

International Meeting of the Communist and Worker's Parties

23-25 November 2018, Athens, Greece

**The contemporary working class and its alliance. The tasks of
its political vanguard – the Communist and Worker's Parties –
in the struggle against exploitation and imperialist wars, for
the rights of the workers and of the peoples, for peace, for
socialism**

**Intervention of
Communist Party of India (Marxist)**

Dear Comrades,

This is the twentieth time we are meeting in this form – the International Meeting of the Communist and Workers’ Parties. On behalf of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), we thank the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) for taking the initiative in organising these meetings without any interruption all these years. We also take this opportunity to greet the KKE on its birth centenary – 100 years, which includes heroic struggle against fascism, dictatorship and all sorts of reactionary attacks. The splendid arrangements made by the KKE in organising this 20th Meeting is a reflection of its strength and experience gained through all these twists and turns in its history. We congratulate the KKE for making excellent arrangements that enable us to discuss such a serious topic in this 20th Meeting, as the challenges confronting the working class and its political vanguard – the communist and workers’ parties are immense.

As we have been noting since 2008, the Global Economic Crisis, which is now into its eleventh year, has exposed the limitations of the capitalist system. However hard the ruling classes are trying, they are unable to wriggle out of the present morass they find themselves in. Even the imperialist financial institutions like the IMF in its *World Economic Report, October 2018* accepts this fact. The Report covering the economies of 180 countries says that the majority of the countries are yet to reach the pre-2008 crisis output levels. It has also pointed out the alarming increase in income inequalities testifying to the fact that profit maximization is being undertaken through intensified exploitation. Confirming our assessment, the banking and financial systems in particular, are in the midst of a continued crisis. The IMF Report says that “government debt-GDP ratio stands at 52 percent, up from 36 percent before the crisis; central bank balance sheets, particularly in advanced economies, are several multiples of the size they were before the crisis”.

The Report points out that employment has fallen as investment levels in the majority of the countries was 25 per cent below the pre-crisis levels. But profits are rising despite growing unemployment due to increase in the levels of productivity. Though capitalism prevents the full realization of human potential due to its production relations that fetter growth of productive forces, this is temporarily being achieved through the replacement of human labour with technology, particularly the adoption of artificial intelligence in the production process. This is a tendency that is likely to increase further in the future, but it is unsustainable.

Karl Marx has pointed to the capitalist tendency to pit technology against workers, 150 years ago, in his seminal work, *Das Capital*. “But machinery not only acts as a competitor who gets the better of the workman, and is constantly on the point of making him superfluous. It is also a power inimical to him, and as such capital proclaims it from the roof tops and as such makes use of it. It is the most powerful weapon for repressing strikes, those periodical revolts of the working-class against the autocracy of capital....It would be possible to write quite a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working-class”. Though, he talks about strikes and how advancement in machinery is used to break strikes and working class unity, he also makes the point about how the capitalist class substitutes workers with technology in order to increase their profits. “The immediate result of machinery is to augment surplus-value and the mass of products in which surplus-value is embodied”.

McKinsey Global Institute's report, *Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: Workforce Transitions In A Time Of Automation*, assesses that in about 60 percent of occupations, at least one-third of the constituent activities could be automated, implying substantial workplace transformations and changes for all workers. Activities most susceptible to automation include operating machinery, preparing fast food, collecting and processing data, etc. This could displace large amounts of workers, which could be on a scale not seen since the transition of the labour force out of agriculture in the early 1900s in today's developed countries. According to their estimate, between 400 million to 800 million individuals could be displaced by automation and need to find new jobs by 2030 around the world. This is what Marx had said: "The instrument of labour, when it takes the form of a machine, immediately becomes a competitor of the workman himself. The self-expansion of capital by means of machinery is thence-forward directly proportional to the number of the work people, whose means of livelihood have been destroyed by that machinery. The whole system of capitalist production is based on the fact that the workman sells his labour-power as a commodity....When machinery seizes on an industry by degrees, it produces chronic misery among the operatives who compete with it. Where the transition is rapid, the effect is acute and felt by great masses".

Capital, in order to ensure its profit rates, is wreaking havoc in the lives of working people all over the world. The World Bank itself accepts this fact in its *World Development Report 2019*, stating that "advanced economies have shed industrial jobs", just as Marx had pointed out: "the rate of surplus-value, cannot be increased, except by diminishing the number of workmen". These job losses are adding to the numbers of the unemployed and resulting in high unemployment rates. Technology is also put to use to increase precarious work relations. Globally, it is estimated that two billion people are working in the informal economy, where so many lack any protection. In India, more than 90 percent of the workers are in the informal sector. Social insurance is virtually nonexistent in low-income countries, and even in upper-middle-income countries it reaches only 28 percent of the poorest people.

Governments of many countries, those agencies of capitalist State, are acting at the behest of Capital and are weakening several protections that working class has won through its prolonged struggles. Labour reforms is on the top of the agenda, with an aim to further increase the precariousness of work and deprive the workers' their right to associate and protest. The World Bank, in its report, *Doing Business 2018*, approvingly states that "between June 2, 2017, and May 1 this year, 128 governments introduced a record 314 reforms" and labour reform is important among these reforms. They want the governments to remove all legal barriers in ensuring that workers work night-shifts, overtime and on holidays without demanding any additional benefits. In the name of 'gig economy', they want to do away with even the minimum employment guarantees that exist. Capital, together with automation is eager to 'reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by that repellent yet elastic natural barrier, man'. And hence this attack on trade unions.

Indian Situation

In the current stage of capitalist development in India there is an expansion rather than contraction of the working class. Though the bulk of this increase is not in organised industrial sector, wage-employment in production and mainly in non-agricultural activities (including construction and services) has risen in the last two decades. There has been an increase in

organised private sector employment in non-manufacturing activities though only a small part of this is of high salaried white collared employees. Within the unorganised sector too, excluding the construction sector, there are over 38 million workers who work in unincorporated non-agricultural 'establishments' and 27 million of them are hired workers. Then there is the category of 'home-based' workers who are not in the real sense self-employed but work for employers. The most significant expansion of wage employment (in both the organised as well as unorganised components) however, has taken place in construction and related activities which now employ nearly 11 per cent of India's work-force (50 million). The working class army in India is therefore large – larger than the working populations of most countries in the world. The situation and characteristics of this working class reflect both the historically limited nature of capitalist development in India as well as the effects of globalisation.

Since the advent of neoliberal policy regime in 1991, regular employment in the public sector has shrunk by more than 2 million, most significantly in industrial activities. On the other hand, the increase in regular employment in the private sector was only around 4 million, mainly in non manufacturing activities. The recent Report published by the Labour Ministry shows that since 2014 net employment generation, including job losses owing to closures, has turned negative. In the past one year, Indian economy lost more than 9 million jobs. The large reserve army has enabled depression of real wages and intensified exploitation of the working class in production activities. The access to sophisticated technologies has facilitated this by enabling sharp rises in productivity even as wages stagnated. This in turn has enabled a drastic redistribution of incomes in favour of profits and other surplus incomes. The squeezing of the wage share has allowed this, despite the fact that there has been a rising trend in the salaries of white collar employees with higher levels of education in the private corporate sector.

Labour law amendments to make labour 'flexible' and provide freedom to the employers to 'hire and fire' workers has been an important component of neoliberal policies, even though in practice only a miniscule section of workers is covered by them. Attempts to amend important labour laws like the Industrial Disputes Act, Trade Unions Act and Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act etc have recently gained momentum. Despite the existence of labour laws that provided job security to the workers, directly employed permanent workers are being substituted by workers with informal and precarious work relations. Between 2003-04 and 2009-10, the employment of directly employed workers grew by only 5.1 percent while that of the contract workers grew by 12.4 percent. The share of contract workers in total organised employment has increased from 10.5 percent in 1995-96 to 25.7 percent by 2009-10, while the share of directly employed workers has declined from 68.3 percent to 52.4 percent in the same period. Significantly, the practice of employing more contract workers increased in the larger companies, employing more than 50 workers, by the end of the 2000s compared to earlier. By 2009-10, nearly half of the total workers employed by companies with more than 5000 workers were contract workers.

New methods of recruitment like appointing 'apprentices' in place of 'workers', in order to ensure that Labour Laws are not implemented and the policy of 'hire and fire' can be easily implemented are now being designed. All these measures are intended to further increase the precariousness of employment and is detrimental to the interests of the working class.

The profile of employment relations has vastly changed under neoliberal policies. There is no clearly defined and identifiable employer employee relationship for vast sections of workers, not only in the private sector but also in the public and government sectors. The proportion of workers in the unorganised segment of the organised sector, i.e. workers with precarious working conditions, with no job security, no income security, no social security and no legal protection has increased under the neoliberal regime. According to a study, in 2011-12, 77.5 percent of the total workforce in the organised manufacturing sector had no written contract; another 2.43 percent had a written contract for only less than a year. Only 17.41 percent of the total workers had a written contract for more than three years. More than 70 percent of all regular salaried workers in the organised sector had no written contract. The condition of women workers was worse. 91 percent had no written contract in 2011-12; only 6.3 percent had written contract for more than three years. 60 percent of the regular workers were not eligible for social security benefits like provident fund, pension, health care, etc., with women workers being in a worse condition than male workers. Unorganised sector workers have very little legal protection related to their wages or working conditions and whatever legislations exist, are not effectively implemented. It was found that in 2011-12, 93 percent of the casual workers were not eligible for social security benefits and there has been deterioration in their conditions.

Organising workers, particularly in the private organised industries has become a serious challenge for the trade unions under the neoliberal regime. Registration of trade unions has become difficult. Mostly victimisation and occasionally allurements are used as tactics by the employers to prevent workers from joining unions. The labour enforcement machinery is consciously made ineffective by the State. It was found that only one-third of the workers in the organised sector have access to a union at their work place. In 2004-05, 36.2 percent of total workers knew of a union at their work place; this number fell further to 31.5 percent by 2011-12. Even among the regular workers, only 34.5 percent were aware of a union at their work place in 2011-12. And even among the workers who were aware of the presence of a union at their work place, in 2004-05 only 76 percent were members of any trade union; this has further come down to 66.3 percent in 2011-12.

Wage depression, irregularity of employment, the need to often move locations for such employment, and the cuts/restrictions in social welfare provided by the State, have made it difficult to sustain working class households. Increases in expenditures resulting from some of these, combined with low wage incomes, have made it necessary for members of working class households to earn additional incomes through different means including the unpaid work by women. In this way, all kinds of unpaid employment, the issues of livelihood and of social welfare in general have also become concerns of the working class. All these concerns have to be addressed by the trade unions while organising different sections of the working class, though some of them might be in a domain different from the production enterprise in which they may be wage-workers.

There is another challenge that the Indian working class movement is facing. The conditions of the working class provide a fertile ground for the growth of many reactionary ideological and cultural tendencies within the class and the reinforcement of such elements that are already part of their consciousness. The corporate controlled visual media has been promoting such reactionary ideologies and cultural practices and has been able to influence large sections of the working class. Conscious attempts are being made in the media to glorify isolated cases of

individual successes and deride collective efforts, creating illusions among sections of the working class. The influence of caste, religion and such identity based organisations has also increased among the working class which is adversely impacting class based unity. With the right-wing BJP assuming office at the central level, there is an increase in the polarisation of the people on religious lines, attempting to break class unity of the toiling sections, particularly, the working class.

In this background, the task of organising trade unions is challenging, as never before. Though there are many changes that are taking place in the process of production, production per se does not cease to exist. As long as goods and commodities are produced, however intense might be the level of automation, the role of human being in the process of production cannot be completely dispensed with. Only the instruments with which human beings work, change; but work, they continue to do. The nature of capital, as Marx had made explicitly clear, is to extract surplus, even if it is only one person employed in the production process. Thus capitalist system cannot get rid of exploitation and as long as exploitation exists, the contradiction between capital and labour remains. In order to resolve this contradiction, organisations and unions become a necessity.

Explaining how the exploited life of workers compel them to form associations, Marx writes: “Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance – combination....Combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups....and in face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them (i.e., the workers) than that of wages....In this struggle – a veritable civil war – all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character”. (*Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy*)

Marx’s advice and guidance for the trade union movement, is relevant even to this day: “Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centers of the working class in the broad interest of its *complete emancipation*. They must aid every social and political movement leading in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural workers rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of downtrodden millions”. (*Karl Marx, Selected Works, Volume 2*)

Lenin taught us that socialist consciousness, the consciousness to realise socialist revolution, cannot come directly out of trade union experience. The Party as the highest form of class organisation has to create it uniting the experiences of the class, and carrying on the work of agitation, propaganda and theoretical education on the class. Arguing for closer relations between the Party and the trade unions and against ‘neutrality’, Lenin states: “Today activity in the trade unions undoubtedly assumes tremendous importance. In contrast to the neutralism of the Mensheviks we must conduct this activity on the lines of closer alignment of the unions with the Party, of the development of socialist consciousness and an understanding of the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat” (*VI Lenin, Preface to the Pamphlet By Voinov (AV*

Lunacharsky) *On the Attitude of the Party Towards The Trade Unions, Collected Works, Volume 13*).

CPI(M) understands the need for ‘politicising’ the working-class. Due to the peculiar character of capitalist development in the country, the Party has to prioritise struggle to instill democratic consciousness among the workers to counter the prevalence of all kinds of reactionary ideologies like caste and religion among them. Lenin had stated in his pamphlet, ‘*The Tasks of Russian Social Democrats (1898)*’: “The objective of the practical activities of the social democrats is, lead the class struggles of the proletariat and to organise that struggle in both its manifestations – socialist and democratic. These two forms of agitation are inseparably bound up with each other in the activities of the social democrats like the two sides of a medal”.

The Party is also set to struggle against economism, which is a dominant trend in the Indian trade union movement, by maintaining correct relationship between the Party and the trade unions, never forgetting the mass character of the trade union, nor the guiding role of the Party. The Party also notes its responsibility to raise the working class consciousness to a higher level – the level of socialist consciousness. It stresses this task and calls for more propaganda work among the workers, and not to be satisfied with more agitation. While not overstepping the existing consciousness of the mass of workers and other organisations, the unions under the guidance of the Party, work in the direction of raising this consciousness. In particular they work for the growing intervention and participation in movement on democratic issues and struggles, for defence of the interests of the peasantry and the people.

CPI(M) and Trade Unions

The Party has discussed and adopted a document on the ‘*Tasks in Trade Union (1983)*’, where it was stated: “For the Marxist-Leninist Party the tasks on the trade union front do not comprise only the tactical line of running the trade unions as organs of daily struggle for the effective defence of the economic interests of the working class under given conditions, while defending the daily interests, they aim at organising a disciplined working class with revolutionary consciousness, drawing it nearer the Party, with its best elements joining the Party in hundreds enabling the class as a whole to play its historic role in the revolutionary struggle”.

The revolutionary role of the working class, who its allies are and the role of the Party in today’s context is clearly stated in the Programme of the CPI(M). According to our Party, in India, capitalism was super-imposed on the pre-capitalist society. So Indian society is a ‘*peculiar combination of monopoly capitalist domination with caste, communal and tribal institutions*’. In such a situation, it becomes the task of the Indian working class and its vanguard Party to bring together all those progressive forces interested in destroying the pre-capitalist society. The working class and the Party also has the task of consolidating the revolutionary forces, complete the democratic revolution and lay the ground for the transition to socialism. So, essentially, the nature of our revolution in the present stage is anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly and democratic and hence is characterised by its opposition to landlordism, foreign monopoly capital and the big bourgeoisie, which is leading the State and pursuing policies of compromise and collaboration with finance capital, in alliance with landlordism.

Marxism teaches us that it is the stage of our revolution that determines the role of various classes in the struggle to achieve social transformation. In this stage, it is the task of the

proletariat to lead the democratic revolution as a necessary step in its march to the establishment of a socialist society. We believe that in the realisation of these tasks, a People's Democratic Front, consisting of all the class allies of the proletariat, under the leadership of the working class is necessary. The core and basis of the People's Democratic Front is the firm alliance of the working class and the peasantry. It is on the strength and stability of the worker-peasant alliance that the role of the other classes in carrying out the revolution, crucially depends. Agricultural workers, poor peasants, middle-peasants are the reliable allies of the proletariat in this stage, while the urban and rural middle-classes will also join this alliance. The role of the rich peasantry, non-big bourgeoisie which is non-monopolistic, depends on a number of concrete conditions – on changes in the correlation of class forces, on the sharpness of the contradiction between imperialism, landlordism and the people, on the depth of the contradictions between the big bourgeois-led State and the remaining sections of the bourgeoisie.

The CPI(M) understands that the struggle to realise the aims of the people's democratic revolution is complicated and protracted and needs to be waged in varying conditions, in varying phases. Different classes, different strata within the same class, are bound to take different positions in these distinct phases of the development of the revolutionary movement. Only a strong Communist Party which develops the mass movements and utilises appropriate united front tactics to achieve the strategic objective can make use of these shifts and draw into its ranks these sections.

This, we believe, is the correct application of Marxist-Leninist theory. Lenin states: "There is no other way to social democracy than through democracy, through political freedom. He strives, therefore, for the complete and consistent realisation of democracy for the sake of attaining the ultimate goal socialism. Why are conditions of the struggle for democracy and of the struggle for socialism not alike? Because the workers are bound to have different allies in the two struggles. The democratic struggle is waged by the workers together with part of the bourgeoisie, particularly the petty bourgeoisie. The socialist struggle is waged by the workers against the whole bourgeoisie". (*VI Lenin, Socialism, Petty-Bourgeois and Proletarian, Collected Works Volume 9*)

In our efforts to implement our understanding, efforts are being made to build worker-peasant alliance, the core of the People's Democratic Front, through joint struggles of these organisations on issues confronting these classes. An important development in this period has been the united actions of the working class and the peasantry. Over five lakh peasants and workers participated in the picketing and court arrests across the country on August 9. This struggle was conducted jointly by the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU). This was followed by the September 5 Mazdoor-Kisan Sangharsh Rally called jointly by the CITU, AIKS and All India Agricultural Workers Union (AIAWU). The demands charter of the rally encompassed the major demands of all the three basic classes. The big mobilization with more than one and a half lakh people participating was a significant step in the efforts to forge worker-peasant unity. The 'Worker-Peasant Struggle Rally' on 5th September has created great enthusiasm among not only all those who participated in it but also among all sections of toiling people, Left supporters and progressive people. It has created confidence among the toiling people who are struggling against the impact of the BJP government's policies and enhanced their determination to defeat it. This rally had an impact

on other trade unions in the country, with all of them shedding their earlier vacillations and agreeing to our request for jointly intensifying the struggle in defence of working-class rights. All the central trade unions except the one affiliated to the ruling party have joined forces together and have called for a two-day general strike in January 2019.

Similarly, more than hundred peasant organisations have come together in their struggle for land, minimum support price, loan waiver and other such demands. The Peasant Long March organised by our peasant's organisation in Maharashtra, one of the provinces in the country, had inspired all the toiling people in the country.

With the response witnessed from the above mentioned activities, the possibilities to take the struggle against the anti-worker, anti-people and anti-national policies of the government at the centre has entered a new phase with altogether a new dimension. This is for the first time in the history of the country's democratic movement that such a joint worker-peasant joint actions could be organised at district and even lower levels in several states, culminating in the massive national rally.

In our effort to further broaden this unity, a platform of various class and mass organisations has been formed to take up the class and mass issues and lead the masses into struggles. Many programmes were conducted by this Platform and many more are lined up for the future. The Party feels that it is through the course of our struggles on class and mass issues that we can build the unity of the toiling classes as desired in the People's Democratic Front and utilise the objective conditions for ensuring a societal transformation.

Conclusion

The development of a progressive working class movement will certainly have to face the challenges posed by the pervasiveness of reactionary tendencies. However, it must also be kept in mind that the only effective counter to such tendencies is also the development of a strong working class movement. The basis for such movement also lies in those very same conditions. Whatever expressions it takes in the consciousness of the working class, the underlying objective reality is one of intensification of oppression and exploitation of the working class and a relentless struggle for survival. Even if the conditions are promoting a growth of aspirations within the working class, it is also impeding their ability to meet those aspirations. These contradictions must mean a growth of an animosity within the members of that class towards the conditions created by the tyranny of capital. Capitalist tyranny might, for some time, be able to prevent this animosity from overtly expressing itself or might be successful in misdirecting such expressions. However, in the process, class oppression and the basis for generating class unity and resistance are also bound to develop. It is this challenge that the CPI(M) undertakes in its quest to build a world free of exploitation, oppression, discrimination – a world of lasting peace, a world of socialism. And we believe that we are going to succeed and we have before us – A World To Win.