

**LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF
COM.B.T.RANADIVE**

A CITU PUBLICATION

The hundredth birth anniversary of Com. B T Ranadive, a valiant fighter for the working class ideology, falls on 19th December 2003. The CITU has decided to observe the Birth Centenary year of this great revolutionary and teacher of the working class by a massive countrywide programme of education of the workers on principles and history of trade union movement, need for building a confederation of Indian trade unions and on organising a powerful movement to build world-wide struggle against imperialism and for world peace and socialism. The programme will also include steps to strengthen the CITU and increase its membership to 4 million by 19th December 2004.

The purpose of the booklet is to give a brief background of his life and underline his teachings for the Indian working class. He devoted his entire life for the cause of the working class and the toiling masses of the country. Comrade BTR left behind a legacy that would continue to inspire new generations to carry forward the task he left unfinished during his lifetime.

As a true revolutionary B T Ranadive always had in mind the objective of abolition of the capitalist society and establishment of the socialist society. One of the most outstanding contributions of Com.BTR to the Indian working class movement was that he always stood for linking the day-to-day struggles of the working class and the toiling masses with the final objective of social transformation.

Comrade BTR was always advocating that no transformation of society can be achieved without a revolutionary theory and a revolutionary party of the working class. While emphasising the need for development of trade unions as independent mass organisations, Ranadive never ignored the task of involving the working class more and more in political actions and strengthening the party of the working class.

During his concluding speech at the foundation conference of CITU, Comrade BTR categorically declared, "The trade union movement can never forget that socialism and freedom from exploitation will remain words if the working class does not consciously struggle to capture power; and that the first step towards it is to remove the present bourgeois-landlord government by a genuine peoples

government.”

BTR was a strong believer of the concept that without fighting revisionist and dogmatic tendencies in the revolutionary movement the working class cannot advance in its march towards establishing a socialist society. He was always emphasising that both these deviations in the revolutionary movement equally help the capitalist society to continue its exploitative regime.

BTR relentlessly fought against the reformist outlook of keeping the working class away from political action. In his personal life also when in the prime of his youth his association with trade union movement began, he was already involved in political activity, thanks to his early acquaintance with the revolutionary teachings of Marxism-Leninism. All his life he played a leading role in the party of the working class—the Communist Party. His trade union activity was inseparable from his political life and each had important bearing on the other. Although this booklet is primarily concerned with the life of BTR in trade union movement, full understanding of his trade union life demands occasional reference to his political life as well.

Life and teachings of Com.B T Ranadive continue to inspire us in our day-to-day activities and even after his sad demise the CITU continued to grow relentlessly and his teachings continue to guide our movement. He had extensively written on most of the issues that are relevant even today for our movement.

BTR’s teachings are based on application of Marxist-Leninist principles during his life time. With scientific world outlook we can consistently find correct solutions to the problems of our time. It is necessary to learn the philosophy of the revolutionary movement so that it will effectively guide our activities in our objective of ending exploitation of man by man.

Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive was born on 19th December 1904 in Mumbai in Dadar area in a locality known as Dhuruwadi in Dagdi Building. The name of the building was perhaps given since its outer-walls were of stone. His father Trimbak Moreshwar Ranadive hailed from a middle class family and was an income tax officer.

He was a follower of Prarthana Samaj which believed in unity of all religions. He had political views and was a supporter of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a well-known liberal politician in the country. Ranadive's mother was Yashoda, a kind hearted woman whose affectionate care of young Bhalchandra had created powerful impact on his childhood life. BTR had three brothers—Chintamani, Prabhakar and Jaisingh and four sisters— Ramabai, Pramila, Kusum and Ahilya.

BTR's father had sympathies for the Congress Party and the freedom movement. Young Bhalchandra's mind developed patriotic feelings in that family background. Except Ahilya and P B Rangnekar, no one joined active politics but other members of the family were keenly interested in current political developments and some of them were with the Communist Party for some period.

At the age of 8, BTR was admitted in Nutan Marathi Vidyalaya, a well known Marathi School in Pune, in the fourth standard. As a brilliant student Bhalchandra always stood first in the class and was popular among the students. Despite his engrossment in studies young Bhalchandra used to attend meetings of political parties and discuss political developments with his school friends. He was fond of reading books and took great interest in extra curricular activities. In the initial stages he was impressed by the ideologies of Lokmanya Tilak and Gandhiji.

Bhalchandra passed matriculation examination in flying colours in 1921 and joined Fergusson College in Pune for higher studies. However, at the instance of his father he joined Wilson College in Bombay next year. He passed BA examination with history and economics as subjects in 1925 and was awarded scholarship for post graduate studies. Despite his brilliant academic career, he did not forget the political developments in the country. He enthusiastically supported non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhiji. But following the Chouri Choura incident in 1924, when two policemen were burnt alive, Gandhiji withdrew the entire non-co-operation movement by calling it a Himalayan blunder. Bhalchandra was demoralised by this action of Gandhiji and felt that the withdrawal of the movement was not justified.

BTR joined Bombay School of Economics for MA degree course in 1925. He worked for his MA thesis on population problem under the guidance of prominent economists like Prof K T Shah and C N Vakil. He stood first in the MA examination in 1927 and was awarded gold medal by the Bombay University. Though he received scholarship for 3 years for academic research, Ranadive preferred to join active politics and returned the fellowship. His father wanted him to take a job but he avoided doing so due to his keen interest in active political work.

BTR's cousin G M Adhikari went to Germany in 1925 for his doctoral studies in chemistry where he came in contact with communists. He sent some Marxist literature in a clandestine manner. Ranadive came across Labour Monthly, edited by R P Dutt, from England. He also purchased selected works of Lenin. He was carefully reading whatever was secretly available on Marxism in those days. He was attracted by Marxist ideology and joined the Communist Party in 1928. In the same year he came in contact with leaders of the textile workers and started working among them. In 1928 Ranadive edited Kranti, a Marathi weekly. In 1929 he was arrested by police while addressing workers and was imprisoned for a month.

The fighting spirit imbibed by BTR in his early age was clearly witnessed when he appeared before the court of enquiry into the 1929 textile strike in Mumbai. The report mentions the exchange of remarks between BTR, as an official of Girni Kamgar Union and Mr Mody, the chairman of Bombay Mill Owners' Association. Mr Mody complained that Girni Kamgar union was not following "recognised trade union principles."

B T Ranadive: What are recognised methods?

Mody: In case of dispute to try and bring about a settlement by negotiations and not to provoke strike after strike.

B T Ranadive: Do other trade unions follow these recognised methods?

Mody: I should think so.

B T Ranadive: Is it not true that you are out for a fight to finish in regard to the present strike?

Mody: I have already stated that the moment we found ourselves

confronted with a union which was bent upon the destruction of capitalism and organised industries and we recognised that we had to fight it some day.

After release, BTR came in contact with railway workers' movement and was elected as secretary of GIP Railwaymen's Union. When the union planned for a general strike he was arrested in December 1929 and imprisoned for one year.

The British Government appointed the Royal Commission on Labour known as Whitley Commission in 1929 and the AITUC, under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to boycott it. However, the government nominated N M Joshi and Diwan Chamanlal from AITUC as members of the Commission. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru criticised those who walked out of the conference. This led to a split in AITUC and supporters of N M Joshi walked out of the conference and founded Indian Federation of Trade Unions. Ranadive supported the call to boycott Whitley Commission. He edited an English journal 'Workers Weekly' in 1931.

Another split occurred in the AITUC in 1931 when Subhash Chandra Bose presided over the conference at Calcutta. On the question of representation to Girmi Kamgar Union, there was a serious dispute. Ranadive and Subhash Chandra Bose clashed over the issue and the communists walked out of AITUC and formed a new organisation viz: Red Trade Union Congress. It was again merged with AITUC in the year 1934.

Meanwhile, in 1931 when Gandhiji came to Bombay to address a public meeting at Parel, Ranadive courageously mounted on the Dias and called Gandhi a betrayer for his stand on execution of Bhagat Singh and detention of prisoners in the Meerut Conspiracy case. Gandhiji just quietly listened, kept mum and then commenced his speech after Ranadive got down from the dais.

During this period, the differences cropped up in the communist movement in India on the question of attitude towards Congress and its activities. BTR and others formed Bolshevik Party since they had strong differences with the Communist Party. However,

Communist Parties of England, China and Germany addressed a joint letters to all the communists and appealed to them for unity of the party. Bolshevik Party was then dissolved and Ranadive and others joined the Communist Party of India. In 1934 when an all India centre was established Ranadive was included in its Central Committee.

BTR's father died in 1934. It was a big shock to him. However, he could not attend his funeral despite his great desire.

The textile workers movement developed new militancy in this period and in Girni Kamgar Union the reformist union leadership was defeated and the communist leadership was established. A powerful strike of textile workers was organised against cut in Dearness Allowance which was widespread. Ranadive edited a Marathi weekly Mumbai Kamgar, which became popular among the workers. The British Government detained BTR and G Adhikari for two years. Ranadive studied Marxist literature in jail extensively despite rigorous jail life. He was released in 1936.

Immediately after his release BTR again plunged into trade union activities in Bombay. In 1937 elections, the Congress party was elected in Bombay province and formed a government. Bombay Industrial Dispute Bill was passed by the Assembly in 1938 attacking the workers' right to strike. It provided recognition of scab unions and legal machinery was provided to avoid working class struggles. Textile workers in Bombay went on a protest strike against the Bill. Dr B R Ambedkar supported the strike. In other parts of Bombay Presidency the strike was successful.

BTR met Vimal Sardesai in 1939 who also started working among the textile workers in Bombay. During the activities among the workers they came closer to each other and decided to get married. However, due to hectic political activities of BTR it was not possible to do so for quite some time.

The second World War commenced on 1st September 1939 and strikes were organised in different parts of the country to oppose the war. Big demonstrations were organised all over India. The British Government banned the "National Front" and "Kranti", the

journals published in English and Marathi by the Communist Party. Seeing the danger of arrests, leaders had to go underground. Before going underground, BTR and Vimal Sardesai arranged registered marriage in presence of selected comrades. However, after few months of underground life he was arrested and taken to Deoli detention camp in Rajasthan. Ranadive conducted struggles in jail against the harrowing conditions of the detainees. He also conducted political classes of detainees on Marxist philosophy.

While in jail, international developments took a new turn. On 22nd June 1941, Hitler treacherously attacked Soviet Union which changed the character of war. The defence of a socialist country became an important role for the progressive forces all over the country. Ranadive noted the changes in the character of the war and called upon the people to rise in defence of Soviet Union and for defeat of fascism all over the world. His thesis is known as Deoli Thesis which was smuggled outside the jail and the leadership of the party accepted the thesis.

The Government of India lifted the ban on the Communist Party in July 1942 and ordered the release of communists. Ranadive was also released along with others. He hoisted the Red Flag in Bombay when the Party headquarter was inaugurated.

The Indian National Congress decided to launch 'Quit India' movement on 9th August 1942. The British Govt arrested all prominent leaders and Gandhiji gave a call: "do or die". The Communist Party did not agree with the movement in the form and manner, it was conducted since the task of defeating fascism was of uppermost importance at the global level. The Hitler's Fascist troops had reached Stalingrad and the Soviet troops were defending the world from the onslaughts of the fascist marauders. Mussolini's fascist army attacked North Africa and the Allied Forces were on the retreat. Moreover the Japanese troops occupied almost the entire south-east Asia and also attacked the Pearl Harbour in USA. The emphasis given by the Communist Party on the primacy of defeating the fascism was criticised by the Congress Party branding the communists as supporters of imperialism. Ranadive and other leaders of the Communist Party called upon for campaign for release of all political prisoners and develop national unity to

defend the country from the attack of the Japanese fascist forces. The Communist Party also gave a call for the unity of Congress and Muslim League to jointly decry and oppose the failure of the British Govt to firmly fight the fascist invaders and raised a demand for a 'national government'. In this period, Ranadive played an important role in carrying forward the policies of the Communist Party in such crucial juncture and replying to all slanderous accusations.

The first Congress of the CPI was held in Bombay in May 1943. He played an important role during Bengal famine and Tebhaga movement in Bengal and Warli Revolt in Maharashtra. During this period the struggle of Punnappa-Vayalar peasants in Travancore, campaign to demand release of INA, the upsurge of RIN (Royal Indian Navy) Ratings in Bombay and the struggle of Bombay workers in solidarity, the heroic Telangana peasants struggle against Nizam of Hyderabad were also major landmarks in Indian freedom movement. BTR wrote extensively on these struggles and roused anti-imperialist consciousness of the people.

After great sacrifices, the Soviet army could finally defeat the main strength of the fascist Germany in 1945, liberated the eastern Europe and marched towards Berlin. It was only at that time the second front was opened by US and British forces to prevent further marching forward of the Soviet troops. The Second World War was almost coming to an end in the process of defeat and retreat of fascist troops all over the world. At that material period, Atom Bombs were dropped by USA on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan on 6th and 9th August 1945.

As a result of valiant struggle of Indian people, British Imperialist had to hand over the power to Indian leaders but the country was divided into India and Pakistan. There had been severe outbreak of communal riots and the Communist Party was active in defending unity of the people and prevent riots. An interim Govt was formed in the country and on 15th August 1947, the country got independence. In this period the Communist Party committed certain reformist mistakes of tailing behind the bourgeois parties. Ranadive realised these mistakes, analysed their nature and played important role in unifying the Party against those errors.

BTR played an important role in criticising the reformist policies of the CPI. In 1948 in the second congress of the party at Calcutta Ranadive was elected as the General Secretary of the Party. The Congress Government banned the CPI and detained 25,000 of its activities. BTR went underground and remained till 1950. However, the party policy went to the other extreme and sectarian mistakes were committed. It had its impact on trade union movement too. Periodic call for strikes were given which could not succeed. Adventurist struggles of detenués in jail were conducted which resulted in loss of life of several valuable comrades. Unjust disciplinary actions were taken against several party leaders. At the intervention of Communist Information Bureau (Coinform) the mistakes were corrected. Ranadive was removed from the post of General Secretary of the Party and membership of the Central Committee. He, however, admitted his mistakes and commenced his activities in Bombay as an ordinary party member.

In this period he wrote 2 important books—‘India’s Five Year Plan – What it offers?’ and ‘Crisis of Indian economy’, which received wide acclaim. He soon became secretary of the Maharashtra State Committee of the party in 1955.

BTR’s intellectual calibre and his deep knowledge of Marxist Leninist principles were recognised by the party and he was soon acknowledged as a national leader by the CPI. He was elected as a member of the Central Committee in the fourth Congress of the party. He shifted to Delhi and functioned from the party centre. He was working as editor of New Age monthly, theoretical journal of the party.

In this period, the Communist Party, once again faced the problem of ideological differences and BTR contributed a great deal in fighting against revisionist and reformist policies prevailing in the dominant leadership of the CPI. In 1958, when the 5th Congress of the Party at Amritsar was held, BTR contributed a great deal in posing ideological issues before the party. He was elected as a member of the national secretariat of the party in the Congress.

BTR’s position in the party continued to improve due to his consistent adherence to the Marxist-Leninist principles. In 1961

when the Sixth Congress of the party was held at Vijayawada, Ranadive placed an alternative document on behalf of 21 members of the National Council of the party. Later a common understanding was reached after the intervention of some fraternal parties. This unity, however, was short-lived.

Difference in the communist movement emerged in sharp focus during the India-China border conflict. Ranadive and other leaders advocated peaceful settlement through negotiations but the dominant leadership of the party fully supported the policies of Govt of India and even accepted industrial truce promising not to go in for strike action. BTR was arrested along with several leaders of the party by the Congress government. He was released only in 1966. Meanwhile, differences within the Communist movement were increasing both nationally and internationally. Internationally the difference between the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties came out in the open dividing the World Communist movement. The majority of CPI leadership supported the line of Soviet Communist Party while the minority section of the leadership were opposing such stand. Within the country, the ideological differences on party programme and revolutionary tactics were also reaching point of no return. The dominant leadership of the CPI was openly advocating class collaborationist line and it was impossible to keep the unity of the party. Incidentally, the exposure of Dange's letter written in 1924 to British imperial government to seek release from jail and assuring support to the Govt became a serious controversial issue. The dominant section of the Party leadership refused to take any action against Dange for this letter. 32 members of the CPI National Council walked out of the meeting and decided to form another party. A convention was organised at Tenali (Andhra) which decided to hold the Seventh Party Congress at Calcutta in 1964. CPI (M) thus came into being with a revolutionary programme and policies. BTR was elected as a member of the Polit Bureau of CPI(M) in the Congress.

Despite split in the Communist Party in 1964 BTR advocated unity of the TU movement and work inside the AITUC. In the conference of the AITUC in 1966 he strongly advocated a platform of TU unity and stressed the need to work together on the basis of the programme. However, Dange felt that the leadership of CPI (M)

would remain in AITUC to capture its leadership and he was opposing all efforts for unity. BTR was elected as a member of General Council of AITUC in the Bombay conference. During the meetings of the General Council he always emphasized the need for strengthening the class struggle and building TU unity. However, Dange and AITUC leadership wanted to sideline Marxist leaders in TU and began to form rival unions to CPI (M) led unions all over India. More than 300 unions led by CPI (M) were denied affiliation to AITUC while rival unions were formed in over 200 establishments. After consistently fighting for 4 years to build united nationwide struggles and Dange leadership's consistent opposition to these struggles while advocating class collaborationist line the dissidents in the AITUC found it impossible to work together. Dange also desired that the CPI (M) leadership should leave AITUC so that his unhindered control over the AITUC would be maintained. Thus the split in the AITUC became inevitable.

Thirty two members of the General Council who walked out the meeting in 1970 decided to call a convention of members of the General Council and State Councils and Committees to hold a National Convention on 9-10 April 1970 at Goa to chalk out further course of action. B T Ranadive presided over the convention and guided its deliberations. A resolution adopted by the convention stated, "Repeated efforts made by the class conscious workers and those who wanted to carry forward the line of class struggle to put an end to this disruption and unite trade unions were frustrated by the dominant leadership. The leadership refused to implement even the principle that had long ago been accepted by the AITUC itself of unity of the trade unions on the basis of democratic elections with proportionate representation and democratic decision by the workers and their elected organs on all questions affecting the workers."

The resolution further noted, "Not content with all these, the dominant leadership inflated the membership of their unions, refused to carry out check up of membership, on the basis of any norm and affiliated bogus paper unions—all with a view to keep absolute control over the organization."

It also pointed out, "With this control, it nominated its own nominees

in government bodies, such as tripartite committees, wage boards, study groups of the National Labour Commission, in which these so-called representatives of the working class join hands with the employers and government representatives...”

The Goa convention decided to hold a National Conference on 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st May 1970 at Calcutta and form a new all India organization of the working class of India. In the foundation conference of CITU over 5000 delegates attended with over 8 lakh membership. While summing up the deliberations of the conference BTR observed, “We are starting a new organization with a new line. We wish to give a new orientation to the TU movement. But for that all the leaders of the TU movement, every one of us, must change his own consciousness, must be determined to give up old consciousness and old practice; then alone we will be able to carry on the concrete line of correct struggle against the reformist line of all others.”

The conference elected BTR as the president and P Ramamurthi as General Secretary of the new organization, Centre of Indian Trade Unions, and a rally of about a million workers welcomed the formation of a new militant organization of the working class.

Alarmed by the emergence of a new trade union centre, the Union Labour Minister, R K Khadilkar convened a meeting of INTUC, AITUC and HMS and constituted National Council of Trade Unions. Ranadive condemned the constitution of the NCTU and observed, “The coming together of these three organizations is nothing short of an alliance of the government and pro-government parties on the TU front. It is not a combination to resist the anti-working class policies of the government but one to give prestige to the measures which the government is planning against the working class and at the same time divide the TU movement and facilitate the task of the administration to suppress the left TUs”.

BTR took interest in bringing together all central trade unions and industrial federations to fight the new menace to the unity of the trade union movement. On 1-2 October 1972 a conference of representatives of central trade unions and National Federations was held at New Delhi which decided to form a new organization

called United Council of Trade Unions(UCTU). BTR attended the conference and guided the deliberations. George Fernandes was elected as a convener of this organization. It conducted several united struggles demanding bonus for all, opposed Compulsory Deposit Scheme, and mobilised Central Govt employees against Pay Commission Report. BTR wrote articles in support of these struggles.

While NCTU could not carry its activities, UCTU was reacting to every policy pronouncement of the Govt of India. During emergency in 1975 AITUC and INTUC supported the bonus cut from 8.33% to 4%. Dange spoke in a Nagpur rally, “Gains of emergency are 10 times more than the bonus loss.” HMS walked out of the NCTU and held a meeting with UCTU constituents to fight the national emergency and the bonus cut. BTR took active interest in the activities of the UCTU and was guiding the united movement against Central Government’s policies. During emergency in 1975 he had to go underground but he continued to guide the united movement of the working class and the people against authoritarian emergency rule.

In 1974 when the All India strike of railwaymen took place BTR was guiding the movement on day-to-day basis. In the formation of NCCRS (National Coordination Committee for Railwaymen’s Struggle) he had played an important role. He was extremely critical at the way in which the strike was withdrawn by George Fernandes and heavy repression was let loose against railwaymen by the Congress Government.

“The Railway workers in India have made history,” wrote BTR, “For three weeks they have carried on a heroic struggle of resistance in the face of mass arrests, mass dismissals and above all widespread terror against them and their women and children”. He then called upon the trade union movement, “Let the entire trade union movement and the people rally round the railway workers and make their cause their own.”

BTR took initiative in arranging legal aid to the victimised railwaymen and was associated with the campaign till the railwaymen were reinstated. He was also keen in the movement

of loco-running staff and guided their struggles. He was consistently stressing the importance of railwaymen in the revolutionary struggles of the working class.

BTR's sustained guidance was also responsible for emergence of CITU as the real unifier of the working class movement and as instrument of fight against alien ideology within the working class. Despite important responsibilities given to him by the CPI (M), Ranadive was finding time to give regular guidance to the trade union movement. He played an important role in finalising the CPI (M) documents: Tasks on the Trade Union Front in 1966 and 1983 which underline the revolutionary role of the working class in fighting for socialism.

When Morarji Desai Government brought the Industrial Relations Bill, BTR wrote a strong critical booklet and roused the working class to fight against the Bill. A united nation-wide convention was held in 1979 which condemned the Bill and a big rally was held before Parliament against it. Ultimately the govt could not get the Bill passed in Parliament.

BTR played an important role in formation of National Campaign Committee of Trade Unions which brought together all Central TUs except INTUC and 55 industry wise federations. The NCC organized the first nationwide general strike of Indian workers in 1982.

In 1979 at the initiative of BTR first national convention of working women was organized in Chennai to highlight the problems of working women. He also was instrumental in holding 1st public sector workers' convention at Hyderabad in 1978 which later on paved the way for the formation of CPSTU.

BTR's role in the campaign against wage freeze policy of the government of India and wages and income policy enunciated by Bhoothalingam Committee is also worth noting.

During 20 years of his presidentship of CITU he went abroad only once. In 1974 at the instance of Vietnamese Trade Unions he went to attend the 3rd Congress of Vietnamese Trade Union at Hanoi,

while greeting the conference on behalf of CITU, BTR said, “The struggle that the people of Vietnam have been waging is an unprecedented and unparalleled struggle. Never before perhaps was a people pitted against such a brutal power having overwhelming superiority in the most destructive arms. But the spirit of freedom, of resistance to secure the unification of the motherland, its freedom and its right to a better social order conquered the bombs and vaunted military might of the American imperialists.”

Earlier he went to Romania to attend a party congress along with Com. M. Basavapunniah. He did not go abroad any more throughout his life though he was invited on many other occasions. He used to say, “We have so much to do in our country, where is the time with us to go abroad.”

BTR used to write extensively for party journal Peoples Democracy, as well as CITU monthly Working Class. Even during his last days when CITU organised a national convention on right to work, BTR, despite his illness wrote an article which acted as a guideline to the convention.

BTR was always accessible to comrades. Even if he was doing serious work of theoretical nature he could find time to talk to comrades and guide them in their activities. He had a knack of facing difficulties without any rancour. He used to cut jokes and have a hearty smile even when some difficulties were lying before him. “One who cannot face difficulties with courage cannot become a communist,” he used to tell younger comrades.

Living a simple life was a great quality in him. If you are accustomed to comforts you become only lazy and cannot discharge revolutionary responsibilities. He was always chiding comrades who use to tell him about their difficulties. He endeared himself with ordinary comrades due to his Spartan lifestyle. Comrades were finding it easy to talk to him frankly and with open-heart.

He had no interest of his own in life except the interest of the working class and the toiling people. Sometimes he appeared to be in a hurry to achieve the final objective of the working class and the people.

Since 1989 BTR's health was showing signs of deterioration. However, despite falling health he was trying to remain active and attend to his work in a limited manner. His article on right to work was practically written from deathbed. He also wrote on the developments in USSR and how attempts to emasculate the working class were made in that country.

While staying in Delhi he was taken ill. After detailed examination it was found that he was suffering from cancer at an advanced stage. He was therefore admitted in Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital in Bombay in January 1990. Even from the hospital bed he continued to enquire about political developments in the country. Those who came to enquire about his health were surprised to find out his total devotion to the cause of the party and the working class. Vimal Ranadive and his son Uday were attending to him continuously. They realised that he was sinking.

His pain became more and more unbearable but he was bravely facing it. He realised that he was in his last days but he faced the ordeal courageously.

When I went to see him in the hospital during the last days people were not allowed to meet him. With special permission from the doctor I was permitted to see him for a minute only. When I went near to him he just opened his eyes and tried to smile. But it was not his usual smile. He tried to say something but could not speak. My time was up and with heavy heart I left his room. Uday told me that according to doctor he could not survive for long.

Ranadive, the great teacher of the working class and the toiling masses, breathed his last on 6th April 1990. The news spread all over the country. The CPI (M) and the CITU ranks felt that they became orphans. A deep sense of grief spread everywhere. On 7th April his funeral was arranged in Bombay. Thousands paid their homage to the great warrior against capitalism. Leaders from all walks of life reached Janashakti office in Mumbai where his body was placed prior to his last journey.

BTR left behind his rich heritage which is a guide for the activists in the revolutionary trade union movement for ever.

STRUGGLE AGAINST REVISIONISM AND DOGMATISM

BTR was never tired of warning the working class against the main dangers to the revolutionary movement i.e. revisionism and dogmatism. Both the trends in the working class movement ultimately serve the interests of capitalism and damage the cause of revolutionary movements. Though both the trends talk in Marxist terminology, they, in practice, deviate from Marxist ideology and sabotage the class struggle. These right and the left deviations are two sides of the same coin and unless sustained struggle is launched against them the working class movement cannot advance effectively.

However, BTR will be specially remembered in our trade union history for the determined struggle he led on theoretical and organizational plane for salvaging Indian trade union movement from getting bogged in the morass of reformism and revisionism. In the post independence period, following splits in AITUC a large segment of Indian trade union movement and organization went under reformist influence. But when the dominant leadership of AITUC adopted politically revisionist outlook, the entire trade union movement in the country was under threat in the late 1960s. It is at that juncture that Com. BTR took the reins of a fierce struggle. Around him mobilized a band of most honest dedicated and conscious workers steeled in many battles.

For carrying on an effective struggle it was necessary first to draw at the political level a clear line of demarcation between reformist revisionist outlook on trade union movement and the revolutionary outlook. It was on the basis of the revolutionary teachings of Marxism-Leninism that the line of demarcation was delineated with major contribution from BTR. While defending the daily interest, trade unions with revolutionary perspective “aim at organizing a disciplined working class with revolutionary socialist consciousness...” Again, “The Marxist-Leninist outlook regards economic battle as small skirmishes during the course of great class battles between the two contending classes for power and therefore always bears in mind the vital link between the immediate and the political or final struggle”. But the reformists want to restrict the working class and the trade union movement to a purely

economic outlook of daily struggle divorced from the main struggle for socialism whose essence is capture of political power by the working class.

Here in lies the main difference between the revisionist-reformist and opportunist outlook on trade union struggle on the one hand and the revolutionary approach on the other.

In all his writings and speeches, his articles published in *The Working Class*, in party journals and elsewhere, his presidential address to conferences and meetings of CITU, BTR constantly upheld this basic principle of revolutionary trade unionism, developed it and elaborated the tasks of the trade unions in accordance with this principle for every concrete situation. These constitute his most important teaching and his greatest contribution to the working class movement.

When deviation of 'euro-communism' was emerging in various communist parties in the world, Ranadive wrote extensively against that deviation and pointed out how the ideology of Euro-communism was, in practice, giving up the essence of revolutionary doctrine of Marxism.

How fierce was the struggle for assertion of the principles of revolutionary trade union movement that started within AITUC and how it culminated at the organisational level in the founding of the CITU has been briefly traced earlier in this booklet. The constitution of the CITU incorporated this revolutionary Marxist-Leninist outlook in section on 'aims and object' in the constitution.

In his concluding speech in the foundation conference of the CITU at Kolkata in 1970 BTR forthrightly noted, "The revisionist line has brought disruption in the working class movement and it is our business and our duty to see that unity is restored in the ranks of the working class and its fighting forces are organized. The struggle for unity is a serious struggle, it has to be carried on with great precision, with great confidence and in the bargain and in the process, the forces of disruption have to be isolated. Only then, our organization can really develop the fighting strength of the working class, can be an effective organ to develop its

consciousness further so that it can discharge its political obligations which history has placed on it.”

In the same speech he, however, warned, “In their anger, some people might concentrate their fire on the revisionists and forget the main enemies. This will be inexcusable. It is exactly the thing the revisionists do when they attack us. Should we do that mistake? We fight reformism, we fight revisionism, we fight every such tendency, only because our common class struggle against our main enemy is hampered.”

While advocating a change in our practice and method of functioning, Ranadive asserted, “We have correctly understood the Dange line is a reformist and revisionist line and have rejected it in the TUs have started our organization, but if our practice remains the same, then this becomes a non-genuine, a insincere fight, a fight which need not be started.”

While stressing the need for genuine unity to strengthen the class struggle BTR warned about false notion of unity without any principles. He noted, “no compromise with reformist practice, no compromise with revisionist sabotage, no more cheating of the working class in the name of a false concept of unity.”

He was equally vehement in opposing dogmatism. Marxism, to him, was an evergrowing science and he always emphasised the need to see the changes in the social developments and adopt suitable tactics to meet those changes. He strongly condemned the left sectarian deviations of the Naxalites who wanted to resort to adventurist armed struggle without preparing the masses for a mass-upsurge. He warned the working class against falling prey to the empty slogans of the Naxalites who talked of immediate revolution and failed to take into account the level of consciousness of the toiling people and take positive steps to enhance the level of their consciousness for the ultimate struggle to overthrow the yoke of the capitalist system.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM

The working class movement can afford to ignore the role of

imperialism only at their peril. The working class has to consistently mobilise its forces to defeat imperialist machinations. Hence the struggle against imperialism forms an important aspect of teachings of B T Ranadive.

On innumerable occasions, BTR pointed out the imperialist conspiracies against the socialist world and highlighted the urgency for the working class to strengthen the resistance against imperialism to save the gains of socialism. In his article, “Defeat Imperialist Conspiracies against the Socialist World”, BTR wrote: “ The US imperialists are preparing to unleash a war against the Socialist World to regain the lost world for capitalism. Regan is following the footsteps of Hitler. He is openly supported in his preparations by some powers like Britain, though there are misgivings in the minds of some others. But the danger of war is real and has to be countered by the working class. It is intended to drown the world in a sea of blood, unleash unheard of destruction, and mass-killings of millions. To achieve what ? To achieve and fulfil the sunset of socialism, the global ambition of USA- the ambition of dominating and subjugating the world”.

BTR had extensively written about national liberation movements all over the world and continuously expressed full solidarity with them. The heroic struggle of the people of Vietnam against the world’s mightiest military power, the valiant resistance by the people of Cuba against US imperialist blockade and black-mail despite worldwide condemnation, the longdrawn liberation struggle by the people of Palestine against the Israeli occupation of their homeland, the anti-aparthied struggle by the people of south Africa, the historic liberation struggle of the people of Bangladesh— and in fact on all the anti-imperialist and liberation struggles against colonial rule in his life time had found place in his analytical writings.

For Ranadive, the imperialist hegemonism was the most brutal expression of the world capitalism and the struggle against the same was an essential and inseparable part of the class struggle.

Now after the fall of socialist system in USSR and East European countries, the imperialist forces got strengthened and became more desperate in their machinations as the world’s correlation of forces

has tilted in their favour.

After passing away of B T Ranadive, the US imperialism has become more aggressive and fight against imperialism has acquired paramount importance.

The offensive of globalisation through instruments of World Bank, IMF and WTO has engulfed the whole world and struggle against globalisation is growing in all continents.

BTR's teachings on imperialism and the anti-imperialist tasks of the working class will continue to guide and inspire the revolutionary movement to carry forward the united struggle against imperialist machinations with greater vigour and determination.

MARX AND TRADE UNIONS

Ranadive's study on 'Marx and Trade Unions' has obvious relevance to his teachings on reformist and revolutionary trade unionism. Ranadive elaborated at length the teachings of Marxism on the trade union movement. At the outset he noted the leading role of the working class in socialist revolution and quoted from the Communist Manifesto "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product."

The International Working Men's Association, founded by Karl Marx, was a real and practical organisation of the working class in the shape of trade unions, mutual aid societies, cooperatives, educational societies, etc. It was a collection of organisations of different ideologies and Karl Marx had to fight against erroneous trends in the working class movement.

The early socialist ideas began to appear in religious and humanitarian forms. The French socialists, Saint Simon, and Fourier strongly criticized the existing society but only gave utopian promise of happiness and prosperity. They did not think of revolution but hoped to reorganise the society by peaceful means appealing

to the hearts of people, including progressive capitalists.

While analysing the period BTR noted, “Both Marx and Engels link the daily struggle, the struggle of the trade unions and strike 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.”

Marx had to fight a long drawn battle against Proudhon, an influential French socialist who advocated a change in the society through a vast network of producers and consumers’ cooperatives, which were to eventually to replace the capitalist system. He was opposed to labour unions, to strikes, to wage increases and labour legislation. Karl Marx in his book “Poverty of philosophy” pointed out how Proudhon did not understand how the worker was exploited through extraction for surplus value.

Marx had to fight another socialist, Ferdinand Lassalle, who advocated producers’ associations, supported by state and considered as the means of introducing socialism. Lassalle thought that by introducing universal suffrage the objective could be achieved by peaceful means. “The vote was considered to be a powerful means to represent the interests of the working class and eliminate class contradictions in society. Here was a rejection of revolutionary struggle,” BTR wrote.

Lassalle advocated the Iron Law of wages which meant that no matter how a worker fought he would not be able to improve his conditions because of the inflexible law of capitalist society. BTR pointed out, “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.”

In his criticism of the Gotha Programme drafted by supporters of Lassalle, Marx noted, “There is not a word said about the organisation of the working class as a class, by means of trade unions. This is very essential point, for this is the real class organisation of the proletariat, in which it carries on its daily

struggles with capital.”

The International Working Men’s Association had to expel Bakunin, an anarchist in Hague Congress (1872) because of his disruptive role of arguing that the state has created capital and it had to be abolished. He did not visualise the need for abolition of capitalist state and establishment of socialist state by the working class. Bakunin was advocating abjuration of all politics by the working class and abolition of state power through economic struggle.

“The workers in most cases are ignorant, they still do not know theory,” Bakunin wrote, “consequently they have only one path left - the path of practical emancipation. And what should this practice be? It can be only one: the struggle based on solidarity of the workers against the bosses; that is trade unions, organisation, and federations of resistance fund societies.”

This explains why Bakunin had to be expelled by the First International.

Marx and Engels had to criticise Robert Owen another utopian socialist from Great Britain. Though Owen advocated abolition of class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, he wanted to do so through economic reforms only. Pointing out the weakness of the contemporary British trade unions, Marx noted, “They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects and not the causes of these effects.” BTR observed, “Even in Britain Marx had to contend against the viewpoints that wage-rise only increases the price level and leads to no improvement in the conditions of the workers.”

BTR summarised Marxian scientific understanding about the trade union movement in its class struggle thus:

- æ trade unions should continue to defend the daily interests of the workers;
- æ at the same time they must act as a conscious centre working for the emancipation of the working class;
- æ for this purpose every social and political movement “tending” in that direction should be aided;

- æ they are champions of the entire class and should not form themselves into closed corporate bodies only of their members, shutting out non members;
- æ it is their duty to help organize those who cannot organise themselves easily, and protect the interests of worst paid trades like the agricultural workers;
- æ 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.

ON WORKER-PEASANT ALLIANCE

It is the peasantry which constitute the largest contingent of downtrodden millions in the country. There is hardly any major speech or writing of BTR on the task of the working class, which did not stress the crucial question of building a worker-peasant alliance. In the foundation conference itself in his concluding speech, Ranadive stated, "Class struggle is going to be so fierce that every time fierce attacks will be made and the working class alone will not be able to meet those attacks unless it has got powerful allies in the democratic forces."

Elaborating this point further, he pointed out, "Only then we will be able to seize initiative in the common democratic struggles to replace the bourgeois-landlord government by a genuine people's government, and form a durable alliance with the peasant masses and other democratic forces and march to victory against the ruling classes, who exploit the people and growingly yield to imperialist pressure."

BTR thus highlighted the strategic character of the worker-peasant alliance in a democratic revolutionary struggle. At the same time he emphasised the need for such alliance in day to day struggles which pave the way for a strategic alliance.

In an article, "Let workers and peasants rise in defence of their living standards", he wrote: "The peasant masses are the basic allies of the working class. The working class is born out of the womb of the peasant class. Its struggle for better living conditions, for socialism, cannot succeed except in alliance with the peasantry,

without protecting the agricultural workers and poor peasants against bourgeois landlord depredations. The united working class movement which is growing, all central organisations, all trade unions must combine to protect the peasant and render every help to the rural masses and warn the vested interests that the rural poor are not without strong friends in the cities.”

When serious drought situation prevailed in India during 1973 while addressing the second conference of the CITU, BTR said, “The destitute peasant, with his cattle dead and gone will neither be able to undertake agricultural operations nor maintain himself during these days.... The working class and the CITU raise their voice in defence of the agricultural workers and peasants to compel the government to see that they are not deprived of relief and literally thrown to the wolves... “The working class has yet to make its contribution for the defence and relief of the peasantry. Though some sections have contributed liberally for financial relief, still we cannot say that we have discharged our duty. Much less we can say that we have brought our full strength to bear on the government and compel it to provide adequate relief to the peasantry. Failure in this respect will be an act of callousness, of political suicide and betrayal. All talk of socialism and democracy in the mouth of trade unions end if they cannot defend the peasant mass, — in the struggle for democracy and socialism.”

BTR concertedly advocated that land reforms were essential to bring down the prices of food and essential commodities. In his presidential address to the third conference of the CITU he pointed out, “In alliance with the vast mass of agricultural workers and peasants the working class must demand a smashing of the land monopoly of the landlords and redistribution of the land to the tiller. Without this agrarian revolution there is no salvation either from high prices or from food famine, from the peasants’ impoverishment. Immediately the demand should be put for the commandeering of landlords stocks at prescribed prices, attracting small peasants produce by offering attractive prices and bonus and complete state trading in wholesale foodgrains trade. It should be the task of the trade unions to educate the working class and rouse it to fight the landlord domination of our economy.”

Once again in 1987, when drought conditions prevailed in India, Ranadive called upon the working class to rally behind the peasantry. He stated, "All unions, all sections of working class must do everything to save the peasantry. They must liberally contribute from their earnings at an earnest mark of their solidarity with the Indian peasants the main representatives of India. The united efforts of the trade union movement should go a long way in helping the peasants in this critical situation.

ON DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING OF TRADE UNIONS

For successfully carrying on the task set before the working class by history, the essential pre-requisite is a strong trade union which cannot be achieved unless trade unions function democratically. BTR consistently remained unequivocal in stressing the need for democratic functioning of trade unions. He was advocating that the struggle against reformism in the trade unions cannot be carried effectively without involving rank and file workers in formulation of policies of the trade unions. In many trade unions the ordinary members are treated as passive spectators while all the major decisions are taken by handful leaders without proper consultation with members of the union.

In the foundation conference itself BTR emphasized this aspect in a clear cut manner in the following words:

"Absence of democratic functioning of unions is a basic disease of the trade union movement in our country. Democratic functioning means what? In most of the unions it is a fact or not that the ordinary worker is more of a guest in the union than that man whose fortress it is, whose house it is. Good, well intentioned, honest men of integrity but some of them slowly become trade union bureaucrats, they dominate the unions. A tendency is there to make the union a preserve of few leaders, instead of a widespread organization of mass of workers. It only becomes a focal point – the workers are loyal. In strike struggles, they participate; they pay union subscription, but leave the taking of decisions to the leaders. The consciousness that we have created is such that not a single worker protests that you are functioning the union undemocratically. They

think that the unions are to be functioned in this manner.”

The Bhubaneswar resolution has once again stressed this aspect and after repeated discussions in the organizations some improvement has no doubt taken place. Union meetings are being held more frequently. The participation of workers in these meetings has improved. At higher level also some improvement in the style of functioning is visible to some extent. However, we cannot say that democratic functioning has been fully introduced in our unions. We have yet to remove the malice that was pointed out by BTR in the foundation conference.

On several occasions when local union leaders used to meet BTR for guidance on the problems they were facing, BTR invariably was enquiring whether they held a general body meeting and consulted the workers. He would ask them to hold the meeting of the workers and find out how they feel about the problem and how they suggest ways and means to solve the problem. In such cases the advice given by the workers was found to be of great significance in deciding the policy of the union.

There were occasions when after protracted struggles it was seen that carrying out the struggle further was becoming difficult in the then prevailing situation. Under such circumstances BTR advised leaders to go by the opinion expressed by the general body of the workers.

BTR was always insisting that during negotiations the trade union leadership should regularly report to the workers the progress made in the talks and make the issues involve in negotiations issues of campaigning among the workers. He snubbed leaders on many occasions when he found that the leadership was not regularly reporting on negotiations to the union committees and general body meetings.

BTR was always emphasizing the need to report to the general body meeting the final shape of the agreement and the leadership should sign the agreement only after obtaining the approval of the general body of the workers.

ON WORKING WOMEN

Support to working women's struggle was a matter of concern for BTR. When the first conference of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women was held in Madras in 1979, he explained, "The CITU had to take the decision to call a special conference because it was found that the grievances of working women were unattended, the government was indifferent, the employers were hostile and even the trade unions were not very enthusiastic about their demands. In so many strikes that the working class fought there were very few instances when the special demands of the working women were given prominence."

He further noted, "The state of affairs was partly due to the disabilities which women suffer from in a society like the Indian society. The inferior status assigned to women in both the Hindu and Muslim communities is known to all. That discrimination doggedly pursues the working women and it is the elementary duty of the trade unions to fight against it. We cannot say that our workers and some of our trade union leaders are free from this discriminatory attitude towards women."

BTR continued, "It has been noted that the employers resorted to retrenchment of women workers to avoid giving maternity benefits and provision of other facilities prescribed by law. In many industries the number of women employees is decreasing. The axe of retrenchment falls first on the women workers."

BTR, therefore, categorically asserted, "Our leaders and cadres besides must see that the union leadership does not become a male preserve, that women are trained and quickly promoted to leading positions. The trade union movement cannot attain its full stature unless the women contingent plays its role in organizing and leading the unions. Thousands of women have participated in strike struggles, faced jail and repression, gone through privation along with male workers and employees. But they are far from occupying the position in the unions that is their due."

He, in several of his speeches in the CITU meetings criticized the feudal attitude of male comrades towards women workers. He also

criticized trade unions for not treating women's problems as problems of trade unions.

BTR time and again pointed out the economic exploitation of women by the capitalist and social exploitation by male members of the family and called upon the working women to fight against this dual exploitation.

Despite repeated warning, by BTR our trade union movement has yet to fully assimilate his teaching and act according to his guidance in restoring full equality for working women in trade union movement.

ON DIVISIVE FORCES

Capitalist landlord classes continuously try to divide the working class and the toiling masses on the basis of caste, religion, language, region etc in order to weaken the edge of class struggles. At times these divisive forces have attracted a large number of workers which has considerably weakened the working class struggles.

In his article "The Working Class and Divisive Forces", BTR wrote: "The working class has to play this role of defending popular and national unity overcoming religious and communal differences. If sections of the working class themselves become affected by communal virus, then working class is doomed. Unfortunately in India the workers themselves are swayed or neutralized by religious and communal considerations and stand paralysed before the attack of disruptive forces, when they should be in the street to fight them back. This often happens in communal or linguistic riots when the linguistic or communal majority sits silent and does not fight those who attack its class brothers. The working class and the trade union movement must fight against this paralysis and train itself to a secular class army out to defend its unity and unity of the people. It must realize that the unity forged by its prolonged battle can be reduced to nothing if it fails to act as a class force and influence the people."

Ranadive pointed out how the divisive movements in Punjab and

Assam have disrupted the TU struggles. He criticized Shiv Sena for sowing hatred against workers outside Maharashtra and diverting the attention of the people from the exploitation of the capitalists. The communal riots engineered by RSS and Hindutva lobby have on several occasions made working class movement powerless. He criticized Telengana separatists who divided the unity of the working class of Andhra who heroically fought for reorganization of states on linguistic basis.

Pointing out the role of imperialism behind these divisive movements, Ranadive noted, "The western imperialists—the USA and its agents—want to weaken and disintegrate and dismember India so that they can enslave the country and exploit it."

While emphasizing the need to protect minorities BTR condemned the role of muslim fundamentalists who seek to preach hatred against majority community and give grist to the mill of majority communalism.

Ranadive equally criticized casteism as a dangerous trend which adversely affects the trade union unity. He, therefore, emphasized the need to fight casteism in the trade union movement. The advanced elements in the trade union movement and the working class must show in words and deeds that they are free from all bias in matters of religion and caste.

BTR stressed the need to fight these divisive tendencies among the working class by enhancing the level of their political consciousness. He observed, "Despite the efforts of reactionaries the trade unions do succeed in forging unity of thousands during strikes. But its unity based on immediate economic demands is not sufficient to counter the reactionary offensive. On the basis of this unity already achieved the working class must be roused politically to directly intervene against the attack of divisive forces as it does in Bengal during communal riots. The sinister meaning of this attack must be politically explained to the workers and armed with this the united strength of the trade union movement must plunge among the people to combat every manifestation of divisive attack.

ON LEFT FRONT GOVERNMENTS

BTR called upon the working class to rise in defence of Left Front governments in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. He used to call them “advanced outposts of democracy in our country.”

In his article “Defend the Left-led Governments” wrote in 1981, Ranadive pointed out the achievements of these Governments. He stated, “These Governments have loyally served the common man, protected democratic rights, and thrown the weight of their administration on the side of the exploited in economic struggles. Working under inhibiting financial restrictions arbitrarily imposed by the Central Government, these three governments have endeavoured to do justice to the common man and protect democracy. They have refused to use the National Security Act or any other measure for preventive detention.”

The Left Front Governments emerged as defenders of peoples’ rights and interests and never allowed the burden of the capitalist crisis on the shoulders of working class and the toiling masses. BTR noted, “Under the Left-Front ministries both Muslim minority and Harijans are well protected, there are no communal riots which are replaced by amity for common struggle. Atrocities on Harijans do not take place. The workers right to strike is fully protected and it is ensured for the State Government employees also. There are no police firings against striking workers, there is no police intervention against workers and the people to support the capitalists; the share croppers, the agricultural workers, peasants, all are having a new deal with their interests fully protected. The employees and the entire people feel the free air of democracy.”

He, therefore, continued, “The concrete measures taken by these governments to give relief to the people have angered the capitalist-landlord classes and their representative, the Congress(I) and the Central Government. They are angry because instead of passing on the burdens of the crisis to the people, the three governments give them relief at the expense of the capitalist landlord classes.” Since the left front governments were working within the framework of the capitalist system, class struggle continues in the left ruled states also, which stand consistently and more effectively by the

side of the working people, Ranadive asserted.

He called upon the working class in every CITU meeting to rise in defence of the Left Front Governments as a part of the struggle to protect democracy in the country.

“As a vanguard fighter in the cause of democracy the entire strength of the working class must be mobilised in defence of these ministries and defeat the challenge of dictatorial authoritarian forces.” He was consistently stressing this point.

ON UNEMPLOYMENT

BTR consistently emphasized the need to fight against growing unemployment in the country. In a capitalist system the question of unemployment is bound to get more accentuated as the years pass by. However, the capitalist class always tried to conceal the real extent of unemployment. He squarely attacked the Planning Commission and the Government of India on this score in the following words:

“The figure of unemployed has reached such huge proportions that both the Government of India and the Planning Commission have decided to conceal its real magnitude under one excuse or another. The previous reports of the Planning Commission used to estimate the backlog at the beginning and end of each plan and forecast the number of unemployed in the coming years, after making allowance for the new jobs created under the plan. Every successive plan revealed the inefficiency of planning to meet the problem and ended in an even larger number of unemployed. Finding the verdict on their bankruptcy embarrassing, the government and the Planning Commission started suggesting that there was no precise definition of the unemployed, and therefore, no proper estimates about their total number could be made.”

Unemployment is a direct product of capitalist system and BTR emphasized that unemployment cannot be eliminated in a capitalist society. He therefore, explained, “The ruling classes of India have set the country on the path of capitalism. As a result, the laws of capitalist society are being super-imposed on earlier economic

relations making the situation worse every day. One of the basic consequences of capitalism, the consequences of the law of capitalist accumulation is increasing unemployment. No capitalist country in the world escapes this problem.”

BTR elaborated this phenomenon in the following words, “In the competition for market, the success of each capitalist or each competing country depends on how far he or it is able to cheat or rob his or its labourers and thereby either make excess profit or sell more of the goods produced in the market.The whole trend of modern production lies in more and more capital being used by less and less numbers of workers i.e. a trend towards more productivity of labour leading to relatively lesser employment of mass of labourers.”

Though BTR advocated measures of genuine relief to the unemployed including unemployment allowance, he insisted that it should not be paraded as effective fight against unemployment. He proposed reduction in hours of work of workers without reduction in wages as one of the measures to reduce unemployment. Struggle against lockouts and closures, was considered by him as a method to fight unemployment. He called for genuine land reforms to reduce the rural unemployment. More public spending for job creation was also advocated by him but he opposed paltry doles to the unemployed. Ranadive proposed need for organising the unemployed in the struggle for more and more job oriented programmes.

ON THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND THE PEOPLE

BTR advocated trade union and political rights for the central and state government employees. He considered them as a part of the working class movement in the struggle for peoples democracy and socialism. He disapproved denial of right of collective bargaining and right to sign wage agreement to the state and the Central Government employees.

BTR wrote, “The central and state employees are virtually reduced to the ranks of second grade citizens by depriving them of the right of political expression and action.

“This is having harmful consequences for their immediate movement. They have been forced to keep themselves away from the main trade union organisations and plough lonely furrow. They cannot join a common central TU organisation.”

BTR expressed concern at the gulf created between the state and government employees and the people which was always exploited by the government to beat down their resistance. While asking the government employees not to alienate the people he wrote, “Every demand of the central and state employees has to be met from public treasury. This fact the government utilises to tell the people that the employees want to advance their demands at the expense of the people. And the government often succeeds in creating apathy in the minds of the people. Besides, the employees do not realise that they stand in special need of cultivating the friendship and understanding of the people as it is through them that the misdeeds of the administration and the social system are passed on to the people. They are innocent vehicles of all that it had in the administration. Some of them instead of cultivating public sympathy, actually alienate it by their behaviour. The rupture of the link with the people, the lack of common bond through common suffering and struggle is likely to prove costly to the employees’ movement.”

BTR asked the government employees, “Who will protect the minimum rights of the employees if they do not get the protection of the people.?”

“Let the central and state government employees break through the shackles of the past, forge their unity, create public sympathy for their cause and regard themselves as one of the sections of the democratic and popular movement marching forward to socialism,” he concluded.

ONE UNION IN ONE INDUSTRY

B T Ranadive was a strong advocate of formation of one union in one industry. He always insisted that multiplicity of trade unions was an internal problem of trade union movement and it should be resolved through a proper dialogue within the trade unions. He

debunked the capitalist press shedding tears about strikes taking place due to multiplicity of trade unions. “The workers go in action only when they feel the punch of the economic situation,” he wrote.

While stressing the need for one union in one industry, BTR stated, “The trade union movement has its own sound class reasons for advocating one union in one industry. The trade union movement stands for unity of the working class and its efficiency depends on its strength among the workers. The larger the number of workers under the banner of one union the greater its capacity for collective bargaining and for disciplined strike action and fighting disruption. This logic must find in the willing of coming together of all workers in an industry in a single union and all such unions under one single central organisation.”

He analysed at length the causes of present disunity in the trade union movement and pointed out, “We cannot simply wish it away, or decide to abolish it by legislation or by agreement among the leaders.”

He felt that trade unions only remained focal points of resistance, the organs of workers unity during strikes but otherwise remained very weak and ineffective organisations.

BTR noted, “This naturally led to the rise of a number of unions in the same factory or the same industry. The formation of unions in factory by the followers of various parties was rendered possible because of this situation; otherwise all of them would have had to work inside a single union.”

He continued, “Another factor which encouraged the formation of separate unions was the attitude of leaders of some unions to debar those who differed with them—workers included—from participating in the union, running the union bureaucratically and arbitrarily and forcing the dissident and discontented section of the workers to seek the leadership of another union.”

BTR believed that only through common action and solidarity that all-in unity of the working class could be achieved. He specially laid emphasis on democratic functioning of trade unions as a

pre-requisite for unity of the working class.

Knowing fully well that formation of one union in one industry is a long drawn struggle he placed some concrete proposals for immediate action to pave the way for this objective. He wrote, "While working for creating a proper climate for one union, we can suggest some immediate measures to hasten our progress towards unity,

a) "Immediately the question of recognition should be settled by ballot i.e. by secret ballot of workers in the factory or concern or when possible in the industry as a whole. If any one union gets an overwhelming proposition of vote (percentage to be fixed) that union alone will be recognized for purpose of collective bargaining. The other unions will have the right to continue their activities, recruit members and represent individuals' grievances, but not made binding agreements on behalf of workers.

b) "When no union gets overwhelming percentage of votes, all unions getting votes, above a minimum percentage, will be represented on the coordination committee of these unions, each union having representatives on the basis of its strength and this committee alone will have the authority to enter into collective agreement on behalf of the workers.

c) "No agreement entered into by recognised union or by a coordinating committee is considered valid unless put before the mass of workers and ratified by them;

d) "Unions with right to collective bargaining must guarantee democratic functioning of the organization and have appropriate constitutions. If the working class goes along this path, it will be possible to achieve the objective of one union in one industry much sooner than the opponents of the TU movement think and an invincible force could be created in the cause of the working class and the people."

ON CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

BTR developed the concept of Confederation of Trade Unions to consolidate the gains of the movement and evolve a common policy

for the entire TU movement. He first spelt out his ideas in Fourth Conference of CITU held at Madras in 1979.

In his presidential address he clearly observed, "The united actions of central trade union organizations have created unprecedented climate for unity. They have succeeded in drawing together organization of employees, federations of workers not affiliated to any central organization.

He, therefore, underlined the need to build an all in trade union unity of the working class which will include not only central trade union organizations but also federation of central and the state government employees, bank employees, defence employees, officers associations, unions of public sector workers as well as independent unions not affiliated to any central trade unions.

With a view to bring in qualitative improvement in the trade union movement Ranadive noted, "The CITU thinks that our movement now needs more stable and wider base for unity. This reflects the growing maturity of our movement. The various organizations are no longer concerned with day-to-day issues but are involved in deciding wide policy issues like the income and wages policies." The trade unions if they are to protect the interests of the workers and the country must have a common policy on issues like exports and imports policy of the government, its fiscal policy and various other matters. The battle for policies cannot be carried on without continuous concerted action on the part of the trade union movement.

He, therefore, posed the question: "Can we not, come together in a loose kind of confederation?" "Is it not time give up the present ad hoc basis for unity; coming together only when attacked?"

BTR reiterated the appeal for confederation in the fifth conference of the CITU at Kanpur in 1983. Indrajit Gupta, the then General Secretary of AITUC, who attended the conference as a fraternal delegate raised the question of ideological disunity among the working class and expressed his doubts about forming a confederation irrespective of ideology. Ranadive in his concluding speech clarified that ideological differences cannot be a bar in

formation of confederation. He pointed out that commonly agreed policies in the confederation can alone be the policy of the confederation. Ideological issues can be raised only on the platform of individual central trade union organizations.

Despite repeated efforts by the CITU it has not been possible to form such a confederation so far. Some central trade unions have advocated merger of the trade unions. However talks between HMS and AITUC, between HMS and INTUC have clearly indicated the immediate merger of trade unions is not feasible. Therefore, a body like confederation is necessary which can pave the way for ultimate merger of trade unions. This, as Ranadive always emphasized, is possible only in the process of series of working class actions against the onslaughts of capital.

ON PUBLIC SECTOR

B T Ranadive was very keen to emphasise the importance of the movement of public sector workers in India since he clearly understood its importance in the revolutionary movement. He was particularly stressing the significance of the public sector in independent economic development of the country.

BTR observed “The public sector in India no doubt is an instrument of capitalist development, at the same time it acts to a certain extent as an obstacle to imperialist penetration and guards the independence of the economy. Besides, in a country like India, without a powerful public sector extending over key industries there is no chance of any kind of national planning, for curbing the activities of the private sector and the manipulation of the economy”.

In a developing economy like India state capitalism has a special role to play from the point of view of faster economic development. He therefore, pointed out, “Countries like India living long under colonial domination had their industrial development thwarted by the imperialist rulers who saw to it that they did not develop basic and heavy industries and remained largely suppliers of raw materials to the metropolitan countries. It became necessary for these industries to avoid complete dependence on imperialists for their industrial development. But the indigenous capitalist did not

have sufficient resources to develop these industries and the job had to be undertaken by the state.”

BTR was however fully conscious of the limitation of the development of public sector due to the “gross mismanagement by the bureaucracy”. He emphasized the need for the trade union movement to fight against the role of bureaucracy in sabotaging the positive role of the public sector undertakings in the national economy. He, therefore, asserted “By placing the public sector at the service of the private capital by its bureaucratic and corrupt management and by incurring heavy losses in running it, the Government has done its best to discredit public ownership. And now the same government seeks to disown the public sector because of losses incurred by bad management. The private capitalists lose no opportunity to denigrate the public sector and hope that their propaganda will soon result in privatizing public sector concerns and place at their disposal huge productive capacities built through the blood and toil of the people.”

BTR was regularly replying to the slanderous accusations that due to inefficiency of the workers the performance of the public sector was not good. However, he criticized trade unions movement for not properly understanding the role of public sector in the national economic development. He said, “It may be said without contradiction that by and large the trade union movement of our country missed the importance of a well-managed public sector in guarding the independence of our economy and restricting the operations of the private sector. The outlook of economism dominating the trade union movement blinded it to the role of the public sector in our economy.”

Hence, BTR underlined the task before the trade union movement succinctly in the following words, “Considering the anti-national character of the policy of dismantling the public sector, the CITU and the entire trade union movement must speak against it and rouse the working class and the people to the dangers following from it. The entire trade union movement must combine to compel the government to withdraw from the policy of surrender to the World Bank pressure.”

WORKERS PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT

“Workers participation in decision making process is increasingly being accepted as a superior alternative to autocratic management patterns where all decision making powers are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals at the top of the hierarchy”. These words were uttered by Dr Man Mohan Singh prior to his becoming champion of globalisation. He was then Governor of Reserve Bank of India and was speaking in a meeting of the National Productivity Council in 1983. While approvingly quoting this extract in his address in the Working Committee meeting of the CITU at Jamshedpur in 1983, Ranadive observed, “The CITU repeatedly urged such participation where workers and management have equal responsibility to run the concern. But this is anathema both to the government and the private sector so far.”

BTR vehemently opposed the fake scheme of workers participation in management prepared by the Government of India which did not give any real powers to the workers. Hence it became an instrument of class collaboration. In his Presidential Address to the sixth conference of the CITU held in Bombay in 1987, BTR stated, “The CITU has repeatedly expressed its desire and its willingness to accept responsibility for organizing production and participating in production-management provided the workers are given equal status along with management and provided all documents concerning purchase of raw materials, finances, credit are placed before the workers. Neither the government nor the employers have shown any willingness to accept this offer. The Government on its part prepared a fake scheme of workers participation in management which the CITU has rejected.”

The Bill on workers participation in management brought by V P Singh Government though provided participation up to the Board level but did not involve equality of membership for workers. Ranadive wanted full equality at all levels then alone participation could be meaningful and effective. The employers refused to give the right of equality to the workers which clearly proved their lack of keenness in implementing genuine scheme of workers participation in management.

BTR had pointed out that ultimate objective of the trade union movement was to establish workers control over the industry and he was looking at workers participation in management as a step in that direction within the framework of capitalist system.

After the advent of globalisation employers have opposed the very concept of workers participation in management. According to them the concept of liberalization militates against the concept of workers participation in management. When hire and fire is the rule where is the scope for workers participation in management.

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The working class of India will celebrate the birth centenary of late Com. B T Ranadive throughout this year. His great contribution to the trade union movement in India will be recalled in meetings and seminars as well as in literature that will be published in the centenary year. Notwithstanding various weaknesses, the working class movement in India has developed in the course of decades of struggle, broad-based unity in the fight for defence of its rights and for legitimate demands. BTR was undoubtedly its chief architect. He persistently urged the workers to fight reformist trends in trade union movement and to raise it above economism. While guiding at every steps for two decades with meticulous care, the activity of CITU which was founded under his guidance, he left his indelible imprint on the entire trade union movement in the country. While recalling his teachings the working class will pledge themselves to implement every piece of his advice in work, spirit and to emulate his life, which was completely dedicated to the cause of emancipation of the working class and the toiling masses.

Education of the working class on the teachings of Ranadive will continue even after centenary year is over. His message will continue to guide the working class till the achievement of the objective of establishment of a peoples' democratic state as a step towards building socialism and communism!

Long Live the rich heritage of Comrade B T Ranadive!

Working class unity, working class struggle—these must go together... The fight against reformist ideology and practice must be understood by the working class not as a partisan fight..., but as a fight between a correct policy for the working class and a wrong policy for the working class. This is the tactics of uniting the working class and simultaneously isolating all poisonous ideologies.

Therefore, the fight against reformist practice in the trade unions has to be combined with the growing struggle for unity- in-action of the working class, the two cannot be separated... The one is the complement of the other, the more you are able to organize the unity of action and struggle, the more difficult it becomes for the reformists, to cheat the working class....

B T Ranadive

May, 2004

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