

Teachers' Unionisation: A Case Study of BUCTU

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Case Study – BUCTU (Bombay University and College Teachers' Union) based on an Interview with Dr. K. K. Theckedath, a Founder Member of BUCTU)

“The working class movement and its politically mature leadership should recognise the reality that without philosophy the movement is blind and cannot move towards the historic role of the working class”. - Dr. K. Theckedath

Abstract: *Teachers are not workers, and the teaching community cannot be considered a part of the working class. The working class in the words of Marx and Engels is the special and essential product of capitalism, its own creation. The teachers belong to the strata of middle classes having their origin in the petty bourgeoisie and the pre - capitalist formations. However, there is a great similarity between the working - class movement and the movement of teachers worldwide.*

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1. Introduction

Teachers are not workers, and the teaching community cannot be considered as a part of the working class. The working class in the words of Marx and Engels, is the special and essential product of capitalism, its own creation. The teachers belong to the strata of middle classes having their origin in the petty bourgeoisie and the pre - capitalist formations. However, there is a great similarity between the working - class movement and the movement of the teachers worldwide. The teachers' movement can be considered as an ally of the workers' movement for better working conditions and in the achievement of the historic task of the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system and the building up of a socialist society.

First, although they are not a part of the working class, the capitalist system is rapidly converting teachers into wage labour. Second, in the creation of surplus value, which is the essence of human labour power for capital, teaching plays a role unlike such as trade, banking, advertising, where other sections of the middle classes are employed. In advertising, for example, value is transferred from the production sphere where it has already been created, and in banking and credit, value is transferred from the future that is yet to create value (Mohun 2003). Regarding teaching and education Marx says in Capital, vol. I:

In order to modify the human organism, so that it may acquire skill in a given branch of industry, and become labour - power of a special kind, a special education or training is requisite, and this on its part, costs an equivalent in commodities of a greater or less amount. This amount varies according to the more or less complicated character of the labour - power. The expenses of this education (excessively small in the case of ordinary labour - power), enter into the value spent in its production. (Marx and Engles 1971: 168 - 9).

Many so - called Marxists are taken in by the phrase 'education as human capital', but they are unable to understand that this input of education goes into forming variable capital and not constant capital, and it is therefore, part of the value increasing input. It should never be treated

as another input like investing in machines for a factory. Hence, unlike other sections of the middle classes engaged in trade, banking and credit, advertising, and other such professions, teachers create surplus value, in the sphere of production, and do not just take part in the transfer of value in the sphere of distribution. This makes the teacher a special stake holder and an ally of the workers in the process of creating surplus value.

Thirdly, in India, the first teachers' organisations, like the West Bengal College and University Teachers Association or the Greater Bombay Secondary Teachers' Association, were formed in the early years of the decade 1920 - 30. This is contemporaneous with the formation of the all - India trade union federation under the inspiration of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the first year of the same decade.

Talking about the formation of the BUCTU Dr. Theckedath said “AIFUCTO is All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Oraganisation was formed in the year 1965. BUCTU is Bombay University and College Teachers' Union was formed in 1966.

I have joined AIFUCTO in 1971 at the Patna Conference. I became the general secretary of the BUCTU in 1974. I was the founder member of BUCTU. At that time the scales were announced for 2nd pay revision for the Central government employees and teachers were excluded from it and then teaching fraternity felt humiliated and teachers in Bombay were angry with the old association called UBTA - University of Bombay Teachers' Association. So we decided to call a meeting at Ruparel College in Mumbai on 18th August 1966. We had a meeting of around 300 teachers and we decided to form a union. That is how BUCTU was born. At that time, I became ad - hoc executive committee member”.

Fourth, in the capacity to fight prolonged struggles also the teachers' movement is a good example. While the well - India railway strike of 1975 went on for 26 days, the all - India college and university teachers' strike of 1987 went on for 34 days, and in Mumbai, the strike was extended by another 20 to 54 days. In Andhra Pradesh the college teachers' strike went on 45 days in 1986. In Maharashtra, recently the college and university teachers went on 44 - day

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strike (July 14 to 28 August, 2009). The school teachers of Maharashtra went on 54 - day strike along with the state government employees in the year 1977. The junior college teachers in the state went on a 42 - day strike in the year 1991. In 1992, the college teachers of Bihar went on a 90 - day strike. Although this is an incomplete list, it shows the power and resilience of the teaching community to fight tenaciously for their trade union demands.

The potential of the teaching community to be an ally of the working class politically in the first phase of the Indian revolution, namely the state of people's democratic revolution, has been recognised by certain political parties in India. For example, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] states in its programme that both the urban and rural middle class suffer heavily under the capitalist landlord rule. The large number of white - collar employees, teachers, professionals, engineers, doctors and new strata of intelligentsia constitute a significant and influential section; the bulk of this section is plagued by ever rising consumer goods prices. These sections can and will be an ally in the people's democratic front and every attempt should be made to win them for the revolution.

This classification refers mainly to sections of the urban and rural middle class, and only particularly, to the teaching fraternity. Before we come to the potential of the general class of intellectuals, it is necessary to point out recent history, and specifically, the close connection that the teachers' movement has had with the working - class movement.

In April 2001, a total bandh was organised in the in the state of Maharashtra to protest against the proposal of the government to introduce new labour laws in the state. Under the impact of the neo - liberal policy changes, it was felt necessary for the rulers to make labour laws flexible, with easy hire and fire clauses. This was why the bill was brought in. This protest strike and bandh programme was organised by different trade unions' joint action committees. An important and leading role in this strike was played by the teachers' organisations. In Mumbai, all the constituents of the teachers' coordination committee from the primary teachers to the college and university teachers participated in this strike.

Coming to the all - India movement of trade unions against the Government of India's neo - liberal policies, it may be noted that during the past one decade there have been nearly a dozen of trade union actions in the form of one - day strike, processions, squatting, and so on. In each of these actions the teachers' organisations have been in the fore front. There were all - India strikes on 14 December 2006 and 20 August 2008. In spite of difficulties of a logistic nature, the teachers had participated in both strikes. Thus, whether it is an action of the working class, or a wider action of the democratic sections like the state and central government employees, one can see the active role played by the teachers' organisations.

Before moving onto the potential role of the intelligentsia, let us note that the active role of teachers' organisations has been worldwide. In the United Kingdom, the coordinated

and united movement of teachers is so well - established that the name of their united forum, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), has entered the Concise Oxford Dictionary as an English word NUT.

Potential Role of the Intelligentsia

A large proportion of the intelligentsia belongs to the class of teachers, especially at the level of higher education. The trade union movement has in recent times expanded to include large sections of the intelligentsia. One such strong current is the all - India movement of teacher, and especially, of the college and university teachers. The members of the intellectual elites are passive members of the teachers' unions and hardly take a role in the organizations. However, they are sympathetic when there is a movement and tend to move into action if properly approached.

The intellectuals have an important role to play in the revolutionary struggles of the working class and the working - class leadership cannot afford to ignore this section, especially as the battle reaches its critical stage. The intellectuals are generally neutrals far as the struggle goes. However, it is necessary to note that stratum of the intellectuals is important for the working - class led revolution, for its potential, as reserve force and an ally in the class war. It is a reserve force which should be retained with us, rather than be allowed to be used by the bourgeois class on their side and against the working class.

Ideology

Expressing the concerns about emerging new ideologies Dr. Theckedath opines, "Quality of life also includes - life with family; time spent with children, personal space, etc. Everything has affected adversely. So the labour standards all over the world except some socialist countries are going down. Exploitation of the labour is the only way through which profits of the capitalists can increase. Profit comes from surplus labour; profits can be earned only by squeezing the labour and this is happening all over the world. Ideologies of workers are under attack and new ideologies are created for instance - 'live happily', 'night life', 'enjoy yourself' - it simply means that you are taking labour away from the real issues; whatever money they earn they have to spend it on these things. The capitalist system is fostering such type of ideologies".

In the present ideological struggle, which is being waged by the bourgeoisie against socialism, the largest sections of the intellectuals are being utilised the bourgeoisie to strengthen their ideological positions.

Let us start with the ideological struggle. In his work *What is to be Done?* Lenin has pointed out that 'Without revolutionary theory no revolutionary movement is possible.' Giving a long quotation from Engels, he writes: 'Engels recognises, not two forms of the great struggle of social democracy, political and economic, as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on par with the first two'

Writing to the German workers, Engels says that the important role of the German workers, who had the heritage of the great philosophy of Hegel and others, demands study.

This demands intense efforts in every field of struggle and agitation. In particular, it will be the duty of the leaders to gain an ever - clearer insight into theoretical questions, to free themselves more and more from the old - world outlook, and constantly to keep in mind the socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it is pursued as a science, i. e., that it be studied.

Marx and Engels believed that intellectual bourgeois ideologists must raise themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the movement as a whole, who gave the science of socialism to the working - class movement. In fact, Marx and Engels themselves were representatives of this process.

A Reserve Force

The intellectual stratum of society has a role to play in the ideological struggles against the bourgeoisie which tries to demolish the theory of the working class. They represent a reserve force and can be of help for the working - class movement in countering the ideological attacks on socialism. After the revolution, the leadership of the working class can be sustained only on the basis of the assimilation of intellectuals into the socialist system.

In the middle ages, the church was able to hold its sway, and feudal relations could dominate social life, because they were able to absorb the most intelligent people into the system. A similar situation is to be found in the history of the growth of capitalism.

Both feudalism and capitalism are seen to recruited and relied on the intellectual stratum of the society to consolidate their rule, and to work as supporters, apologists and ideologues of the respective systems. The intellectuals, although belonging to no class in particular, yet form a substratum which is a reserve force in the ideological struggle. The working class and its party should learn from this historical experience and ensure that this reserve force comes as an ally of the working class rather than remains an ally of the capitalists in the coming revolution.

Contemporary Situation

While talking about the present conditions of the working - class Dr. Theckedath states that "Under the NEP (New Economic Policy, 1991) labour is under attack. Working class is exploited lot. Though, some segments get better salaries. But the conditions of service, quality of life has gone down everywhere without any exception. Some people don't call themselves 'workers. A young fellow who is wearing a tie and goes to work in a call centre will not call himself a 'worker'. But he has to work continuously, he does not have job security; he sits in a cubicle and being observed continuously. He is getting exploited; he is a worker. Salary packages have gone up but the quality of life has gone down drastically".

The reality today, however, is that the intellectuals have been captured by the capitalist class and they represent the ideological force in the capitalists' struggle against socialism. It is this stratum used for running down socialism by means of lies and defamation. More and more

sophisticated means are invented by this stratum in the vicious ideological warfare.

One such ideological attack consists in the attempt today to show that, with the new changes in the technology, there is an emerging unity between the two systems of capitalism and socialism. This is the so - called convergence theory. According to this theory the contemporary world is pictured as a sum total of states differing in economic, military and scientific and technological potential. No account is taken of the opposition between socialism and capitalism.

The argument is that the countries with capitalist and socialist systems are both industrialised countries. Their systems work to increase productivity, and in the process, they open up, so that the world becomes an integrated system. The problem of one country affects all other countries. Such is the picture presented by this convergence theory.

In the current financial crisis, which has been triggered by the speculative lending by the banks of the USA, the attempt by the ideologies of the capitalist system is to cover up the innate tendency of capitalism to break out into crises again and again. The concentration is on the immediate cause of the crisis in the financial sector. It is then pointed out that the crisis affects all the countries in the world. The financial crisis is admitted to be mainly a crisis in the Western advanced economies, but it is pointed out in the same breath that the crisis will affect the developing countries like India and China.

By combing India and China as two powerful developing countries, the attempt is to play up the convergence arguments of an integrated world. The special feature of the socialist country China, where the main sectors of the economy are state - owned, and only a small part of the gross domestic product is produced in the private sector and the fact that it differs from India, are both deliberately suppressed. It must be noted that in a socialist country, it is very easy to deal with problems arising out external causes such as inability to export in the same old way. State intervention by a socialist country is done in a scientific way, because the disturbance from the fluctuating market is minimal.

Here one can find an example of the subtle, but a pernicious attempt to stress on globalised economics and to suppress the redeeming features of socialist planning and development. Such propaganda is the creation of the intellectuals who are working overtime for the capitalist class. This is precisely where the need is felt for having intellectuals working for the socialist cause and on the side of the working class.

2. Conclusion

In India, the freedom struggle of the downtrodden under the leadership of the Dr. Ambedkar, have led to a considerable expansion of education in general, and higher education in particular, because of the provision of the reservations. Large numbers of young people from the working class and those belonging to the reserved categories have been able to

raise themselves to the level of intellectuals. As products of the present bourgeois educational system, these intellectuals tend to identify themselves with the present bourgeois system.

But as we have seen, these people coming out of our educational system are also being drawn in their hundreds into the democratic movement in general and the teachers' movement in particular. This is the great treasure house from which the working - class leadership has to recruit the ideological defenders of socialism. It should thus recognise that in this march the teachers' movement is a potential ally.

Dr. Theckedath is quite optimistic about the nature of the contemporary state of the labour movement and said "I think it has a same zeal. It has become more mature. It has taken up the issues of the broader unity of the working class. This time the unity is so broad that unions like BMS, HMS, ShivSena, INTUC all have come together against NEP, 1991. In trade union movement, individual unions may have different philosophies but this attack of neo - liberalism forced them to join hands together. This has been happening since last 20 years. In last 15 years (i. e. post 1991) there have been around 20 all India strikes on economic issues. In India all trade unions are jointly fighting with this attack of neo - liberal policies. In this the leftists' unions took initiative to unite all unions. The contemporary labour movement has the same zeal, enthusiasm, and there is a greater awareness about social reality especially the awareness about the dangers of NEP and it is expressed in increasing unity among unions. "

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