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On Approach To Mass Organisations (Adopted by the Central Committee At its October 29-31, 2004 Meeting)

The Central Committee resolution “**On Mass Organisations**” of 1981 was meant to explain the communist understanding of the role of mass organisations and the work of the Party in them. The resolution addressed the basic question of what are mass organisations, its scope and character as distinct from that of the Party. It stressed the need for the independent functioning of these organisations, the formulation of slogan and tactics by these organisations keeping in mind its broad character and the need to facilitate the entry of the broadest and most backward sections. As distinct from the mass organisations’ programme, platform and tactics, is the work of communists within this organisation who are under the discipline of the Party and who have to also conduct political work among the sections drawn into the mass organisations.

The C.C. document on “Mass Organisations” adopted in 1981 states:

“The mass organisations fulfill the role of rousing the elementary consciousness of the sections which they organise and through it growingly link the backward masses with Party’s activities. The guiding role of the Party consists in consistently raising the consciousness of the concerned sections without shutting the organisation to the continuous inflow of backward sections. Otherwise the organisation will be an organisation of the militants nearest to the Party and inspite of its strength in numbers will be isolated from the main mass and unable to activise them.

“The mass organisations are required because Party’s direct slogans of basic change -- revolution, capture of power etc are unable to rouse these masses immediately. The wide masses are attracted immediately on the basis of partial demands, immediate demands which are or appear to be possible of achievement without a complete overhaul of the social order. The education and experience gained in these struggles train the consciousness of the masses under the guidance of the Party and directs it in revolutionary channels. The work of the

Party in this connection should not be identified with the work of the mass organisations among the masses, otherwise the link with the masses will be broken. This is an absolute law of guidance of mass organisations. To substitute the role of the Party by making the mass organisation itself the spokesman of the Party is bound to lead to harmful consequences.”

The resolution clarified the Party’s understanding and corrected certain erroneous understanding prevalent about mass organisations. Since then, we have periodically reviewed the implementation of this correct approach. The 14th Congress in 1992 adopted a Report on Organisation and Tasks which included a review of the implementation of the Salkia Plenum directives. Referring to the 1981 resolution it stated, “In practice this understanding is being violated still in most states and mass organisations. The mass organisations are narrowed in scope to the Party’s periphery by utilising them as Party platforms and mechanically transmitting Party slogans and understanding. In many weak states, in the Kisan Sabha, in youth and student organisations, this problem constantly crops up. A determined struggle has to be waged to rectify and reorient the Party’s outlook to mass organisations, if further growth has to be made.”

Since the 1981 resolution and the efforts made, some progress was made in clarifying the role of the mass organisations and the work of the Party in such organisations especially the multi-class organisations. In the student organisation, the practice of Party leaders addressing conferences of the organisation has generally stopped. There is more attention paid by the student and youth organisations to address the various issues of the students and youth. The women’s organisation too has based itself on what the 1981 resolution has said of taking up the problems of women as women, as citizens and as workers. Amongst all the mass organisations, there have been more efforts to forge joint platforms with other mass organisations working amongst the same section of people.

Yet, there are still defects within the Party in the understanding of mass organisations and how our Party members should work in them. These need to be pinpointed and corrected at all levels of the Party.

The 17th Congress Political-Organisational report called for the updating of the 1981 resolution on mass organisations based on the past experience. This document is not meant to be a review of the work done in each of the mass organizations. Rather it is updating our approach to mass organizations based on the generalized experience of work in the mass organizations since 1981.

Why is it necessary to concentrate on the functioning of mass organisations and the relationship between the Party and mass organisations? Without the development and expansion of the mass organisations and new sections of people joining them, the Party’s growth is not possible. As the 1981 resolution explains, the mass organisation is the link between the Party and the vast mass of the people most of them with backward consciousness who

are neither under the Party's fold or political influence. The mass organisations are required because the Party's direct political slogans are unable to rouse these masses immediately. It is through the struggle for partial demands and the experience gained through these struggles that the consciousness of the masses under the guidance of the Party can be developed.

One of the arguments used to justify the mass organisation acting as an adjunct of the Party is that all parties have their wings or feeder organisations of youth, students, kisan, women etc. It is therefore argued that it is not possible for the Party to have mass organisations functioning on an independent basis. This is a wrong argument which should be rejected. The bourgeois parties derive benefits from mobilising sections of the people and cultivating them as vote banks. They are not concerned with building the unity of different sections of the working people. In contrast, a working class party committed to building a revolutionary movement seeks to unite people of different classes overcoming the divisions that exist among them. The united movement helps build class unity among workers, peasants, agricultural workers etc.

The bourgeois party's approach to mass organisations and the working class party's approach are therefore radically different. That is why in the quest to build the unity of the working class, communists do not hesitate to work in reformist-led unions with a mass base.

As we have noted since the Salkia Plenum, the Party has made efforts to develop the all India mass organisations and increase their scope and influence. However, whatever growth we have registered still does not match the requirement to make these class and mass organisations represent a substantial, leave alone a majority, of the people who they are meant to mobilise and organise. In the last two decades the unevenness of growth of the mass organisations has not reduced in any manner.

At the time of the 17th Congress in 2002, the membership of West Bengal and Kerala amounted to 87% of the kisan front, 67% of the trade union front, 86% of the youth front, 81% of women and 70% of the students. In the case of agricultural workers front (since there is no organisation in West Bengal) Kerala and Andhra Pradesh constitute 77% of the total membership.

The trends in mass organisation membership shows that between the 14th Congress (1992) and the 17th Congress (2002) the total membership of the class and mass organisations in the Hindi states has not increased but declined slightly from 12,83,564 to 12,71,188. Of particular concern is the decline in the membership of the kisan and agricultural workers front. This shows the lack of adequate attention paid to the work in the mass organisations and in many cases the failure to build and consolidate from the activities and struggles of the mass organisations. This is applicable not only to the Hindi states but to other weak states too.

What this means is that we are still way behind the goal set forth in Salkia of a mass revolutionary party. We are unable to reach vast masses of the people in different states, draw them into mass organisations and then bring them towards the Party and its political influence.

If we have to achieve a breakthrough in the weaker states, one of the main tasks is to work in the class and mass organisations in a manner whereby the wider sections of the people can be brought within their fold and activities. The work of the trade unions, kisan sabhas, agricultural labour organisations in our basic classes are still limited amongst a small section of these classes. The same situation applies to the youth, student and women's fronts with a few exceptions. In order to rectify this situation and make advances, the Party must devote special attention to the problems of the mass organisations and how Party cadres are functioning amongst them. The three main areas where we must pay attention are:

- I. Developing the independent functioning of the mass organisations so that they acquire a broad character and reach to new sections of the people.**
- II. The democratic functioning of the mass organisations and in the case of the youth, student and women organisations, maintaining its character as a democratic platform.**
- III. A proper understanding of the Party's guiding role and Party building.**

I. Independent Functioning of Mass Organisations

Independent functioning of the mass organizations depends on how it takes up the issues affecting that section of the people. The more effectively such issues and problems are picked up and the masses concerned mobilized, the better the independent nature of the mass organisation is established. The strength and influence of the mass organization will also depend on how we project and fight for the issues by mobilizing the people irrespective of their political affiliations.

There is a persisting tendency even now to treat the class and mass organisations as adjuncts of the Party. In practice, the distinction between them gets obliterated. Often there is no difference in the slogans raised in the Party platform and the mass organisation or in the style of functioning. Since most of the members of the mass organisation committees and office bearers are Party members, there is hardly any distinction made between the Party and the mass organisation.

To bring about a correction in this erroneous approach, the leading Party committees and cadres at all levels must keep in mind the following:

- i) The direct slogans of the Party should not be mechanically given from the platforms of the mass organisations. Keeping in mind the consciousness of the ordinary members, slogans and demands should be raised.

- ii) The basic work of the mass organisations should be to take up the immediate problems and long-term issues affecting that section of the people. Though progress has been registered overall in taking up the local and immediate issues, more emphasis and attention has to be paid to developing the local struggles and movements.
- iii) Party leaders not connected with the concerned mass organisations are seen to be prominent in the conferences and meetings of the mass organisations. In some of the strong states like Kerala, Party leaders inaugurate/address delegates' conferences of the mass organisations. This is a wrong practice and should not be followed. Party leaders should not inaugurate/address conferences of the mass organisations unless they are associated with the movement. Particular care should be taken in this regard with multi-class organisations like students, youth and women's organisations. The concern should be not to identify the mass organisations as a Party platform.
- iv) In some states, circulars are sent in which student, youth, women's organisations are asked to join Party rallies and programmes. This should not be done. If there is a joint programme, the concerned mass organisation should issue circulars to their units.
- v) The practice of giving names of all members of mass organisation committees through the concerned Party committees should be stopped. Only the President and General Secretary (and in the case of trade unions, treasurer) should be approved by the concerned Party committee. The other office-bearers and members of the committees should be proposed in the mass organization bodies by the fraction committee/fraction after taking into account the opinion of the non-Party sections and members of the mass organization.
- vi) The office of the mass organisation even at the state and district levels continue to exist and function from the Party offices. A beginning should be made by shifting out the mass organisation offices at the state level out of the Party office and then follow it up at the district level.
- vii) Party cadres functioning in the mass organisations should realize that we represent only a section of the masses whom we are working amongst and stress should be given for united platforms with other mass organisations while maintaining our independent platform and activities.

II. Democratic Functioning And Role Of Mass Organisations

Democratic functioning concerns two aspects. The first is how we function the mass organisations. It should be on the democratic principle. Unlike the communist party which functions on the principles of democratic centralism, the class and mass organisations work on the democratic principle enunciated in their constitution and rules. Party members working in the mass organizations are bound by the discipline of democratic centralism, but this cannot be applied to the mass organisation as such. The broad-based character of the mass organisations can be built up only if there is democratic functioning which involves a wider section of the members and masses drawn into the movement. Repeated reviews have shown that on the trade union front we still have to inculcate the principle of democratic functioning of the unions.

The obstacles to democratic functioning come in two forms. Firstly, Party cadres who are trade union leaders do not foster a democratic style of functioning involving all concerned at different levels and office-bearers, the executive, the general body of workers etc. Unions remain the preserve of an individual or a small group. Secondly, the guiding role of the Party is often translated as the Party committees deciding without properly assessing the line of thinking of the workers or consulting the fractions.

The second aspect concerns the democratic character of the mass organisations of youth, women, students and so on. These are multi-class organisations and in the democratic stage of the revolution their slogans and demands should conform to the general democratic character which means apart from raising their own demands, they should be able to raise the consciousness of the people they work with to the demands of the general democratic movement. This matter was clinched in the 1981 resolution, but a narrow or incorrect approach still prevails in some sections.

The tendency in the weaker states to use these mass organisations and its cadres as just instruments of the Party for immediate jobs and activities without having concern for their broad democratic character often eliminates the scope of growth of these organisations. Both in the case of the kisan and youth fronts, very often in the weaker states at the level of the district committees and below there is no distinction between the Party and the mass organisation platforms.

To promote democratic functioning and genuine participation in the mass organisation decisions, Party sub-committees and fraction committees should not discuss all the details of the mass organisation work which are the purview of the mass organization committee. This reduces the mass organisation bodies to a rubber stamp of the Party. Conscious efforts must be made to elicit opinions and promote meaningful discussion within the mass organisation bodies. There should also be willingness to accommodate any useful suggestion or necessary modification made in these forums.

In certain sectors of the trade unions there is a tendency for comrades to stay on in the leadership even if they have retired. Such a practice prevents the development and coming up of new comrades. Generally, retired persons should not continue in the leadership, unless the relevant Party committees or forums consider certain specific cases of continuance as necessary. In certain cases, even after retirement from the leadership of the mass organisations, the comrades continue to be leaders of the concerned Party committee even though they do not have direct contact with the workers and Party cadres. This also prevents the development of new leaders. Similarly, it is necessary to promote workers/employees in key positions in the union leadership rather than rely on leaders from outside.

There is also the phenomenon of leaders in the trade union front being in the leadership of many unions. They are not able to attend the office bearers/committee meetings nor are they able to meet the mass of members, or directly lead their struggles. Both democratic functioning and promotion of new cadres to the leadership gets affected. It is necessary to limit the number of unions of which a comrade can be an office bearer.

It is necessary to induct new cadres and promote new leaders in the trade unions and other class organisations.

Since the 1981 document, the growth of the women's movement and the increased participation of women in political activities and struggles has highlighted the acute discrimination faced by women in different spheres. The Party has to ensure that gender issues are taken up by all the class organizations and mass organisations independently and jointly. The issues of women within the different organizations such as women agricultural workers, women workers, women students and youth must be taken up. In the mass organizations there must be a conscious policy for promotion of women in different committees and in panels of office bearers.

Independent functioning and democratic functioning are interconnected. It is by promoting both these aspects that substantial growth can be registered in the strength of the mass organisations. Independent and democratic functioning will also help in overcoming the passivity of the membership of the mass organizations whose only contribution is the payment of the membership fee.

The Party committees should check-up and see that regular meetings of the mass organisations are held. The conferences are also to be held as per the provisions of their constitutions.

III. Relationship Of Party And Mass Organisations

The third and final point is the relationship between the Party and the mass organisations i.e. how the guiding role of the Party should be exercised and Party building which is the main task which Party members must accomplish of recruiting communists from the mass organisations.

The correct relationship between the Party and mass organisations is related to the earlier two points made about the independent functioning and the democratic character of the mass organisations. The Party provides guidance to the mass organisations not by dictates to the mass organisations but by working through its Party members and fractions to influence the mass organisation membership. Here the Salkia Plenum had pinpointed to deviations which are still relevant. Firstly, treating the mass organisations as adjuncts of the Party violating the independent and broad based character of the mass organisations. The second deviation is of Party functionaries in the mass organisations bypassing and ignoring the Party committees and collective functioning. In order to avoid mass organisations becoming adjuncts of the Party, it is necessary that Party leaders and Party committees do not give dictates to the mass organizations. If any decisions are to be taken they should be communicated to the Party fractions or the Party functionaries in the mass organisations. The practice of Party leaders addressing mass organisation committees or meetings directly has generally been given up but it still exists in some places.

Party members who are leaders of mass organisations and who command mass influence function mass organisations as their pocket boroughs and do not bring the work of the mass organisations under the purview of the Party's supervision and guidance. In many states, some leaders of the mass organisations who began their Party life actively working among the masses of a particular mass organisation, continue to remain in the leadership of the mass organisation long after they have ceased to give enough time to that mass organisation. Their loss of live links with the people and the mass movement because of other responsibilities given by the Party render them incapable of providing effective leadership and guidance to the mass organisation. Given the prevalence of such cases, the Party committees must plan to renew leadership by bringing in new elements at the appropriate time.

We should change the methods and style of functioning in the mass organisations which replicate the Party style of functioning. For instance, the conduct of mass organisations conferences are generally a carbon copy of Party conferences. The reports prepared and speeches made reflect this wrong trend. Fraternal delegates' speeches take up a lot of time. Delegates often do not get sufficient opportunities to take part in the discussions. Methods should be adopted to make the conferences lively and responsive to the delegates concerns and to enable them to express their opinion frankly.

The guiding principle for the Party should be not only to attract the mass through the leadership of the mass organisations but also learn from them.

Allocation of Cadres

An examination of the structure of the mass organisations shows that below the state level, the identity between the Party and the mass organisation is blurred when it comes to organisations like the Kisan Sabha and the youth front. It has also become a common practice in most of the weak states for the key functionaries of the Kisan and other mass fronts not devoting their main time to the mass organisation but treating that work as subsidiary to the Party responsibility.

The allocation of appropriate and sufficient cadres to the concerned mass fronts is an important issue. Often the paucity of cadres hampers work in the mass organisation. It is often found that the main functionary of the mass organisation is devoting more time for Party work or other responsibilities. For instance, in the Kisan front in some places, the key functionary is discharging other responsibilities instead of concentrating on Kisan work. The same would apply to the agricultural workers or youth front. So allotment of proper cadres for the mass front is essential to ensure proper functioning of the mass organisations.

The Party committee's should periodically discuss the allocation of suitable cadres for the various mass fronts. Special attention should be paid to the youth and student fronts which will help get new cadres for the Party. The work of the Party members in the mass organizations must be assessed periodically. The Party Committees should review the work of wholetimers working in the mass organisations and look after their minimum needs and family requirements.

Sub-Committees/Fraction Committees

The individualist functioning of leaders of mass organisations and the lack of Party's supervision or collective functioning through fraction committees and sub-committees leads to the absence of Party guidance for Party building in the mass organisation. In the recent review of the trade union front it was noted that there are large number of workers in many major trade unions but very few become Party members. The work of Party building has to be taken up by those Party leaders and members who are working in that front under the guidance of the fraction committees and concerned Party committees.

Sub-committees and fraction committees must take up the agenda of Party building and make proposals to the Party Committee and monitor the progress in Party building and report to the general Party Committee. The Central Committee and the State Committees must start the practice of getting reports on Party building from the sub-committees/fractions providing guidance to them.

The proper functioning of the fraction committees and sub-committees must be stressed. In the 1992 review of organisation it was noted that both in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh where there has been relatively better

development of the class and mass organisations (outside the strong states), it was found that there was better functioning of the sub-committees and the fraction committees.

The Party should examine how much efforts are being made to approach new sections outside the current purview of the mass organisation. For instance, on the trade union front, are we planning work in the key industries, the unorganised sector or among women workers? In the kisan front, are we setting targets to reach new areas, blocks and villages to spread the movement? Similarly, in the student, youth and women's front, the thrust should be to reach out to new areas and sections to explain the mass organisation's influence.

It has been critically reviewed earlier that from the CC downwards there are no periodic reviews of the work on the mass fronts. If this is not done, the check up of whether the mass organisations are broadly working in the direction of the Party's policies, and the check up of the Party functionaries in these organisations are not undertaken. Since the 17th Party Congress, the CC has reviewed and adopted immediate tasks documents for the trade unions and Kisan-agricultural fronts.

To ensure coordination between the various mass organizations on common issues, the Party can play a role by taking up such matters with the concerned Party functionaries and committees connected with different mass organizations. The line of promoting worker-peasant unity should be pursued at the Party forums while discussing these fronts. Relations between mass organizations and questions of allocation of Party cadres should also be discussed in the Party committees so that the all-round development of the mass movements is undertaken.

The Party committees must implement the decision taken in the 16th Congress that at least once a year there will be a review of the work in each mass front of the general direction and implementation of the policy of the Party and the checking up the Party building in that front.

In the communist outlook, wherever people organise themselves and associate, the Party should find ways to work amongst them. There is a wrong understanding that Party members should work only in such organisations in which we exercise leadership. There are a large number of mass organisations which do not come in our existing pattern of class and mass organisations. There are locality based/mohallah organisations, residents associations, cultural and welfare bodies which have people of various affiliations who are non-political. Party members should work in such organisations and also set up new organisations of this type wherever required. The principle being that communists work in all such associations/bodies which concern the daily life of the people and their issues.

All India Centres

When we look at the development of the mass organisation since the 1981 resolution the other aspect to be noted is the functioning of the all India centres. Since Salkia and the 1981 resolution we have been successful in setting up all India mass organisations of the youth, agricultural workers and women. All these mass organisations have their centres and offices in Delhi. The working of the all India centres must also be reviewed periodically. These reviews must be undertaken through the reports of the sub-committees and discussed in the Polit Bureau and placed before the Central Committee once a year.

It is also necessary to formulate certain norms and rules for the utilization of the funds available with the mass organisations' centres. Since substantial sums of money are involved there should be proper monitoring and check up. Thirdly, the agitational and propaganda material brought out by the all India centres should also be periodically looked into. The content of the journals brought out by the all India centres and other pamphlets and propaganda material should also be discussed keeping in mind the basic approach to these mass organisations which we have adopted.

The five-point guideline set out in the 16th Congress along with the additional points enumerated below should be made the basis for a campaign within the Party for implementation, which is as follows:

1. Ensure the independent role of the mass organisations and their democratic functioning.
2. The day-to-day work of the mass organisation must be conducted by the office bearers of the relevant elected committees.
3. The principles and methods of Party functioning should not be imposed on the mass organisations which have their own rules and procedures. Party cadres should be educated about the correct role of Party subcommittees and fraction committees of the mass organisation.
4. Party members working in the mass organisations are bound by the discipline of the Party and they should abide by the decisions taken by the Party forums. They should contribute to the development of the Party apart from their mass organisation work, by doing the specific political and organisational work for the Party.
5. A regular report should be submitted to the Party committees about the work done in every mass front for building the Party and a review of the general direction and implementation of the policies of the Party must be undertaken by the Party committees at least once a year.
6. To ensure democratic functioning, state committees must check up which are the mass organisations and trade unions which have not held conferences and executive committee meetings regularly. The Party should hold the Party functionaries concerned accountable for this inaction.
7. Steps should be taken to separate the Party and mass organisation funds where it is not so. Separate and proper accounts should be

- maintained of the mass organisations which should be checked up periodically.
8. In each state, ensure that the key functionaries of class and mass organisations devote their main time to the work of that organisation. To begin with, in weaker states, this should be taken up for review at the state and district levels.
 9. Insist that Party members work in a mass organisation. Party committees should allocate adequate cadres for the mass organisations' and review their requirements periodically.
 10. Function sub-committees and fraction committees on the principle of the Party. They should not discuss the routine work of mass organisations. They should discuss questions of policy, Party building, recruitment into the Party, purvey Party literature and Party views to members in the mass organisations etc. and submit reports to the Party committee.

Rectifying our approach and our style of functioning in the mass organisations must begin from the top echelons of the Party. As the 16th Congress political-organisational report pointed out:

“The PB and CC cannot assume that this lag exists in the state committees and lower units only. At the Central level itself, there has been no concerted effort and continuous intervention to rectify the deeply entrenched wrong outlook and practices in the Party.”

The PB and CC should take the lead by adopting the correct approach and methods of work.