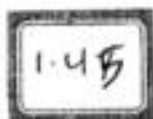


LABOUR MOVEMENT

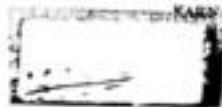
- A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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D. B. THENGADI

BHARATIYA MAZDOOR SANGH
KARNATAKA PRADESH



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FOREWORD

The Karnataka Unit of B.M.S. got up a function on 23-1-1982 at the Town Hall, Bangalore, to felicitate Sri D. B. Thengadiji, founder of the B.M.S. on his completion of 60 years. This memorable function was presided over by the veteran of the freedom of the Press - Sri Khadri Shamanna.

In his reply to the felicitations Sri Thengadiji in the the course of his illuminating speech analysed the economic ills under which the whole nation is groaning today. The glaring and basic defects undermining the very principles of a labour organisation pointed out by him were so serious that it was felt necessary that the speech should be brought in a book form for the benefit of our readers.

It will be clear from a reading of the book that there has been an attempt to crush the organised labour as part of a big strategy to immobilise the democratic forces. It is time that we realised that the workers of today are functioning like the vanguards in the fight against dictatorship.

Sri Thengadiji who is a thinker and intellectual of repute, in his unique and unparalleled way, dissects the causes of the present economic crisis and lays bare the hidden reason which is at the root of the matter - lack of national self-respect on the part of those who are manning the government at present. His call for all the democratic forces in the country to back the struggle of the organised workers is most timely and worthy of emulation. The book is of absorbing interest.

Now on to you dear readers.

Bangalore
15-5-1982

B. M. S.
Karnataka Pradesh

LABOUR MOVEMENT — A NEW PERSPECTIVE

In public life I have occasion to speak, but today's is an unusual occasion. You have invited and felicitated me on my completion of 60 years. So you expect me to say something. At the outset I wish to admit being overwhelmed by the manifestation of love and affection for me. I hardly deserve all this. I am particularly thankful to our Shri Khadri Shamannaji who is a dedicated social worker and whose mettle has been proved during the emergency. We are proud to have him in our midst to preside over this function. I am extremely thankful to him for sparing his time to attend the function and show his affinity with us — individually and organisationally. I see here my old comrades-in-arms. It will not be an exaggeration to say that this is a family get-together. Our friends from various organisations, which I am connected with, have come from various places. All our important activists of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh from various states and districts are here. Our constitution is family based and so this is an occasion for rejoicing. We are happy as all the family members are present. Inside a family, members do not formally thank each other. Still I shall say I am grateful — though this be contrary to family custom. When it was decided to celebrate Shastyabdi-poorti, I remembered what Late Shri N. C. Kelkar, a famous Marathi writer, has said in connection with such celebrations. He points out that such a celebration

is like the warning bell in a typewriter as the end of a line is approached - warning that now only a bit more can be typed in the line. It tells me I do'nt have much more time left. I have received so much love, good wishes and blessings from all of you that I tend to be little that warning. Praise has been showered on me, I would have been happy to deserve all that. The achievements accredited to me are really not my personal achievements. In my horoscope Saturn and Jupiter are so placed that when my colleagues succeed in their work, they deposit the entire credit to my account but if they fail the whole discredit is shared by them. Naturally if anybody looks into my bank account, he is impressed by the credit side. This has been so in the past and may continue to be so in the future also.

The growth of B. M. S. is really very impressive since we were the last to arrive on the scene of trade union movement, some of the organisations that started after 1948 did not really have to begin at the beginning; they were just extensions of already existing bigger organisations. But we had to start from a scratch and in August 1980 Govt. of India recognised us as a central labour organisation. Further some months back Govt. of India declared that as on 31-12-1978 B. M. S. was the second largest labour organisation. All this could be accomplished because of the qualities of B. M. S. activists. Hanuman is praised as Budhimatam Varistham and as Vanarayouthamukhyam i.e. he possessed all the qualities of leadership and the necessary calibre but he was not egoistic, individualistic, careeristic. He had

surrendered himself to an ideal for he was "*Shreerama Doota*" all the time. B. M. S. has thrived because it combines in itself the twin qualities of Hanuman - ability and idealism. A sculptor carves out of stone an image of a deity and then himself prostrates before it. In line with this Indian tradition, B. M. S. workers have fashioned me and are now praising me. So you should take the praises not with just a pinch of salt but with a bagful of it.

I come from RSS university or gymnasium where occasions for replying to felicitations are very rare. So my sense of what I should say today appropriately to the present occasion is limited. Yet I wish to take this opportunity to analyse the cause of the very unhappy conditions in our country at the present time.

Today we are passing through a grave crisis. This is a critical stage for the country in general and the worker in particular. The worker's condition is deteriorating day by day. Unemployment and underemployment are growing fast. The planning commission has not cared to develop so far a method of gauging these two and so the Govt. has no statistics about these. There is no diagnosis and no remedy to think of. In the case of those who are employed, there is no security of service, no need-based minimum wage and no protection of real wage. Real wage is being eroded by ever rising prices. The Govt. is not willing to fully compensate the fall in real wage and also does not accept that so long as there is a gap between living wage and actual wage, bonus must be treated only as deferred wage and

should be given the priority it deserves. There still continue to be bonded labour and insecurity of job under various categories as casual labour, work-charged labour, temporaries and what not. At one stage we asked for bread & we were given stones and now when we ask for bread again we are given E. S. M. A. which deprives the workers of their right to strike. B. M. S. is a nationalistic organisation and we do not want that production should be hampered. We are aware that if there is no production, what will be distributed will be poverty and not prosperity. But workers alone can not be held responsible for maintaining Industrial peace. There are other parties to Industrial relations viz. the Management and the Govt. If these two do not behave properly and do not carry out their moral obligations, workers must have the right to strike as a last resort. Hence B. M. S. has demanded that, like the right to work, the right to... strike be included in the Schedule of Fundamental Rights in our constitution. But instead of doing this the Govt. has come out with ESMA, thus launching a long attack on the working classes. I do not want to go deeper into the matter on this occasion. But the ESMA has proved a boon in disguise. Unions which were antagonistic so far have, with the exception of I. N. T. U. Congress, forged a united front. All Central Labour Organisations have come together under the banner of National Campaign Committee which has launched a united struggle.

- On 23rd Nov. 1981 there was a big demonstration of workers before the Parliament in New Delhi in which

at least 1.5 million workers participated. On 19-1-1982 there was a successful one day industrial token strike. Govt. used every possible weapon in their armoury to foil this strike of 19th Jan., 1982. In the second world war they used to say that truth is the first casualty in a war. Govt. conducted itself on a war footing and let loose a false propoganda against the strike - giving truth a good bye. In Delhi Govt. spoke of everything being normal in Bangalore and in Bangalore of everything being normal in Kerala. Govt. chose to refer to a Latex Factory in Kerala, boasting that the attendance was 80%. But they significantly concealed the fact that this factory has just 300 workers. Nothing was said about lakhs and lakhs of other workers in Kerala. Again I personally heard the A. I. R. Delhi provincial Bulletin announcing on the previous day that B. M. S. was not joining the strike. When I contacted the Radio authorities, they read out their news script which did not mention it! The National Campaign Committee had clearly stated that the event of the 19th January was only a one day Industrial Strike. In her attempt to play it down, the Prime Minister herself started the the falsehood that the workers had given a call for Bharat Bund and after the event boasted that it could not come off. I am reminded of Don Quixote who declared a wind-mill as a giant and boasted of its destruction. Notwithstanding the false propoganda by Govt. and its attempts to play it down, we know from various reliable reports that the workers stood solidly behind the National Campaign Committee and the one-day token strike was a grand success. NCC will meet

again in the first week of March chalk out further programme and you will hear about it in due time.

We can use this opportunity to do some fundamental thinking about the reason why the Govt. is behaving in this fashion and what emboldens it to attack the workers who are in a strategic position in Indian Economy. Two causes will occur to anybody's mind. One is the vulnerability of the workers due to disunity. The second is the lack of public relation on the part of the trade union movement.

Let me analyse the first of these two. Political unionism can not be accepted as a principle for in our country it has divided the ranks of the workers and weakened their force of collective bargaining. B. M. S. has always stood for trade union unity which alone can ensure the influence of workers on the management and Govt. policy. But complete trade union unity is possible only when one and all follow the principle of non-political trade unionism. Of course every worker is conscious of his rights and duties as a citizen and is free individually to join or not to join and work or not to work for a political party of his choice. But as union members collectively the workers must keep out of politics. This enables workers of different shades and parties to come together and work shoulder to shoulder and speak from a common platform. Genuine trade union is an organisation of the workers, by the workers and for the workers within the framework of national interest. And it carries the conviction that interests of the workers and those of the nation lie in the

same direction. Reaction to ESMA has brought all to the common platform of NCC. But it is high time that they take into account the fact that so far political trade unionism has only divided and weakened the workers in our country as also elsewhere as in France, Italy and some other countries. But where there is genuine trade unionism, workers are strong and influential as in the United states. In U.S.A, there is only one union in each industry and all unions are federated at the national level under the banner of American Federation of Labour and E.I.O. So the workers are so strong that not only the capitalists but even the President, though he is constitutionally very powerful, has to consider a hundred times the possible reaction of the workers to any policy he may chalk out. This relates not only to policy about industry and labour but to even the foreign policy. This is the case with capitalist America. But even in communist countries there is, among workers, an urge for genuine trade unionism. Even in Russia the first communist country, there are various strikes. We know how in 1953 in East Germany, in 1956 in Hungary and in 1968 in Czechoslovakia workers had revolted, one of their main demands being the right to have an independent trade union. In 1980 the workers in communist Poland revolted against the communist regime, their first and foremost demand being the right to form an independent union. There the solidarity organisation is ever becoming stronger and poses a challenge to the totalitarian and dictatorial regime. I feel that so far as the principle of genuine trade unionism is concerned, American Federation of Labour is the

B. M. S. of capitalist U. S. A. while the Solidarity organisation is the B. M. S. of communist Poland. If NCC ponders over all this and determines to strictly follow genuine trade unionism, I say that B. M. S. would be the first to dissolve itself in the wider interest of the nation and the workers. This it can do as B. M. S. members have looked upon B. M. S. as a means to an end and not as a means of egoistic satisfaction. We have no institutional ego.

Having dwelt at some length on the first cause that has prompted the Govt. and emboldened it to attack workers in the form of ESMA, I now turn to the second cause. It is the lack of public relation on the part of the trade union movement. For the last 34 years, Govt. is conducting false propaganda about grievances and demands of workers, but the trade unions have not contradicted it. Govt. has been blaming the loss of production on the strikes and the price rise on increased wages. BMS has always held that the effect of strikes and wage rise on production loss and price rise have always been just marginal. And now confirmation of our view comes from an impartial source. The Indian Institute of Public Administration surveyed and studied these problems in July and August. They mention various reasons for loss of production such as mismanagement, top-heavy administration, non-availability of raw materials and of spare parts, breakdown of machinery power shortage and failure, absence of export facilities, wrong marketing policies etc. Considering the percentage rates of all these, they

have clearly stated that the effect of strikes is only marginal. The Govt. conceals all these facts from the people and makes the workers the scapegoats. Regarding the effect of increased wages of workers on price-rise also the Indian Institute of Public Administration has clearly said that the effect is only marginal and that the main factors responsible for the price-rise are (i) Deficit Financing (ii) Black money and (iii) Unrestrained profits, dividends and interests. Now all of us know that deficit financing is practiced by Govt. itself. Black Money is patronised by Govt. through Bearer Bond Scheme. Govt. has given good-character certificates to holders of black-money but it had no guts to restrain profits, dividends and interests. So actually it is the Govt. itself which is mainly responsible for the price-rise. The lapse on the part of the Trade Union Movement is that it did not take the general public into confidence and educate and enlighten them about the factual position. The result is false, repeated Govt. propaganda passes for truth for as Dr. Gaebbels, used to say, "A lie repeated a hundred times becomes truth." Naturally in times of confrontation public sympathy, instead of being with the poor worker, is with the Govt.

Let me now turn to another point. There are un-
savoury economic events. For example, the import of 1.5 million tonnes of wheat when our own country can produce it or the Govt. raising prices of petrol products when the same are falling throughout the world. On

such occasions various parties pour forth statements condemning the Govt. But these parties have done precious little to point out that all these events spring from a common cause viz. wrong economic policy. And further these parties have done nothing to educate the masses in this matter. If somebody has boils all over the body, it is not enough to give them local external treatment but it is necessary to go to the root cause of the malady and take steps to purify the impure blood stream. The undesirable economic events are like the boils and wrong policy of Govt. is like the impure blood. And when the Govt. adopts a wrong economic policy, the leaders of Govt. have no option left but to attack the workers. Recently, in Delhi 2 or 3 professors approached and requested me to convene a national seminar on national economic policy of the country. Their objective was to educate and guide the Govt. which is following wrong policies. I asked them, "Do you think that the Govt. is less intelligent than you and me." They replied in the negative. And then I said "You may say it of Ministers. But Ministers are not the only constituents of the Govt. There are Secretaries and experts who are not less intelligent than you and me. It is not as if wrong policies are followed. And we must find out what motivates them."

I shall now show what prompts the wrong policy. Because of the pressure of circumstances, after the second world war, not only India but also

several colonies of white imperialist countries were granted political independence. The prosperity of these imperialist countries was based on the economic exploitation of their colonies etc. For example, raw materials were taken from India to Great Britain and manufactured goods were sold here at very high prices. Their economic structure was neither self-sufficient nor self-reliant but depended on manifold economic exploitation of their colonies or countries under their rule. Here I should like to explain a new terminology which has come into vogue recently. The term northern countries refers to the imperialist countries of yore and these lie in the northern hemisphere. The term southern countries refers to the countries which got their freedom after the second war, which are economically underdeveloped or undeveloped and which lie in the southern hemisphere. Though the Northern Countries, can not afford to forego their economic imperialism which alone enables the economic exploitation forming the very basis of their long cherished economic structures. Amongst the North Countries Russia has an advantage over the others; The east European countries like Poland, Czekoslovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, East Germany lie very close to Russia and have been reduced to Russian satellites by the pressure of Russian tanks. So Russia can and does exploit these countries. So the self-preservation instinct of North Countries, demands that they do all they can to bring only such people to power in South Countries as are willing, for a price, to betray the economic interests and

the self respect of their respective countries. This is a life and death concern for North Countries.

Added to the above factor is the constitutional set up which is not indogenous but imported from the West. Mahatma Gandhi had said as early as in 1915 in Hind Swaraj that if we attain Swaraj we should not commit the mistake of importing the British Parliamentary system. He said that the British Parliamentary system of majority and minority, if implanted here, would make the plight of the common man like that of a "prostitute who can be bought and sold." One is wonderstruck at his prophetic vision because he had said this as far back as in 1915. In our country poverty and illiteracy are rampant. 60% of the population is below the poverty line, 420 million are thoroughly illiterate and the literacy of another 120 million is doubtful. In such circumstances the introduction of the British system makes corruption the shortest cut to power. In this connection I may mention Stafford Cripps' definition of politics as a "gentle art of getting votes from the poor and campaign funds from the rich by promising to protect each from the other."

I do not know if there exists today in India a political party which is idealistic, which believes in Mahatmaji's Sadhana Shuchita (i. e. purity of means), is willing to work for decades, if necessary, to raise the level of public education and of national consciousness and is patient enough to wait till enlightened and nationally conscious masses return it to

power. Such a party would never barter away its idealism and purity of means in exchange for a quick rise to power. Such a party may or may not be existant. But the general trend for political parties is to seek short cuts to power. The shortest cut is through corruption. Corruption needs money which can be had only from money bags and certainly not from the poor. And money bags will not give a single paisa without extracting a prize-like Shylock demanding his pound of flesh. The prize sought is a free hand, in the economy of the country, to protect and promote their vested interests which involve exploitation of general masses, particularly the poor. If money is accepted from money bags to win elections then, on coming to power, you cannot but implement policies dictated by them and allow their vested interests to exploit the general masses.

These two situations – the dire need of North Countries for self preservation to exploit the South Countries and the present internal political situation in our country – have jointly given rise to a chain of wrong policies and it is not as if the Govt. is following wrong policies out of ignorance. The leaders of the Govt. are committed to foreign capital and some foreign governments and some of the monopolist capitalists – I am not talking about the medium and small capitalists who do not really matter much in the present context – are also playing a role subservient to foreign capital in their personal and family interest. The leaders of the Govt. are committed to give free scope for the

exploitation of the masses to the foreign capitalists, some of the foreign powers and to monopoly capitalists and have reached a point of no return. Govt. leaders fear, however, that the poor masses, - sooner rather than later, would see through the game of the ruling party as no body can fool all people all the time. So the safest thing for the ruling party is not to hold general elections anymore. I can tell you on the strength of reliable information that there would have been no elections held in 1977 also, but for the fact that the very intelligence department of the Govt. misinformed the ruling party that if elections are held, the party's credibility and its democratic facade will be maintained abroad and at the same time it will be safely returned to power. It is already decided not to hold general elections any more.

This brings us to a new point. The ruling party will not repeat its mistakes of 1975. The greatest mistake was to antagonise all the democratic forces of the country at the same time and it bore a bitter fruit after 19 months. The new strategy is to attack and cripple one democratic force at a time. Their first choice has fallen on the organised labour of economic field. They can safely neglect the unorganised labour and the unemployed whose voice can, any way, be muffled easily any time. Once they succeed in crushing the Trade Union movement in the country, I have reliable information that their next target will be the press. Govt. is already interfering with some national newspapers that criticise the Govt. While

attacking each democratic force, Govt. will try its best to lull the other forces into inaction by telling them that Govt. is not proceeding against peace-loving citizens who have nothing to fear. The present fight spearheaded by the workers is part and parcel of a much bigger battle for the survival of democracy. The democratic elements of this country are wrong if they think that the workers' struggle need not concern them as the workers are fighting only for their own trade union rights. It must be realised that the workers are today functioning like the vanguards in the fight against dictatorship. The democratic elements must treat the worker's fight as their own.

Apart from the workers' fight for their rights and its being the spearhead to fight against dictatorship, there is also the very important question of National Self Respect and I propose now to dilate upon it at some length. Countries like Germany and Japan were razed to the ground as the second world war was fought on their ground. But they have risen from the dust again. Germany (West) is already, in economic field, a power to reckon with and Japan's Yen has giving a shock treatment to the American Dollar. While countries like these have registered such wonderful progress, we are steadily going further down during the same period. Our people are frustrated. Do we or do we not have the potentialities for prosperity? To illustrate the two factors involved let me take an example of two students. The dull one fails in the

exam, and so does the bright one also. But the latter has been unable to appear at the exam, due to illness. The cause of failure are different. In the case of the first it is internal viz. lack of brains. In the second case, it is circumstantial. Our failure is not due to lack of inherent ability, man power, natural national resources or talent. Our vast population is not a liability but if properly used, a source of strength. Very few countries are blessed with natural material resources as we are. Indian scientists and technologists are so able and brilliant that in NASA - the Space science Agency of U. S. A. - they hold a place of equality and status among Americans and other Nationals. India ranks third in size among the scientific communities of the World. So we eliminate a lack of potentiality as the cause of our backwardness. And now let us examine the circumstantial cause. This is the lack of will on the part of the leaders of the Govt. Very few people are aware that our planning policies are guided and directed not by our people, keeping in view the Indian requirements but by foreign experts keeping in view the requirements of the foreign countries. Indian planning is not by Indians and for Indians, though the members of the Planning Commission are Indians right from the inception of the Planning Commission. Don't think that without aid from these white countries the non-white countries cannot prosper. There are examples of countries becoming self-reliant without depending on these white, erstwhile imperialist countries. I will give only two examples - one of a very small country

Biatra which is part of Nigeria and the other of a very big country China. The story of Biatra can be concisely stated. During Nigerian Civil War, Biatra was isolated from the rest of the world and its communication means were very meagre. With its very few scientists, engineers and technologists, but with a strong will of self reliance it tried to build up its national economy and succeeded in it.

I shall need more time to describe the Chinese example. In 1948 there was a communist revolution and Mao-tse-tung and his colleagues suffered from the illusion of communist inter-nationalism. Russi-Chini bhai bhai was the slogan. The first five year plan of China was drafted entirely by Russian experts. All plants and projects were manned by Russian experts and most of the machinery used was Russian. But soon the Chinese found out that what the Russains were aiming at was not internationalism but an attempt to found Russian economic empire in China. This made Mao-tse-Tung who was more a patriot than a communist - to recover from the reverie of communist internationalism. Mao and his colleagues decided to risist this Russian attempt. A war of nerves began. In 1960 Russia severed all connections with China and brought pressure on China by suddenly withdrawing all experts and machinery, hoping thereby to bring China to its knees. But the Chinese were not caught napping. They had foreseen this possibility and had prepared to meet it. Even during Russian-Chinese bhai bhai days Russian experts,

who were constructing a certain big bridge over the big river Yangtze were diverted to another work somewhere else. Later when the Russian experts were given an opportunity to visit the bridge sight, they were surprised to find the bridge fully completed quite accurately as per specifications. Not only that but a still greater surprise awaited them. The Chinese had made a perfect prototype of the Russian bridge building machinery and the Russians could not tell the one from the other. This was possible because the day the Chinese suspected the ulterior motives of the Russians, they had directed the best talent in China to indigenous production and were enthused by the National Self Respect of the Chinese. There was the will for self-reliance and it found a way. Contrast this with the Indian case when a big bridge was to be built across the river Hugli, Our engineers and experts were certainly competent to plan it. But the whole thing was entrusted to foreigners.

From what I have said so far it will be clear that while the problems are economic, the remedy does not lie in the economic field. The trouble arises from the lack of national self respect and the will to make our nation great. We have the man power, the natural resources and talent and if we can build up national psychology properly and infuse patriotism in every heart, nothing prevents us from becoming one of the first five nations of the world before the turn of the century.

From this point of view though the workers are fighting for their trade union rights, fight against

Essential Services Maintenance Act has been imposed upon the workers because of the policy of the Government of selling national self-respect, national economic freedom and national sovereignty to foreign interests. Therefore, workers' fight is not only for their own rights, not only to serve democracy, it is also a fight against the policy of the Government which is devoid of National self-respect, economic freedom and sovereignty. It is a fight for National self-respect also. From this point of view it is necessary for all patriots to realise that workers today are becoming the vanguards of the fight for National self-respect though superficially it may appear that they are just fighting for their trade union rights. Hence this workers' fight should be treated and accepted by all Nationalists as their own fight for National self-respect. Viewed in this perspective the real nature of this fight against the Essential Services Maintenance Act will be clear to everyone of us.

As I said earlier, in fact the occasion did not call for any speech by me. Even after making a long speech I am doubting whether it was not inappropriate on my part to have said anything except expressing gratitude to all of you. But the situation is so grave for the country and for the workers that I could not contain myself. I have given vent to my feelings in your presence. Once again, I express my deep sense of gratitude for the love and affection expressed by all of you and pray God that He should make me worthy of the love and trust expressed by you.