

THE ONWARD MARCH

OF

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh



BY

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Before the rise of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh the Indian labour field was dominated by political unionism. The recognised Central Labour Organisations were the wings of different political parties or groups. This trend was bound to encourage multiplicity of unions and preference to political rather than workers' interests in the actual conduct of trade union affairs. This often made workers the pawns in the power-game of different parties. The conscientious workers resented this political exploitation and relegation of their own interest to the background. They were awaiting the advent of a national centre based upon genuine trade unionism i.e., an organisation of the workers, for the workers, and by the workers. They were equally opposed to political unionism as well as sheer 'economism' i.e., 'bread-butter unionism'. They were votaries of Rashtraniti or Lokaniti. They sought protection and promotion of workers' interests within the framework of national interests, since they were convinced that there was no incompatibility between the two. In fact, all parties to industrial relations were part and parcel of the national organism and their sectional interests were identical with those of the Nation. They considered society as the third—and the more important—party to all industrial relations, and the consumers' interest as the nearest economic equivalent to national interest. To ensure highest measure of democracy in the country, various mass organisations representing different interest groups must be free from the hegemony of political parties, they believed. Some of them met at Bhopal on July 23, 1955 (The Tilak Jayanti Day), and announced the formation of a new National Trade Union centre, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh.

Those who attended the Convention had full confidence in the ability of our national genius to evolve new social systems and philosophical formulae. They sought to free their countrymen from intellectual slavery of Western concepts, terminologies and ideologies. They were determined to steer clear of both, capitalism as well as communism. They were opposed to the crude materialism of the West and felt that in the absence of Bharatiya spiritual values it was impossible to evolve any healthy social structure free from internal dissensions and strife. They had implicit faith in the scientific character and ultimate victory of the Bharatiya Social Order based upon the tenets of integral humanism.

Inspired by this Bharatiya Darshan, the pioneers of this new movement rejected the 'class' concept. They believed in the vertical arrangement of society, and not in its horizontal division. They, therefore, stood for neither class-conflict nor class-collaboration. The class-concept—which is a fiction, and not a fact—would ultimately result in the disintegration of the nation, they declared. They, however, refused to identify national interests with those of the privileged few in the economic, political or any other department of national life. The criterion for determining the level of national prosperity was, according to them, the living condition of the financially weakest constituent of the nation. To improve the lot of the underdog they would resort to the process of collective bargaining, so far as possible, and to conflict, wherever necessary. Exploitation, injustice and inequality must be put an end to. There must be equitable distribution of the total national product. The ratio between the minimum and the maximum incomes in the land should be 1 : 10. All monopolies must be abolished and economic authority decentralised. The problem of unemployment and underemployment must be tackled on war-footing.

They demanded recognition of the 'Right to work' as a Fundamental Right; appropriate ban on automation and restrictions on rationalisation; due priority to agriculture in plan allocation, implementation of massive rural works and rural housing programmes; launching of minor irrigation pro-

jects, and organisation in the rural areas of labour-intensive cottage, forest, village, small-scale and agro-industries with the help of local resources, local man-power and appropriate technology—laying equal stress on production by masses and mass production; rejection of the exclusive importance of the Gross National Product; strict implementation of the land reform laws and immediate redistribution of all surplus and cultivable waste lands among landless labourers,—particularly those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes; extension of the protection of the Minimum Wages Act to agricultural workers as well as to all other unorganised and unprotected sections; and introduction of new debt relief legislation.

For industrial workers they demanded security of service, needs-based minimum wage, wage differentials on the basis of job-evaluation, right to bonus as deferred wage, full neutralisation of price-rise so as to ensure the real wage, massive industrial housing programmes, and integrated social security and welfare schemes.

To ensure the health of national economy the convention proposed, among other things, the following measures :

1. Imposition of a ceiling on all incomes ;
2. Boosting up the domestic rate of savings and their channelisation into industrial investment ;
3. Fullest utilisation of all installed capacity ;
4. Ban on all vulgar, ostentatious, wasteful expenditure ;
5. Introduction of a consumption tax ;
6. Withdrawal of all indirect taxes and rationalisation of the entire tax-structure ;
7. Drastic reduction in deficit financing ;
8. Destruction of the parallel economy of black money through stern administrative measures ;
9. Strict measures against tax-evaders, black-market-teers profiteers, hoarders, smugglers, speculators, adulterators, and other corrupt and anti-social elements ;
10. A ban on luxury goods industries and encouragement to consumer-goods-industries ; and

11. An appropriate change in the patterns of consumption and encouragement to the spirit of swadeshi, simplicity and austerity.

The Convention rejected the official contention that every wage-rise leads inevitably to price-rise and results in the shrinking of employment avenues. The wage-rise is responsible for price-rise only to the extent to which it (i.e. wage-rise) is in excess of the productivity-rise, the Convention asserted.

The Convention further demanded a Round Table Conference of all the economic interests to evolve an integrated National Policy on employment, investment, productivity, prices and incomes/wages. "That is the way to evolve a 'People's Plan,'" the Convention remarked.

The Convention insisted upon the evolution and implementation of the national financial discipline.

In keeping with the perfectly non-political character of the new body, the Convention declared that its attitude towards any duly elected Government would be that of 'Responsive Cooperation' whichever be the party in power.

The Convention further decided that the entire approach of the new movement should be constructive, and not merely agitational. Industrial peace was the essential pre-requisite for industrial progress. As a nationalist organisation, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh should strive to ensure that production is not hampered without adequate justification. It must eschew and oppose violence, sabotage and all other anti-social acts in the labour field. But it was opposed to the undemocratic ban on the workers' right to strike which, according to the Convention, was their fundamental right. Instead, an appropriate mechanism should be devised which would render the right to strike a superfluity.

Beginning from the beginning

Notwithstanding all these bold assertions and the long range vision of the founder-members, the fact remained that on July 23, 1955 the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh had not a single registered union affiliated to it. It had to begin from the scratch.

All the four national trade union centres which were recognised by the Government of India were groupings or regroupings of the already existing and functioning trade unions. None of them was required to begin from the beginning. Consequently, the very determination to set up a new central labour organisation appeared to many as the height of audacity. The announcement was received by the trade union leaders with ridicule and contempt.

The B.M.S. structure was evolved from the bottom to the top, and not imposed from above,—as is generally the case. To begin with, small unions were formed at the local level. Their formation was followed by the organisation of bigger unions, state-level industrial federations, state-level B.M.S. units, national industrial federations, and, after full twelve years, the first all India Convention in which the National Executive of B.M.S. was elected for the first time. All these years, the B.M.S. was functioning without National Executive or All-India office-bearers. This experiment of building up an organisation from the grass-roots has been unique,—the only of its kind in the public life of India.

The plight of early B.M.S. activists was most unenviable. Immediate victimisation by employers, general hostility of the governments; natural scepticism of the workers; total neglect, ridicule and bitter opposition by the established unions,—and all this when they themselves were suffering from complete lack of material and human resources. Nevertheless, in the midst of these adversities, they never lost their poise, equilibrium and determination. In spite of their zeal, they refrained from launching fresh unions wherever such a gesture was calculated to harm the immediate interests of the concerned workers. On the contrary, they considered no risk to be too great when they were convinced that the established unions were not serving the workers properly. Their conviction was : When the best suffer, the rest prosper.

After the emergence of the BMS

With the emergence of B.M.S. on the national scene,

a few, hitherto unknown symbols were introduced in the labour field.

During those days, the red flag, with its international background of class-conflict and party-dictatorship, was presumed to represent the aspirations of the working class,—the tri-colour of INTUC symbolising—rightly or wrongly—in the workers' mind the subservience of the workers' cause to that of the Establishment. The B.M.S. unfurled the saffron which has been a traditional symbol of universal love, renunciation and self-sacrifice. The product of the soil, the saffron represents the best and the noblest in the Bharatiya values of life.

The B.M.S. symbol is characteristically Bharatiya. While its industrial wheel symbolises industrialisation, 'bali' agriculture and general prosperity, and human fist workers' unity, the real stress is on the opposable human thumb. No implement, weapon or means of production could have been evolved had man not been blessed with the opposable thumb. Man alone could develop these instruments because man alone has opposable thumb. In this sense, human thumb is the real origin of all machinery, hammer, sickle, plough, charakha or sputnik. No human limb has so far found any place in the symbols of other trade union centres.

It was a matter of sad surprise that even after its existence for more than three decades the Indian Labour Movement had not found out or conceived of the National Labour Day. Even in the United States, which happens to be the birth-place of the International Labour Day, the workers celebrate their own National Labour Day on the first Monday of every September. In our country, Viswakarma Day is being observed as national labour day from times immemorial. Even today workers belonging to different religions—and even European employees—of Jamshedpur and other factories worship their machinery on this auspicious day. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh boldly introduced this Day, and, happily enough, it has received wide acceptability from the workers, though some of the so-called radical labour leaders are still hesitant on this point.

The extent of indifference, if not callousness, of trade union leadership to the problem of raising the level of national consciousness of workers can be very well imagined from the fact that before the advent of B.M.S., 'BHARAT MATA KI JAI' was a slogan quite alien to the Indian labour field. Workers were taken by surprise when B.M.S. first introduced this slogan and thus tried to bridge the gulf between the sectional and the national view-points. Being essentially patriotic, workers were not slow to adopt this slogan.

But according to Bharatiya tradition, there is nothing exclusive—in the spirit of nationalism. Nationalism and internationalism or humanism are the two consecutive stages in the process of the healthy growth of human consciousness.

In 1955, the widely current slogan was : 'Workers of the world, unite : ! It was hardly realised that, carried to its logical conclusion, this would divide every nation or society horizontally. Thus, in reality, this was a slogan of all-round disruption. We rejected it, and replaced it with our own slogan : 'Workers : Unite the world.' !

The B.M.S. also introduced some new, hitherto unknown slogans based upon patriotism. For example, it replaced the current slogan of

1. 'हमारी मांगें पूरी हो । चाहे जो मजबूरी हो ।'

hamari mangel puri hon. chahe jo majburi ho
(Let our demands be fulfilled at whatever cost)'

by

'देश के हित में करेंगे काम, काम के लेंगे पूरे दाम,'
desh ke hit me karenge kam, kam ke lenge pure dam.
(We will work in country's interest and will demand full wages)'.
by

2. नया जमाना आयेगा, कमाने वाला खायेगा ।

naya Zamana aega, Kamane wala Khaega.
(In the new era to come he who earns will eat)'.
was replaced by :

नया जमाना आयेगा, कमाने वाला खिलाएगा ।

'Naya Zamana aega, Kamane wala Khilaega'
(In the new era to come he who earns will feed)

It boldly laid stress upon rights and duties. For leftists, its most startling slogan was : बी० एम० एस० की क्या पहचान ? त्याग, तपस्या और बलिदान ।

(What is the badge of B.M.S. ? suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom).

The intense patriotism of B.M.S. was reflected in its attitude towards foreign capital. It demanded nationalisation of foreign banks, Indianisation and democratisation of all foreign-owned industries ; elimination of restrictive clauses in all foreign collaboration agreements ; moratorium on all foreign debt repayment, progressive elimination of foreign capital from national economy, and provision of investment opportunities for the willing capital of the patriotic Pravasi Bharatiyas.

The B.M.S. stands for complete national self-reliance.

B.M.S. was the first trade union centre to recognise the special importance of 'self-employment sector', which it termed as 'Viswakarma Sector', in the national economy. It urged for a separate department under the Ministry of Labour and Employment to assist the self-employed persons. It also exhorted our technologists :—

- to study thoroughly and assimilate industrial technology all over the world,
- to locate and introduce such parts of foreign technology as are suited to Indian conditions :
- to introduce for the benefit of artisans, reasonably adaptable changes in the traditional techniques of production, without incurring the risk of increase in unemployment of workers, wastage of the available managerial and technical skill, and complete decapitalisation of the existing means of production ; and,
- to evolve our own indigenous technology with great emphasis on decentralisation of the processes of production with the help of power, with the home, instead of the factory, as a centre of production.

What it stands for

BMS declared its belief in the concept of God as the sole moral proprietor of all wealth.

On the practical plane, the BMS was the first to highlight the fact that nationalisation was not the only alternative to private capitalism; nor was it a panacea for all industrial maladies. There were various other patterns of industrial ownership, such as, municipalisation, co-operativisation, democratisation, joint industry, joint sector, self-employment, etc. It urged for the constitution of a National Commissions on the Pattern of Industrial Ownership. The pattern of ownership should be determined in the light of the peculiar characteristics of each industry, and the total requirements of national economy. It firmly rejected both the extremes of 'all nationalisation' and 'no nationalisation'.

The B.M.S. has recorded its strong resentment against the continuance of the system of the Public Limited Companies or the Private Limited Companies. In future these categories of "Employer" must be dispensed with. While it is a fact that the economy needs a vigorous search for the not-yet-discovered entrepreneurial talents, it is equally true that continuance of the status of entrepreneurs in a set up in which entrepreneurship has no specific role to play is detrimental to the health of national economy. Sleeping partners of the Limited Companies enjoy the status and the privileges of "Entrepreneurs" without functioning actively as real "Entrepreneurs".

Pleading for the organisation of autonomous Financial Institutions to channelise small savings of poor people into industrial investments for the benefit of the specific industries, the B.M.S. has said that the industrial structure in future would continue to be complex, with various patterns of ownership, existing side by side, but greater stress will have to be laid on setting up industries which will be :

Financed	by	Commoners
Owned	by	Workers
Supervised	by	Institutions
Decentralised	by	Technologists
Served	by	Experts
Coordinated	by	Planners
Disciplined	by	Parliament

Assisted	by	State
Utilised	by	Consumer.
	&	
Governed	by	Dharma.

The credit for introducing the term 'Labourisation' goes to B.M.S. only. It stressed that under all categories of 'employer' and under the various patterns of industrial ownership, the labour of workers must be evaluated in terms of shares and workers raised to the status of shareholders contributing labour as their share. As a standard-bearer of Bharatiya culture the B.M.S. proclaimed that the surplus value of labour is managed and deployed by employers (accountable to themselves) under capitalistic order ; by State (accountable to Party) under communistic order and by workers (accountable to the Nation) under Bharatiya order.

The B.M.S. declared that the onward march of labour is along the following lines :

From

The Master-Servant relationship.

Through :

A Better Deal
Joint Consultation
Joint Management
Auto-Management
Participation in Ownership.

To :

Worker's Ownership.

The B.M.S. again, was the first labour organisation which brought home to the workers' mind the fact that the problem of technology was of vital concern to them as well as to the country. It opposed the revival of the bullockcart economy as well as wholesale transplantation of western technology. It demanded the appointment of Experts' Committees on the location, the size and the technology of various industries, with a view to redrawing the industrial map of India.

Against this background it will be easier to grasp precisely the significance of the B.M.S. slogan :

Nationalise the Labour

Labourise the Industry

Industrialise the Nation.

Foresight of the BMS

The foresight of B.M.S. is evidenced in a number of cases. Recently, after the revolt of the C.R.P. and the Central Industrial Security Force, some political leaders were surprised to find that as early as in 1969, the B.M.S. had demanded in its National Charter of Demands : appropriate machinery for the redressal of grievances of :

- (i) the military personnel ;
- (ii) the police personnel ;
- (iii) the members of the Central Industrial Security Force ;
- (iv) employees of religious institutions ;
- (v) employees and officials of foreign services ;
- (vi) employees of Intelligence Departments ;
- (vii) senior executives and class I and II officials' administrative and managerial cadres ; and
- (viii) licensee workers.

Only during the post-emergency period, the Government thought of enacting special laws for the managerial employees and the employees of educational institutions and hospitals. While the managerial employees are already referred to above, the B.M.S. [Charter demanded before a decade that there should be special Industrial Disputes settlement machineries to protect the interests of workers in educational institutions, social welfare organisations, domestic employees, hospitals, cooperatives other than workers' cooperatives, construction works, small scale industries, cottage industries, seasonal industries, rickshaw pulling, Mallah-work, agriculture, forests, concerns and institutes of various arts, employees of former Princes and firms of advocates, solicitors and other legal agencies. All these workers should be covered

by the definition of 'workman' and the protection of the Indian Trade Union Act extended to them, the Charter stated.

Long before the nationalisation of banks the B.M.S. had urged for the setting up of an autonomous Monetary Authority in full charge of currency and credit, by raising the Reserve Bank to that status, after changing its character and composition, so that its Board of Directors should be manned by independent economists, and not by bureaucrats or politicians. The authority should be made responsible for price-stability through currency control and fullest employment through credit control.

It also suggested organisation of a far-flung Financial Consultation Service of the Banking industry, 'From class-banking to mass banking' was the direction indicated by the B.M.S

B.M.S. was the only organisation pleading for introduction of the system of Efficiency Audit and early warning in all industries.

The demand for introduction of functional representation alongside the current territorial representation is another illustration of the long-range vision of this organisation.

The originality of B.M.S. thinking on industrial matters is very prominently illustrated by its concept of Industrial Family. According to this BMS concept, it shall be the duty of all parties to Industrial Relations to reconstitute themselves into an Industrial Family.

Towards this end, for each major industry and for minor industries or their trade groups, Industrial Councils comprising of the elected representatives of workers, managerial and technical cadres and capital be constituted on National and State levels respectively.

Such Industrial Councils, will have final authority, subject to the approval of the Parliament or State Assemblies, in determining the general policies of their industries, including those pertaining to the deployment of labour force, managerial and technical cadre and capital.

The entire labour force, the managerial and technical skill and the capital within the industry shall be at the

disposal of the national or state Industrial Councils for their own deployment as well as for the purposes of formulating and implementing certain decisions such as, production and employment targets, level of technology, wage policy, import and export trade etc.

Each Industrial Council shall work for an objective target given to it by the Nation and co-ordinate its activities with similar Councils of other industries following the discipline laid down by the Nation. For this purpose it shall revise and suitably amend from time to time its constitution and reformulate the internal relationship of firms, units, groups, individuals etc., working within the industry.

They will follow a plan of income-distribution adopted at national level to meet the needs of workers, technical skill, capital, consumers, research and development needs, plan priorities and dues of the State.

The Industrial Councils thus constituted shall be under an obligation to ensure that no worker is retrenched consequent upon mechanisation, rationalisation, modernisation or automation, unless an alternative employment is offered to him without loss of continuity of service, in the same industry, though may be in a different establishment.

Each Industrial Council shall take full care of each individual worker and members of his family and foster his full growth on natural lines never to throw him out of employment or in distress and privation for want of basic necessities of life. All those depending for their daily livelihood on the Industry shall be treated as members of one large joint Industrial Family and the Family's social security cover will be extended to workers as well as their children, old people, the afflicted, the widows, the physically and mentally handicapped persons etc., that are the natural members of the Industrial Family.

It shall be the duty of the Industrial Family to absorb within the Industry the children of their member-workers unless they themselves opt differently.

The Industrial Family working on this discipline will thus give a material shelter to human-beings that are its constituents and afford to them suitable opportunities for their cultural and spiritual pursuits and fulfilment of life.

The BMS National Charter of Demands of Indian labour is also a peculiar document. In this Charter, all demands of workers are presented as an 'Order of Duties and Disciplines'. The fact is that whatever is a demand of one section of our population constitutes a 'duty' or 'discipline' for some other corresponding section or organ of the society. Secondly, it implies that while private employers and the State, as employer or as administrator, are to shoulder the main burden of socio-economic responsibility in this respect, all the various sections, organs or institutions in the society, such as the Local Self Government Bodies, the Universities, the Press, the Social Organisations, etc., have also certain specific duties towards the labour.

All these facts clearly indicate that the B.M.S. is striving not only for the solution of immediate problems but also for the gradual evolution of the blue-print of the future socio-economic order.

Gradual Growth of the BMS

Gradually, the B.M.S. began to gather flesh and blood. Disenchantment of workers with professional leaders and their curiosity about the new organisation, formation of new unions and fresh federations, organisation of state units, emergence and training of young, idealistic, disciplined cadres, progressive unfoldment of the new ideology, recognition in some small and subsequently big establishments, inclusion of B.M.S. representatives in state level committees, recognition by some state governments, occasional invitation by the Central Government for special, broad-based tri-partite-talks, inclusion of B.M.S. representative in Indian workers' delegation to International Labour Organisation, visits abroad of its nominees on the invitation of international agencies, and, finally declaration by the Labour Ministry that according to information available with it, the B.M.S. stands the third among Central Labour Organisations in point of numerical strength. This has been the course of its evolution so far.

In the fifties, voluntary support by B.M.S. to any

struggle was taken to be a liability by the concerned union. In 1960, the B.M.S. was more willing to extend co-operation to the striking Central Government employees than their associations to receive it. In 1963, B.M.S. was a minor partner playing the role of coordinator in the successful move of Bombay Bundh, in 1968-69 it became an equal participant in the national coordination committee of central labour organisations for the cause of the victimised Central Government employees, and a signatory to the Indian Workers' petition to the I.L.O. which was organised at its instance.

In 1974, its affiliate was one of the two major constituents of NCCRS which conducted railwaymen's strike. It had a lion's share in the organisation of worker's resistance to authoritarianism during emergency. During the post-emergency period, it became an inevitable part of every united front of democratic trade union centres forged to fight the anti-labour policies of the Government.

During all these years it has faithfully followed its professed policy of responsive cooperation, irrespective of changes in the Government and the ruling parties at the central and the state levels.

It lent its fully unreserved support to the national war effort in 1962, 1965 and 1971. During these periods of national crisis it inspired its followers to perform every possible sacrifice for the sake of the nation. The same spirit of self-sacrifice by B.M.S. workers was evidenced whenever the countrymen became the victims of natural calamities, such as, floods, famines, etc.

The Take-off Stage

With its 24 national industrial federations and a total membership of about 1.3 million scattered in varying degrees in all organised industries, the B.M.S. has now reached the take-off stage. Recently, it has also entered the informal sector of unorganised workers, particularly, in the rural areas. Apart from its regular affiliates, the B.M.S. has as its associate organisation the Confederation of the Central and the State Government Employees with a

membership of about one million. It has given, for the first time, a big jolt to the monopoly of communists in the government sector. The psychological impact of the B.M.S. is already far greater than what would be justified by its physical membership. Even those patriotic workers who are not in a position, for urgent practical reasons, to quit the red unions immediately are internally convinced that B.M.S. is the only ultimate ray of hope for the entire nationalistic labour force of the country.

And the ideatistic activists of B.M.S. are determined to march on till, through sincere efforts of our toiling masses, the Bharat becomes a first rate nation of the world. Their motto is :

इदं राष्ट्राय ! इदं नमस्

(All this for the nation, not for me)

