

# Labour Policy of First UF Government of West Bengal : Its Real Significance

*With the first United Front government of left and democratic parties taking office in West Bengal in 1967 on popular verdict, a question came up in sharp relief: what shall be the guideline for a pro-people government to run the administration in the present setup. At the initiative and insistence of the SUCI, this UF government made the historic declaration on its labour policy that 'police shall not interfere in legitimate democratic mass movements'. Unfortunately, the CPI(M) and some other constituents of the UF, failing to understand the significance of this policy, misused it for sectarian gains, creating serious problems for the United Front. In this address to the open session of the Conference of the West Bengal Engineering Workers' Union held in this background a few months after the installation of the government, Comrade Ghosh explained the revolutionary significance of this pro-working class labour policy which aimed at advancing mass and class struggles towards the goal of final overthrow of capitalism — thereby providing the left democratic forces of the entire world with the basic governing outlook that should guide a genuinely pro-people government, formed in a capitalist setup, which is, to use the governmental power to provide all encouragement and widest scope for the growth and development of people's legitimate movements and never to allow the police to interfere in these movements. Grasping this significance enjoined that the working class realize it had before it now a revolutionary opportunity unfolding, which at once exhorted the working masses to educate themselves with the correct politics and strengthen their class organizations with revolutionary consciousness to step up the struggle to its logical culmination, shedding all impacts of economism, legalism, reformism.*

Comrade President, Brother Engineering Workers and Friends,

I have been invited to say a few words at this annual conference of the West Bengal Engineering Workers' Union today. I will try to briefly explain to you, in the background of the existing socio-economic system, the true significance of the progressive labour policy adopted by the United Front government in West Bengal after it came to power, and also the task before the common people and the working masses, in particular, in this situation.

First of all, conferences were also held previously with similar fanfare, some on even bigger scales and many a resolution was adopted. You greeted the leaders' speeches with applause so often. You responded with emotion, evinced a desire to do something for the organization ; so often and in so many ways you affirmed resolve to build up struggles. For long, in fact, you have been organizing conferences of this type and conducting struggles to realize your demands. You have also demonstrated your capacity for sacrifice and your spirit of struggle many times. But after all this the fact remains that you find yourselves in the same condition basically as before. It

has hardly changed. You were wage-slaves, condemned to groan under the exploitative capitalist system, prior to the formation of the United Front government and you remain the same exploited and oppressed workers even as the United Front is in government with its progressive labour policy and all that. With the United Front government here, is it that the capitalist class has ceased to exist, that exploitation and oppression have disappeared and there is no repression, no retrenchment, no lay-off and job insecurity ? Have things really changed like that with the United Front's accession to governmental power ? Or, is such change really possible ?

Till now you are used to thinking, better say, you have been fed the idea and are still being fed that since adult franchise or the right to vote has been granted in this country, what use is revolution after all. The Congressites, the ruling capitalist class and its henchmen, and also a group of people who are swayed by the fanfare about parliamentary politics, advance the idea, from their heinous motive to mislead you in your judgement, that since people have got the right of voting and by exercising that right they can elect a government of their own choice and the government has power vested in it to enact and amend laws in the public interest and also since the police, military, bureaucracy, etc., that is, the permanent organs of the state, are under governmental control, there is neither the need of a revolutionary ideology nor is there any justification for continuously developing the revolutionary struggles. These capitalist agents are constantly at it to feed you all this. They carry on a propaganda that those who preach the revolutionary struggle despite adult franchise deliberately want to plunge the country in a civil war and want to disrupt the national unity and undermine the unhindered development of the country, they want to create anarchy with borrowed, alien ideology and slogans. They try to impress upon you that it is the people preaching revolutionary struggle who are behind all this.

This is a deliberate lie. You ought to shatter this false propaganda and bring to light the truth which these reactionaries try to conceal behind a smokescreen of verbiage. Now that the United Front government has been installed, the objective situation will show how false and deceitful is their propaganda. Today's new and changed political situation provides the background of the real test of whether this propaganda is true or false.

My point is, as you desired, here is the United Front government. Are the basic problems of your life solved by that ? Or, is it possible for this government, if it so wishes, to solve these basic problems merely by reforming laws ? You ought to realize, it is just not possible. One may ask : Is there then no justification for forming the United Front government in the interest of the workers ? I think, there is. If the United Front government resolutely pursues its declared policy of strengthening democratic mass movements in the sphere of working class struggle against the exploitation and oppression relentlessly perpetrated by the capitalist owners who are under protection of the bourgeois Constitution and laws, then despite the fact that it cannot win you emancipation from exploitation, yet in the interest of conducting the struggle to win emancipation the United Front government does have its significance. I am coming to this point later on.

Let us now review the situation obtaining today even after installation of the United Front government. Workers still do not have security of job, they don't get legitimate wages in return for the wealth they produce and the labour they put in. Parasites are thriving on the wealth they are producing. These parasites wield the power ; they are the influential, the honourable in society. Displeasure voiced by even one individual among them is given wide coverage in the media. But the heart-rending cry of thousands of those who produce this wealth creates no stir in the same media. A single utterance by any of these parasites who lead a luxurious life in rather uncivilized vulgarity, appropriating the wealth produced by the workers, is sufficient to create an

uproar throughout the length and breadth of the country. But no media in the country voice the agony of the millions of the masses, their genuine needs, demands and grievances. It is natural on the part of the capitalist owners and their lackeys to deny attention to the agony and the needs of the workers. But as can be seen, there is no reflection of obligation to the genuine needs of the working masses in the thoughts of the intelligentsia and the vast masses of the middle class, nor is there any importance given to it or any genuine respect for the dignity of labour. These intellectuals read a lot, but all their reading seems to increase the burden of their false ego. Their attitude to the legitimate struggles of the workers against oppression by the capitalist class shows how ignorant they are of the history of loot and plunder and violent oppression leading to emergence of individual ownership and private property.

This mentality, this realization has not yet developed in our country that it is through the toil of these people, millions of toiling people, that wealth has been created, that civilization has been built up — the wealth and civilization we feel proud about — it is the workers and not the capitalists who have created all this. The very production on whose growth, we are used to say, depends the development of the nation, that is in reality produced by the workers. It is not the money of the capitalists which produces wealth ; rather wealth is created by production coming out of the toil of the workers and is amassed in the capitalists' coffers by depriving the workers. Therefore, for the sake of progress and development of the whole society, it is necessary to realize the basic problems of the working masses and feel the wrenching pain of their heart. But as yet there is no instrument, no countrywide organizational machinery to voice the pains and problems of the workers. And because of its absence the capitalist owners raise a hue and cry on and off on most trivial issues. The outlook of these handful of capitalists does in no way correspond to the outlook and attitude of millions of working people ; the two are quite contrary. But the fact is that the voice of these millions is given no importance, whereas the outburst of the handful of capitalist owners is given loud publicity and explanations in their favour are being dished out in the media.

You find all this happening because the social psychology has been created that way. It is being patterned like that. But why ? Because, this present society has been made to subserve the capitalist class, to patronize the capitalist owners. Everything in this society is designed to serve them, it cannot be otherwise. You have either to revolt against every aspect of this society and courageously fight it out, else you have to serve this system in whatever way. Take the instance of those who run the newspapers. Their problem is that unless they serve the capitalists they cannot run their paper business. Because, they will be denied advertisements. So, they have to publicize the capitalists' viewpoints. The employees of the newspapers have to sell themselves out to the owners lest they lost their job. Even those who occupy governmental power through elections realize that they cannot retain their power for long unless they serve the capitalist class. It is for this that the Congress government has so long been serving this capitalist order with the attitude, approach, plans and programmes, ideas and all else you found in them. But while doing it, they claim their service to the ruling capitalist class to be service to the country. They claim the measures they take in the interest of the capitalist class to be measures for the uplift of the country. They claim the abject surrender of the interest of the working class to the interest of the capitalist class to be sacrifice of the workers' interest or individual interest in the greater interest of the country. I say, before anything, this lie must go.

Consider what should be the main object of your struggle in the present situation of the country. Whom shall you fight, why shall you fight and how ? What shall be the guiding ideology and objective of your struggle ? You must be clear about what really needs to be done

so that your basic or fundamental problems can be solved. Does that mean only recourse to movements centring round day-to-day demands ? Of course, this day-to-day movement has to be there, but that should by no means be the main object of your struggle. For the past four decades the working class in India is conducting its struggle for wage increase, reform of laws and extension of rights. You have of course won some rights. I don't say that it has no significance. All this is of much significance no doubt, but its real significance lies elsewhere. That lies in using the rights you have earned to strengthen your day-to-day democratic mass movement and through it to give birth to an invincible revolutionary organization so that one day it becomes possible to establish the working class rule free from exploitation through overthrow of this capitalist order.

If, instead, the main object of your struggle becomes anyhow to get your wages increased, say by two, or four or five rupees, opportunism of a kind is sure to creep into the working class movement. Examine closely and you will notice that opportunism has already largely swamped the revolutionary essence of the working class movement in India. This infiltration of opportunism has fostered an outlook in the workers which prompts them to run after those leaders who can arrange such benefits from the capitalists. But, friends, if you go about this way, no one can remove your misery. Even the Almighty<sup>1</sup> himself cannot. He hasn't the power to remove your misery. The revolutionary political organizational strength of the working class cannot grow in this way and the proletariat can never win emancipation from capitalist exploitation.

You must come out of this course. Miseries can be removed only if you will realize that the fundamental question of your emancipation is inalienably linked with the question of the revolutionary transformation of the present social system of India. This transformation will not come about if you just go about shouting slogans here and there for this and that. To fight for realizing some economic demands and winning and extending some democratic rights without a clearly defined and conscious political objective means only to try to secure some benefits within the very exploitative capitalist social system, keeping it intact. Conducting struggles to amend laws and to realize some economic demands, but without an objective and comprehensive strategy for the ultimate overthrow of the exploitative capitalist order, means it just does not concern you whether capitalist exploitation or wage slavery and this exploitative system based on injustice and exploitation get perpetuated thereby or not. Which is to say, you really don't oppose capitalism and that this exploitative system based on injustice and exploitation doesn't hurt your dignity. Also, you don't really mind being a slave of this capitalist system ; this would not hurt your self-respect. Merely to mitigate somewhat the sufferings due to exploitation and making it a little more bearable is the main object of your struggle. Which in reality means that the capitalist owners remain the owners as before and you too remain the wage-slaves as before — they fully enjoy their right to exploit you. Equally the right of the capitalists to individual ownership is retained and the object of production which is to earn maximum profit also remains as before. If such be the situation, the emancipation of the workers from capitalist exploitation can never be achieved.

Another point should also be clearly understood here. You produce for society. But you are made to believe that you labour to earn your own bread and that the capitalists have set up industries and a production system to provide you with the means of livelihood and the country with prosperity. This is a piece of unadulterated lie. You should realize that your labour in the main is not for providing a means for your individual consumption, although meeting personal needs is a factor behind everyone's labour. Today, the character of your labour has become

social. Your labour is for society and what you produce with it has a social character. It serves society and it is for this that society advances and the country prospers. It means, all your labour is for the welfare of the country. The wage you get to support you in exchange of your labour actually should have been paid by society. But because it is a capitalist society, so it is the capitalist owner and not society who pays you your wage. Inevitably, the capitalist owner pays you that little, short of which you will not survive and be used as a tool for capitalist exploitation and profit appropriation. The capitalist owner is paying you the minimum wage needed to somehow keep your body and soul together and somehow physically fit so that the capitalist owner can make use of you as his instrument to reap profits. He himself is appropriating as profit the remaining part of all the wealth created by your labour. Hence no class conscious worker should expect social justice in this system. What is the capitalist's concept here of the worker's barest needs ? On the question of justice regarding the worker's wage it is argued that the worker be paid a wage which is, 'just and humane', at its minimum. But what is this concept of 'just and humane' in this social system ruled by the capitalist class ? To the capitalist owner 'just and humane' means that amount of wage, that minimum, less than which makes it impossible for the worker to survive physically and move his muscles to operate the machines of the capitalist's factory and ensure profit for him.

In the present situation, where the capitalist owner denies the worker even this minimum, let alone pay him his legitimate due, the worker in order to survive has no option but to organize democratic struggle on the basis of legitimate demands. An uproar has been created now over *gherao*. But it must be understood that *gherao* is just one among different forms of democratic mass movements, one that has emerged in the course of the twists and turns in the present objective condition of the country as one current of mass movement. Tata says : *Gherao* is a law of the jungle. I would say in reply : Your law, under which you, the capitalist owners, are administering the production system better suits an even deeper jungle. Workers resort to *gherao* to secure social justice, not to exploit others. Whereas, the capitalist owners arrogate to themselves the right to trample people and the ideal of humanity, to sap them of their spirit and use the same in their own interest. Queer indeed that they claim it to be civilization and dub *gherao* as jungle law. If *gherao* be dubbed the law of the jungle, then the law which entitles the owner to unfettered right of retrenchment without giving least protection to the right to work is the law of the deepest jungle. It is uncivilized, savage and torturous in character. Before condemning the workers' *gherao* movement, there must be an end to this oppressive situation. The workers do not resort to it out of fascination. They sweat hard day and night, they do it for the whole country and the whole society. But you will not find them, people who advocate action against *gherao*, paying heed to the question of protection of the workers' minimum interest. If proper measures are taken for protection of workers' interest, they will have no need to resort to *gherao*. Until their interest is protected, they will have no option but to fight for and win their right. If the law becomes an impediment before their cause, instead of providing support to it, they will have to uphold the cause of human justice, even if that entails going against the law. If need be they will have to compel the government to reform the law.

This is the outlook with which you should approach the working class movement. What the authority will do from their seat of power is their business. But the attitude of the patriotic and democratic people should be like this. Having realized this, they should develop the correct understanding about the present phase of democratic mass movement.

Workers should realize that it is not in their interest to exclusively depend upon the governmental patronage. If they depend only on the government's patronage for their struggle,

that cannot last long. If the government resorts to repression, the struggle will fizzle out. Right now, the government is not coming down upon them, so the movement is consolidating. But if the government launches onslaught tomorrow, the movement will fall through. For this reason, it should be the major objective of each and every struggle to acquire political consciousness and build a steel-strong organization.

Workers must concern themselves with the root cause of their sufferings and the main political issue of the country. They should realize that even change of government all over the country and reform of laws, or just taking a decision that police shall not intervene in *gheraos* do not concern the workers' fundamental interest. All these will have importance, temporary at that, only when the working class can correctly integrate these struggles into the main struggle of winning emancipation from capitalist exploitation. It was with this objective, and since long before the elections, that the SUCI, the only genuine revolutionary working class party on this soil, has been fighting for keeping legitimate democratic mass movements free from police interference in case a Leftist government came to be installed.

People should also give thought to another point. 'All are equal in the eye of law'— it is there on paper all right, but in reality the law is used in the interest of the owners, the capitalists as an instrument of oppression against the working masses. We, the students of Marxism-Leninism, the revolutionaries, know that in parliamentary democracy in this present capitalist system it sounds indeed very sweet to hear that 'law is equal for all', but that is a blatant lie. In this society law pretends to be equal, in reality it is not equal for all people. It safeguards the interests of the capitalists. In a class-divided society law is obliged to safeguard the interests of the ruling class. Therefore, the assertion that 'law is equal for all' is in reality a bourgeois ploy to hoax people by concealing the class character of law. People who refuse to admit it only try to conceal the class character of the judiciary in the capitalist society, and it is they who carry on the propaganda from their heinous object of confusing the public that the judiciary is the custodian of justice and public conscience. It is also important to keep in mind in this connection that in a class divided society even public conscience cannot be supra-class or independent of class base. Inevitably, it reflects one or another of the class thoughts in society.

Similarly, it is also asserted that the police, too, are neutral. But you all know, if someone who is moneyed goes to a police station, he receives a cordial treatment and his 'weight' begins immediately to tell. Even a false charge lodged by him receives prompt attention. Whereas, common people like you are harassed on every occasion. If you don't have an influential connection to plead for you, or you don't have the money power, nobody will heed what you have to say. The entire system is like that. Common people learn it the hard way from their everyday experience. As I said, if a capitalist owner goes to the police station and lodges a complaint which is false, the police officials get overenthusiastic about that. But if it is a worker who has come to the police station to file a case against an unlawful attack by his employer, the police officers may remand him in the lock-up, charging him with attempt to file a false case against the owner. Such instances are quite frequent in this land.

I wish to point out a thing to our journalists. They discuss 'big' problems of the country when they write articles, but all these problems of the masses do not catch their attention. Every now and then they raise a hue and cry over democracy, democratic movements and such matters. But what is the essence of democracy? Does it mean writing some articles in newspapers, or publishing speeches of the Members of Parliament? No. The real strength of democracy lies in people's consciousness stemming from democratic mass movements and democratically organized unity. So, if democratic movements cannot be safeguarded and if the strength of

becoming democratically organized is not allowed to grow, if avenues cannot be opened up for people to imbibe democratic consciousness, democracy will die anyway. It will die despite the loud cry of the journalists. They will fail to save democracy, even in its bourgeois sense. So, the votaries of the rule of law, who equate democracy with that, should grasp that it is impossible to save even this rule of law by simply writing articles in the newspapers. They must come out with fortitude and stand by all the legitimate democratic mass movements. They do not seem to realize that if powerful democratic movements are not built up then the military can step in one day and disband the elected bodies to seize power, using law and order as a pretext, especially if it receives support from parties like the Jana Sangh and Swatantra. Our journalist friends cannot save parliamentary rule then. It is the collective political consciousness and democratic revolutionary movement of millions of common people that can save the country from such an eventuality. This is the real purpose of the United Front government's declaration on democratic mass movements.

The United Front government's declaration that police shall not interfere in democratic mass movements is meant to provide people with an opportunity to build up this type of organization that is based on collectively developed consciousness and to imbibe the democratic spirit. If they correctly utilize this opportunity, it will be easier to develop the mass movements and mass organizations speedily. Police repression, or the way the police conducted itself as the servitor of the capitalist class interest, stood in the way of achieving it earlier. There was no scope for it, strictly no breathing space, because, it was commonplace that whenever workers in a factory made a move to form their union, a case was filed against them. Those who took the initiative were forthwith retrenched, action having been taken on some secret reports. There was no way to save them. There are no laws in the country to protect them, in fact no kind of remedy. If you report the matter to the police, you are inviting just another trouble. If a worker wanted to lodge a complaint with the police against unjust coercion, the police would tell him, 'So you dare to complain against your master', and instead of recording his complaint they would remand him on any charge whatsoever. Such was the reality. In this situation, in the parliamentary system, what is expected of a progressive government? A progressive government, let us not speak about the Leftists, I mean a government that is just a little progressive, one that is endowed with a little humane attitude and is not altogether blind and at least does not act as an agent of the capitalist class — the first and the foremost duty of such a government should be to protect democratic movements of the people, if they are legitimate and democratic from direct interference by police on the plea of 'law and order'.

But the working class should also correctly grasp the significance of this declaration to protect legitimate democratic mass movements from police interference. What is this significance? Its significance is that you will have to fully concentrate all your efforts for utilizing the opportunity that you have now in organizing the workers and imbue them with consciousness of democratic movements, more particularly anti-capitalism oriented movements. This right is not meant to be misused in any way. In that event, its very purpose would be defeated. Your object will be foiled. If you resort to *gherao* every so often and indiscriminately, its very political objective will be defeated. Hence, in my opinion, the working class has to carry on a two-fold movement. One is to build up a conscious, well-organized, powerful political resistance movement against all reactionary machinations. The other is to exercise utmost restraint while conducting these legitimate democratic mass movements in the present situation. They must not forget even momentarily that the government at the Centre, the capitalist class, a

powerful section of bureaucracy and even some forces within the United Front are in collusion to mount pressure for reversing this declared policy of the government.

This is a United Front coalition government — this truth should be known to you. It is not a single party government, nor is it a Leftist government consisting of Left parties alone. Moreover, this government is conducting itself within the constitutional limitations imposed by the capitalist state. It has, therefore, a lot of obstacles to overcome. You may have many expectations. But if you have only expectations and do not bear in mind the constraints, if you do not consider these and are even unaware of these, you will only harm your cause. How will the harm come about ? On the one hand, from your political inaction in the face of the ongoing conspiracy by the reactionaries to sabotage the United Front government and its progressive policies and, on the other, from your failure to comprehend the real significance of this progressive policy and its main objective, you will look upon the policy of non-interference by police as an opportunity, and you will start an irresponsible and aggressive conduct, giving full play to all your grievances and personal animosity, however trivial, which have accumulated in you over all these years. In the process you will allow yourselves to be used as an instrument to fulfil the petty interests of those political parties who are taking full advantage of this situation from their narrow, sectarian outlook to anyhow expand their organizational base, even though temporarily, either because of failure to understand its political significance or from any other motive. All this will have the result that you will objectively give the capitalist class and other reactionary forces — all the hostile forces — an opportunity to rally together and discredit this United Front government. If you go on just blindly acting like that, handing over to the capitalist owners one opportunity after another for launching attacks, it may in the end lead to a situation when this government will fail to cope with it. Because, it is not such a government that it can do whatever it wishes.

In the beginning I touched upon this question but could not proceed, because I had to pass on to other issues, considering them urgent. Only remember, this government is not very powerful or all-powerful a body. It will be a travesty of truth to say that if there is an election through which is formed a government, that vests in it enough power to change laws at will and solve everything. Take the present case. This government has taken a definite measure. You now see what hurdles it is up to. What a furore has been created by the reactionary clique ! I would sound a note of caution for you. You will see, this is not the end of it. It is just the beginning, just the prelude before the storm. Old hands in politics know — it is nothing, only a few moves of pawns like in the opening game of chess. The knights and bishops are yet to take the field, but they will enter the scene in due course. Whether this government can survive then will depend solely on democratic mass movement, democratic consciousness of the masses and their revolutionary unity and solidarity. But if you, the workers, stay politically inactive and think that the all-powerful government is on the throne and for that you can go on behaving as it pleases you, and you merely raise slogans against the Congress and the conspiracies of the capitalist class but do not pay heed to the political conspiracies around and do not alert the people about these, then one fine morning you will discover that the United Front government has collapsed. You will not be able to resist it. Because, this government has really no power of its own, the real power is vested in the state. The real power is in the hands of those who control the economy, who control the banking system, the factories and all industries. The real power is in the permanent staff of the state, that is, in the state structure, in a word.

The state and the government are two different entities. There are two different names for them, both in English and in Bengali — in any language for that matter, unless a language has



limitations. There are two different names because the entities are different. The state denotes a system, a concept of law and order, a concept of principles, a concept of some fundamental rights, and on this base a structure made of bureaucracy-administration, judiciary, and the military to protect all these. Whereas, the government is, as I like to put it, a caretaker of the state. For instance, consider a loom. It is a machine which works on a specific principle. It cannot have a different working principle. This device has a specific construct which allows the yarn to be woven in a specific way and the woven cloths to come out also in a specific way. Any deviation from this will lead to breakdown, and the device will need repair. As long as the loom is in order, the yarn will be woven in the same specific way, the cloth too will come out in its same specific way and get folded. Similarly, the social system, the state machine is somewhat like this weaving machine with the government as its weaver. Whoever may sit on the weaver's stool, so long as it is a weaving machine the weaver can only weave cloths. What difference is made with change of the weaver ? A weaver who is bad at work, or one who is a shirker will neglect his work, which means he will take longer and weave less. Whereas, a good weaver weaves more in less time, and he weaves fine. Also, you can add the point of personal manners as one factor. But, anyway, change of government is like change of a weaver. Against this, change of the state structure or transformation of the social order can be likened to replacing the weaving machine itself by an altogether different machine. Imagine the loom to be the state machine out of which exploitation flows, and imagine the cloth to be this exploitation. Then it comes to this that all oppression and repression on you are coming from this machine of exploitation. Capitalism or the capitalist state is a machine much like this imagined weaving machine which constantly engenders exploitation, creates unemployment, generates speculation, anarchy, crisis in production, crisis of the market, recession and crisis in the name of advancement of science, etc., and ensures higher and still higher profits for the capitalist class. The social structure comprising appropriate Constitution, jurisprudence, and organs like the police-bureaucracy-administration, judiciary and the military to look after the social system — that is called the state. I compared it with the loom ; in such a case, as I said, the state is the loom and the government is the weaver. I wanted to show you how limited is the power of the weaver. Can the weaver at his pleasure crush sugarcane in his loom ? Similarly, can a government at its pleasure set up socialism in the framework of capitalist economic system and state structure ? Can it win people's liberation ? Can it win them emancipation ? It cannot. Precisely because of this working men and women will have to give birth to appropriate political leadership on the basis of correct revolutionary theory in order to smash this exploitative capitalist state machine with the force of revolutionary upsurge and establish in its place the socialist social system free from exploitation. If they are able to develop a political organization under such a leadership, on the one hand, and, on the other, can develop invincible organizational strength by organizing revolution-oriented movement — then only their dream of revolution will come true one day.

To organize these struggles and to build the revolutionary organization — this is the prime task. It is to this end, to help you speedily develop the movements and the organizations, that this policy has been framed that 'the police shall not interfere in democratic mass movements'. It has not been framed simply to satisfy some individual needs of the workers, nor to fulfill petty and sectarian interest of any political party. If you deviate from this objective and just for the sake of your petty personal interests you misuse this policy declaration having such a revolutionary significance, it becomes tantamount to causing grievous injury to yourselves. Workers should bear this in mind. And you should critically examine every development in this light. What should never be forgotten is that so long as the capitalist class of India remains entitled to freely

carrying on trade, commerce, business and its exploitation and oppression, till then no minister and no government can give the working class its emancipation, no matter how many pro-labour laws it may have enacted or how much right it may have granted to the workers. The working class can win emancipation only by building its own anti-capitalist revolutionary organization and overthrowing the capitalist order.

The significance of the progressive labour policy of the present government will have to be approached from this angle. As long as this government is there and for that matter this labour policy remains in force, during that time the workers will have to be organized fast, they will have to be imbued with necessary political consciousness and their organization will have to be given a massive character within the country — this is the essence of this policy. Remember, this is a golden opportunity. If we fail to get organized by availing of it in the proper way and fail at the same time to equip the people with clearly defined political consciousness, we will fall into disarray when attacks will come on us again. We shall not have the power then to offer powerful organized resistance against those attacks. But with concern I am finding that from failure to grasp this significance of the labour policy just the opposite is being carried out in the name of developing movement, shirking the responsibility to give birth to the political consciousness of the organizations and the masses. Strange indeed ! However, even if others do so, you should take it on as an essential task to explain to the working masses that by no means they should misuse this policy. Nobody must use it in the petty interest of the party or the trade union, nor use it to secure narrow personal interests.

You may recall, even before the United Front came to power, there were many *gherao* movements, some having been even more intense than those at present. But the capitalists did not raise a hue and cry at that time. They started it after the declaration that ‘police shall not interfere in legitimate democratic trade union movements’. Whatever their outcry against *gherao*, their real objective is to undermine this declaration of the government.

So, has this declaration of such great importance, which has shaken the very base of this capitalist regime, been made to serve petty and sectarian interests ? No. It has been made, as I have already told you, with the object of availing of this breathing space to organize the working people in entire West Bengal with revolutionary consciousness, to raise the democratic movements to higher phase, to build up a steel-strong organization as speedily as possible. If at any time a conspiratorial move gets underway to bring this government down, in that event with the powerful organization we can foil it. But consider what is going on. If an attack comes to topple it, say, tomorrow, can people do anything to resist ? At best they will gather at street corners and start throwing brickbats, venting their indignation for a couple of days. Do they have the power to do anything more ? Can the working people, for whom this labour policy has been framed, safeguard their present position if this government topples under attacks from the capitalist class, the central government, organized vested interests, or whoever it be ? Do they really have necessary organizational strength for it ? They don't. Maybe, as I said, for a couple of days they will throw brickbats. But the ruling class is least afraid of brickbats, or crackers for that matter. They wield the organized state power, they are not bothered about brickbats. Rather they invite it, they want brickbats and crackers to be thrown by unorganized people. It gives them a bigger handle. Because, they would simply make a plea of restoring law and order to run ruthlessly the steamroller of oppression and repression. They would seize it as an opportunity to further strengthen their repressive machinery. Moreover, using this act as a pretext, it would be advantageous to draw into the fold of reaction the intermediary masses of common people who

stand between the workers and the capitalists. By that they may succeed in isolating the workers from the vast masses of the common people.

This type of sporadic action, therefore, does not frighten the rulers. But they fear most the politically conscious, strong and disciplined organization which will fight to the last inch. It is a battle different from the sporadic fights in the street by unorganized people. It may begin on a low key, with anything, even with brickbats, but it grows as organized resistance. What begins with brickbats may in the end turn into a decisive trial of strength. The significance of this labour policy is that it exhorts you to build through your day-to-day struggles this type of organization which is imbued with political consciousness. But I don't find our working people at all conscious of this task. Leaving aside the working people, do the trade union leaders, or leaders and cadres of different parties who guide the trade unions, and the political parties themselves who are so loudly hailing this labour policy as progressive and greeting it with applause realize the inner meaning, the significance, the tremendous revolutionary importance of this declaration? I don't think so. Their response confirms that they have not understood its significance by a whit. All they have understood is how to use it to fulfil their petty party or individual interests. But here is an unprecedented opportunity before you, a great opportunity which even the so-called communist government of Kerala could not provide. At no time could anyone think that the police will not be allowed to interfere in legitimate democratic movements of people, that those who are running this government will not allow it so long as they are in the government.

But does it mean that workers, will resort to *gherao* on flimsy grounds as they have been doing — a manager has said something objectionable, so immediately he is *gheraoed*. Day and night *gherao* goes on for the slightest of lapses even. Or, something else is going on as a result of which the main line of struggle of the workers which includes workers' conferences, political classes and disciplined, organized and powerful movements over legitimate demands, meetings, processions, through all of which the significance of this policy can be explained to the workers — the line of struggle is not going in that direction notwithstanding the uninterrupted opportunity. The object of this labour policy is to build legitimate struggles free from adventurism, with no advantage to the capitalist owners to avail of an opportunity to confuse the public and undermine the government's progressive policy on the pretext of protecting the law and order situation and, on the other hand, the object is to fast make the workers aware of the ongoing conspiracy of the capitalists and reactionaries inculcating proper political consciousness in them, and to rally them to get equipped for long-drawn battles, to organize them in committees on a firm footing, and to inspire them to take resolve — we will fight and resist the impending attacks. Now is the unrestricted opportunity before you to do all this — to carry on campaigns, build organizations, conduct trade union activities, rallies, meetings, processions and organize strikes if needed. The advantage is that if you now engage in trade union activities, police will not be allowed to come down upon you. When the situation calls for, you will resort to *gherao* even. When there is no other way to compel the owners to concede your legitimate demands or to protect the main struggle, you have to resort to *gherao*, whether or not it is legal in the eye of the law in force. Even in such cases, workers will get protection — that is the declaration of this government in clear terms. But where adventurism marks the conduct of workers, and if they lack in political wisdom and patience to detect adventurism and misuse it for personal or petty interests, if there is no true effort on their part to grasp the political significance, they may greet this policy declaration with applause but that will do no good. Nobody can save you then, not even the Almighty. Today, you applaud this progressive declaration, maybe tomorrow you will

start decrying it out of resentment. What has always happened in this country, the same would happen again.

I do not like patting at all. I hate buttering up. I am speaking what I consider to be true. If you consider it correct, accept it. If you do not follow or do not agree with it, do not accept it. But what I am saying is the truth. What goes on in this country ? When it pleases you, you applaud. But you don't take the trouble to use your brain. It is admitted that only muscle power does not win. Getting agitated over something doesn't do any good. We need intelligence and brain power. And, this brain is leadership. That is why, workers are to think, study, re-think. They are to cultivate politics day and night during all their work. People who say that workers must not engage in politics and that entry of politics in trade union must be stopped are cheats and swindlers. They are a band of parasites who make pelf and power from trade union works. They love to overlord, and leadership is both a profession and an obsession with them. It is they who spread the lie that politics must not come into trade unions. But in the language of Marx — Marx and Engels, whose portraits are hung by workers and all Red Flag wavers — trade union is a school, a school of politics. He said : What is trade union ? Briefly and without use of terms like 'instrument', 'struggle' and such others — these are all there — he explained that trade union is the school of communism, a massive school of politics for education in communism. Such is the character of trade union. If trade unions are not looked upon as schools of communism and consequently they do not develop as living centres of political studies, then the trade union movement will inevitably degenerate into an instrument in the hands of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes to disrupt and confuse the working class movement. In that case, instead of increasing the revolutionary political consciousness of the working class, trade union movement in its ultimate consequence engenders economism or opportunism in working class movement.

Economism in working class movement, which in a word is called opportunism, is a blessing for the capitalist class and bane for the working class. You should remember, starvation which is often the worker's lot cannot be a justification for recourse to opportunism in any way. The owner loots wealth of society ; so, his opportunism is even worse. But it is wrong to argue that since the worker has to starve so his opportunism is humane and rational. So, the worker must also fight against economism-opportunism in his own class interest.

Workers must have their demands fulfilled in order to survive, and they must fight to realize their demands. But that cannot be the ultimate goal. If they make it the main objective of their struggle and unions are led to this end, then these unions are going to produce opportunist workers. They will not produce conscious and truly patriotic workers imbued with the true revolutionary ideal, who are capable of leading the struggle for emancipation. So, workers' conferences need to be held with this objective in view, workers movements need to be conducted in this manner and trade unions need to be guided in this direction.

But what do we actually find to be the daily routine of the trade union leaders ? Workers come and daily ask the leaders questions like : What about this demand ? What about the other one ? Are we getting this amount or not ? Please arrange to get it for us. And so forth. In brief, they ask the trade union leaders to manage all this for them. In other words, they plead with the leaders to grease the owners. They put it straight like this : You are so big, so influential. We beg you, please manage it with that man in management or power. The leaders manage it exactly that way. Because, the more a leader can butter up and manage this way the more popular a leader he becomes. It goes round among the workers that it is no use approaching a particular leader, because he is not as effective at buttering up the management as some other leader is. A leader with a hearty relation with the management and greater skill to plead with the management is the

one who is more adept at buttering up. So if the workers approach such a leader then chances are greater that demands will be fulfilled. What kind of attitude is this ? Isn't it opportunism ? Does it keep up the workers' ethics ? What does it reflect of dignity of labour ? What's the use then of all these rhetorics, applauses and struggles ? What becomes of that worker who has lost his sense of dignity of labour and so is victim of opportunism ? He has to suffer. Is he really worth the name of man ? My heart is with the worker who has the sense of dignity, has self-respect. Who would rather die than surrender self-respect. Who would fight to win his demands, and who is conscious of his obligations as the worker. But the worker who is a typical agent of the capitalist owner, I have no love and affection for him just because he is a worker. Bear it in mind and this consciousness you all should imbibe.

Only in this way can workers rise above opportunism and petty personal gains, they can grasp the true significance of this declaration of the labour policy. It will help the workers organize struggles over their day-to-day demands. Its deeper significance is that it has brought to the workers one great opportunity to cultivate politics, to imbibe the correct revolutionary political consciousness. So, avail yourselves of this opportunity without delay and take bold strides in this direction. Yes, you have your daily necessities – as there is necessity of responding to the call of nature, going to the market and rushing to the medical shop if the child is ill. That means you have your day-to-day demands and struggles to conduct over them. As there are demands, there are struggles, too. But should it push politics out of trade union movement ? Why should you have apathy towards the fundamental political outlook? Why this apathy and indifference ? I notice one thing very often – drowsiness sets in when the question of politics comes up. Eyes become sleepy when national or international questions are discussed. But workers become instantly alert when discussion turns to the issue of demands – about the different demands and about lobbying for some of them. What do you say : Am I right or wrong ? If you cannot shake off this attitude, you are doomed to remain wage slaves. In future your son will be still worse a sufferer, and his son, that is your grandson, will remain a jobless wretched creature. He will never be free from his shackles. Have you even thought for once what answer you owe to your posterity ? You are the workers, creators of this civilization. This civilization is in the throes of deliverance, it begs of you its deliverance. Not only your own emancipation, on you depends deliverance and emancipation of the entire mankind.

This is your responsibility – the responsibility of the worker. But the tragedy is that even now you the workers are not conscious of it. If this consciousness does not dawn on the workers yet, if the workers fail to be inspired with this consciousness, then everything they do will end in failure. This conference will have no relevance in that case and all its resolutions will carry little sense.

My concluding appeal to you, brother workers : Build up the genuine revolutionary political party, and take part in its activities regularly. Not for once indulge in apathy or indifference here. Study even as you have to do a thousand other works, take part in debates and discussions, be regular in your attendance in the party classes. If anyone shows reluctance about all this, then the problem has to be properly dealt with. Workers must realize that in this present crisis they can save themselves and the country, save the United Front government and its progressive labour policy, but only if they will acquire and get imbued with revolutionary political consciousness and will organize themselves under the genuine revolutionary party to stand granite-strong like the Himalayas. Do not forget even for a moment that the SUCI is the only revolutionary working class party on this soil. You are to protect it like the apple of your eye. Only then can you save yourselves and save this country. Only then nobody will be able to bring this United

Front government down. It will remain, so will its progressive labour policy, and movements will be growing with momentum. As these movements will intensify, a day will come when capitalism can be overthrown and the dream of the workers to establish the working class rule in place of capitalism will come true. And that day is not too far off.

With my revolutionary greetings to the brother engineering workers present at this conference, I conclude my speech here.

**Long Live Revolution !**

*Speech on May 15, 1967.  
First published as a booklet  
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The title has since been changed.*

### **Note**

1. It is a kind of expression in vogue in Bengali which does not mean any real belief in God.