

A Reply to the Statement of Comrade M. Basavapunniah And Others on Party Unity by S. A. Dange

When the resolution on the ideological questions was introduced and the National Council proceeded to discuss it, in accordance with the agenda, on 15 October, Comrade Basavapunniah, supported by 16 members of the National Council, placed before the Council a written statement. The Council had to postpone the discussion of the resolution and gave consideration to the statement of the 17 comrades, as it contained very serious propositions regarding threat to the unity of the Party and the future work of the Party.

The statement of the 17 Council members says that 'as a matter of fact, looked at from the angle of political, ideological and emotional unity, our Party is already split. The apparent and formal organisational unity that still exists is also hanging by a thin thread.'

The National Council is aware that a serious threat to the unity of the party has come into existence. It stated at its last meeting that it has reasons to believe that a parallel Party Centre is functioning and asked the Control Commission to look into it, as to what comrades in what way are concerned with it.

The above statement bears out the seriousness of the situation and in a way confirms the National Council's previous resolution.

While expressing anxiety about the situation and its readiness to do everything to prevent a split, whether formal or spiritual, the National Council does not accept that the Party is *evenly* split between two lines of thinking and has become only a bunch of 'factions' or 'groups' as the statement of 17 would like to convey. Nor is the party in that completely paralysed and divided condition as they would like the people to believe.

While no doubt differences exist, the Party is leading people's battles for better living and better organisation of the life and politics of the country. The overwhelming majority of the Party has firm faith in the ideological positions of the Party based on Marxism-Leninism and the programme of world communism as laid down by the Moscow Declaration of 1957 and the Moscow Statement of 1960 adopted by the world conference of 81 Communist and Workers' Parties.

Nor is the Party so divided as to be completely paralysed in its work. The Great Petition and the Great March of 13 September 1963 show what the Party is capable of and what its strength is, despite the attempts of some sections which worked against that great mobilisation.

Not only did that Great March show the strength and mass following of the Party; it played a positive role in bringing very significant gains to the people, and in curbing the growing strength of Right reaction in the country. If the Party were so hopelessly divided, demoralised and paralysed and so wrongly led by the present central leadership, all these gains and movements would have been impossible. Hence the National Council is unable to agree with the hopelessly pessimistic picture of the Party as represented by the statement of the seventeen.

Even then, it would not be correct to ignore the propositions of these members of the National Council because

even that disunity that exists, even that functioning of the Parallel Centre that goes on, even that defiance of the Party line and directives that is taking place, whether by well-known leaders or committees is harmful to the further development of the Party and the mass movement. Hence, we have paid serious attention to the proposals of the seventeen to see if they can take the Party forward.

Our examination shows that the proposals not only will not unify the Party, they will paralyse the work of the Party and prevent it from leading exactly those mass campaigns which the National Council, including these seventeen comrades want to carry forward. We give below the reasons for this conclusion.

The authors of the statement wish to trace the roots of the disunity in the Party back to 1947-48 and to state that during all these fourteen years, despite Party Congresses, etc., 'we could not solve any single basic question satisfactorily.'

Here we do not wish to join issue with these comrades on the causes and progress of the differences and disunity in the Party in all these fourteen years. We may reserve that for another occasion.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact—and the Party Congresses so far have taken note of the fact—that during all these years the Party has led mighty mass movements, won big election battles, had formed the Kerala Government, won rights and relief for the working people, etc.

We may not have solved 'a single basic question satisfactorily', as the authors say, but we have solved many questions, if not quite satisfactorily, at least in some way as to make quite some progress. We do not agree with the sweeping and pessimistic picture which the authors of the statement want to put before the Party and the people about the Party's work in the last 14 years. We have committed many mistakes, but we have also many achievements to our credit in the last 14 years.

The authors then proceed to say that the state of 'sharp division and disruption became a chronic malady in our Party'. And now to add to this, the fact that the international communist movement was engaged in the ideological-political controversy which has superimposed 'another misfortune on our already strife-ridden Party.'

The other misfortunes that they mention are the differences on India-China border question, the arrests of hundreds of Party members, the provocations of the bourgeois reactionary press (in which, by the way, they bracket the *Blitz, Patriot, Mainstream*) as factors which have further worsened the situation.

We do not wish to undertake a political discussion on these points because they have been discussed and resolutions of the National Council are on record on all these questions. The point, therefore, is what do the authors propose to do about these problems in so far as they affect the work and unity of the Party?

According to them, 'some of our Party members are strongly of the opinion that the ideological political line advocated by the CPSU is departing from scientific Marxism-Leninism and deviating in the direction of revisionism, while others are equally emphatic in asserting that the CPC's line is nothing but dogmatic and sectarian.'

It is true that in the National Council and the Party, there is an opinion which holds that the CPSU, and not only the CPSU but the overwhelming majority of the world's Communist Parties who agree with the CPSU, have become 'revisionist'—and not only revisionist but agents of American imperialism. And this is the opinion which was first propagated by the CPC.

The National Council in its resolutions has made its stand clear on this question. It does not hold the CPSU to be revisionist, it agrees with the 1960 Programme, it agrees that the 22nd Party Congress of the CPSU lays down a programme of communism in the Soviet Union and not that of capitalism and so on.

It is also true that the National Council has from time to time and particularly from November 1962 onwards disapproved of the line of the CPC.

It is also true that some comrades do not agree with this but agree with the alternative line as enunciated by the CPC. We, however, have no knowledge as to what line on this question the authors of the statement hold.

They, however, say that, while our Party cannot remain 'indifferent or neutral' on these issues, 'it is equally wrong for us to remain as passive spectators of this historic debate or to uncritically line up behind one or the other of the two sharply polemised positions of the CPSU and the CPC.'

We have no objection to agreeing to this general proposition. But we do not accept that the whole controversy is as between the CPSU and the CPC or that the National Council is uncritically lining up behind the CPSU. It is between the world communist movement, of which the CPSU is the vanguard as stated in the unanimously adopted 1960 Statement to which the CPSU was a party, on the one hand, and the CPC on the other. When the National Council adopted its resolutions repudiating the charges of revisionism against the world communist movement led by the CPSU, when it hailed the 22nd Party Congress Programme which now is denounced by the CPC as a programme of restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, when it endorsed the Test Ban Treaty as a step forward in easing world tension and reduction of the danger of world war, it was not lining up behind the CPSU as such at all. We are taking up positions in terms of the unanimously accepted propositions of the 1960 Conference and positions which since then are endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the world's Communist Parties, positions which are based on Marxism-Leninism.

At the other end is the fact that the opposition to these positions is initiated and led by the Communist Party of China and supported by that of Albania.

The statement of the seventeen does not, of course, tell

us where the authors stand on these most crucial issues of the international communist movement.

They, however, admit that these issues were discussed in the National Council and other committees. Then what do they want to do now?

They say that those discussions were of 'a cursory nature'. So, the whole subject should be thrown open for discussion in the Party because there has not been a 'well-organised inner-Party discussion drawing all the rank and file members into it.' This, they say, is necessary because the Party is sharply divided on these issues. That is one.

'The second biggest question that is badly dividing the Party is that of Sino-Indian border conflict and the correct Marxist-Leninist approach to the whole question.'

On this question, the assessment of the 17 wants the Party to conduct a national campaign for a peaceful settlement, coupled with an inner-Party discussion.

What is new in this? The Party has all along worked for peaceful settlement and we agree to do more. But the authors do not at all mention whether in this campaign we support the Colombo Proposals as a way to open peaceful talks. In fact, the total absence of any mention of this point in the statement shows that the authors do not agree with the National Council position on this question also. They want the Marxist-Leninist approach on the India-China border issue to be thrown open for discussion in the party and also conduct a campaign without acceptance of Colombo Proposals being mentioned. That is two.

On the internal political situation and the Party's line of work, the statement of the seventeen takes the position that the situation in which the Vijayawada Congress laid down Party policy has changed. First of all, big developments have taken place inside the Party and the world, which demand of us serious reassessment of the situation to work out a tactical line. Secondly, the 'unified and composite leadership' that was expected to truthfully interpret and implement the Vijayawada political line got shattered completely.'

So, the third question that is to be thrown open for discussion is the Vijayawada Congress political line and its interpretation. The changes in the objective situation in India and the world demand a political reassessment of the Vijayawada Congress, which is said to be no longer valid. And the truthful interpretation even of that line has become untruthful because the 'composite leadership' (made up of various trends?) composed at the Congress has been shattered. The present leadership not being 'composite' cannot be expected to interpret and implement Vijayawada correctly and cannot expect its interpretation being accepted as correct by those who differ with it.

We have no hesitation in admitting that the situation in India and the world has changed since the Vijayawada Congress and that the evaluation done at Vijayawada should be reviewed.

It is a fact that a 'composite leadership' was elected at Vijayawada, after the famous crisis of resignations and boycott that was created by well-known leaders (many of whom are among the present authors of the statement) at the Congress. It is also true that another crisis which arose after the death of Comrade Ajoy Ghosh was overcome by agreement at the Delhi meeting of the National Council and another 'composite leadership', that is the Secretariat, came into being.

It is also a fact that this 'composite secretariat' no longer exists. But the 'composite' National Council and the composite Central Executive Committee which were elected at Vijayawada do exist and have not been changed. So when the authors say that the 'composite leadership' got shattered, they are not quite correct. The leadership of the Party is not the Secretariat, nor the Chairman nor the General Secretary. It is the National Council and it continues to be composite, as also the CEC.

The Secretariat changes did not take place because some majority sections of the 'composite secretariat' threw out the minority.

The change took place when, following the crisis ushered in by the India-China events of October-November, the National Council adopted the November resolution. The resolution was adopted when all trends in the composite leadership were present. It is after the adoption of that resolution that three comrades there and then and the General Secretary later on resigned from the Secretariat though they were requested not to do so.

So, if the composite leadership, meaning thereby the Secretariat only, has changed, and if today it is not 'composite' according to the authors of the statement, the present Secretariat cannot be blamed for it.

So also we cannot admit that because of this change, the interpretation and implementation of the Vijayawada line has ceased to be truthful. While not ruling out the fact that mistakes may have occurred, we have to state that all decisions of the Secretariat have been subject to the criticism and sanctions of the CEC and the National Council. So, the assumption that just because four comrades have left the Secretariat following the India-China crisis of November 1962, all the work of the leadership of the Party has ceased to truthfully represent the Vijayawada understanding is wholly without foundation.

What are the concrete proposals of the seventeen comrades in order to correct the situation and prevent the 'disaster of split' in the Party? That part is the most important part of the statement. The proposals that the Comrades make are of a very far-reaching character and it is our considered opinion that, if we accept them, *in toto*, it will lead to a complete paralysis of the Party, will not bring about Party unity, will prevent all mass work and lead to total disruption of whatever progress has been made so far. In fact, we shall be legalising two or three Party Centres at the same time. We will give reasons for our conclusion.

The first proposal is that all ideological-political questions of the national and international situation be thrown open for discussion to all party units.

In principle, we have no objection to the proposal. It is an established principle of Party organisation that when differences of a serious nature arise and if a section of the Party membership demands open discussion, it may be conceded.

There are, however, limitations to this principle. The situation must be such as to demand and permit such a discussion. The time, the method, etc., has to be properly weighed.

We are quite agreeable to throwing open for discussion all the four issues framed by the authors of the statement:

- (1) The ideological-political questions and the general line of the world communist movement, as adopted by the 1957 and 1960 Moscow Statement and Declaration and their subsequent application in national and international questions.
- (2) The assessment of the situation in India since the Vijayawada Congress and the tactical line of the party.
- (3) The Marxist-Leninist approach on the India-China dispute.
- (4) Proposals for a Party Programme. These four may cover all the ideological-political questions affecting the international situation and the national.

In order to frame the issues and conduct the discussion, the Party must first adopt some basic positions to initiate the discussion.

Hence, we propose that the resolutions of the National Council adopted so far and to be adopted now, should become the basis of the discussions, as they are already the documents and decisions of the Party and its leadership (except the Programme).

The Opposition to these positions and decisions should place before the National Council or the CEC their viewpoint in the form of one or more documents. The issues should then be framed, taking into consideration both sets of documents and discussion initiated in the Party Press.

In order to do this, the National Council must adopt a line on these propositions as it already has done and is doing now.

The discussion, as according to Party principles, has to be conducted under the guidance and control of the central leadership.

They propose that 'to conduct organised and principled inner-Party discussion, the National Council set up a small body of seven comrades who represent and command the confidence of all comrades in conducting free and fair discussions. Similar bodies may be set up at different State centres wherever it is found necessary.'

We cannot agree to such a procedure. Apart from the difficulty of finding seven comrades who represent and command the confidence of all comrades, when according to their own reading, the Party is sharply divided, we cannot agree to scrap the existing leadership and its authority as determined by the National Council from control over the discussions. We do not want to bog down into perpetual argument inside a sharply divided body, as proposed by them, the issues and documents of the discussion. We agree, of course, that all views be presented before the Party, without in any way holding back principled points of discussion.

For this, the Secretariat should be the controlling body. But we agree that the Opposition should be associated with the Secretariat to organise the discussion. We propose that two members chosen by the Opposition of the seventeen and one who may not agree with them or with the Secretariat should be associated with the Secretariat in conducting the discussion. Any differences that may arise among these eight can be reviewed by the CEC.

The time of opening the discussion is also important. The discussion cannot be allowed to interfere with the development of the mass campaigns or the work of the Party and must not be prolonged over a long period of time. As the discussions have to be clinched by the Party Congress, they should begin *four months* before the Party Congress, when its date is fixed. The issues for discussion have already been under discussion though not stamped with that

name. A long period of discussion will only immobilise the Party and mass work.

In the meanwhile, what is the line of Party work? Just because a discussion is opened, the Party cannot be left without a binding line, permitting anyone to express any opinion and do anything he or any unit likes.

Hence, it is absolutely necessary, according to established Party principles that even when discussions are opened and Party Congress is visualised, the work of the Party is carried on, on the basis of the accepted decisions of the National Council and its directives.

It follows from this that those who violate these decisions and directives must be brought under the discipline of the Party and its organs.

But the organisational proposals of the seventeen just on this question are such that not only ideological-political questions are thrown open for discussion but all organisation, all authority of the National Council, the CEC, the Secretariat and Party Committees is brought to a standstill. The Party organisation as such gets virtually liquidated and anarchy reigns supreme.

They propose that 'organisational measures taken by the National Council during the last year in the midst of an acute inter-Party crisis' be reviewed and revised—that is, cancelled.

The measures of the special Punjab Provincial Conference held after the arrests should be annulled.

The Bengal POC be scrapped and replaced by the old State Council.

'All moves for constituting inquiries into the conduct of leaders like Comrades Gopalan and Sundarayya be withdrawn.'

'The Control Commission be directed to stop further activities relating to issues mentioned above.'

We cannot accept these proposals as they would lead to complete defiance of all Party norms and to liquidation of all Party work and authority.

What is their proposal on the Party Congress?

They want conferences of States to be held where leaders are released and normal conditions have come to prevail.

As for the Party Congress, it must wait until all the leaders are released. That is conferences are held where leaders are released and not held where they are not. But the discussions are held in the Party even without these leaders or their participation.

Thus we will have States which have held conferences and elected delegates and States which have done nothing but discussions. In that condition, we wait for the Congress and also for State conferences where leaders are not released.

Then what is the sense in talking of a Party Congress time-table or holding Party Conferences in some States?

It means that Andhra, Tamilnad, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat hold the conferences for the Congress and elect delegates and new State committees. The others wait. And the Congress waits for all.

We fail to understand the import of such a proposal. We have not the least objection to wait for the release of the comrades in jail and hold the Party Congress after their release. In that case, the party conferences should be held simultaneously in all States. But if any State wants to hold them after the discussions even without a time table of the Congress, we will not disapprove of it.

This naturally raises the question of membership roll.

On this the Opposition comrades want the rolls of the Vijayawada Congress alone to be held valid, as it was 'accepted by all unanimously.'

We cannot agree to this proposal. Just as the political situation has undergone a change since Vijayawada, the Party membership also has undergone a change. New members have come and are coming to the Party in thousands and they cannot be barred from the Congress.

We have no objection to the National Council evolving a suitable machinery to resolve genuine disputes regarding membership where they arise.

These are the views of the National Council on the several points raised by the statement of the seventeen.

Reading the document, one can see clearly that these comrades are making some very vital demands on the majority in the National Council. We have already said that the nature of their proposals is such that if accepted as they are, they will virtually paralyse all political, ideological work of the Party, will not help unification and disrupt the Party and mass work further. So, we have accepted in principle only their demand to open discussions in the Party, under controlled direction and to prepare for the Party Congress.

But we cannot agree to stop taking disciplinary actions and to stop the Control Commission from functioning. We cannot agree to let the Party remain without any line or authority and guidance from the National Council because the Opposition does not agree. At the same time, all opportunity for free and fair discussion is given to all, consistent with the work of the Party and the mass campaigns.

There is one aspect of the document and the attitude of the seventeen comrades which requires series attention from all. They have, so to say, made all the demands on the majority but they have failed to assume any single obligation on their part. We may, therefore, put to them and their supporters, certain points:

Do they and will they disown unequivocally the slander propogated by the CPC that Communist Party of India (of which these comrades are themselves members) is no longer a Communist Party but is merely a clique?

Do they and will they disown unequivocally and condemn those who make the statement that it is the present leadership and its adherents, who handed over lists of PMs to Government for arrest and that it is this leadership which is responsible for the arrests?

Do they accept the authority and discipline of the National Council and the Party organs, irrespective of their differences with it?

Do they agree to abide by the ideological-political resolution

of the National Council until they are changed by the Party Congress?

Do they and will they denounce the call for organising separately the so-called 'pure' as apart from the 'impure' Communists, inside and outside the Party, which, in effect, is nothing but a call to split the Party and is given by the CPC, since its differences with the international-communist movement and was addressed to those in India also?

Do they agree to stop the chain of papers that have recently appeared as rival to the Party papers and preach a line contrary to that of the Party?

It is regrettable that when these comrades wrote their well-thought-out points for unity, they forgot to notice these things which foment the split and feed disunity. Hence we have put them for their attention and answer.

In short, to put it bluntly, do they really wish to bring about unity or only make manoeuvres under the guise of unity proposals? We consider that the statement of the seventeen is actuated by a desire to prevent a split. But the measures proposed in their actual effect will lead to exactly the opposite effect.

Hence, we have accepted some and rejected others and made our concrete proposals to prevent a split which, they say, exists in fact. We wish to do all we can to unify the Party and take the country and the working people forward.