

TRADE UNIONS MUST ENTER POLITICS TO PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS

A Conference of all the 'Untouchable' workers of the 'Great Indian Peninsula' (GIP) Railways was held at Manmad on 12th & 13th February 1938. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar consented to be the Chairperson for this Conference and accordingly an informative handbill was circulated among all the branches of GIP Railways.

This Conference was planned to discuss the problems faced by the 'Untouchable' workers in the Railways due to the practice of Untouchability. It was also planned to discuss the pitiable condition of these Untouchables and their families', in spite of the Railway being one of the richest and strongest organizations in India.

To make this Conference a success, the workers from Manmad, Bhusawal, Kalyan, Igatpuri, Nandgaon, Dound, Solapur, Thane and Mumbai had discussed this issue with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar previously. To this, there was positive response from Delhi, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Jabalpur, Raipur etc.

An appeal was made to make this Conference a grand success. Shri R. R. Pawar, who was well known amongst the 'Untouchable' Railway workers, was the general secretary of this Conference.

It appears from the correspondence between Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Shri R.R. Pawar, General Secretary, 'Dalit Workers Conference', Manmad, that due to unavoidable circumstances Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was unable to attend the Conference on 29th & 30th January 1938 and instead, he himself suggested 12th & 13th February 1938 (Saturday and Sunday) for this Conference. This correspondence was included in the handbill of the Conference.

A huge pandal was erected for this Conference on the open land of Mr. Ibrahim Tajbhai Sheth, just near the Manmad Railway Station and was named as 'Dalit-Kamagar (workers) Nagar'.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar made a halt at Manmad on both these days. During this period he visited Satana and Kazisangavi.

A “Youth Conference” was arranged on Saturday February 12th for which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was Chairperson.* The future programmes of ‘Independent Labour Party’ and its vigorous implementation in all the areas were discussed in this Conference.

Similar to the Youth Conference, ‘Untouchable Women’s Conference’ was planned on Sunday 13th February at 3 p.m. under the chairmanship of Mrs. Mainabai Shamrao Bhole, a worker from Pune. Mrs. Venubai Ravikant Jadhav was elected as Chairperson of the Reception Committee for this Conference. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar addressed those women about the movement and guided them.

Various entertainment programmes were held on both these days. A band from Chalisgaon was specially called for this Conference. Loudspeakers were arranged in the pandal. Mr. R. R. Pawar, Mr. Bankar, Mr. Ahire, Mr. Khare, Mr. Sansare, Mr. Patil, Mr. Sarode, Mr. More, Mr. Pagare, Mr. Telure etc. worked hard to make this Conference a grand success.

On this occasion, separate offices for ‘Janta’ weekly and ‘Independent Labour Party’ were established in the Conference premises to collect the annual membership for ‘Janta’ and membership fees of ‘Independent Labour Party’ along with information about these movements.

The Conference

The Conference was successfully held on 12th & 13th February 1938. ‘Dalit Kamgar Nagar’ was well decorated. Seating arrangement for about twenty thousand delegates was made. A separate dais was prepared for the President and other workers. The photographs of various workers along with a large portrait of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar decorated with flowers were

*The speech delivered in the Youth Conference is on page 193—Editors.

arranged. Special arrangements for women, members of Reception Committee and special invitees were made. On Saturday evening Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was welcomed in 'Dalit Kamgar Nagar' with the band and loud cheers of 'long live Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar', 'workers victory' etc. till he occupied the dais.

Initially few songs were sung by young boys and girls. Mr. Shankarrao Salve took lot of efforts for the success of this programme. Mr. P. N. Bankar read his welcome speech. Mr. Ramchandra Pawar welcomed the delegates and invitees. He read, on this occasion, the various messages, specially sent by Subhedar Vishram Gangaram Sawadkar and Bhai Anantrao Chitre from Mahad.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was elected as Chairperson for the Conference, on Saturday 12th February 1938. His election as a Chairperson was acclaimed by loud clapping by the audience. After occupying the chairperson's place and after getting garlanded. Dr. Ambedkar gave an introductory speech.

On the second day, Sunday, 13th February 1938, regular work of the Conference was resumed with some delay. In spite of the heat of the sun in the 'Dalit Kamgar Nagar', huge crowd had assembled to listen to the speech of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. He rose to speak in the midst of the overwhelming clappings of the people.....¹

In his speech Dr. Ambedkar said,

"Friends !

This is a Conference of the Depressed Classes who are working as Railwaymen on the G.I.P.* Railway. The Depressed Classes have heretofore met in many a conferences in this Province as well as in other Provinces of India and on many occasions. In a certain sense this is not the first Conference. But in another sense it is the first of its kind. The Depressed Classes have hitherto agitated principally for the removal of social grievances. They have not taken up the work of the removal of their economic grievances. This is the first time when they

¹: Janta, dated 8 may; 25th December 1937 and 22nd January, 5th February 1938.

*Great Indian Peninsula Railway

are meeting to consider their economic grievances. Hitherto they were meeting as *Pariahs*. Now you are meeting as workers. I am not prepared to say that we have been wrong in concentrating our efforts in emphasizing social grievances. Whatever other people may say there are grievances under the load of which our very manhood is crushed out. Nor can it be said that our agitation has borne no fruit. It is true that we have not succeeded in the removal of Untouchability. It is true that we have not succeeded in securing some of the most elementary rights to which all human beings are entitled. But it is also true that our agitation has succeeded in so far as we have obtained possession of political power. Who has power has liberty is an observation which no one can gainsay. Power is the only means whereby one can secure liberty and free himself from all obstacles and political power has a potency which if it is not as great as religious or economic power is quite real and effective as far as it goes. I am sorry that the political power which the Depressed Classes have got under the new constitution has been frittered away by the machinations of our enemies and by the selfishness of needy and profligate adventurers from among ourselves. Power behind which there is no organization, power behind which there is no consciousness is no power. I hope one day, not before very long the Depressed Classes will become organized, will become conscious of the power they have got and will begin to put it to wise and effective use in order to secure their social emancipation.

Although I am not prepared to say that our efforts have been misdirected I confess that we have too long neglected to lay the same emphasis on the economic problems with which we are faced as we do on social problems and I am therefore glad that we have met today more as workers than as Untouchables. It is a new departure and I congratulate those who have given us this opportunity of discussing them.

There are however some people who have read into this move a sinister motive and have criticised me for being a party to this Conference. I would not have cared for this criticism had it not been that this criticism comes from labour leaders. The gravamen of their charge seems to be that by holding this Conference of the Depressed Class Workers we are dividing the ranks of labour.

There are in my view two enemies which the workers of this country have to deal with. The two enemies are *Bramhanism* and *Capitalism*. The accusation by our critics arises partly because the critics fail to reckon Brahmanism as an enemy which the workers have to deal with. I do not want to be misunderstood when I say that Brahmanism is an enemy which must be dealt with. By Bramhanism I do not mean the power, privileges and interests of the Bramhins as a community. That is not the sense in which I am using the word. By Bramhanism I mean the negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In that sense it is rampant in all classes and is not confined to the Bramhins alone though they have been the originations of it. This Bramhanism which pervades everywhere and which regulates the thoughts and deeds of all classes is an incontrovertible fact. It is also an incontrovertible fact that this Bramhanism gives certain classes a privileged position. It denies certain other classes even equality of opportunity. The effects of Bramhanism are not confined to what are *social rights* such as inter-dining or inter-marriage. If that was so, one would not mind it. But it is not so. It extends to *civic rights* as distinguished from *social rights*. Use of public schools, of public wells, of public conveyances, of public restaurants are matters of civic rights. Everything which is intended for the public or maintained out of public fund must be open to every citizen. But there are millions to whom these civic rights are denied. Can anybody doubt that this is the result of Brahmanism which has been let loose in this country for thousands of years and which is functioning even now as a live wire? So omnipresent is Bramhanism that it even affects the field of economic opportunities. Take the Depressed Class worker and compare his opportunities with a worker who does not belong to the Depressed Classes. What opportunities of obtaining work has he? What are the prospects he has in the matter of security of service or advancement therein? It is notorious that there are many avocations from which a Depressed Class worker is shut out by reason of the fact that he is an Untouchable. A notorious case in point is that of the Cotton Industry. I do not know of what happens in other parts of India. But I know that in the Bombay Presidency the Depressed Classes are shut out from

the weaving department in the Cotton Mills both in Bombay and in Ahemadabad. They can only work in the spinning department. The spinning department is the lowest paid department. The reason why they are excluded from the weaving department is because they are Untouchables and because on that account the caste Hindu worker objects to work with them although he does not mind working with the Musalmans.

Take the Railways. What is the position of the Depressed Class worker on the Railways. No one can deny that his destiny is to work as a gangman. Day in and day out, all his life he works as a gangman with no prospects of a rise. There is no higher grade post that is open to him. Very rarely he is employed even as a Porter. That is because as a porter he must also work as a domestic servant as a part of his customary duties in the household of the Station Master. A Depressed Class worker becomes quite useless to the station master who is generally a high caste Hindu because he cannot avail himself of the services of the porter for his house hold purposes if the porter is an Untouchable. He therefore generally avoids appointing a Depressed Class man as a porter. In the Railway there is no qualifying examination for the appointment of clerks and Non-Matrices are usually employed for these posts. Hundreds of non-matrices from Indian Christians, from Anglo-Indians, and Caste Hindus are employed as clerks in the Railways. But the Depressed Class boys who are non-matrices and there are hundreds of them are systematically rejected and hardly one ever gets a chance. The same is the case in Railway Workshops. Very seldom is a Depressed Class man employed as a mechanic Class. Hardly ever is a Depressed man seen to occupy the position of a Mistry. He is never made a foreman, or even a chargeman in the Workshop. He is just a cooly and remains a cooly. Such is the condition of the Depressed class workers in the Railways.

In those avocations where he has a chance to obtain work he is employed in the lowest grade. He is excluded from any place of power or authority. He is not only employed in the lowest grade but he is confined to that grade until he retires. There is no rise for him. There is no career for him and often

there is no promotion for him. This is what happens to him when there is no slump. In days of slump he is the first to be fired as in the boom he is the last to be employed.

To the critics who have accused me and you of sinister motive I wish to ask two questions-and they are plain questions—are these or are these not real grievances? Secondly, if they are real grievances must not those who are suffering from them organize in order to see that they are removed? If the answer to these two questions is in the affirmative-I do not see how any honest man can give any other answer- then our attempt is amply justified. Labour leaders who are accusing us are undoubtedly suffering from certain delusion. They have read in Karl Marx that there *can* be only two classes-owners and workers and, on reading Marx they straight way assume that in India there are only owners and workers and proceed on their mission of demolishing capitalism. There are obviously two errors in this. The first error consists in thinking as real what is only possible or ideal. Marx never said as dogma that there are only two clear-cut classes in a society namely the owners and workers. Such a statement is untrue in fact and therefore it is dangerous as a foundation to build upon it any active propaganda with any chance of success. It would be as false as to hold that an economic man or a rational man or a reasonable man is a fact which exists in all classes. The economist has always uttered a wise caution whenever he puts forth the economic man as a basic fact for drawing his conclusion—that the economic man exists only if other things are equal. The labour leaders have forgotten this *ceteris paribus*. It would be incorrect to suppose that even in Europe, what Marx said was true. “Is there a poor and oppressed man in Germany? Is there a robbed and ruined artisan of France? Well, there they appertain to one race, one county, one creed, one past, one present, and one future. Let them unite.” This is an exhortation which has been addressed ever since the days of Marx. Has the poor and oppressed man in Germany united with the robbed and ruined artisan of France? Even after 100 years they did not learn to unite and in the last war they fought as open, avowed and ruthless enemies. It would be positively erroneous with regard to India. A clear cut division

does not exist in India. That all labourers are one, form one class is an ideal to be achieved and it is the greatest error to assume it as a fact. How are we to consolidate the ranks of labour? How are we to bring about unity among labour? Not by allowing one section of the workers to suppress other section of the workers. Not by preventing the oppressed section from organizing. Not by preventing the aggrieved section from agitating against the injustice that is being done to them. The real way to bring about unity is to remove the causes which make one worker the antagonist of another worker on the ground of race and religion. The real way to bring about unity is to tell the worker that he is wrong in claiming rights which he is not prepared to give to other workers. The real way to bring about unity is to tell the worker who makes these social distinctions which result in unfair discrimination are wrong in principle and injurious to the solidarity of workers. In other words we must uproot Bramhanism - this spirit of inequality - from among the workers if the ranks of labour are to be united. But where is the labour leader who has done this among workers? I have heard labour leaders speaking vociferously against Capitalism. But I have never heard any labour leader speaking against Bramhanism amongst workers. On the other hand their silence on this point is quite conspicuous. Whether their silence is due to their belief that Bramhanism has nothing to do with the organisation and unity of workers, whether it is due to their non-appreciation of the fact that Bramhanism has great deal to do with the disorganisation of labour or whether it is due to sheer opportunism which believes in acquiring leadership of labour and not saying anything which would hurt the feelings of the workers I do not stop to inquire. But I must say that if Bramhanism is admitted to be the root cause of the disorganisation of labour then a serious effort must be made to remove it from the workers. This infection will not go away merely by ignoring it or by remaining silent about it. It must be pursued, dug out and knotted. Then and then only will the way for the unity of workers be made safe.

So long as Bramhanism remains a living force and so long as people continue to stick to it because it confers privileges upon one class and puts handicaps on others, I am afraid, that

till then there will be the necessity for those who suffer from these handicaps to organize themselves. And what harm is there if they do organize themselves. I could understand the force of the complaint if this organization was engineered by the employers. If it could be proved that we are the tools of the employers, that we are playing into their hands, that we are organizing separately with the deliberate purpose of dividing the ranks of labour, then there would be sufficient justification for condemning this conference. Indeed such a conduct could be denounced as treachery. But can any one say that this move of ours is engineered by the employers and that we are out to help the employers and ruin the cause of labour? I challenge any of our critics to do so.

There is therefore no necessity to be ashamed of or to offer any apology for holding this Conference. The reasons and motives amply justify it. There are one or two men from the Depressed Classes who have disapproved of this Conference. There is nothing strange in this. Some of them are the tools and hirelings of others. Some are misguided. The Depressed Classes are so weak in themselves and the word union has such a charm in it, especially when it falls from the lips of influential propagandist that it is no wonder they are deluded; but such people forget that there can be no real union between parties whose feelings and attitudes are in every respect opposed to each other and where one of whom claims rights and interests which are adverse to the interests of the others. Union among such people would be nothing but fraud upon the weak and suffering party. Every sincere man who repudiates the fraud is maligned by these imposters, as one who would sow division. Division, indeed! Yes, a division it may be, but it is a division, where a real difference and a real antagonism exists. This antagonism arises chiefly because one section of Labour claims vested rights against another section of Labour namely the Depressed Classes. Nobody wants to create a difference. What we are doing is to recognize the difference and to prevent the difference from working an injustice to us.

There is no question that you must organize if you want to remove your grievances. The next question is what purpose is your organization to serve. That you must organize for trade purposes goes without saying. The question is should you form a separate union of your own or should you join any of the existing unions. This is a question which you must seriously consider before you decide upon your line of action.

Trade unionism in India is in a sorry state. The chief aim of trade unions is completely lost sight of. The chief aim of trade unionism is to protect the standard of living of the working class from being reduced. In Europe there is a noticeable tendency on the part of a normal man to cling to his established standard of comfort to the mode of life to which by birth and training he is accustomed. He will resist with firm determination any attempt to reduce it. It is notorious that this determination is not to be found in the Indian worker. He is anxious only to exist. He has no desire to live. And as Mill pointed out "where there is not in the people a resolute resistance to this deterioration - a determination to preserve an established standard of comfort - the condition of the poorest class sinks, even in a progressive state, to the lowest point which they will consent to endure." If there is any country where trade unionism was an absolute necessity in my opinion it was India. But as I said today trade unionism in India is a stagnant and stinking pool. It is entirely due to the fact that the leadership of trade unionism is either timid, selfish or misguided. There are some labour leaders who are only arm-chair philosophers or politicians who have limited their task to issuing statements in the papers. Organizing the workers, educating the workers and helping them to agitate does not form part of their duty. They are only anxious to represent the workers and speak on their behalf but avoid having any contact with them. A second category of labour leaders is of those who are engaged in forming unions for the sole purpose of finding a place for themselves as Secretaries, Presidents or Chairmen. To maintain themselves in their places they try to keep their unions as separate and rival entities. One notices the astounding and shameful phenomenon that the warfare between different unions is far more deadly than what exists - if any at all - between workers and owners-and all this for what- for no other purpose than that of securing

mastery over unions for certain individuals whose ambition is to find a leader's place for themselves. The third class of labour leaders is composed principally of the communists. They may be well meaning but I have no hesitation in saying that they are a misguided body of men and I go further and say that nobody has brought a greater ruination on the workers than these men. If to-day the back of workers is completely broken, if to-day the masters have the upper hand, if to-day unionism is an anathema it is entirely due to the misuse of the powers which the communists had at one time secured over the trade unions. Their aim seems to bring about discontent among the workers as though there was any absence of it, because they believe that with a discontented body of workers they will bring about a revolution and establish the rule of the proletariat. Therefore to bring about discontent they launched upon a systematic campaign of organizing disorganization. The series of strikes on which they drove the men can have no other meaning and no other consequence except that it was a deliberate attempt to organize disorganization. For a successful revolution it is not enough that there is discontent; what is required is a profound and thorough conviction of the justice, necessity and importance of political and social right. Not even a revolutionary Marxist would make a fetish of strikes, as was done in the good old days by the Revolutionary Syndicalists. The strike was never considered by revolutionary Marxists as a "revolutionary exercise" but was regarded as a very serious measure to be resorted to as a last extremity after all efforts have proved unavailing. But the Communists have thrown all this to the winds and have looked upon strikes as a divine means of creating discontent among the workers. Whether they have created greater discontent or not they have most certainly destroyed the very trade union organizations which were the source of their strength and their power and now they are practically on the streets seeking to take shelter under all sorts of capitalist organizations. What else can be expected from such a senseless activity. The Communist is like an incendiary who in his desire to set up a general conflagration has not taken care to save his own house.

As a result there are no unions in existence to which workers can resort to. I am not going to speak about the *malaise* that prevails among the textile workers in Bombay. The less is said about it the better. But take the state of affairs existing in the G. I. P. Railway workers. In 1920 the G. I. P. Railway Staff Union was organized. It was defunct between the years 1922-24. It was revived in 1925. In 1927 another rival union by name the G. I. P. Railwaymen's Union was organized. In 1931 the two unions were amalgamated under the name of Railway Worker's Union. In 1932 there was a split in this union and a new union called the Railway Labour Union was started. In 1935 the old G. I. P. Staff Union was revived and started as a new body. It is now the recognized union and there is a sharp conflict and rivalry between these unions which all are out to serve the interests of the Railway workers. All this conflict is due to competition for leadership between the communist and non-communist groups among the labour leaders. The same rivalry has caused a split in the central organization. The All India Trade Union Congress was started in 1919 as the central organization of labour. All unions were affiliated to this Congress till 1929. In 1929 a split occurred at Nagpur and those unions which did not accept the leadership of the Communist section seceded and formed a separate body called the National Trade Union Federation. A sharp antagonism prevails between these two bodies. In 1931 and 1932 efforts were made to bring about unity between these two rival bodies. But they have failed. Something to that effect is now on the anvil. What good will come out of it is more than I can say. Under these circumstances it is difficult for me to give you any advice. There would be nothing wrong if you started a separate union of your own provided you have got the men to run the union. This is a very big proviso. A union if it is to flourish must function and a union cannot function if it cannot secure the services of efficient functionaries. Can you get men to run your union? If you can, form your own Union. In fact it would be better if you did. There is nothing wrong in a separate union. Because separate unions need not result in separatism or weakness. Your separate union can always be affiliated to some central organization of labour which can give

unity of purpose and unity of action. If you cannot organize a separate union of your own you may join any one of the existing unions. But you must take care that the union does not use you for its purposes. There is great danger of such a thing happening. It has happened in Bombay where invariably strikes have been called in the interests of the weavers and the spinners have been used to support the cause of the weavers. To avoid this you must insist upon two conditions. Firstly you must insist upon a special representation in the executive of the union so that your special problems will receive the attention and support of the union. Secondly you must insist upon some part of your contribution to the union to be ear-marked for being used if necessary for fighting out your grievances. These must be two essential conditions on which you should join a general union of all workers if you do not decide to have a separate of your own.

There is no question that you must organize a union for trade purposes. But that is not enough. You must also organize for political purposes. Experience has shown that trade unionism by itself cannot help the labourers to win in their struggle against the masters. The question whether trade unions should enter politics is a question on which there can now be no two opinions.

Trade unions must enter politics because without political power they cannot protect purely trade union interests. Even for the purpose of securing such reforms as standard rate, normal day, common rule, minimum living wage, collective bargaining are aims which cannot be secured merely by organizing unions. The power of unions must be strengthened by the force of law. This cannot happen until in addition to organizing yourselves into unions you also begin to play your part in the politics of the country.

The protection of purely trade union interests cannot be the only reason why trade union must enter politics. To confine your attention to trade unionism is to mistake the immediate task for the ultimate goal; it is to assume that slaving for others is a destiny which the labouring classes cannot escape. On the contrary your aim should be to replace this system of wage-slavery by a system which will recognize the principles of liberty,

equality, and fraternity. This means re-building of society and, I say that it is the primary concern of the labouring class to bring about such a reconstruction of society. But how can the labouring class realize this ideal? Effective use of political power is certainly a powerful means to this end. Why should they not seize such political power as they have got? Repudiation of politics by trade unions does not mean that workers, as individuals will not interest themselves in politics. On the contrary, many of them will attend political meetings, vote at elections for one candidate or another and frequently join one or other of the political parties. "No politics" for trade unions does not mean no politics for workers who are members of the union. The watch word of 'No Politics' will apply only to the organized forms of politics. Under such circumstances every individual worker could privately engage in politics as much as he desired, and of any shade he liked, but when organized with his fellow workers he was to quit politics the moment he entered his organization. Naturally, by thus atomising himself politically, by refusing to use in the interests of his class, that which constitutes this main strength i. e. organization the worker is sure to be a prey to the organized force of the capitalist party. As you probably know that the two rival bodies which claim the right to speak in the name of labour, the Trade Union Congress and the Trade Union Federation have decided to merge themselves into one body. Each has gone by half to bring about this unity. The Trade Union Congress has adopted the constitution of the Trade Union Federation and the Trade Union Federation has agreed to drop its name. I understand that one of the conditions of this unity is that this organization is to be a purely Trade Union organization. It is to have no politics. When I heard this I wondered if these gentlemen really understood what they said. It is a matter of great sorrow that the workers have been suffering the gross injustice to which they have been subjected chiefly by neglecting to use the means at their command towards removing the cause of it, I mean the use of political power. I fail to understand what this trade union unity is if it is not for a united political action. There is some meaning in the phrase agreeing to differ if the point on which there is difference is so small or immaterial that it does not disturb the agreement

on other important and material points. But there is no meaning in a unity where the point on which people agree to differ is so big that the agreement on small and minor points is of no consequence whatsoever. Whatever may be the view of other people I must say that if organized labour avows to eschew politics their labour is doomed. We at any rate must realize that hitherto our efforts have been directed in one channel of social reform and that we had forgotten or partially remembered that there was the necessity of directing our efforts in the channel of economic reform. We must realize that all the evils under which, we suffer have a common origin- namely that those who exercise social and economic dominance over us have taken over in their hands political power which rightly belongs to the labouring classes.

To enter politics means the formation of a party. Politics without a party behind it is a futility. There are many politicians who prefer to be independent, to plough their lonely furrow. I am always suspicious of a politician who wants to be independent. If a politician is so independent that he cannot join with anybody then he is useless for any practical purposes. He can achieve nothing. His lonely furrow cannot make even a blade of grass grow. But many a politician who want to be independent desire independence not because their intellectual honesty demands it. They want independence because they want to be free to sell themselves to the highest bidder. It is because of this that they want to be free from the trammels of party discipline. At any rate such has been my experience of many of the politicians who are pursuing the line of independence in politics. Without a party there can be no real effective politics.

Question is what party you should join. There are various alternatives. There is the Congress. Should you join the Congress? Will it help the cause of labour? I have no hesitation in saying that labour should have a separate organization in politics independent of the Congress. I know that this view is opposed by a section of the labour leaders. There is a section represented by the Congress Socialists who would like to have labour organizing itself for the achievement of Socialism but

the organization must be within the Congress. There is another section- calling itself communist- represented by Mr. Roy which is vehemently opposed to any separate organization by labour or by any class in India either inside or outside the Congress. I am entirely in disagreement with either group. Mr. Roy must be a puzzle to many as he is to me. A communist ! And opposed to separate political organization of labour !! A terrible contradiction in terms !! A point of view which must make Lenin turn in his grave. The only rational justification that one can give for so queer a view is that Mr. Roy looks upon the destruction of Imperialism as the first and foremost aim of Indian politics. In no other way can one read any sense in the view which is being propagated by Mr. Roy. This view would be correct if it could be proved that with the disappearance of Imperialism all vestige of Capitalism will also disappear from India. But it does not require much intelligence to realise that even if the British depart from India, the landlords, the mill-owners, the money-lenders will remain in India and continue to bleed the people and that even after Imperialism has gone, labour will have to fight these interests just as much. If this is so why should not labour organize from now ! Why should it wait for developing its organization ? I don't find any answer. The Congress Socialists evidently realize that labour has to fight capitalism as much as Imperialism and therefore agree that labour must organize. But they have put a proviso that any labour organization must be within the Congress. I am not able to understand the virtue or necessity of this compulsory coalition between the Congress and labour. The aim of the Congress Socialist is to bring about Socialism, so they say. How they hope to bring it about, by converting the right wing of the Congress. That is the explanation they give for not going out of the Congress. A more pathetic case involving utter ignorance of human nature cannot be imagined. If socialism is to be the aim then the way to bring it about is to preach it to the masses and organize them for that purpose. Socialism will not come by wooing the classes. That the right wing of the Congress will not tolerate more than a slight dose of socialism is a fact which is becoming clear day by day. Pandit Nehru last year opened a whirl-wind campaign in favour of socialism. The poor

man was soon called to order and like a naughty boy was sent to his room, made to live on bread and water and was brought downstairs only on his agreeing to behave well. The Pandit has now completely recanted and has become so much domesticated that he now objects to the red flag which he once waived but which to the right wing in the Congress is an anathema. The right wing of the Congress in Bihar has shown its teeth. Swami Sahajanand, the leader of the Kisan has left the Congress and his colleague Mr. Jaya Prakash Narayan is about to leave. I am told that at the last meeting of the A. I. C. C. held in Bombay the Congress Socialists were charged by the Right wing for indiscipline for preaching socialism from Congress platform and let off a simple admonition as is done with first offenders under the Criminal Procedure Code. Such is the futility of the politics of the Congress Socialists.

Indian politics has become wrapped by its reaction to Imperialism. Labour is made to forget its real enemy namely the vested interest. Both the Royists and the Congress Socialist are trading in this quagmire because confusion of thought. Even if Imperialism is to be dealt with as the common enemy, it does not mean that all classes must forget class interests and join in one organization. Imperialism could be fought by the different class organizations making a common front. It is not necessary to dissolve all organizations for this purpose. It is not necessary to have a merger. Common front is quite enough. I am sorry that many people do not seem to realize that the right wing of the Congress is merely using Imperialism as an excuse for preventing separate and Independent organization of labour and I warn you against falling into this error. Politics must be based upon class consciousness. Politics which is not class conscious is hypocrisy.

You must therefore join a political party which is based upon class interests and class consciousness. Applying this test I find no other party than the Independent Labour Party to which you can join without detriment to your interests. It is the only party which has a clear programme, which gives the interests of the workers a first and foremost place, which has a definite line of action which proposes to exhaust all constitutional means

for furthering its programme and will not agree to resort to unconstitutional means unless forced to do so, which is willing to avoid class war but is not prepared to give up the principle of class organization. It is true that the Independent Labour Party is in its infancy and is confined only to the Province of Bombay. But that is no argument against it. Every party at one stage is in its infancy. The question is not how old is the party. The question is what are its principles, what does it stand for, what are its potentialities. Any one who cares to read the manifesto of the Independent Labour Party will know what are its principles and what it stands for. That the party has great potentialities is evident. The party is not a close corporation. It is open to anybody irrespective of caste and creed. It has a programme which although it emphasizes some of the special needs of the Depressed Classes, is wide enough to include the needs of all labouring classes. One of the difficulties in the way of the growth of the Independent Labour Party is social and not political. The fact that its substratum or nucleus consists of the Depressed Classes is the only thing that stands in the way of the growth and expansion of the Party. It is the general feeling of not associating with low class people such as the Depressed Classes, which has prevented caste Hindu workers from joining the fold of the I. L. P. and I am sorry to say that many people who are opposed to the growth of the Independent Labour Party are exploiting this feeling and disuading the ignorant and the superstitious from joining the Party. But I am sure that the straight and honest politics of the Independent Labour Party will work as a powerful magnet to draw all labouring classes within its fold and will counter balance any disruptive force originating from the Hindu social system. Already the Party has completely established itself in the three districts of Thana, Kolaba and Ratnagiri and has secured a footing among peasants and workers. It is making leadway in other parts of the Province. The Party is functioning in the Province of C. P. and Berar and I hope that it will have its place in the rest of the Provinces of India. The Independent Labour Party is therefore the only Party which justifies the support of the labouring classes.

In the organization of labour the Depressed Classes can give a great lead to Labour in general in India. Mr. Gammage, a student of the Chartist Movement in England, has well observed: "It may be doubted whether there ever was a great political movement of the people without a social origin. The chief material object of mankind is to possess the means of social enjoyment. Secure them in possession of these and small is the care they have for political abstractions. It is the existence of great social wrongs which principally teaches the masses the value of political rights." Your wrongs are great, your wrongs are real. Therefore your politics can be genuine and real. If you realize this you can be the beacon light to all Labour in India in the matter of genuine political organization. There is another service you can render to Labour in general. You have an assured quota of representation in the Legislature. Some labour leaders do not seem to realize the advantage to Labour in general which this assured quota of representation gives. Elections are gambles. No system of election can secure to any party in the ordinary way any assured quantum of representation in the Legislature. Nor can any system of election give to any body of voters representation in proportion to the number. The history of elections in England will show how surprising and disastrous are the results of elections to the different parties. Often a minority of voters obtain a majority of seats. Such disasters are avoided in our system of assured quotas. And so far as the assured quota of representation to the Depressed Classes is concerned it is an advantage not to the Depressed Classes only but to Labour as a whole. The Depressed Classes being sure of representation can give great support to other labouring classes in their attempt for political organization if they care to avail themselves of this support. How great can be the support of the Depressed Classes to Labour in general for securing political representation to Labour is proved in the last election. The Depressed Classes were able to elect three representatives of caste Hindus to the Bombay Legislative Assembly who stood on the I. L. P. ticket and rendered help to several others who did not stand on its ticket but who were approved by the party. Those who care to profit by our efforts may do so. But the fact remains that the Depressed Classes by themselves can play a great part in

the politics of this country and a part which can be very helpful to themselves and to Labour in general.

All this however depends upon how well and how quickly you organize yourselves. I have told you why you must organize and what you can do by organisation. I will now close by telling you, begin your organization and wait not till you achieve it. I thank you for the honour you have done me in asking me to preside at this Conference and I wish you all success.”¹

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