

On Preserving Unity and Establishing Revolutionary Leadership in Workers' Movement

Economism, opportunism and social democracy in its different trends have made deep inroads in the working class movement in India, wrecking the vital unity of workers in their mass and class struggles against capitalist exploitation and oppression. In this address at the delegates session of a steel workers conference back in 1974, Comrade Shibdas Ghosh discusses some major problems facing trade union movement in this country and how revolutionary workers will develop their organization and advance their struggle, acting with revolutionary purposiveness, ethics and culture.

Comrade President and Friends,

In this delegates session of the workers-employees starting here today, I will deal briefly with the present state of workers' movement in our country, and then discuss what ought to be the basic outlook guiding trade union organization and the method of work in our country, keeping in view what should be your style of work and how you should conduct your political propaganda to help you achieve your task.

Disruption of unity in Indian trade union movement

First of all, the workers' movement of India has a long history. Many large trade unions and workers' associations have since long grown in this country under the leadership of both the rightist or the so-called revolutionary forces. Ebbs and tides being natural in movements — workers' struggle in this country has sometimes made bold strides ahead, sometimes even had to retreat two steps back. But what has come to be the general characteristic feature of the workers' movement after so many battles spanning over such a long period — this has to be noted. Workers' movement effectively began in this country in 1920. Since then innumerable strikes were organized. In every industry — by industry I do not mean a factory — be it in engineering,

steel, port and dock, railway, general textile, jute, sugar-mill or the small-scale industry — with a few exceptions, trade unions were largely in existence and that too for a long time.

It is not that these unions have been there for the name's sake, serving no particular purpose. That the unions exist means that there are struggles, some time or other on various demands, and many such struggles had indeed been conducted. Despite political differences the workers have to build up trade union movements, which fall in the ambit of democratic movement, to fight against the injustice and oppression perpetrated on them and in demand of their legitimate demands. These demands cannot be achieved without struggle in this exploitative system. In this capitalist system the workers have no other means but to develop trade union movement in order to extract anything from the capitalists or the management. Because, if the workers remain unorganized, the owners flout even the rules and regulations framed by themselves — all these are known to you. Yet the very unity of the trade unions, with which we develop democratic mass movements, could not be preserved at an all-India level. Look at the central trade union organizations: they are split into so many divisions. But during the period of freedom movement and till the partition of the country or, in other words, till achievement of political freedom through partition, the AITUC was the only central trade union organization in the whole country. It was because of disruptive outlook and activities that once a rupture in it appeared around 1930. Finally, around 1930-31 a split came about on an all-India level in AITUC. M. N. Roy's group had once set up a separate organization, namely, Federation of Labour. But then it did not have much influence or effectiveness. Then, you see, the AITUC suffered a split around 1930 due to the ideological confusions and the disruption caused by the ultra-leftist political line ; and then veteran leader Ranadive and others thinking alike, formed a new trade union under the name Red Trade Union.

There have been repeated attempts to forge unity among the workers and everyone agrees on the question of unity. And if you ask me, from a political point of view and with regard to effectiveness I strongly feel that whatever may be the political-ideological conflicts, viewed from what ought to be, what could have been a model, there should be one single platform or forum of the workers for conducting democratic battles. And it would have been ideal if everyone strove for that. My point is: let the political parties win over the workers. Let them convince the workers ideologically and draw them over to their sides. However, the workers have to be

ideologically won over — not made to toe one's line by use of force or compelled by coercion to accept one's view. Nor should it be done by engineering 'cliques' within committees or forcibly capturing such committees. My view is, if any political party could win over the workers with its political ideology and could thereby control the trade union through securing majority, it is welcome to do so. My failure to bring working people over in my favour through persuasion does not in any way entitle me to form a new trade union out of a fit of anger. Yet this is how splits have repeatedly occurred and are still occurring. Imposing my views, my majority, my politics or my authority over others is clearly a coercive method. This can never be entertained.

Cause of split in unity

Comrades, this is a serious problem. It is linked inseparably with the character and outlook of those political parties who provide leadership to the working class movement. Yesterday only (in the address to the Open Session), I mentioned that I do not find any reason, any justification for the recurring splits and disruption of unity in the workers' movements. Is there any plausible reason for causing a fissure in the instrument of the workers' day to day struggle, the united platform of democratic movement, the instrument or forum for democratic battle as because there are political and ideological differences? I think there is no earthly reason for it. There is no reason for bringing about division in the democratic platform or forum because of political differences. Even for establishing the leadership of the party, which means revolutionary leadership, this is not indispensable. Nowhere, in any country those who claim this to be indispensable have accomplished revolution. Rather, everywhere they have opposed revolution, fomented factionalism and created confusion among the workers. Those who have accomplished revolution did at all times endeavour utmost to achieve maximum possible unity of people on the united platform of struggle based on a charter of agreed minimum programme. In united democratic movement, it is very easy to arrive at an agreed minimum programme. Even if there are minor differences of opinion among the political parties over the various legitimate demands required to be raised on behalf of the people, such differences do not turn out to be of that fundamental nature. Therefore, that should not pose any problem in forging unity. An agreed common programme, a charter of demands, can be worked out by the parties believing in different ideologies — may be not by all parties but surely the majority. Then why will unity not be achieved? And why shall we not be able to maintain that unity? Is it because the organization

has to be built up under the leadership of the revolutionary party? No, for that it is not required at all to bring about disruption in the unity. On the contrary, unity is a must for that. The more can we keep the workers united, the less will get non-revolutionary or non-working class parties the scope to create confusion among the workers when there is existence of separate platforms.

If workers work together from a common platform they will get the opportunity to judge by comparison the planning process, thoughts and ideas of the leadership of different parties and their methods of guiding the struggle, as well as the conduct, habit, taste, culture and character of the cadres and leaders of these parties. This paves the path for quicker establishment of revolutionary leadership over the workers' organization. So, in order to establish its revolutionary leadership over the workers' organization, no genuine revolutionary party wants to create disruption in a democratic platform of workers' movement or in any forum or union of the workers. We also firmly hold this idea. Many might ask then why is it recurring over and again? To understand that, one must know as to why it is happening. It is happening on account of two reasons, which we have discussed before, no matter whether one admits it or not.

It so happens that a party considering itself to be revolutionary thinks that unless it establishes total control over the leadership of the organization, the leadership of the reactionaries will be established or that no united movement can be built up if they remain within the organization together with them. Either, as a consequence of such narrow outlook, driven by fanaticism, the organization splits up as was the case in 1930. It was the party calling itself the Communist Party of India — now disintegrated into three factions — that caused the split. It disrupted the unity of the AITUC by forming Red Trade Union, a separate outfit under B. T. Ranadive's leadership. Or, a party at one time coming into the leadership of the union, for whatsoever reason, gives no chance to others to express their views, imposes its views over others, forms cliques and coteries and resorts to force ; and through such fascist conduct breaks the unity. That party has not acquired the habit of moving unitedly on the basis of an agreed programme despite differences and maintaining unity while conducting ideological struggle. Once these parties grab power by hook or by crook, or usurp the leadership of the union, they use brute force to suppress others. This, too, reveals non-revolutionary petty-bourgeois outlook.

Revolutionary party tries utmost to preserve unity

If any of them had been a genuine revolutionary party it would have realized that it needs organizational unity most of all. The more is preserved the unity among the workers and the better they are organized unitedly, the more strengthened is their struggle. Simultaneously, the workers are also better poised to judge different parties not merely by what they profess but by observing the character, conduct and style of work of their leaders and cadres. They also get a better opportunity to judge the views and ideologies of these parties as well as their methods and tactics of conducting movements. That is why a revolutionary party never wants to break unity in the democratic movement. It will spare no efforts to preserve unity — whether it succeeds or not. Because, despite its desire, it may not be able to maintain unity in all conditions. Everything does not depend on its wish. If the forces working against unity, the various forces and the environment working against the movement dominate in the balance of power and if that dominant power goes to disrupt rather than build up unity, then unity cannot be maintained in many cases, notwithstanding all-out efforts on the part of the revolutionaries. As is evident in the history of movement, unity got disrupted, it has been disrupted again and again. So, you see, it is because of this outlook of the leading parties in the working class movement that unity could not be preserved, that divisions and distortions have occurred again and again. Such disunity and disruption do not stem from the differences in political ideology.

That disunity and disruption in the working class movement have occurred again and again, that it could not be prevented, is because the genuine revolutionary party which alone realizes the need of preserving unity is still non-existent in the leadership of the workers' or democratic movement in our country with adequate strength and command. It is the revolutionary party alone, and only if it has adequate strength and power, that can keep all other forces united. It is a fact that the party who truly grasps the correct objective process of preserving unity — that revolutionary party has not yet acquired the necessary organizational strength until now, but on the other hand, that party which talks about unity yet in reality is itself a unity-disrupting force, they are having greater strength even today. If they have greater strength, their reasoning is: since I am a revolutionary then if I associate and remain with the non-revolutionaries, I will lose my revolutionary character, my sacred image will be tarnished. As a matter of fact, they are not revolutionaries at all. In the name of revolution, behind revolutionary verbosity, what they

indulge in is truism. That is why I was saying that disruptions came about in the revolutionary movements, in the working class movements because of such parties, because of such trends. So, what ought to be your task?

Whatever I have come to know after studying your documents and what I know myself is that the split which has occurred here, the division that has been created, has also happened for the very same reason. Right from the time we separately set up a union prior to formation of the united trade union, I have been keeping myself informed of the developments in Durgapur. Not that all details are known to me but I am aware of certain things. So, if someone alleges that a particular political outlook, or let me put it straight, the supporters and executives of the SUCI are responsible for breaking unity, I cannot, on the basis of whatever I know, accept that. I cannot accept it because it is not true. If it were true, then certainly it would have been an issue that had to be examined and they would have to be firmly asked why and in the interest of what kind of revolution they have formed a separate union. What will come out of it? No doubt, they know very well that by this the strength of the workers' struggle gets dissipated because of disruption. The workers will be deprived of the opportunity to fight together and easily judge all the parties from the platform of united struggle. Each party having a separate platform, the workers would listen to their respective leaders quite separately and go on applauding them. This does not help to free the workers from confusion. It is impossible to clearly expose the wrong politics of other parties or lay bare their falsehood simply by campaign from outside. Despite being false it works and remains in existence in such a manner that it appears as truth and thus goes on confusing the people for quite a long time. Otherwise, how could the Nazis and a vile fascist leader like Hitler befool the youth? Did Hitler's Nazism reflect truth? Or was it not the worst enemy of mankind, a pernicious philosophy or political theory? Yet not only the unsuspecting youth, even intellectuals were at a time quite befuddled by this. So, is it not that falsehood does score victory, even though temporarily? This is not an unknown thing. Because, it is not that people can at once grasp the truth when it is pointed out to them from outside — it is not that easy. It is extremely difficult to read in between the lines and search out the truth by rejecting the falsehood. So, the opportunity to closely observe and judge one another from a common platform is one of the main benefits of united movement. When we talk of unity, we never mean unity without struggle. Within unity there is relentless ideological struggle, even existence of differences. So when we speak of unity, we speak of struggle as well. Similarly,

when we talk of conducting struggle against each other, we strive to forge unity as well. If we fail to realize this, then the struggle becomes useless, meaningless. You all will have to correctly realize this particular aspect.

High-handedness of pseudo-lefts wrecked united movement

A particular party has not allowed you to open your mouth, express your opinion. Whenever there was dissent or criticism of its leadership, it resorted to politics of muscle power. By that I do not mean that if they find another party gaining at their cost, or their influence declining, they should not confront it politically or that they should do nothing to expose erroneous views of others or that they should do nothing to point out the ridiculous character of it to the workers. Let them do that. Let them win over the workers through ideological, political campaign. No one can oppose that. But in reality the position they are taking is: I will not allow any dissenting voice to speak out — be it by taking recourse to slander campaign or through character assassination or by means of physical assault — I will not allow the opponents to raise their head. If it is because of such attitude of that particular party that unity has been broken and you have been compelled to form a separate union, even then also it will be wrong on your part to limit yourselves to just fighting separately as because unity is disrupted, or to remain confined to their criticism, to just conduct ideological struggle and thereby simply expose them. No doubt, you will have to do all this. But you have to highlight repeatedly before the people the necessity of united movement and the factors that cause rupture in unity. And if at the same time you do not declare repeatedly that if these factors are eliminated then you will not only unite but also protect that unity — then that will be a great mistake. You will surely make the workers aware of the reasons for break up of unity and call upon them to take initiative and remove the obstacles that stand in the way of forging unity. If the party holding leading position in the union has strength and majority support behind it, it will provide the leadership. No question about it. Why should I be angry if I do not possess necessary strength? How is it that I would be extremely angry if I fail to secure votes of the workers? But I must get the opportunity to express my opinion even if mine is a solitary voice — this is one of the preconditions for maintaining unity in the united movement. This is very essential as that solitary force cannot remain under the subjugation of others, for the very reason that it is a solitary, an independent force. Otherwise why should it be there? Or else, it has

to engage itself in factionalism or in cliquishness. That is a completely different thing. All this from the opposite direction would facilitate the process of destroying unity.

It is of course true that revolutionaries have at times to resort to this sort of thing to wreck the enemy camp. But here I am in the workers' movement. Surely, I am not considering it to be the enemy camp. Where I have not succeeded to build up unity, where the task is that of freeing the workers from a union led by the reactionaries — if I am compelled to work within such a union, then only the question of undertaking factional activities arises. But when I am engaged in developing a united organized movement of the workers, how can the question of factional activity arise, no matter whether I get any chance to place my views or not? There is no connection whatsoever between unity and factional work. And that being the case, why should I not have the scope and the conducive condition to work here? Even if I am a lone man, I must have the right to speak. If I lack strength, if the workers do not support me even after listening to my views and prefer instead to choose someone else, then he will provide the leadership. Under this very leadership, I shall support the common agreed programme. But at the same time, I shall point out where lies my opposition, where my difficulties and where lies my difference. I must have this right to speak out. If this mindset prevails, then I at least do not see any reason for the parties claiming to be leftists, Marxist-Leninists, of having to form separate trade unions or forums in the arena of working class movement as well as democratic movement. Rather, it is harmful. So, even if you are compelled to build up separate trade union, you will have to highlight these aspects for the need of unity, raise this slogan of unity. It is not a tactics, not a manoeuvre, nor a mere propaganda to deceive the workers — you really mean it. Unless you are able to win over the workers by finally convincing them, your progress will be retarded. You might show growth in terms of new recruitment of workers, might advance in the sphere of ideology. But from the point of view of advancement of organized and united working class movement, from the point of view of establishing of what you understand as revolutionary leadership over it, you will be requiring a prolonged period. You will face many more hurdles before accomplishing this.

Revolutionaries can work with anybody

Hence, in the united movement, we observe two main ingredients that work against unity: one is coercion and the other sectarian attitude. Apart from this, I want to discuss another aspect; the over-sensitiveness of some of the revolutionaries who fear that if they have any association or work together with the non-revolutionaries, they would lose their revolutionary character. Marxists, more particularly Comrade Lenin had sounded a note of caution time and again against this tendency. He once said that those who cannot work together with their enemies, with foes and non-revolutionaries if need be, having failed to recognize the need of revolution, the necessity of unity that has arisen in the course of revolution, are in fact haunted by their own shadow. They are frightened having seen their own spectre within themselves. Actually they lack firmness of character. They are no revolutionaries. They must know how to work with all, even with difficult people. Revolutionaries must have the ability and strong base of character to work with anyone. But the wish or capability to work with anyone does not mean *ipso facto* that working with anybody will be possible. The question of working with one and all depends on many a factor. These constitute the main reason why splits occurred time and again in the unity of the trade union movement in India.

Some people say that since class struggle intensified after independence, different political parties have formed different trade unions. But what has intensification of class struggle got to do with formation of separate trade unions by different parties? Rather, with the accentuation of class struggle, the intensity of the united movement and struggle of the different parties ought to have further intensified, assumed higher form today compared to what it was during the freedom movement. The ideological struggle among the various parties ought to have intensified. But that is not what has happened. Rather there appeared cracks in the platform of common action. And such had been the fallout owing to two factors: sectarian outlook and coercion — that is, the attitude of not allowing others to function, to work.

Danger of the bootlicker becoming a leader

I would speak of democratic norms in conducting the affairs of the organization, but would wield majority strength to bully the minority section in the committee and force others to fall in line and accept my politics. And then if someone, reflecting slavish mentality, blindly accepts

my dictates, I would not mind making him a leader. Many are found to be indulging in these type of acts. We may be citing Rabindranath and many other great men, but those of us who claim ourselves to be Marxist-Leninists do not abide by even the values of the humanists. You must remember that those who like and give indulgence to sycophants are themselves vile in nature. No man of worth knowingly becomes a victim of debased mentality, nor does he tolerate flattery and sycophancy. Even if someone indulges in flattery he does not make him a leader nor does he work towards creating any illusion about them among the masses. Because you see the word 'leader' has a distinct meaning. A leader is a model. Actually, a leader is such a person through whom gets reflected the culture, ethics and ideology conducive to social revolution before the people. Naturally, someone who tries to come into prominence through flattery — one cannot give him indulgence and make him a leader. Can it be done even as a tactics ? If one does it what a great harm one causes by that. One would project a bootlicker, a sycophant as the model of a leader — someone who does not hesitate to flatter anyone to fulfil his personal ambition. Yet many so-called Marxist leaders are doing this on and off. I do not want to name anybody here. They are not doing this for the sake of any revolution. Just because the sycophants flatter them, they provide a platform. They never consider even once to what a low level the political consciousness, outlook, culture and ideology will sink if such sycophants become leaders.

Mere slogan raising has not brought about revolution in any country. Revolution essentially requires a healthy and consistent moral base amongst the people. People who are mere slogan mongers who feel brave in gangs but cower when alone, flee like cowards if challenged by strong opponents but whenever they wield the stick they do not consider other people as human beings and assault them — can revolution be brought about by such people? That vile, sanguinary maniacal tendency — that is surely an anti-revolutionary phenomenon. This in turn fosters growth of a fascist mentality in the society. In the name of Marxism-Leninism such confusing and confounding conduct and activities are going on in the workers' and democratic movements today. A relentless struggle needs to be waged not only against such vices outside but also within the party. Struggle must be conducted against anything that is filthy, that prevents man from attaining higher, nobler character.

What is the inherent necessity of one becoming a leader? You can easily realize that a leader in the realm of thought truly constitutes an essential ingredient to imbue and inspire the people. So, in your movement, the larger is the number of leaders you are able to create, the faster will be the pace of your progress. But it is often found that one who has been made a leader, in no time falls victim to vices, popular gestures and various kinds of individualistic tendencies. You will have to go into the root cause of all these. Populism means to behave in such a way so as to gain cheap popularity. Seekers of populism direct all their acts, behaviour, day-to-day conduct, mannerism and stunts to elicit ready praise from the people. What do they achieve by this? Just as they harm themselves, so also they do just the opposite of what of a leader needs to do in the movement. That is to say, even if the people coming in contact with such a leader feel attracted towards him, that is due to their low level of judgement. Generally, people become victim of petty mentality and lower standard of culture that prevail in the society. So, subtly they sense a similarity in the standard reflected by such leaders in day-to-day conduct and behaviour. This draws the people nearer to such band of leaders. Obviously, this fosters looseness and a lackadaisical attitude amongst the people. Their eulogy of the leaders also reflects a bad taste. As a result, the standard of political consciousness of the people, far from being lifted, sinks further through the contact with such leaders.

Hence, we need leaders, but only such kind of leaders who behave like true leaders, have sense of responsibility, can control themselves in any trying circumstances and provide guidance to others. They teach others by their own conduct that even in a difficult or embarrassing situation, one cannot shirk one's responsibility. A true leader does not fight shy of his responsibility citing difficulties or problems as is done by an ordinary man. He must know that he is not an ordinary man. He knows how to handle, how to confront problems. Therefore the word leader does not signify a name only, it means ability to provide leadership. A relentless struggle has to be conducted to acquire such leadership qualities. Each and every true leader must continue this struggle throughout his life. The fact that such qualities cannot be acquired without struggle eludes many.

Class-struggle in the realm of thought

The ceaseless class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the present society is constantly influencing our realm of thought, ethics and culture. This class struggle is not confined to the economic sphere or the arena of movement of the workers against the owners only. It is equally present in the spiritual world or mental domain. Whether you like it or not, it is firmly entrenched in your mind. One aspect of it is of the owners, the capitalists. The other aspect relates to the workers. Consequently it sometimes makes you tilt towards the capitalists, and some other time draws you in favour of the workers. This is the objective existence of class struggle in our society. The prevailing thoughts and concepts of the bourgeois society do impact your mind in the natural course. No leader or cadre can keep himself altogether out of bounds of this social environment. And because that is not possible a leader, no matter how high a stature he may enjoy, must remain ever conscious and introspect whether the thoughts, ideas and attitudes that take shape in his mind at every moment, his behaviour and style of functioning are compatible or not with the revolutionary objective and aspiration of the people.

Revolutionary concept of honour and disgrace

In spite of all such precautions, non-revolutionary bourgeois thoughts and ideas might sneak into your mind, but heaven does not fall if this happens. The moot point is whether you can detect that in time and whether you are able to rectify it accordingly. This is the real issue. If you can yourself detect infiltration of non-revolutionary thoughts in you, that becomes the biggest guarantee. On detection, you might cry shame on yourself and adopt necessary remedial steps. As because to a revolutionary fear of outward public shame does not appear that important. What is important is whether he himself feels shame from within. To a revolutionary, this ought to be the real and prime lesson. If it so happens that when others puff him up, he feels great, but if others cast aspersion, he is stricken with shame — then of course a revolutionary cannot make a single stride. Because in a hostile environment, common men, being misled by others, may indulge in vicious slander against a revolutionary. Does this undermine a revolutionary? People may even shoot him, beat him to death on the street. The same people for whom he is steeled in resolve to give up everything may kill him. Does this in any way humiliate or dishonour a revolutionary? No. A revolutionary is not disgraced if the police drag him to the police station

and beat him up in the lock-up. Again he is not honoured either if the police address him as ‘Sir’. Those revolutionaries are wrong who consider these to be determinants of honour and disgrace. Perhaps they are not aware that in it are hidden bourgeois individualism and ego of bourgeois society which in different forms are out to lead us astray. We did not aspire to become professor, engineer nor had we been after money and fame —we longed to become revolutionaries. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that we wanted to become revolutionaries, we feel a tinge of pride at being addressed as ‘‘Sir’’ and lose face if beaten in the lock-up. This is no revolutionary concept of honour and dishonour at all. To a revolutionary sense of honour and dishonour by its very nature lies within himself, otherwise if people prop him up he will go up and if the props are removed he will come crashing down and break his limbs.

No revolutionary can afford to harbour such an attitude. Our workers must have this realization instilled in them. If this is done they will be inspired to build up unity amidst adversity and hostile surroundings. So the struggle to build up the self as a revolutionary, as a communist is a difficult and complex struggle. Just to cite one example. The common knowledge is that in order to establish socialism the people and the working class will have to be freed from economism and made politically conscious ; and having made them politically conscious and developed people’s own political power in the form of highly powerful people’s committees, the capitalist state will have to be smashed through revolutionary upsurge. But it may so happen that a revolutionary worker with knowledge of all these facts, on losing his job, starts talking nonsense, muddles up revolution, party, union, everything. In other words, so long as he had a job to support himself and his family, he was for revolution. It never occurred to him that for the need of revolution and the party he might have to quit his job. It did not strike him that even if he loses his job for organizing workers’ movement, yet still he would go on working for trade union and live according to the workers’ capacity to provide for him. Many people know many things — but they are not fully conscious that even if one is an engineer, one might have to join a factory as an ordinary porter or a temporary worker to keep contact with the workers and mingle with them. But what do we find here ? If an engineer cadre is asked to find a job from the necessity of building workers’ organization, he would either search for a post befitting to his professional qualification or come back and express his helplessness in getting a suitable job. It means he is a victim of white collar employee mental complex. His state of mind is that as an educated person how can he opt for manual labour. So he would accept an offer befitting to his

professional degree, implying thereby that he will work for revolution, no doubt, but will need alongside a job to his liking. If the job is not to his liking he cannot undertake responsibilities needed for revolution. Wherefrom are these thoughts, line of argument, concepts and attitude coming to him? In spite of knowing so many things about revolution these thoughts are working in him. This is because he has in him no less attraction for those obsolete ideas and thinking ingrained in the life-style of the individual in bourgeois society centring round individual only. This is how in the life of every individual class-struggle is having its impact in the mental realm. A revolutionary worker must remain ever vigilant about it and conduct conscious continuous struggle to build up his life as a revolutionary.

Grasp of revolution draws one closer to people

Another trend is visible among many in the initial phase of their struggle to become revolutionaries. For example, one of my elders was telling me on the way about a young man who worked in the steel plant. He used to be very sociable, very apt in intimately associating himself with people in a cordial manner, take much initiative in every social activity from helping someone in distress to organizing festivals. He was liked by all, loved by all, he was leader to all. But he lacked political orientation. After he got a first-hand understanding of revolution and revolutionary politics, it was found that he stopped associating with people and participating in the local activities. So, he no more commands a following like before. But it was expected that after being imbued with revolutionary political thoughts, he would be able to provide a more mature leadership and the people would have stronger affinity for him. Then why is the opposite happening? It is happening for two reasons. When he first undertook the struggle to become a revolutionary, he, owing to lack of experience and appropriate political awareness began to neglect to some extent, may not be consciously, the people with whom he had had a bond of affection. He started thinking that the people with whom he had been so close and whose company he had so much enjoyed all these days, are bad, talking all intolerable things. As a result, those who used to come to him so often can intuitively feel that he is no more their man. And so, out of some apprehension as well as misunderstanding, they began to distance themselves from him. Secondly, because he lacked experience, he immediately on getting acquainted with revolutionary thoughts and ideas, began to lecture them, grabbing any and every opportunity. Who likes to listen to a friend giving tall lectures like a teacher? So, being fed up,

they run for cover whenever he approaches. Previously they would have relished listening to him as many times as they could. But now as soon as they catch sight of him, they evade him for fear of being lectured. What do these indicate? These indicate that his grasping of revolution has been poor. Otherwise, he would have understood that it is of utmost importance to stay with these oppressed and apparently bad people — just what the missionaries used to do in the past.

And while closely mixing with them, I have to do it in such a way that even if they want to get rid of me, I would not let them. I cannot forsake my revolutionary existence, my revolutionary being. That is, I will be their friend, but not a flippant crony, nor a preacher. I will remain a revolutionary and at the same time their friend too. If the appropriate style of doing all these simultaneously can be acquired I have no problem to remain with any kind of people. But in many cases just the opposite happens. Either one becomes their flippant crony and cannot bring about any change in them, one cannot even impress anything in them, rather whatever one had grasped of revolution, begins to fade. Or, one becomes a fearful object to one's old mates. If we examine these deeply, make a psychogenesis, we will find that all these are prejudices or confusions created by thinking, ideas and attitudes acquired from bourgeois society, which proves that one had not properly grasped revolution.

Importance of individual initiative

The task of every worker is to take individual initiative and constantly increase mass connection. By individual initiative I mean that I will of course discharge my duty when the organization entrusts me with some specific responsibility for carrying out a programme, but even if I am not assigned any particular work to do, I will create my own work. It should not be that I sit idle if I am not assigned any particular work and say: you didn't give me any work to do. Because, a conscious worker not only carries out all the work assigned by the organization, but over and above he creates some work on his own. It is because I, as a conscious revolutionary political worker stay with the people with my particular ethics, morality, culture, political wisdom and my ability to provide leadership that it becomes possible for me to exert my ideological and organizational influence over them. Hence, I also provide guidance to them in overcoming many problems in their life which are brought up and not regarded to be within the purview of the organizational programme. In this respect also I guide and help them, and in the

process I transform them into conscious political workers, not remaining confined to trade union activities only. I work for the union, but I also give serious attention to the personal problems of every individual. Without having to be asked I jump into action — do any work and resolve any problem. I mean that a cadre should have this kind of existence when I talk of individual initiative. Yet what we often find is a diagonally opposite mentality. Many think: you see, I am a leader, they haven't informed me — so why should I go? They argue: did you inform me? What a strange thinking! If they didn't inform me, that is surely wrong but by failing to discharge my responsibility to the people, I did commit a further wrong. What right do I have as a conscious worker to shirk my responsibility towards the people — a responsibility that is constant and continuous — by pointing to others' mistakes or defects in their planning. As because I am conscious, I know and understand the programme and principle of the party and the union, so whether I am asked or not, it matters little, I cannot but discharge my duties to the people, cannot but help them. If the executives do not call me, if they avoid and slight me, if they do not assign a task to me, they commit a wrong, no doubt; but can the object of finding out others' faults ever mean rationalizing one's own failure or hide one's own defects? Or is it not that I point out their mistakes because I want to help them learn not to repeat these in future? Else, on the plea of pointing out a wrong act on someone's part, I do not have any right to commit another wrong act, while pointing to their mistake. Why would I not discharge my obligation towards the people? You see, things like these also happen.

Revolutionaries are purposive in their discussion

Another defect frequently observed among the comrades is that we go on discussing for two hours what should not take more than ten minutes to be disposed of. Once we have started a discussion we do not want to stop. What is found is that while in a discussion meant for chalking out appropriate plan and action, we indulge in useless and irrelevant talks. We go on dragging issues and in this way instead of disposing of matters clearly and quickly we quite unnecessarily prolong our discussion. As a result what happens? The time that we could have gainfully used for some work we waste by getting ourselves embroiled in meaningless exchange of words centring round trifles and creating bitterness among ourselves and blaming one another. This also erodes our ability to take initiative for building up organization to a certain extent. Therefore we must acquire the ability of working with a collective spirit. Our motto shall be: constant common

discussion and association, constant common activity which means to undertake work on the basis of individual initiative and at the same time to learn how to work collectively. This again means that as I can easily work together with my juniors, so do I with my senior comrades and maintain unity. Both I do with ease. These are to be learnt. That is why revolutionary training is necessary, for which training camps and cadre camps are being organized. Even after formal education, even after acquiring a college degree, or Master's degree, workers need to undergo theoretical training, cadre training, because these things cannot be learnt in schools and colleges. These have to be learnt through intense practice. How to work together, collectively, without bitterness has to be learnt. If anyone wants to precipitate a confrontation with me, why should I let it happen? Why should I get trapped? I must know and learn how to bypass it. Many may want to avoid me, or slip out of reach. But even if someone wants to do so, my task is to draw him close in this way or that, and involve him in some work, in a programme of struggle. When someone acquires these qualities — that is what is meant by organizational ability. But often we find that just the opposite happens.

We waste time in discussing accusations and counter accusations, like: "He said this to me, so how can I work with him? Can anybody work under such a condition?" Neglecting party work, we waste valuable time in discussing who is right and who is wrong. Thus, we impair our ability and do nothing to help the other also. This, however, does not mean that we should not discuss things at all. Without discussion we cannot advance even a single step. Constant common activity, constant common discussion — this is what our slogan should be. But these discussions should be impersonal, objective and purposive.

If these discussions are not brief and precise and if these do not help in doing the work better, cementing unity and bringing about better mutual understanding, when it simply drags on it means neither I, nor the comrades with whom I am talking, none of us is capable enough to guide the discussion in the right direction. Whenever discussion drags on unnecessarily we must understand that the discussion is taking a wrong turn. In such a case using common sense we should immediately stop the discussion and propose: come, let's have a cup of tea, and then go and do some work. Let's postpone the discussion. Let it remain pending for the time being. Heaven will not fall, if we do so. Because, you see the discussion has been dragging on anyway. What only drags on but doesn't get resolved is something which can be dispensed with. Come,

let's do some work or go somewhere! Everyone should acquire this kind of common sense and presence of mind, the ability to understand what turn one's discussion is taking. Only then can we lead people's movement.

Revolutionaries keep mind open, ready to learn

Or else, such things would spoil the comradely relation and mutual understanding between friends and animosity would arise centring round mutual criticism. If there is a difference of opinion and I point out your mistake, you feel unhappy. But why should you feel unhappy if your mistake is pointed out for your own benefit? If it were not pointed out, what would have happened? Your false sense of prestige would have been left intact. But you would slide down further in the process of repeating this mistake. But how could it be that you feel happy if great harm is caused to you by not pointing out your mistake? What is the meaning of it? It means you do not know yourself. You don't even know what is good for you, not to speak of revolution and the interest of the organization. That is why Marxism has emphasized a very important point: a critic is a teacher. Marxism says: learn from the enemy even and also from a layman. Can a layman express something as well as you can, or understand as much? Then, why do the great thinkers say this? It is because sometimes a layman can say such startling things from which you have much to learn, something which did not occur to you even after having learnt many more things. At that moment the few words from the layman may, if you are alert, bring clarity to many aspects in your thinking. But if you close your eyes and shut your mind, thinking, 'what does he know', then an extremely useful observation from him at that moment that never struck you despite your vast knowledge, will remain unknown to you. This will harm you only.

Keep your eyes and ears open all the time. Have an open mind. If there is anything to learn even if it comes from the enemy — even when faced with death or if the enemy is assaulting you — learn it. In this way, be open and change yourself. Perhaps the critic may criticize me with an ulterior motive. But though he may not have been sincere, I should probe if there is anything in me that I need to rectify. But if his ulterior motive agitates and clouds my mind, even if there is some partial truth in it that will escape my attention. So even if he criticizes me motivatedly, I can fight it out later. This is the correct approach to accept criticism and the critic. That is why a critic is a teacher, too. These are not my own words. Don't think that I, Shibdas Ghosh, have

made all these up myself and am lecturing you like a preacher. Study Marxism thoroughly and deeply. Not just those abridged small booklets that you read. There are some so-called Marxist leaders who are fond of reading these booklets only. That will not do. Study Marxism thoroughly and deeply, grasp it. Try to get to know its ethics, values, philosophy. If you can do that you will find that it is the essence of Marxism I am talking about.

Nothing is nobler than Marxism

If you do not understand Marxism in this way, it will appear as if people are attracted towards this ideology only because they are suffering from the pangs of hunger, poverty or misery. One has become a Marxist simply because one is haunted by hunger — the issue is not like that. In every country it is boundless love and compassion for humanity that have impelled great men and thinkers of this era to embrace Marxism. Many of them hailed even from the exploiting class, from Kulaks, from rich families. So did Mao Zedong, Engels and many others — none of them experienced any want. They became Marxists precisely for the ethics, ideology and values of Marxism, because they could not find anything in the world that was even greater, nobler, loftier. The appeal of Marxism is not such that a man feels attracted to it just because he is starving. We find an American lobby — a group of technocrats-experts, trying to convince the American politicians that the miseries of the people are the real reason for the revolution by the ‘reds’. And revolution can be destroyed if these people can be turned into pet ‘Alsations’. Provide them with a better living standard, affluent living condition, open a few night clubs: and see that there is provision for rotten entertainment; and there you are! So what if they are workers, all talk of revolution will die away. But they fail to see that right within their own country, even after trying to hold the entire people and the youth enthralled in a feverish existence of artificial excitement with the slogan of ‘eat, drink and be merry’ — they have been unable to kill the people’s urge for movement. The situation in the USA is changing. In the USA itself the people are participating in the worldwide protest demonstrations against their own government, are joining hands with people of the whole world against the savagery in Vietnam, against the crime of loot and ravage of mankind.

Correct politics must guide workers' movement

Hence, from what I have been trying to tell you by referring to certain common happenings among you and keeping all these in view, there are two things you have to understand very well and keep in mind in order to expand your organization. One is, the question of building organization cannot be separated from the question of politics. If you contemplate organizational expansion divorced from politics and even make some progress at a particular juncture due to individual initiative, honesty and sacrifice of some individual or several individuals in fighting for people's demand or centring round certain such incidents, you will not be able to sustain it. An apolitical organization cannot last, will not last. So we have to understand the politics of the organization we are building up. And we should understand that this politics has two aspects — one relates to active politics of the party, the other is: even if someone is averse to be engaged in active party politics, he must determine whether the political line is right or wrong. Without this you cannot organize either workers' movement, or workers' organization or workers' revolutionary battle. If you think that these are mere empty words, you will commit a terrible mistake. With such an attitude you cannot create anything, you would only — how should I say — indulge in a kind of self-deception.

You have to tell the workers openly: listen, to be in politics is not so easy, not to speak of revolutionary politics — that is more difficult. Even to be engaged in politics as such is not all that easy. It may be easy to fool around and indulge in worst type of activities in the name of politics, but to be in politics actively throughout life is not such an easy thing. Well, why do you feel so perturbed? It is one thing to be in politics actively, but it is a different thing altogether to attempt and understand whether a particular politics is wrong or right and accordingly determine what political line one should pursue. To determine this, one need not necessarily engage in active politics. Yet unless you identify the correct political line, you cannot guide a battle, or develop a struggle centring round demands relating to the real well-being of the people, or build up an organization worth the name. Any other idea about building up organization is a myth. These two things must be clear to them. You have to tell them: what's there to be so afraid? Why are you so apprehensive about getting involved in politics? Can anyone be forced to work for a party? This is more so with a revolutionary party, the question of forcing one never arises there. So long as you are not convinced, you need not worry, there is no necessity for that at all. But

what you really need is to understand politics. You may strongly disagree; say, no, no, I do not need to understand politics. But, your dislike for politics notwithstanding, if the wrong politics and political thoughts continue to prevail predominantly and go on increasing their influence over the country, then despite your utmost endeavour to stay away from politics, will you be able to save yourselves, your thinking, sense of ethics, culture — your family and even the organization you are so earnestly trying to build up, from being marred by the impact of wrong politics? Every movement is influenced by politics. Nothing is out of bounds of politics, be it food, medicine or anything else. So how can you keep yourself isolated from it? You are a social being. Not to speak of the organization, even the individual's mindset cannot remain free from its impact. You may be unaware of it and think of keeping yourself aloof from it. You may think that you stay by yourself, not in touch with anybody. This means you lack awareness; you do not know how you enter into a relation with society every moment, how the existing political environment influences your mindset, the ideological outlook of your organization and the style of functioning of your organization. What you call style of organization, that is the method or tactics of running the organization also reflects either bourgeois or the proletarian revolutionary concept.

With what outlook a revolutionary fights in bourgeois elections

For example, say, an election has come, we have to take part in this struggle. You are thinking that in this election we are fighting against the Congress — what is there of revolutionary politics in it? Any tactics to defeat the Congress is revolutionary. No. In election the Congress is on one side, the opposition on the other and people are in between.

So long as revolution is not accomplished, whether people want elections or not, like it or not, they get dragged into it, involved in it. Revolution means that people have realized that there is no need for elections, when they are all organized and boycotting elections in an organized manner, not negatively but have positively reached the stage of seizure of power and are saying: “No more election; capture power.” Only at that point does taking part in the election become infructuous, unnecessary. Or else the people do get time and again enmeshed in the election. And in order to stay with the masses, both revolutionaries as well as non-revolutionaries — all have to participate in the election. The genuine revolutionaries too have to do that. Everybody has to

participate in the election. Only those who practise sectarian truism, those who do not really practise revolutionary politics may want to fight shy of it and remain out, otherwise everyone has to participate. But does it mean that all those taking part in the election are having the same outlook? So you have seen outwardly everyone takes part in the election, I do, we the revolutionary Marxist-Leninists do, the social democrats, the genuine forces, the sham elements, the bourgeois parties, the pseudo-socialists — outwardly viewed, it all appears to be the same. And everybody would say that he only is right, the opponent parties are wrong. So, any tactics or move to defeat the opponent party is justified, because I am right. If this is your line of argument, then there remains no difference in terms of outlook between you and the bourgeoisie. As a matter of fact, an in depth analysis will prove your approach to be erroneous.

What is important to note is that the method and tactics of conducting struggle, the principles of organization adopted both by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, their outlook regarding election, as also the tactics for winning or approach towards defeat — these are determined keeping in view the stage of revolutionary movement and the level of people's consciousness in the country. The main objective of the bourgeois parties is to grab maximum number of seats by any means and ride to power. Having captured power, to protect the existing system they undertake some reforms and raise slogans on false pretexts. To take recourse to whatever propaganda helps them to don a progressive cloak, to confuse and befool the people for some time in order to prolong the existing system itself — this is their purpose. Hence, their main objective becomes securing maximum number of seats in the elections by hook or by crook. Apart from this, they also project some political programme and an agenda of immediate tasks. But whatever be their programmes and slogans, the sole objective is to grab maximum number of seats.

On the contrary, when the party of the proletariat participates in the election with the object of revolutionary purposiveness, being compelled by the necessity to remain with the people, it does so on the basis of mass revolutionary political line. It also tries utmost to win seats. But the essence of its objective is never to anyhow grab maximum seats. The revolutionary party's focal point is to educate the people as to how to fight the election on the basis of a mass revolutionary line and in doing so, if we can win maximum seats; all the better. If we cannot, not even a single

seat, so be it. If we can retain ten seats, then be it so. But the central, the focal point can never be to anyhow grab some seats.

What is that mass line and mass style of activity, what is that revolutionary political line, which I will take to the people in the election? I will take this message to the people: since you are taking part in the election, you should do so from the perspective of people's interest, based on revolutionary politics. While doing so you yourselves should guard your own strongholds. Whatever may be the number of seats you get, as many as you can, say, for argument's sake, all — secure them only on the basis of this very line. Solely on the basis of this line — under no circumstances should you muddle up this point. But instead if you raise this bogey 'do anything and everything to defeat the enemy', then you, too, on the pretext of fighting the enemy and by donning revolutionary mask, would be trying to retain the very same method and tactics used by the bourgeoisie to fight election. Of course, you would do all these in the name of revolution. Is this the way to become a revolutionary? Does this advance the revolutionary task? No, in this way no one can become a revolutionary, nor does this advance the revolutionary task. Does this help expose the bourgeois parliamentary politics, as we say, through election? Is it one and the same to speak about something and to put it into practice? Some people merely talk, and others actually practise what they profess. So, the essential task is to politically educate the people to distinguish between those who merely talk and those who actually practise it.

Unity-struggle-unity is the principle of revolutionaries

Likewise, all are talking of united movement; but who are paying only lip service and who are doing whatever necessary for developing unity, whether with success or not that you should bring before the people. Show them that there is a force that talks of unity but in reality works for breaking the unity. You should bring home to the people that unity is necessary for two things: one is to strengthen one's own organization and the other to strengthen the movement. Again unity is necessary in order to convincingly explain and uphold revolutionary politics and free the people from the illusion of pseudo-revolutionary politics. To free society from illusion, a platform of action is necessary, that is why you need unity. But not by discarding principle or giving up struggle. In this unity there must be due recognition of the ideological struggle. Whosoever consider this ideological struggle to be detrimental to unity, ultimately destroy unity

themselves. Ideological questions cannot be ventilated and resolved because of united struggle — this is simply inconceivable. If ideology is compromised on the plea of united struggle, such unity does not last. Such unity can have only one meaning — that of throwing one's ideology to the wind and becoming someone's lackey. So, if you are not ready to accept this position, then you have to bring home to the people that there is struggle in unity. Having done it with a clear understanding about the political outlook, with both individual and collective initiative, you will have to increase your mass contact and in the process develop people's instrument of struggle, and thereby give birth to people's political power. If you can continue this struggle then one day revolution will surely come about, nobody can undo the inexorable law of history. Your dream of revolution will come true one day.

Long live revolution !

*Speech on March 18, 1974.
First published as a booklet
in Bengali on November 7, 1976
by UTUC-LS.*