

**The Marxist
Volume: 03, No. 4
October-December, 1985**

Marx And Trade Unions

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WHEN Karl Marx entered on his political activities, the trade unions of the working class had just started coming into existence. Their emergence was an anathema to the capitalist rulers, and they were banned in many countries.

Those who thought of socialism in those days- the utopian socialists, the petty bourgeois socialists and others-did not understand the importance of this form of working class organisation. Some of them were openly opposed to trade unions, considering them to be useless and harmful, while others demanded a ban on strikes for being harmful to social development and interests.

Others still saw in the trade unions and strike the exclusive instrument of social change. But they would not go beyond economic struggle and abjured all politics on principle, as compromise with the existing order. None of these viewpoints understood the link of the trade union struggle with the struggle for the emancipation of the working class and society from capitalist bondage and with the struggle for the capture of political power by the working class.

This was because they did not understand the content of the modern class struggle and the role of the working class as the leading force of the socialist revolution.

For Marx, the working class was the only revolutionary class facing the capitalist class. In the *Communist Manifesto* he said: "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry, the proletariat is its special and essential product."

Every activity of this class was therefore, important for Marx-activity in which the class got consciousness to move forward. The formation of trade unions and the trade union movement were important steps in the formation of a class, a common class-consciousness. The superior organisation- the political party of the working class could not be formed and expanded in isolation from this practical struggle involving the large mass of workers. That is why the statutes of the International Working Men's Association provided for affiliation of trade unions and other organisations of the working class, along with individual membership.

In the conduct of the historic International Working Men's Association, as well as after its dissolution, Marx continued to attach due importance to the trade unions in the revolutionary struggle of the working class and at the same time exposed the leadership which severed this link.

The aim of the International Working Men's Association, in the eyes of Marx, was not only to unite the trade unions for daily struggles and international cooperation. The trade unions, of course, achieved primary importance because they represented the direct class activity of the working class. The real aim was to work for the political unification of the international working class movement in the struggle for social emancipation – political organisation of the working class. It was arrived at by focusing on organisation which, in the words of Engels, "would demonstrate bodily, so to speak, the international character of the socialist movement, both to the workers themselves and to the bourgeois and to the Governments-for the encouragement and strengthening of the proletariat, for striking fears into the hearts of its enemies." (Selected Works, vol. 3, page 82). To achieve this purpose it was necessary to pay close attention to the trade union movement.

Marx had to unite the various manifestations of working class unrest- of which the trade union movement was one- and by continuous struggle teach the others of the vital importance of the trade union movement in the struggle for socialism. It was a prolonged battle waged in the International Working Men's Association.

It was a battle, which was later continued against trade union reformism, which diverted the working class from its final aims. That battle had to be picked up by Lenin and later on carried on by the

Communist International and communist parties. This fight against bourgeois influence in the trade unions has had to be carried on today also in almost all capitalist countries, including the newly liberated countries.

The type of united front that had to be forged out of the different manifestations can be seen from the following from Engels regarding the International Working Men's Association: "Its aim was to weld together into one huge army all the fighting forces of the working class of Europe and America....

The International was bound to have a programme which would not shut the door on the English trade unions, the French, Belgian and Italian and Spanish Proudhonists and the German Lassalleans."

This was a motley crowd of ideologies representing the immature state of the working class movement. Marx and Engels had to work and act tactfully to shepherd the actual movement into revolutionary channels, towards the understanding that they had gained.

In his letter to Bolte, Marx wrote, "The International was founded for the purpose of putting the real organisation of the working class in the place of the socialist and semi-socialist sects."

The real and practical organisation of the working class was taking place in the shape of trade unions, mutual aid societies, cooperatives, educational societies, etc., with the political party yet far off.

Non-Proletarian Trends

The sects about which Marx talks represented non-proletarian, bourgeois or petty-bourgeois socialist trends unconnected with the actual activity of the working class.

French socialism, it is known, constitutes one of the sources of Marxism. Marx made a deep study of the French revolution, beginning with the Great French Revolution, and understood how the class struggle of workers and peasants were reflected in the various socialist systems preached.

An outstanding figure representing the socialist trend was Babeuf during the Great French Revolution. The Babovians aimed at organising a revolt of the poor against the rich; they realised that the root of all evil lay in private property and therefore they fought for economic equality. Their manifesto of equals proclaimed that the "French Revolution was only the forerunner of another greater, more powerful revolution which was bound to be also the last." This programme was a big leap forward, though Babeuf and his followers failed to see the social force that would carry out their programme.

Following the suppression of the "conspiracy of equals" in France, there was depression in the ranks of the masses and socialist ideas began to appear in religious and humanitarian forms. Saints Simon and Fourier came out with plans for reorganising human society. The progressive character of their thinking did not lie so much in the utopian promise of happiness and prosperity as their penetrating criticism and exposure of existing society.

Neither of them thought of revolution. Nor could they see in the working class the force capable of realising their objective. They hoped to reorganise society by peaceful means appealing to the hearts of people, including progressive capitalists.

"The Undeveloped state of the class struggle, as well as their own surrounding causes socialists of this kind of consider themselves far superior to all antagonism? They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favored. Hence they habitually appeal to society at large, without distinction of class; nay, by preference to the ruling class....

"Hence, they reject all political and especially all revolutionary action: they wish to attain their by peaceful means and endeavor, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel." ("Communist Manifesto", Collected Works, Vol. 6, p. 515)

These were the sects divorced from the actual struggle of the working class. Their common feature was their failure to understand the class struggle and the role of the working class in changing the social order.

The Task Marx Undertook

The task before Marx was to fight the limitations of these sects and absorb them in the real, actual movement of the proletariat. For this, patient struggle was required, combined with inflexible loyalty to basic principles.

In the *Communist Manifesto (1848)* Marx had already analysed the process of working class organisation leading to the formation of trade unions and the party of the working class. “The proletariat goes through various stages of development. With its birth begins its struggle with the bourgeoisie.

“...The collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the form of collisions between two classes. Thereupon the workers begin to form (combinations) trade unions against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks into riots.

“Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battle lies in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers...

“This organisation of the proletarians into a class and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier.”

Engels in his *Conditions of the Working Class in England* says the same thing about working strikes. He describes strikes as the expression of the social war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, as the training ground for the fighting proletariat to fight its class battles. The strikes may not lead to decisive results, yet they had an importance of their own.

Both Marx and Engels link the daily struggle, the struggle of the trade unions and strikes with the struggle for class emancipation.

Their contemporaries did not share this view. They looked to emancipation of society outside the class struggle of the working class and, therefore, failed to grasp the true meaning of the contemporary trade union movement.

Deeply studying the contemporary trade union movement, Marx noted that in the course of struggle the battle for the maintenance of the association becomes more important than immediate economic demands. The fight for the right of association becomes a major issue in the intensified struggle between the two classes. The workers, who started their organisation to maintain wages, are now prepared to forgo their wages for weeks and months to defend their organisation. That is why the strikes against victimisation, against attacks on the right of association and non-recognition of unions are the most bitterly fought struggles in all countries.

Marx writes in *Poverty of Philosophy*: "If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, in preparation as the capitalists in their turn have combined with the idea of repression, the combinations at first isolated, constitute themselves in groups, and face always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. This is so true that the English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifices a great part of their wages in favour of the associations which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favour wages." (Collected Works, Vol. 6, 210-11)

Fight Against Proudhonism

In securing proper recognition for the practical movement of the working class, and understanding of the trade union movement, Marx had to fight Proudhon and his followers. Proudhon's views represented the aspirations of small entrepreneurs and sections of the proletariat, which still had some bonds with their petty-bourgeois artisan and peasant origin. His views attracted quite a large following in countries where these sections constituted a sizable part of the working class-France, Belgium, Italy and Spain-and this made Proudhonism an influential trend in petty-bourgeois socialism. The Marxist struggle against Proudhonism started before the 1848 revolution and continued for many decades.

Proudhon rejected both class struggle and revolution. He thought of

changing society through a vast network of producers' and consumers' cooperatives, which were eventually to replace the capitalist system. For this purpose there was to be a people's bank supplying free credit to the cooperatives. He was therefore opposed to labour unions, to strikes, to wage increases and labour legislation.

Against the rise in wages, he advanced the familiar argument that it would lead to a general rise in prices and the increase would bring no benefit to society. He was against the right to form combinations, trade unions. "The law permitting association is, as a matter of fact, anti-juridical, anti-economic, contradicting every social regime and public order."

Proudhon did not understand what wages were. He did not understand how the worker was exploited through extraction of surplus value. He confused the value of labour power with the value of the commodities produced.

The Fight Against Lassalleanism

Lassalleanism was another trend which Marx and Engels had to fight. Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864) was a friend of Marx, became a socialist and called for the emancipation of the working class. He formed the General Workers' Union (1863) and sharply raised the question of political tasks and rights of the working class.

The programme of the association was based on the idea of producers' associations supported by state aid and considered as the means of introducing socialism. Its aim was proclaimed as the establishment suffrage by peaceful and lawful means. The vote was considered to be a powerful means to represent the interests of the working class and eliminate the class contradictions in society. Here was rejection of revolutionary struggle. This was accompanied by the rejection of the trade union struggle the actual class struggle carried on by the working class at the time.

Lassalle gave exclusive prominence to the demand for suffrage and government aid for producers' societies. Lassalle looked at the workers' struggle with distrust and did not see any good in strikes. He said, "Association rights cannot be of any use to the workers.

They bring about a serious improvement in the condition of workers."

Lassalle did not see the heroism and the growing class struggle behind the British strikes. On the other hand, he talked about the sad experience of strikes in Britain.

According to him, a strike for wages was a mad and useless adventure because the working class cannot change the fixed law of wages. He therefore rejected the economic struggle of the workers.

What did Lassalle mean by the iron of wages? It meant that no matter what the worker did and how he fought, he would not be able to improve his conditions because of the inflexible law of capitalist society. Marx attacked these propositions as absurd and pointed out that wages consisted of two parts. They included a physical minimum and a social minimum, the latter changing with socio-historical conditions. The resistance of the workers and their organisation play a role in determining the social minimum. But Lassalle with no faith in struggle for improving conditions nor in revolution stuck to producers' associations. "I have repeatedly emphasised that I want individual, voluntary associations, but these, in order to come into existence, must receive the necessary capital by a grant of state credits.

"In order to emancipate your class, in order to emancipate not only a few individual workers, but labour itself, millions and million of thalers are required and these can be granted only by the state and by legislation."

In fact Lassalle was asking the workers' movement to depend on the charity of the Prussian government. Lassalle's outlook in the end led him to lend support to Bismarck and help him in his reactionary designs. Professing concern for the working class, Lassalle often joined hands with the reactionary Bismarck government against the liberal bourgeoisie, siding with feudal aristocracy against the bourgeoisie. Lenin in his article on Karl Marx (Collected works, Vol. 21, p.78) writes that Marx held that Lassalle's attitude was "objectively a betrayal of the workers' movement of Prussia, incidentally because Lassalle was tolerant of the junkers and Prussian nationalism." Lenin further quotes Engels as wrote in

1865....it is dastardly to make an exclusive attack on the bourgeoisie in the name of the industrial proletariat but never to devote a word to the patriarchal exploitation of the rural proletariat under the lash of the great feudal aristocracy."

But Lassalle's outlook led precisely to an understanding with Bismarck's Government and a blind eye to feudal exploitation. Writing about "Royal Prussian Government subsidising of cooperative societies" Marx observed, "Beyond doubt the disappointment of Lassalle's hapless illusion concerning social intervention on the part of a Prussian Government will come.

The logic of things will have its say. But the HONOUR of the workers' party demands that it reject these optical illusions even before flimsy texture is rent by experience. *The working class is revolutionary or it is nothing.*"

Marx criticised Lassallean viewpoint, which failed to understand the importance of the trade union movement and its place in the struggle for democracy, against bureaucracy and feudalism.

In his letter dated February 16, 1868, Marx wrote to Engels: "Association with the Trade Unions arising from them are not only important as means for organising the working class for the struggle against the bourgeoisie-the important of this means is seen in the fact that even the workers of the United States, in spite of the existence there of suffrage and republic cannot get along without them-but we see that in Prussia and in Germany the right of association is besides a breach in the domination of the police and bureaucracy, it tears asunder the farmhand's law and the economy of the nobility in the village, in brief it is a measure for granting the subjects their majority, which measures the progressive party, any bourgeois party in the opposition in Prussia, if it is not insane, could sooner grant a hundred times than the Government of Bismarck." Here again Lassalle's outlook is criticised for its submissive attitude towards Bismarck and the feudal nobility, for failure to understand the anti-feudal democratic role of the right of association.

Marx gives a classic definition of sect while discussing the Lassallean organisation. Writing to Schweitzer in October 1868, he says, "Just because he (Lassalle) is the founder of a sect he denied all natural

connection with the former labour movement in Germany. He made the same mistakes as Proudhon, of seeking the genuine basis for his agitation not among the real elements of the class movement, but of wanting to prescribe to the latter its course according to a certain doctrinaire recipe.

"You yourself have observed the contrast between sectarian movement and a class movement. The sect views its *raison d' etre* (*reason for existence*) and its *point d'honneur* (*point of honour*) not in what it has in common with the class movement, but in a special shibboleth that distinguishes it from his movement." "(Selected Correspondence, p. 251)

The question of trade unions was again taken up by Marx in connection with his criticism of the Gotha Programme. In 1875, a unity congress between the Lassalleans and Eissenachs was held in Gotha. Marx analysed the draft programme and sharply attacked it for compromising with Lassallean principle.

"Since Lassalle's death there has been asserted itself in our party the scientific understanding that wages are not what they *appear* to be, the *value pr price*, of labour, but only a masked form of the *value or price, of labour power*. Thereby the whole bourgeois conception of wages hitherto, as well as all the criticism hitherto directed against this conception, was thrown overboard once for all and it was made clear that the wage workers has permission to work for his own subsistence, that is, to live, only in so far as he works for a certain time gratis for the capitalist (and hence for the latter's co-consumers of surplus value)... And after this understanding has gained more and more ground in our party, one returns to Lassalle's dogmas, although one must have known that Lassalle did not know what wages were, but following in the wake of the bourgeois economists took the appearance for the essence of the matter."(Selected works, Vol. 2, pp. 23-24)

Marx sharply attacked the ridiculous talk about state aid for producers' cooperatives leading to socialism. "Instead of arising from the revolutionary process of transformation of society, 'the socialist organisations of total labour' 'arises' from the 'state aid' that the state gives to the producers' cooperative societies and which the state, not the worker, 'calls into being'.

It is worthy of Lassalle's imagination that with the state loans one can build a new society just as well as a new railway... That the workers desire to establish the conditions for cooperative production on a social scale, first of all on a national scale, in their own country. Only means that they are working to revolutionise the present conditions of production, and it has nothing in common with the foundation of the cooperative societies with state aid. But as far as the present cooperative societies are concerned they are of value *only* in so far as they are independent creations of the workers and not protégés either of the Government or of the bourgeoisie." (pp.24-25)

Marx criticised the programme for its total underestimation of the trade union struggle. "There is not a word said about the organisation of the working class as a class, by means of trade unions. This is a very essential point, for this is the real class organisation of the proletariat, in which it carries on its daily struggles with capital; in which it trains itself, and which nowadays even amid the worst reaction (as now in Paris at present) can simply no longer be knocked to pieces. Considering the importance which this organisation has attained also in Germany, *it would be absolutely necessary in our opinion to make mention of them in the programme and of possible to leave open a place for them in the organisation of the Party.*" (Vol. 2 p. 34, emphasis added)

It will be seen that Lassalle gave a reformist twist to the genuine desire of the working class to reorganise social production, though at the mercy of the bourgeois state; that he adopted the arguments of the bourgeois economists to oppose the actual class struggle of the working class, the strikes, and in the name of the political party of the working class he tried to eliminate the trade unions. His next move was that he formed a political party of the working class, but it had a wrong outlook, a wrong direction and a totally wrong understanding about the important organisations of the working class, the trade unions.

Struggle Against Bakunin

But there was an equally harmful tendency working in the opposite direction. It wanted the working class and the trade unions to abjure all politics, opposed the formation of a political party and relied exclusively on trade union action to achieve the desired change in he

social order.

This trend is association with Bakunin, a revolutionary figure no doubt. He was he ideologist of anarchism and a sworn opponent of Marxism. He waged a continuous factional struggle against the First International led by Marx and was expelled from the International at the Hague Congress (1872).

Marx in his letter to F Bolte, dated November 23, 1871, sums up Bakunin as follows: "His programme was a hash superficially scraped together from the Right and from the Left-equality of Classes (!), *abolition of the right of inheritance as the starting point* of the social movement (St. Simonist nonsense), *atheism as a dogma* dictated to the members, etc., as the main dogma (Proudhonist): *abstention from the political movement*.

"This is children's primer found favour (and still has a certain hold) in Italy and Spain, where the real conditions for the workers' movement are as yet little developed, and among a few vain, ambitions, and empty doctrinaires in Latin Switzerland and in Belgium." (Marx-Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 2, p. 423)

Commenting on the demand "equality of classes", Marx in a letter to Engels (March 5, 1869) says, "The 'equalisation of classes; literally interpreted is nothing but another way of saying the 'harmony of capital and labour' preached by the bourgeois socialists, Not the logically impossible 'equalisation of classes' but the historically necessary 'abolition of classes' constitutes the final aim of the International Working Men's Association." (Ibid. page 266)

Engels explains Bakunin's anarchist theory leading to abstention from politics as follows: "Bakunin has a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and Communism. The chief point regarding the former is that he does not regard capital, i.e., the class antagonism between capitalists and wage-workers, which has arisen through social development but the state as the main evil to be abolished. While the great mass of the social-democratic workers hold our view that state power is nothing more than the organisation which the ruling classes-landowners and capitalists-have provided for themselves in order to protect their privileges, Bakunin maintains that it is the state that has created capital, that the capitalist has his

capital *only by the grace of the state...* The difference is an essential one. Without a previous social revolution, the abolition of the state is nonsense; the abolition of capital is precisely the social revolution and invokes a change in the mode of social production. Now then as to Bakunin the state is the main evil, nothing must be done which can keep the state—that is, any state whether it be a republic or monarchy or anything else alive. Hence complete abstention from politics. To commit a political act, to participate in an election, would be a betrayal of principles. The thing to do is to carry on propaganda, heap abuse upon the state, organise and when all the workers, hence the majority, are won over, depose all the authorities, abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International." (Ibid, p. 334)

Bakunin considered the workers to be ignorant. He did not see classes. He talked about the people, the laborers, etc. His left talks ended in abjuration of all politics by the working class and absolutisation and crude glorification of the trade union struggle. According to his line, the working class must abjure all political actions and struggle and concentrate on practical demands and this will one day produce a social revolution. There was no question of capturing political power. Political power was to be abolished immediately through economic struggle.

In his pamphlet, *Policy of the International*, Bakunin writes: "The Emancipation of the workers is the cause of the workers themselves which is emphasised in the introducing to our statutes. However, the workers in most cases are ignorant, they still do not know theory. Consequently *they have only one path left, the path of practical emancipation*. And what should and must this practice be? It can be only one: the struggle based on the solidarity of the workers against the bosses; that is trade unions, organisations and federations of resistance fund societies.

"Rejecting, in accordance with its statutes, all politics on a local as well as national scale, the International will impart to the workers' agitational activities in all countries an exclusively economic character, setting the goal shorten working hours and increase wages, using as a means the consolidation of the working masses and the organised collection of resistance funds."

Marx who had understood the class nature of the coming revolution,

the need to establish the state of the working class, waged an irreconcilable fight against Bakunin's crudities. Bakunin saw in the trade unions an amalgamation of ignorant people rather than the shaping of the modern revolutionary class.

British Trade Union Movement

The foundation of British socialism was laid by Owen. Marx and Engels highly appreciated as they appreciated Saint Simon and Fourier. Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* writes about Owen: "A reformer, a manufacture 20 years old, a man of almost sublime, simplicity of character, and at the same time one of the few born leaders of men." Owen "worked out his proposals for the removal of class distinctions systematically and indirect relation to French materialism." Unlike Saint Simon and Fourier, Owen threw himself heart and soul into the proletarian movement. Nevertheless, he remained a pacifist utopian and refused to take part in revolutionary activity. English socialism which arose with Owen "therefore proceeds with great consideration towards the bourgeoisie and injustice towards the proletariat in its methods although it culminates in demanding the abilities of the class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat." ("Condition of the Working Class in England," Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 552)

Engels, considered necessary to link up the socialists with the Chartists—the authentic proletarians. Once again it was the same problem of linking socialism with the actual political movement of the working class.

Britain was the cradle of the trade union movement. Marx and Engels paid close attention to the movement here criticising its mistakes. They attached great importance to the struggle for improving the conditions of the workers considering that the condition of the working class is the real basis and starting point for all social movement.

They saw the narrow craft character of the trade unions, their narrow outlook. In *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels observes, "Something more is needed than trade unions and strikes to break the power of the ruling class. But what gives these unions and the strikes arising from them their importance is this, that they

are the first attempt of the workers to abolish competition. They imply the recognition of the fact that the supremacy of the bourgeoisie is based wholly upon the competition of the workers among themselves, i.e., upon their want of the cohesion.... The working man cannot attack the bourgeoisie and with it the whole existing order of society, at any surer point than this."

In his dispute with Weston, the British Owentie, Marx laid his finger on the weakness of the British trade unions which concentrated only on daily struggles and partial demands. "At the same time and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wages system, the working of these everyday struggle. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects and not with the causes of these effects... They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerrilla fights necessarily springing from the never ceasing encroachments of capital ... Instead of the *conservative* motto 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work' they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword "Abolition of the wage system". ("Wages, Price and profit", Selected Works, Vol. 2, p.75)

Even in Britain, Marx had to contend against the viewpoint that wage-rise only increase the price level and leads to no improvement in the condition of the workers. The question was raised by Weston. A discussion was organised by the General Council of the International Weston argued that a wage-rise cannot be of any advantage to the workers; therefore trade unions have a harmful effect.

Marx was asked to reply to Weston. Marx had to give a scientific and substantiated reply to this bourgeois theory. He explained how surplus value is created and because of its existence an increase in wage, a general rise in the rate of wages need not affect the prices of commodities but result in a fall in the rate of the profit. He had to give a theoretical substantiation of the effectiveness of the trade union movement.

The downward path of the movement continued and the trade unions on principle rejected politics and politically the working class itself to one of the two bourgeois parties. Engels in his letter to Bernstein notes this: "The trade unions exclude on principle and by virtue of their statutes, all political action and also the participation in the

general activity of the working class as a class. The workers are divided politically into conservatives and liberal radicals..."

Engels understood the root cause of this degradation: "Participation in the domination for the world market was and is the economic basis of the political nullity of the British workers. Dragging along at the tail-end of the bourgeoisie in the economic exploitation of the this monopoly but always sharing in its profits they naturally, from the political point of view, drag along at the tail-end of the 'great Liberal Party' which has thrown them some small sops, recognises trade unions and the right to strike gave up the struggle for the unlimited working day and gave the bulk of the higher paid workers the right to rule."

Movement In The USA

Marx and Engels also noted the development of the trade unions in the USA and tried to correct the mistaken policies adopted there. In 1866, Marx in a letter to Kugelmann expressed his satisfaction that the American Workers' Congress at Baltimore adopted the slogan of organisation for the struggle against capital. "Remarkably enough most of the demands which I drew up for Geneva were also put forward by the right instinct of the workers," (Selected Correspondence, page 223)

In December 1866, in another letter, Marx noted that the Congress of American Labour Union treated working women with complete equality, "while in this respect the English and still more the gallant French, are burdened with a spirit of narrow-mindedness. Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment."

When after the dissolution of the International, sectarianism arose in the United States, Engels intervened to against it and, in a letter to Mrs. Wischenwtsky, explained that the principle task was to struggle against sectarianism; that work must be carried on in workers' and mass organisations. He advised that the knights of Labour organisation should not be pooh-poohed from without, but be revolutionised from within.

"To expect the American to start with the full consciousness of the

theory worked in older industrial countries is to task for the impossible."

Scientific Understanding

At the Geneva Congress of the International Working Men's Association Marx explained in full his scientific understanding about the trade union movement. The Congress endorsed it and gave the world working class a correct outlook regarding the role of the trade union in its class struggle.

Marx positively repudiates the reactionary and absurd views of his contemporaries, which failed to see the trade union movement as the practical class struggle of the working class in its initial stage. He says these organisations start from the spontaneous attempts of workers to abolish competition among themselves and protect their daily interests. But this attempt to abolish competition among individual workers soon turns them into the focus of *class organisation*; Marx likens them to medieval guilds and communes, which were weapons of political struggle of the bourgeoisie against feudalism. Regarding the past of the trade unions, the draft prepared by Marx says, "Trade unions originally sprang up from the spontaneous attempts of workmen at removing or at least checking that competition..."

The immediate activity of the trade unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities... This activity of the trade unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary-on the contrary, it must be generalised by the formation and the combination of trade unions throughout the country. On the other hand, unconsciously to themselves, the trade unions were forming *centers of organisation* of the working class, as the medieval municipalities and communes did for the middle class. If the trade unions are required for the guerilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as *organised agencies for superseding the very system* of wage labour and capitalist rule." (Selected Works, vol. 2, pp. 82-83)

But then Marx knew that this was far from the consciousness prevailing in the movement. He therefore characterises the present of the trade union movement in the following words, delineating its weaknesses.

“Their present.

Too exclusively bent upon the local immediate struggles with capital, the trades' unions have not yet fully understood their power of acting against the system of wages slavery itself. They therefore kept too much aloof from the general social and political movements. Of late, however, they seem to awaken to some sense of their historical mission as appears, for instance from their participation, in England, in the recent political movement..." (Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 83)

Asking them to overcome these weaknesses and breaking through the narrow framework of daily economic struggle Marx calls on them to take a new course for the future.

“Their future.

“Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centers of the working class in the broad interest of its *complete emancipation*. They must aid every social and political movement leading in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural workers rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of downtrodden millions” (Ibid, p. 83)

this advice guided the revolutionary trade union movement since the days of Marx. It armed it to fight the invasion of reformism and revisionism in the trade union movement. The reformists precisely forgot the aim of abolition of wage slavery, delinked the trade union movement from the struggle for socialism and turned it into an inward looking movement-seeking gains for its members. Since the days of Marx the struggle inside the trade union movement centered round the place and role of the trade unions in the general class struggle of the proletariat. For decades in Europe, the labour aristocracy bought by concessions arising from the colonial loot of the colonies, tied down the trade union movement to parliamentarism, to activity within the framework of the capitalist system. After Marx, Lenin waged an irreconcilable struggle against the betrayal by trade union bureaucrats and reformist social democratic leaders.

Marx's advice and guidance is equally sound for the trade union movement in India which stands imprisoned in the economic struggle, is often unable to see beyond its factory or industry and has shown its incapacity to intervene in political matters, matters affecting democracy and the unity of the country. Its weakness regarding the defence of the peasantry and agricultural workers is equally well known.

The efforts to fight this well-known disease are there but they have to be multiplied many times to bring the movement in line with Marx's teachings.

What does Marx say in the last part? (1) Trade Unions should continue to defend the daily interests of the workers; (2) but at the same time they must act as a conscious center working for the emancipation of the working class; (3) for this purpose every social and political movement "tending" in that direction should be aided; (4) they are champions of the entire class and should not form themselves into closed corporate bodies only of their members, shutting out non members; (5) it is their duty help organise those who cannot organise themselves easily and protect the interests of the worst-paid trades like the agricultural workers; (9) by their action they must show that they are not using their organised strength only to guard their interests, but working for all the downtrodden millions.

Struggle For Partial Demands

Marx not only laid down the general line for the trade union struggle at the Geneva Congress, but he also suggested concrete immediate demands for the trade unions. He demanded limitation of the working day to eight hours. "This limitation being generally claimed by the workmen of the United States of America, the role of the Congress will raise it to the common platform of the working classes all over the world." (Selected Works, Vol. 2, p. 79)

It was further demanded that women should be rigorously excluded from all night work *whatsoever* and all shorts of work hurtful to the delicacy of the sex, and exposing their bodies to poisons and deleterious should be prohibited.

Marx also proposed and the Congress adopted restrictions on the use of juvenile labour of both sexes. It was demanded that the employment of all persons from 9 to 17 years (inclusive) in night work and all health-injuring centers should be prohibited by law. It was also demanded that children of 9 to 12 years of age should not be employed in workshops or housework for more than two hours those between 13 to 15 should not be employed for more than four hours and those between 15 to 17 should not be employed for more than six hours, with a break of at least one hour for meals or relaxation.

Marx suggested a statistical enquiry into the situation of the working classes of all countries. He prepared a detailed questionnaire calling for information on (1) salaries and wages; (a) apprentices; (b) wages by the day or piecework; (c) scales paid by middlemen. Weekly, yearly average.

(2) Hours of work: (a) in factories; (b) the hours of work with small employs and in home work, if the business be carried on in these different modes; (c) night work had day work, (3) Meal times and treatment.

(4) Sort of workshop and work: overcrowding, defective, ventilation, want of sunlight, use of gaslight, cleanliness, etc.

(5) Nature of occupation.

(6) Effect of employment on physical condition.

(7) Moral condition; education.

Marx attached importance to the struggle for partial demands and the success secured by the working class. He saw in these the intensification of the workers' struggle, the growing consciousness of their rights. In their success he saw the defeat of bourgeois policies and bourgeois theories and a source of further confidence to the workers. He showed that the various factory legislation in England were the direct product of the class struggle of the working class which forced a retreat on the methods of unbridled exploitation prevailing till then.

When the British working class succeeded in carrying the Ten Hours' Bill in Parliament Marx wrote: "Hence the Ten Hours' Bill was not only a great success, it was the victory of a principle it was the first

that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class."

Proletarian Internationalism

The international Working Men's Association led by Marx sowed the seeds of proletarian internationalism among the European workers. It taught them the necessity of working class solidarity stretching beyond national frontiers, the international unity of their struggle against capital, and the necessity of helping each other in daily struggles. As part of its daily activities it collected funds for strikes in different countries and strengthened this unity. It did everything possible to unite the trade union movement in different countries under the common banner of international and class solidarity.

The First Address on the French – Prussian War said: "The English working class stretch the hand of fellowship to the French and German working people. They feel deeply convinced that whatever turn the impending horrid war may take, all alliance of the working classes of all countries will ultimately kill war. The very fact that while official France and Germany are rushing into a fratricidal feud, the workmen of France and Germany send each other messages of peace and goodwill; this great fact, unparalleled in the history of the past, opens the vista of a brighter future. It proves that in contrast to old society, with its economical miseries and its political delirium, a new society is springing up, whose International rule will be *Peace*, because its national ruler will be everywhere the same-Labour. The pioneer of that new society is the International Working Men's Association." (Selected Works, Vol.2, pp. 193-93)

Deeply influenced by the internationalism taught by the Association the French members of the Association reacting to the war issued a manifesto "to the workmen of all nations" in which they said, "Brothers of Germany; our divisions would only result in the complete triumph of *despotism* on both sides of the Rhine... Workmen of all countries whatever may for the present become of our common efforts, we, the members of the International Working Men's Association, who know of no frontiers, we send you as a pledge of indissoluble solidarity the good wishes and salutations of the workmen of France." (Ibid, p. 191)

Marx's call internationalism had inspired thousands of workers. It was becoming a part of working class consciousness. Since then this heritage has been carried forward by the revolutionary trade union movement following the Marxist-Leninist path. Lenin waged struggles for years on behalf of proletarian international sharply attacking the trade union and social-democratic leaders who supported their respective governments during the First World War. The Communist International and the Communist Parties upheld the banner and strove to internationally unite the proletarian ranks. During the Second World War, again social democratic vacillated, refusing to take a firm position by the side of the Soviet Union and the world working class.

Today with the existence of the socialist camp and the World Federation of Trade Unions, the sense of internationalism is very strong and is able to counter the moves of the imperialists. Nonetheless the war danger is increasing and it cannot be said that all the detachments of the world trade union movement are upholding the banner.

Lack of international outlook, indifference to world developments and the struggles of world working class are a major weakness of India's trade union movement, taken as a whole. This was natural in a country, which for decades was enslaved and had to concentrate on national emancipation. But since then four decades have passed and there is hardly any progress. On the contrary, forces rousing national chauvinism, preaching indifference to the world outside, openly opposing proletarian internationalism are very active. This also suits the interests of the ruling classes and ruling party, which would like the Indian people to be sheltered from all revolutionary influence.

The situation obtains notwithstanding the friendly relations between the people and the government of the Indian Union and the socialist countries and the valuable aid rendered by the USSR in building the Indian economy. And because of this India's trade union movement is unable to speak with one voice on the question of war and peace exposing the US warmongers and supporting the peace policy of the USSR and the socialist camp.

The Internationalism of the International Working Men's Association, its influence over trade unions and its growing help to strikes, all earned for it cures, slanders and vilification from the capitalists and

their government. Strikes, the Paris Commune, everything was blamed on the International which only showed that the power and strength of the first international association of workers had started frightening the bourgeoisie.

Political Party Of The Working Class

At the Hague Congress in 1872, Marx succeeded in getting the congress sanction for a political party of the working class. Through the activities of the International he had already succeeded in merging the various sects in the actual movement the working class-the trade unions-and assigning a correct revolutionary role to them in the emancipatory struggle of the working class. Time was now ripe for an open class party of the working class, taking a stand on its class outlook and determined to fight the exploiting classes.

A new article 7a was included in the rules of the General Council. It said, "In its struggle against the collective power of the possessing classes the proletariat can act as a class only by constituting itself into a distinct political party opposed to all the political parties by the possessing classes.

"This constitution of the proletariat into a political party is indispensable to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and of its ultimate goal: the abolition of classes."

The coalition of the forces of the working class, already achieved by the economic struggle, must also serve in the hands of this class as a lever in its struggle against the political power of its exploiters.

"As the lords of the land and capital always make use of their political privileges to defend and perpetuate their economic monopolies and to enslave labour, the conquest of political power becomes the great duty of the proletariat."

The unity already achieved in the economic struggle-the trade unions-must serve as a lever in the struggle against the political power of the exploiters.

Marx showed the fundamental path to be followed by the trade unions. But it did not mean that the majority of the trade unions and their leaders had fully accepted the line and that there were not problems to be faced. These problems appeared in new forms in the European movement, which abandoned its partiality for producers' associations and neglect of trade union struggle, but continued with excessive and exclusive faith in the struggle of the moment, the struggle for immediate demands. Engels already noted the basis for this reformism in his comment on the British trade unions. Lenin with his penetrating analysis of the stage of imperialism again showed how a section of labour—the labour aristocracy—was corrupted in the "comparatively peaceful period" of capitalism which could accommodate the workers with some concessions and some democratic rights and parliamentary privileges. Lenin traced the collapse of the Second International in the First World War to this corruption, which led to class collaboration, and adjuration of proletarian internationalism and support to imperialist war.

Lenin found the same problems both in Russia and Europe, though sometimes their forms changed. Now the battle for the political role and tasks of the trade unions was centred round the relationship between the political party of the working class and its mass organisation, the unions. It was the same old problem of the trade unions devoting exclusive attention to their daily work and brooking no interference from outside.

Continuation Of The Struggle By Lenin

Lenin's fight against the neutrality of trade unions towards the socialist party, his fight against spontaneity and economism, his fight against ignoring the mass character of the trade unions, his demand that communists should work in reactionary unions were all part of the fight that had to be continued against reformists and sectarian deviations, against those who sought to divide the trade union struggle from the political struggle of the working class against those who underestimated the role of the trade unions.

Lenin developed the Marxist concept of the political party of the working class. The party is the vanguard of the class, its highest political organisation which guides all other organisations. This understanding was gradually imparted to the working class.

But Lenin had to fight for recognition of this correct understanding

step by step. In his time, the question of the relationship between the party and the trade union organisation became prominent in the international movement.

Lenin opposed the neutrality of trade unions towards socialist parties. The Stockholm RSDLP Congress voted for non-party unions and endorsed of neutrality. Lenin described it as the view of Bernsteinians. The London Congress of the party, on the other hand, declared for closer alignment of the unions with the party. The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart endorsed the view and voted for closer and stronger connections between the unions and the socialist parties. Lenin endorsing the Stuttgart stand says that the resolution lays down the general principle that in every country the unions must be brought into permanent and close contact with the socialist party. He adds, "We note that the harmful aspects of the neutrality were revealed in Stuttgart by the fact that the trade union half of the German delegation were the most adamant supporters of opportunist view." (Collected Works, Vol. 13, pp. 78-79).

What was the Party to do? The draft resolution on the economic struggle for the Second Congress of the RSDLP (1903) stated, "The Congress deems it absolutely essential in all cases to support and develop in every way the economic struggle of the workers and their trade unions (principally the all - Russian unions) and *from the very outset to ensure that the economic struggle and the trade union movement in Russia have a social-democratic character.* (Emphasis added). (This last phrase is nothing but ensuring the guidance of the Party for linking the trade unions with the revolutionary political struggle.) (Collected Works, vol. 6, p. 473)

In Russia the Social-Democratic Party was formed before the workers' mass trade unions came into existence. It was important for the Party to take a correct stand towards the mass activity of the working class, the practical movement of the proletariat. Otherwise there was every danger of social democracy turning into a sect, divorced from the practical activity of the working class. Lenin wrote, "It is important that at the very outset social-democratic should strike the right note, in regard to trade unions, and at once create a tradition of social-democratic participation, of social democratic leadership." Arm the rising trade unions with a correct Marxist consciousness through the party of the working class-this is what Lenin advocated.

In *What Is To Be Done*, Lenin directed his fire against the economists and worshipers of spontaneity who glorified the consciousness arising out of the trade union struggle and saw no role for the Party to enhance, enrich and revolutionise it. In effect it was the same old song of imprisoning the trade union movement within its narrow, circle, virtually depoliticalising it.

Lenin did not belittle the daily struggles waged by the trade unions. Quoting Engels on the basic forms of struggle, economic, political and theoretical, Lenin considered the economic struggle as an integral part of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. "In the initial stage the economic struggle—the struggle for immediate and direct improvement of conditions, is alone capable of rousing the most backward strata of the exploited masses, gives them a real education and transforms them—during a revolutionary period—into an army of political fighters within the space of a few months." But at the same time pointed out that the consciousness generated through these spontaneous struggles, trade union struggles, could not go beyond trade union consciousness to challenge wage-slavery itself, unless it is enriched and trained by the Party on the basis of Marxism. The bourgeoisie and its state are not frightened by the narrow craft and unionism of the workers' movement. "The spontaneous working class movement is trade unionism... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie." (*What Is To Be done*)

Lenin had to fight against new deviations—completely fusing the party and the trade unions, forgetting the mass character of the trade unions and the level of consciousness of its members. This was another form of denigrating the role of mass organisations and converting them into narrow appendages of the party.

Party And Trade Unions

The new problem of establishing a correct relationship between the party and the mass organisations was succinctly explained by Lenin in accordance with the teachings of Marx and Engels. It is no accident that reformists and revisionists have rejected this revolutionary teaching.

At the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin prescribed the method of communist work in mass organisations. It must be done at the grass-roots level. It must reflect the experience of the masses, which should be conveyed to the party. It must educate the masses by means of agitation and Marxist propaganda. These calls, which are to be in close touch with one another and with the Party center, should, by pooling their experience carrying on work of agitation, propaganda and organisation, adapting themselves to absolutely every sphere of public life and to every variety and category of toiling masses systematically educate themselves, the Party, the class and the masses by means of such diversified work."

Like Marx, Lenin fought the attempt at formation of a sect. Certain German communists using high-sounding phraseology wanted to run away from the task of working in mass trade union organisations in Europe and start their own pure communist organisation. In effect this would have led to isolating the communists from the practical activity of the class carried through the mass trade union and would have made communism itself a sect. "This ridiculous 'theory' that communists should not work in reactionary trade unions reveals with utmost clarity the frivolous attitude of the 'left'-communists towards the question of influencing the masses."

The question here was of working in trade unions led by reformists no doubt, but which had huge mass sanctions behind them, and which for years were the only organisations known to the workers. These communists wanted to form separate unions on the basis of recognition of the Soviet system and dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin described the proposal as childish. He said in the Soviet Union, after the revolution, they would not lay down such conditions for membership. "The task devolving on the communists is to convince the backward elements, to work among them and not to fence themselves off from them with artificial and childishly left slogans."

Lenin taught that socialist consciousness, the consciousness to achieve revolution cannot come directly out of trade union experience. The party as the highest form of class organisation has to create it uniting the experiences of the class, and carrying on the work of agitation, propaganda and theoretical education on the class.

Lenin continued the work of spreading the ideas of proletarian internationalism- the great banner unfurled by Marx and Engels. His

relentless fight against the opportunism of the Second International and foundation of the Third (Communist) International were part of the fight he waged on behalf of internationalism.

Unity Of The Class

The struggle for a correct attitude to the trade unions was a part of the struggle to bring about the political unity of the working class under the guidance and the leadership of the party.

That is why the struggle for trade union unity assumed great importance in the world of all communist parties.

The scientific outlook developed by Marx and Engels was not accepted by all sections of the trade unions movement. In fact, after the death of Marx the major part of the trade union movement in Europe took a reformist turn and confined itself to work within the framework of the capitalist system. Lenin, as has been pointed out earlier, waged a continuous struggle against this domination of reformism in the European trade union movement.

The struggle to bring about trade union unity on the basis of the revolutionary outlook demanded criticism and fight against the established leadership, its practices and ideology. The communists have the task of bringing one with masses in their daily struggle and in the course of it, make an endeavor to release the workers from reformist illusion win them over to a revolutionary outlook.

The struggle for the masses and mass organisation, and their unity took various forms. Work in mass trade unions led by the reformists, united fronts and united actions and the formation of separate mass organisations-all have played a role in building trade union unity when they reflected the appropriate form of cooperation and unity aimed at struggle among workers.

During Lenin's lifetime a separate organisation-the Red International of Trade Unions-was formed. The first International Congress of Revolutionary Trade Unions was held in Moscow in July 1921.

This was a period in which differentiation in the labour movement was continuing and sharp ideological struggle was necessary against those who were pulling them back and it was necessary to supply a focal point to the workers who were shedding reformist illusions.

But soon the situation changed. The partial stabilisation of capitalism gave a further lease to the reformist leadership. The leaders continued to maintain their hold over trade unions.

With the rise of fascism the tactics and forms for trade union unity, for winning over the majority of the working class changed. Now it was a question of common resistance to fascism. Trade union unity was to be achieved for organising anti-fascist resistance.

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International took quick steps to forge trade union unity to meet the changed situation.

On the basis of experience of the communist parties in a number of countries in the struggle for trade union unity the Seventh Congress laid down proper and minimum conditions for such unity. Unity could be achieved if the minimum conditions necessary for organising anti-fascist resistance were accepted by the reformists. The International put forward only two conditions, vis, conduct of close struggle and observance of trade union democracy. In the bargain the communist parties agreed to accept the slogan of trade union independence from political parties. This by no means meant that the communists now turned into supporters of trade union neutrality and class struggle. The communists stood, as before for the most active class position of the trade union and against any dependence whatsoever on the bourgeoisie, but they recognised the organisational independence of the united trade unions. "We are even prepared," said Dimitrov, "to forgo the certain of communist groups in the trade unions if that is necessary in the interest of trade unions unity; we are prepared to come to an agreement about the independence of the united trade unions from all political parties. But we are decidedly opposed to any dependence of the unions on the bourgeoisie, and do not give up our basic point of view that it is impossible to adopt a neutral position in regard to the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie." (Outline History of the Communist International, Institute of Marxism-Leninism, CPSU).

This certainly was not the abandonment of the role of the Party but its masterly applied to fulfill it in the given condition, which required the concentration of all working class forces against fascism. The communists did not give up their faith in the party. They only assured the mass of workers under reformist influence that policies would be decided democratically and not imposed.

Following this, the Red Trade Union International was dissolved in 1937. The Soviet trade union organisations raised the question of their affiliation to the reformist Amsterdam International of trade unions laying down only one condition, vis, the International was to conduct a consistent fight against fascism and war. An agreement was reached, but it never came into force, because it was torpedoed by the reformist leaders at the Amsterdam Internation.

It will be seen that the struggle for unity takes diverse forms but it always has one aim-to intensify class struggle, the revolutionary struggle that is urgently necessary to move forward towards the ultimate aim. It is not an aimless search for numbers, but a search for class unity, for struggle. Hence minimum conditions are always necessary.

Immediately after the victory in the anti-fascist war, the Soviet trade unions took the initiative to unite the trade unions of the world in a common organisation-the World Federation of Trade Unions. It had initial success. But soon organisations like the British TUC and others separated themselves to pursue their old policies.

Nevertheless, the WFTU today continues its efforts to unite the trade union on the question of opposition to nuclear war and preservations of world peace and its efforts are attracting millions from trade unions under the influence of the reformists.

Movement In India

The trade union movement in our country also had to go through several that the movement elsewhere had experienced. Its beginning was the spontaneous action of workers in defence of their demands. In the words of Karl Marx, this was yet an incoherent Mass unaware of the necessity of a permanent organisation. In India, besides, under

the British colonial rule both industry and the working class were developing very slowly and the workers were a small force surrounded by an ocean of peasants. Their link with the peasantry remained and continued, and in the earlier years they considered themselves more as peasants than workers and thought of factory employment only as an aid to their main occupation, agriculture.

Under the colonial rule there were no rights for the workers, no right of association, no right of trade union bargaining. The Trade Union Act was passed only in 1920, that is three years after the Russian Revolution.

In these circumstances it was not surprising that trade union consciousness grew slowly and it took years before the need for a permanent organisation was felt and met. But this urge for organisation was repeatedly repressed and crushed by the British rulers.

The unheard of repression against striking workers under the British was aimed at defeating all organisational efforts and confidence in organisation. This was accompanied by open victimisation of trade union leaders and activists and denial of jobs to them. The workers of an enslaved country had very little chance to organise big unions and pit them against the state directed repression and employers' victimisation drive. In the earlier years the combination could take the form of joint strike actions and nothing else. The lack of right reduced unions and combination to fight only for wages to determine which standards were laid down.

But out of this chaos the necessity for permanent organisations began to assert itself and they began to be formed by the second decade of the century all over the country. Here, again, there were hardly any rights, and the only right left to them to express their unity was strike. The government began to describe such unions derisively, many of which were led by communists, as only being strike committees.

Anti Imperialist Actions

It was inevitable that these trade union struggles should confine

themselves to immediate economic demands, mainly of wages. That was the consciousness of the participants, workers who were just laying the basis of a common organisation. But anti-imperialist politics would from time to time break asunder the barricade of economic demands and make the workers use their strike weapon to protest against imperialist repression. The workers were being drawn into the national protest against British tyranny. This happened in 1908 when Lokmanya Tilak was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. The workers went on a one-day strike for every year of the sentence. They clashed with the police and the British army. Several were killed. Their resistance galvanised the entire city of Bombay and drew into action small businessmen and the middle classes. This was the first time that the working class used the powerful weapon strike in all industries for a political purpose and revealed its efficacy as the general mobiliser of the people.

A decade later, the workers of Ahmedabad, on hearing the news of Mahatma Gandhi's went on strike that ended in clashes with the police, so that the British Government placed the city under martial law. After another decade, in 1930, the Sholapur textile workers went on a complete strike in protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi, drawing the entire town into the protest. The administration was chased out of the city, the government declared martial law and later hanged 4 patriots one of whom was the secretary of the textile workers' union. On October, 2, 1939, 900000 Bombay workers carried out a one-day political strike against the war and the repressive measures of imperialism. The call for all these actions was not given by the Congress leaders who led the national movement. It was the spontaneous action of the working class under their own initiative.

The national appeal was breaking through the economism of the trade union struggle but such outbursts of proletarian protests were and exceptional. The last independent action of the working class over the head of the national leadership was the general strike of Bombay workers in 1946 in support of the revolt of the RIN cadets. The call for strike was given by the Communist Party.

A number of top national leaders like Tilka, Lajpat Rai and others played a part in laying the foundation of the AITUC. Lajpat Rai presided over the first session and C r Das over the second session.

After the 1930 movement and the increasing number of strike and especially the rise of the communist leadership, the line was to run down strikes, fight the communist influence, that is, all independent trade union activities creating socialist consciousness, and appeal to the working class on the basis of nationalism to confine it to such anti-imperialist action as suited the Congress leaders. In effect it meant that the trade unions should confine themselves to economic demands, settle them round the table, abjure all revolutionary politics and go in for political action only when called for by the bourgeois leadership.

The emergence of bourgeois leaders and their effort to tie down the trade union to their politics was bound to lead to a struggle inside the trade union movement when the communists took to trade union work seriously.

This happened some time after the foundation of the AITUC Communist groups were rising in different parts of the country under the inspiration of the Great October Revolution. But as yet they were individuals and groups totally unconnected with the practical movement of the working class. There was every chance of some of them turning into a special sect divorced from the actual movement of the working class.

The common feature of earlier communist conspiracy cases, including the Kanpur conspiracy case, was that the young communists had not yet succeeded in approaching the working class with the new ideology. Between Kanpur (1924) and the Meerut (1929) trials the situation had changed. Now the communists were carrying the ideology of the working class to the working class; Marxism was being united with the practical working class movement. The communists succeeded in forming big mass unions preached complete independence and agrarian revolution, organised huge anti-imperialist protest and strike to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle of the people. The complete strike of the workers of Bombay when the imperialist Simon Commission landed in the city in 1927 became part of the gigantic national movement for boycotting the commission. Calcutta and other industrial centers saw similar protests. This was possible because the communists by hard work in fighting for the immediate demands of the industrial workers had build powerful mass organisations in which the masses had full confidence and which had already raised their consciousness to higher level.

In the Meerut trial the composition of the accused reflected the change-Marxism going to the working class. Along with communist from the lower middle classes now stood in the dock two textile workers of Bombay who were the leaders of the mass Girni Kamgar union (membership 80,000) and who till a few months before the trial were working in the mills.

And along with them stood three British symbolising the unity of the workers in oppressed and oppressor countries.

Struggle Inside The Movement

As has been pointed out earlier a struggle inside the trade union movement was now inevitable as in other countries. The non working class non-Marxist views were bound to clash with the proletarian ideology and the task of keeping the trade unions united was to be carried on despite the clash and conflict and without surrender outlook.

Conflicts spilt united front unity again spilt and united front these were bound to occur. But the communists never left their search for unity in the trade union movement fully understanding Marxian teachings.

The note of the CPI(M) on splits on the AITUC published in *People's Democracy* (August 9, 1970) gave an objective account of the various splits and the political struggle behind it.

After the first two splits the AITUC was reunited and made progress.

The third split took place in 1947 and subsequently. It once more shows how the bourgeoisie and their agents feel the necessity of a split when the Communists gain influence over the working class.

Congress-Engineered split

In 1947, the Congress wing in the AITUC split away at the behest of the leadership of the National Congress to found a new trade union

organisation, the INTUC. Sardar Patel organised the split asking the Congress unions outside the AITUC and inside AITUC to come together and form a new organisation. The bourgeois leaders of the Congress required a separate organisation to extend their influence over the working class and fight the communists as the main enemy.

It was political necessity for the bourgeoisie to split away and they did so. This was made plain in the speeches delivered at the foundation session of the INTUC, which made it clear that the seceders wanted a policy of class-collaboration, and strike at the influence of the communists.

In his inaugural address, Kripalani made clear the difference: "In fact there is an unbridgeable gulf between the sponsors of the new trade union and the AITUC. The new organisation will not hesitate to employ the weapon of strike, if it were essential to promote the true interests of labour. But that weapon is to be employed after due consideration and with the utmost caution. But it would however not only be a misuse of this weapon if it were to be employed for the attainment of sectional political ends." Familiar language both against strikes and the revolutionary working class movement. Class interests of the bourgeoisie demand that both should be rejected by the working class.

Gulsari Lal Nanda put the matter more clearly: "The policies pursued by the AITUC leadership under the communist leadership which functions in its name stand in sharp and total conflict with our aims. Their ways threaten the welfare and security of the community and are inimical to the best interests of the workers themselves. The urgent need of the movement is, therefore, to provide machinery for coordinating the scattered forces of those who are in fundamental opposition to the communists in their approach to labour matters." (G Ramanujam, *Story of Indian Labour*, p. 56)

And in his presidential address, Sardar Patel said, "In their blind position to the Government, the communist leaders have thrown all regard for the national welfare to the winds. The irresponsibility and recklessness of these people pass all understanding. Strikes are launched on all conceivable pretexts in utter disregard of the workers' own interests and well being. Nothing is achieved through these strikes except chaos and misery all round."

The class fear was quite consciously stated in the main resolution, which said, "Whereas the course which the labour movement in the country is taking under the leadership of those who are opposed to peaceful change and democratic methods has proved trade unionism, etc."

Peaceful change, democratic methods, is not this also the refrain of the present day reformists. The main point is that the Congress split the AITUC to fight the communists and revolutionary movement and take the trade unions to bourgeois politics-economic struggle without strikes and constitutional politics.

The socialists and some other groups also later on split away from the organisation. Sectarian mistakes in the Party's political line also facilitated and contributed to the splitting away of some other groups. In the earlier years also sectarian mistakes in the trade front sometimes the task of the disruptors.

The AITUC now mostly under the leadership of the Communist Party continued to grow. It received a set back after the sectarian mistakes following the Second Congress of the Party. But it again gathered strength.

But soon the bug of class collaboration began to bite a section of the Party leadership. Supported by revisionist tendencies abroad, this section rapidly traveled down the inclined plane of opportunism. It led to the split in the Party and the formation of the CPI(M) in 1964.

The CPI(M) while opposing the revisionism of the CPI leadership decided to work in the AITUC and fight for a correct policy inside based on the teaching of Marx.

That leadership was moving more and more away from the CPI(M) and non communist left towards the National Congress and Indira Gandhi. This period saw the break-up of the United Front ministries in West Bengal and Kerala, the CPI leaders playing notable role in this disruption. It also saw the displacement of the coalition ministry of the CPI(M) and CPI and others by a coalition ministry in Kerala of the Congress (I) and the CPI. The fight against the CPI(M)-Communists-now replaced the fight against the bourgeois leaders,

the Government and the ruling party.

This naturally led to similar tactics in the AITUC with the inevitable result of a split.

The 1970 Split

Having failed in their unity efforts the CPI(M) and some other members of the General Council of the AITUC held a special convention in Goa on April 9 and 10, 1970, and called for a special conference of those who were opposed to the class-collaborationist policies of the AITUC leadership. This led to the foundation of the CITU.

In calling for separate conference the Goa Convention made the following observations in its resolution.

A grave situation faces the militant trade union movement and all class-conscious workers in the country. The AITUC, which over long years had grown as the rallying center for all militant trade unions in the country for carrying forward the united struggle of the working class, has ceased to be so due to the class-collaborationist policies of the Dangeites.

The working class was thus sought to be disarmed and prevented from playing its role of rallying the democratic forces against the danger of penetration of American imperialism into our economic, political, social and cultural life, and in the struggle against the Government's Plans and policies in the interest of monopolists and big landlords.

As a natural corollary to this line, the dominant leadership of the AITUC praised to the skies the tripartite conference and committees, the wage boards and such other machinery set up by the Government to sow illusion in the working class and paraded them as big victories of the working class. Rationalisation 'without tears' was accepted in 'national interest'. The leadership gave its full cooperation to the Government's scheme of 'productivity' and so-called 'workers' education', the so-called 'code of discipline',

weighted against the working class, and which was used by the employers as an instrument to malign the militant working class struggles, was agreed to. And finally in 1962, industrial truce was accepted.

It was no surprise therefore that after the split the AITUC leaders rushed headlong along the path of class collaboration and lent their support to the emergency rule.

CPI(M)'s Struggle For Trade Union Unity

As in other capitalist countries, in India also the Marxist trade union line had to contend at each stage for its existence, its acceptance and recognition as a powerful influence in the common movement.

But the CPI(M) was certainly not happy with the split. The Party realised that this was a blow to trade union unity and hampered the work of creating class-consciousness among the workers. Quick steps must be taken to heal the breach. If of cooperation and common action should be devised.

The CITU at its foundation conference asked its unions to observe a trade union unity week and create the urge among the workers for common action.

The CITU worked for united front and united action. A united front organisation consisting of the CITU, HMP, P & t Federation, AIEA was formed in 1973. The AITUC in consonance with its policy of preferring the congress to the CPI(M) and Left joined hands with the INTUC to form another combination. The UCTU front resulted in the organisation of the 1973 all-India railway strike-a remarkable achievement.

The emergency disrupted the movement but at the end of the emergency the CITU and others picked up the thread and set themselves a task of wider unity.

The change in the political line of the CPI, their moving away from the Indira Congress and willingness to join the left opposition forces

made it possible to widen the scope of trade union unity. The CITU ever eager to forge such unity took the initiative in bringing it about and with the cooperation of others succeeded in forming the National Campaign Committee in 1981.

The National Campaign Committee, which is based on central trade unions and supported by several trade union federations with huge followings is today an authoritative voice of workers' and employees' organisations in India. Almost all-important organisations of these two sections are included under it except the INTUC, which toes the line of the ruling party. The isolation of the ruling party from the trade union movement is seen here. It may be mentioned that on certain occasions like negotiations the cooperation between those who are in the National Campaign Committee and the INTUC unions is also developing.

The November demonstration of the working class in the capital, the all-India strike of January 1982, the three-day coal strike are some of the achievement of the NCC which has strengthened the sense of all-India and class unity.

The initiative and work for the formation of the National Campaign committee the importance attached to it by us to its activities, the struggle to maintain its cohesion and unity are expression of our Party's line for trade union unity, for unification of the class in its economic battles. The struggle for economic unity is an integral part for the political unity of the working class to enable it to discharge its role as the hegemon of the People's Democratic Revolution.

To consolidate the unity already achieved the CITU proposes a confederation of all trade unions, central organisations and federation for exchange of opinion and discussion on common problems.

The task on the Trade Union Front document of the Party (1983) notes the limitations of the unity achieved. "Notwithstanding the advance of trade union unity, it has to be remembered that it is secured at a low level of consciousness on the basis of certain preliminary demands. The consciousness reflected here does not show much advance beyond economic demands."

The party knows that with this level of consciousness the working class will not be able to discharge its role. It is therefore set to struggle against economism, which is a dominant trend in the Indian trade union movement. It therefore demands a correct relationship between the Party and the trade unions, never forgetting the mass character of the trade union, nor the guiding role of the Party. It criticises bureaucratic and undemocratic functioning of the trade unions and warns its members against this type of deviations. At its Plenum it criticised those who considered the mass organisations as pocket boroughs of the Party and those who functioned them independently of the Party.

The party also notes its responsibility to raise the working class consciousness to a higher level-the level of socialist consciousness. In its latest document it stresses this task and calls for more propaganda work among the worker, and not to be satisfied with mere agitation. It notes that a lot of improvement has taken place in our work in the trade union front. Along with economic issues political, international issues are being discussed in union gatherings. Yet much remains to be done. What is being done is just the beginning.

While not overstepping the existing consciousness of the mass of workers and other organisations, the unions under the guidance of the party work in the direction of raising the consciousness. In particular they work for the growing intervention and participation in movement on democratic issues and struggles, for defence of the interests of the peasantry and the people.

The party notes the fatal weakness of the movement in its lack of international outlook, its indifference to the vital question of nuclear war and defence of peace. Unions led by Party members have better consciousness in this regard but even this has improved. Looking to the trade union movement as a whole the gap in international consciousness is alarming.

To overcome this Party stresses that the independent activities of the unions under its guidance must be continuously organised. They must set a model of action and consciousness inspiring and educating others.