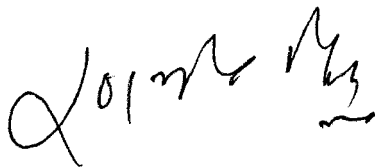

RESPONSIVE CO-OPERATION

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Responsive Co-operation

Let me congratulate the L.I.C. employees of Hyderabad for holding this Conference inspite of great difficulties. Despite the havoc played by the recent cyclone in this region, they decided to hold the conference as scheduled and did not postpone it. As our respected Bade Bhai said, the cyclone is a national calamity. As a nationalist organisation, the B.M.S. treats such a calamity as its own. I would like to assure that all the units of B.M.S., and N.O.I.W. would strive their best to provide succour to the victims of this disaster.

Much has been said already about the problems of L.I.C. employees. I do not wish to add any thing more. What is now going on is a battle between the L.I.C. employees and the present Government. The Government should, therefore, try to understand what these problems are and where exactly they stand. The withdrawal of Bonus to L.I.C., employees is an excess of EMERGENCY and so it should be corrected now. It is a part of the assurances given by the Janata Party to set right all excesses of emergency. The Janata Party Government should realise this truth.

The Janata Party came to power as a result of the change brought about by the last March elections. In this change, all people including the labour, the B.M.S., and the N.O.I.W., were involved. The policy of B.M.S., has always been not to involve itself in politics. But we thought that removing Indiraji's dictatorship was not a political issue but a national issue and an occasion to save democracy. It was

evident to every one that genuine trade union activity could not flourish under a dictatorship and that for the development of such an activity, democracy is essential. Hence, we entered the election arena. At that time, the Janata Party came upon the national scene as a viable alternative to the dictatorship of Smt. Indira Gandhi. So we all supported Janata Party and worked for it. As a result of our cumulative efforts, the Janata Party is in power now.

We all wish that the new Government should function well and succeed in its mission. The main reason for this desire of ours is not because of any extra love for Janata Party. But it is due to the reason that if this Government, which came to power displacing the dictatorship fails, the people of India will lose confidence not only in the ruling party but also in the very institution of democracy. Doubts will arise among our people whether democracy can flourish in this country. They will wonder whether the problems of this country can be solved only under dictatorship. So we wish success to the Janata Party Government. But it is not our wish alone that can make it successful. The party itself should decide to function well. If the party came into power in the last elections, it does not mean that the people had expressed confidence in the Janata Party. The people expressed enmasse lack of confidence in Indira Gandhi and her style of functioning. The Janata Party should not ignore this fact. As you all know, in our Industrial sector, persons newly recruited are kept on probation for 6 months or more. During this period of probation, if they work well, and if their conduct is good, they will be confirmed in service. Otherwise, they are sent out. The Janata Party Government is now on probation. If they work well during this period of probation, people will allow them to continue in power. Otherwise,

people will not hesitate to throw them out, All Janata Party Ministers should understand this. If they fail to understand this truth, it only means that they have learnt nothing from the lessons of March elections.

An issue before us at present is what should be the policy of a nationalist trade union movement towards a national Government. As a nationalist trade union movement, the B.M.S., has a permanent policy on this issue. You are aware of our policy towards a dictatorship. It was very much evident from the role we assumed in bringing down the dictatorship. But a Government duly elected through democratic process is different. Such a national government should always try to have cordial relations with a national trade union movement. Such a Government may be led by any political party. But the policy of B.M.S., shall always be the same towards the government, viz; responsive co-operation.

An open invitation has been recently extended to B.M.S. to become a wing of Janata Party. There was an assurance that if we become a wing of the Ruling Party, all facilities and privileges would be showered on us. Had we been like any other trade union, we would have grabbed such an opportunity. But we are *impractical* people. We told them that we do not like to assume such a position. But our policy shall be one of "responsive co-operation" with any democratically elected Government. What then is the meaning of responsive co-operation? It means that the Trade Union Movement will co-operate with such a Government to the extent the Government co-operates with the T.U. Movement. To the extent the Government non-cooperates with the T.U. Movement, the T.U. Movement will non-cooperate with the Government. If the Government desires to shake hands with us, we are always ready to reciprocate. But if the Gov-

ernment decides to wage a war on workers, the T.U. Movement also will be ready to retaliate. The initiative is, therefore, in the hands of the Government. The ball is in Government's Court. If they raise a hand to crush the T.U. Movement, we will not hesitate to bring down the raised hand of the Government with all our might. This, therefore, is the meaning of Responsive Co-operation. We do not want enmity. We want friendship. But we cannot be silent spectators to whatever the Government does. Such was the policy of INTUC. Whatever the old Government did, the INTUC kept quiet and stood by the Govt. They functioned with the Govt. on a 50% love affair basis. But BMS will not function on that basis. To the extent Govt., loves us, we shall also love them. That is our Policy.

We understand and appreciate the difficulties and problems of the new Government. We have that understanding nature and attitude. We know that the Janata Party Govt. and the ministers are new to their job. The Congress Party, in its 30 years' rule, has left the country insolvent. We also appreciate the fact that the new ministers will take some time to settle down. They must be given sufficient time. The reason is that the Ministers are new, but the bureaucracy is old. It is said that this Country is run by two parallel Governments - the permanent Govt. and the temporary Govt. The first one is run from the beginning by the Secretaries and other bureaucrats. The second Govt. changes once in five years. The permanent Govt. does not tolerate any challenge to its existence or authority from the temporary Govt. It is indeed a difficult task for the temporary Govt. to overrule or exercise control over this permanent Govt. The Bureaucracy is like a horse. It gives all kinds of troubles to a new person, who wants to ride it. It will take some time for a

new rider to get a hold over it. But how much time? There should certainly be a limit to the time to be allowed. Secondly, the new rulers, within the time allowed, should, by their behaviour and policies, at least establish their bonafides with the people. The past 30 years' of rule has unfortunately given rise to serious doubts among people about the bonafides of the political rulers. The new rulers should, therefore, have established their bonafides by now. Even while appreciating the difficulties faced by the new Government, we have decided to continue our old policy of Responsive Co-operation because of the doubts lingering in our hearts regarding the bonafides of the political rulers. If tomorrow, the Marxist party comes to power, duly elected by the people, our Policy of Responsive Cooperation shall still continue as we are not concerned with any Political Party which comes to power.

When we try to understand the implications of our policy of Responsive co-operation and assess the extent of co-operation and non-cooperation we have to extend to the new Govt. it becomes necessary to look at the economic policies of the Govt. Already eight months have passed in formulating the economic policy. Earlier there was a manifesto. Many promises were made therein. Let me tell you that the Labour Ministry has really worked well during this period. But in respect of bigger problems of a financial nature, much delay has taken place in decision making. For instance the lifting of C. D. Scheme, repayment of the instalments, restoring minimum bonus and the revision of D.A. when the price index crossed 312. In all these cases, ultimately the Govt. had to decide in favour of the Labour. But on account of the abnormal delay involved, all the decisions lost their grace. Why so much delay in these decisions? Why so much delay in formulating an economic policy? These questions

resulted in our inability to say what will be the area of agreement or disagreement between the labour and the Govt.

On reading the economic policy document, one cannot say what is wrong or what is right in it. All good things in the world are mentioned therein. There is centralisation and again decentralisation. There is talk about heavy industries and also about cottage industries. So, it is difficult to say exactly what the decided policy of the Govt. is. It is now the responsibility of the Govt. to spell out programmes to implement the policy. But who will spell out, when they will do it, whether it will be the party or the Planning Commission--these are all questions still shrouded in mystery. But some of the statements given by some dignitaries, here and there, are raising doubts. Let us take one instance. In the manifesto, it is said that it shall be the endeavour of the Janata Party to bring about a ratio of 1:20 between minimum and maximum incomes. We appreciate the difficulties involved in implementing this policy in a short duration of time. But what is this ratio 1:20? To whom this is to be applied? The recent statements and assertions of some of the ruling party leaders lead us to doubt that the same old interpretation is still being given to the concept. As in the olden days an attempt is being made to apply this ratio to only wage earners i.e. that the income of the lowest paid worker in an industry and that of the Chairman should be in the ratio of 1:20. Such an interpretation is creating much discomfiture among us. In the manifesto the Janata Party proclaimed that the income of the poorest with the lowest income, and the richest should bear a ratio of 1:20. It means that the income of the lowest and poorest on one hand and the income of Tata and Birla on the other should be brought into the definition of this ratio. Unfortunately, the Govt. has left

Tata and Birla and Dalmia and caught hold of LIC employees. They are comparing the Agricultural Labour with LIC employees. Statements are being issued that while agricultural labour are starving LIC employees are purchasing refrigerators. Why don't you compare the facilities enjoyed by Tata & Birla with those of Agricultural labour? Why compare LIC employees with them? In the event of truthful implementation of 1:20 ratio between the incomes of the lowest paid agricultural labour and that of Tata and Birla, if LIC and Bank employees have to suffer a wage cut, they will gladly do so. But in an effort to woo the agriculturists, you are telling them about the wages of LIC employees. You are creating illwill among the rural population towards LIC employees. Nothing did you talk about Birla and Tata. When we put genuine demands, you are preaching us patriotism. All this is increasing doubts in our minds. We want to continue giving Co operation to the Govt. but whether the other side is ready to accept our co-operation is doubtful. I do not know whether they are still expecting the age old 50% love affair basis in their dealings with us.

The Government has recently appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Bhoothalingam. The same bureaucrats are the members of that Committee. These bureaucrats can never understand the problems of the people. How can they then decide the incomes policy for the country? This committee is an incompetent committee. So we do not have any confidence in that committee.

In these circumstances, even before a policy of incomes and wages is announced it is not correct for anyone to term our demands as justified, or unjustified. Let there be a policy first. Then we can decide the extent of co-operation or

non-cooperation with the Government. Industrial peace depends on the policy adopted by the Govt. Let me tell you again that we are not concerned with any particular party which is in power. The Industrial Labour, the agricultural labour and other poor people when they look at the Government, do not take that fact into consideration. They classify the rulers into two categories. The first category are those, who have uppermost in their hearts, the well being of the crores of poor people in this country and those who are ready to take all steps in that direction. The other category are those who only try to protect the vested interests. To the extent the rulers belong to the first category, our area of co-operation will be more. But to the extent they belong to the second category, the area of confrontation will increase. It is now left to the present Government to decide to which category they desire to belong. It is for them to decide whether they wish to have co-operation or confrontation with the labour.

Now, we have to decide to what extent we should carry on our struggle with this new Govt. in the new situation. We have already decided our strategy to carry out the struggle. To implement it successfully, we should decide how strong we should be. Is there any target to measure the strength of our movement? Some people say that we should become so strong that whenever we put up demands, every Govt. should accede to them. When we go to Delhi for Negotiations, the Govt. should eagerly think in terms of fulfilling our demands. Some other people feel that we should become NUMBER ONE among all the Trade Union Organizations. In every industry, there are different Unions. We are strong in some Industries and not so strong in some others. But, whether it is NOIW or B.M.S., there have been different stages of development. In the first stage, there was ridicule.

Others who are already in the Trade Union-field laughed at us derisively. "What can these people achieve when we ourselves are not able to solve the problems?"—they asked. At this initial reaction of ridicule, some timid people usually get frustrated and disillusioned. But, we are made of a different fabric. From this stage of ridicule, we came to the second stage viz., stage of apathy. Others ignored us and said "let us neglect them; they are too small". We crossed this stage also and came to the third — the stage of Confrontation. Other Unions started feeling our growing strength and decided to fight us and crush us. We crossed this stage also and proved that we are not to be cowed down by threats. Then, the attitude of other Unions changed. They have started talking in terms of UNITED FRONTS. In L.I.C., this talk of United Front came about. The very same people who ridiculed us, ignored us and tried to crush us, have started talking about having a United Front with NOIW. The same Policy was adopted by other Central Trade Unions towards B.M.S. Our wish or target is not only that NOIW should become Number One among the Trade Unions functioning in L.I.C.—not only that the sum total of the strength of all our affiliated Trade Union Federations make Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh Number One among all the Central Trade Unions. Our views are different. Our target is different.

Indira Gandhi ruled us till a few days ago. Now, a new Govt has come into being. For the well-being of democracy, what is needed is a strong public opinion. Governments come and Governments go. But, as long as we are unable to develop an intense desire among the millions of our people to have a democratic form of Govt. and, so long as we do not develop a will among them to defend their democratic rights, it is always possible that again the country may go

back to the days of dictatorship. Agriculturists depending on monsoon only believe in fate and feel that if there are good rains fate is good, they will have good harvest and, if the rains fail, the crops also will fail. In the same manner, if the people of our country also believe only in fate and feel that if they have good ministers, they are lucky and if ruled by bad ones, they are un-lucky, then, our mission will not succeed. If we can build up a large organization, which is well-knit and ready to face any eventuality, no rulers and no ministers to whichever party they may belong, whatever be their ideas-good or bad-will have the courage to do anything detrimental to the interests of the people. Democracy will flourish or perish depending upon the degree of awareness among the poorest people of our country and the extent to which they are organised. The guarantee for democracy lies in such public consciousness and not in the political parties or ministers. Building up of such awareness and organising the poor people of our country is our responsibility and our mission.

Therefore, how strong and how much organised we should be? We should become so strong that our leadership-under the leadership of a nationalist trade union movement the poor people of this country wherever they are-either in cities, villages or forests, are organised and an awareness is created amongst them to guarantee protection of our democracy. This is our foremost aim. Then comes the fulfilment of our demands. Till now, we have been trying to discuss our problems at various levels, to impress upon Shri H. M. Patel and others regarding the genuineness of our demands, trying to find out persons who can mediate with the Govt., and trying to assess the response of other Unions in the industry if we give a call for agitation. Our aim should be that

the nationalist trade union movement is so organised under the banner of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh that a situation is created when it will not be the endeavour of the labour to convince Shri H.M. Patel of the genuineness of their demands but it shall be the endeavour and eagerness of Shri H. M. Patel to convince labour.

Now a question is posed whether our Union is recognised. B.M.S. has also been subjected to such a question. Recognition is being accorded to us at various stages. We have representations on various committees appointed by the Government. We are at the negotiating table in many industries. But recognition by Govt., is a small thing for us and so is sitting at a negotiating table. For INTUC, it was a big thing. It was like a doll to a baby for INTUC. We do not want to beg for recognition nor for representation on any committee. All of you know that even without these things, the poor workers in our organisation faced emergency boldly and all the atrocities committed by the then Government including incarceration. The Government had also to accept that ours is a militant organisation. Hence, we should understand the real meaning of recognition. The real aim of a trade union should be to become so strong that the recognition to it by the Government should not be a matter of consequence. It should be a matter of consequence for the Government, whichever party may be in power, to think whether it is recognised by the trade union movement. The trade union movement should be so strong that once the Government loses its confidence and the Trade Union Movement withdraws recognition to it, that Govt., should fall within twenty four hours. That alone is the real target for the strength of a trade union movement. To become such a strong movement, we should keep in our view our target and work

towards that goal taking into our stride all the difficulties and problems. Let me wish you success and thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Sri Dattopant Thengadi's Address at the
Third All India Conference of National
Organisation of Insurance Workers
At Hyderabad.

on 2nd Dec, 1977
