the style of work, to change the stereotype style of work. It means that you shall have to develop such flexibility as to immediately remould your style of work in accordance with the situation. Simultaneously, you will have to put emphasis on releasing individual initiative and on democratic functioning. And you have to acquire that ability to work together and in a disciplined, organized manner. This is ingrained in the three necessary conditions for revolution as I have just now discussed.

Develop DSO as a pivotal, revolutionary organization

At the end, I would like to tell you that you so many students who belong to the DSO can in the near future create a permanent, pivotal revolutionary force and a base for revolution in this country if each of you, every worker, on the one hand, with your own initiative try to repeatedly grasp the ideology and base political line by remaining firmly committed to these and, on the other hand, not remaining content with whatever ability and intelligence you already have, you go on establishing and increasing contact with the students and people at large and, if there is any possibility whatever of building up movement, take initiative to develop that, either individually or collectively, without caring for anything else. I hope all the workers of the DSO who have turned up here will courageously face the situation. You must remember that in India people have reposed abundant confidence in only one political party, the SUCI, and its mass organizations. With intense eagerness they are watching what you are doing. Their only anxiety is that whether you, being small in size, will be able to succeed. You must accept this challenge. Do bear in mind that we may be small, but whatever strength we command is not so insignificant today in the Indian context, least of all for beginning any work. So you must accept the challenge. If you, the students of the DSO, go back from the meeting with the resolve that you will fulfil what people are expecting of you, that you can achieve something, the others will do nothing, and take a solemn pledge to shoulder the responsibility keeping in view what I have told, then I can definitely say that there will be a radical change of direction in the politics of the country. With this, I conclude my address today.

*Speech on December 30, 1974.
First published as a booklet
in Bengali in November 1984.*

Notes

1. Jyoti Basu, a well-known leader of CPI(M) who was later Chief Minister of West Bengal for a number of years.
2. As the situation stood at that time here.